

Submission
No 786

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING SUBMISSION BY SYDNEY FISH MARKET PTY LTD (SFM)

As a member of New South Wales Seafood Industry Council, SFM has contributed to a joint submission by members of that body. Nonetheless there is one item in the Inquiry's Terms of Reference of particular interest to SFM. It is in relation to TOR 1.(d) "....the number and location of Recreational Fishing Havens" that SFM wishes to submit the following.

1. Food Security

Fish is essential for human health and nutrition. The sustainable supply of seafood to the population is a fundamental component of responsible management of aquatic ecosystems. Over 90% of the population depend on commercial fishers to obtain their fresh seafood. This includes the 20% of the population who fish recreationally as it is estimated that only 5% of recreational anglers take most of the recreational catch. Most anglers participate for the pleasure of the activity, not to secure their supply of seafood.

Recreational Fishing Havens (RFHs) result in the reallocation of a community resource from 90% of the population to a fortunate 1%.

Australia, once known for its sustainably harvested, high quality fresh seafood, now imports over 70% of its seafood needs, mostly frozen or canned product.

2. Regional Importance

Commercial fishing is a critically important economic activity in regional centres such as Ballina, Maclean, Coffs Harbour, Newcastle, Forster-Tuncurry, and many more. Furthermore, tourists to these areas expect to be able to buy local fresh fish, often from one of the many fishermen's cooperatives along the NSW coast. They do not understand signs saying "no local fish sold in this town." Several coastal communities have already suffered the economic consequences of local seafood becoming unavailable due to RFHs, marine parks, pollution and other causes.

3. Conservation and Fisheries Management

RFHs play no role in resource conservation or fisheries management. Unlike commercial fishing, recreational fishing has not been subjected to rigorous independent environmental impact assessment yet it is an accepted fact that the recreational catch for several species, including the overfished Mulloway, is considerably higher than the commercial catch.

4. Current Recreational Fishing Havens

According to NSW DPI the 30 locations declared as RFHs in 2002 represented 24% of total NSW estuarine waters.

Other major estuaries such as Port Hacking and Brisbane Water have been recreational fishing havens for decades. Sydney Harbour is also now a RFH by default, due to banning of commercial fishing due to pollution. Apparently dioxin does not poison people eating fish captured recreationally, only those commercially harvested.

Prior to RFHs, estuaries such as Botany Bay, Lake Macquarie, Hastings River, St Georges Basin and many more were major sources of seafood. The harvest from these four estuaries alone was over 1,000 tonnes p.a. and the harvest was sustainable.

The effect on SFM and Fishermen's Cooperatives along the NSW coast has been profound. It has been compounded by other constraints on resource access such as marine parks, and factors affecting fish stocks such as urban run-off and sewage, agricultural pollution and destruction of habitat and breeding areas.

5. Sydney Fish Market (SFM)

Sydney Fish Market (SFM) is the largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere and the principal source of fresh seafood for more than 25% of Australia's population. Seafood retailers from Wollongong to Canberra and Newcastle in addition to the specialist seafood retailers across the Sydney metropolitan area source product from SFM.

SFM trades over 13,000 tonnes of fresh fish annually.

Originally established by the Government of New South Wales to coordinate the marketing of NSW-caught seafood, in 1994 the business was sold to a private company comprising NSW fishermen and the on-site retailers.

In the years following privatisation of SFM, deregulation of seafood marketing resulted in a decline in the volume of NSW-sourced seafood sold by SFM from around 13,000 tonnes pa in 1995 to around 11,000 tonnes pa in 2001/2002. At this time NSW contributed around 75% of SFM's total product, down from around 85% in 1995.

At the time that SFM paid \$3 million to the Government of NSW to buy the business, the Government's intention to deregulate was notified.

The intention to declare RFHs, denying access to fisheries resources by the fishermen supplying SFM, was not advised.

Following the declaration of RFHs in May 2002 the supply of NSW harvested product to SFM fell to a mere 8000 tonnes by 2007, representing only 60% of SFM's total product.

To arrest this decline SFM has been required to invest almost \$10 million in acquiring quota in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark fishery (a Commonwealth fishery). The supply of fish from NSW-managed fisheries has continued to decline in recent years, due to the establishment of Marine Parks with no-take "sanctuary zones".

Conclusion

For reasons of food security, regional economic welfare and sound fisheries management, no further RFHs should be considered and existing RFHs should be critically examined as a misappropriation of community resources.

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