

## **INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL FISHING IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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# SUBMISSION

TO THE

NEW SOUTH WALES LEGATIVE COUNCIL

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ON

INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL FISHING IN  
NEW SOUTH WALES

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prepared by

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## KEY ISSUES

Since 1990 Fisheries Administration in N.S.W. in its various forms has had changes at the senior management level on a regular basis. This combined with numerous internal reviews has had a serious impact on both productivity and morale within the Fisheries Division at the Department as well as a major financial and stressful impact on the Commercial Fishermen and their families.

Further complicating and confusing this industry and its members is that Fisheries as an organisation has been amalgamated with and then separated from N.S.W. Agriculture, been through FOUR major restructures, merged into firstly with the NSW D.P.I and now into the Dept. of Trade and Investment Regional infrastructure and Services (N.S.W TRADE AND INVESTMENT) a "mega agency" during this period.

**Over this time mergers have seen major losses of corporate memory, core skills and expertise in managing Commercial Fishing Issues to the point of utter confusion and personal financial hardship.**

There has been a lot of restaffing across nearly all management associated with Fisheries.

There has also been a reduction in Fisheries Officers' since 2000 resulting in some inexperienced compliance officers causing great concern to experienced Commercial Fishermen that have been fishing for many years and have the compliance rules down "pat". The stress from an inexperienced officer telling you what you can and cannot do, when you know very well that you are correctly achieving your work for the day does not help the personal stress levels at this time combined with such broad sweeping industry turmoil.

It is important at this moment for our self-esteem and worthiness that we are recognised for our important contributions and not fobbed off as "...just fishermen".

The Independent review of N.S.W. Commercial Fishing Policy Management and Administration prepared by Richard Stevens, Ian Cartwright and Peter Neville in March 2012 has said that the N.S.W. government is charged with ensuring the sustainability of the states' wild fish resource.

The research that is carried out by agencies such as Fisheries Research and Development Corp. (FRDC) is paid for out of a management Fee which is a yearly fee paid for by the Commercial Fishermen.

Sustainability is not an issue in N.S.W. as lakes and estuaries are managed and have been managed by dedicated PROFESSIONAL fishermen and dedicated caring fisheries employees for many, many years. I have personally paid for and been part of these scientific assessments also for many years.

A survey of daytime recreational fishing during the annual fishing period, March 1999 to February 2000, in Lake Macquarie N.S.W., issued by the Minister of Fisheries at that time, Eddie O'Beid. Aldos Steff and Douglas J Chapman was employed by N.S.W. Fisheries Report Series 52. Dr Steve Kennelly and Geoff Gordon and Tracy McVea formatted the final report and found that:

- 970,000 recreational fishing hours were reported
- The daytime recreational harvest from Lake Macquarie was approx. 295 tonnes and there were approx. 274 tonnes from the commercial fishermen in this same period. This clearly indicates that the daytime recreational harvest was about 8% larger than the commercial harvest.
- The buy-outs from Marine Parks and RFH's have not achieved what they should have and any fishers who were bought out are now back fishing by leasing licences from other working fishermen.

**This lake was closed on the basis of these figures alone with no consideration given to the impact of this decision on local professional fishing families.**

I was the professional fishermen's representative at the time of the closure of this lake and I said to the Minister "...you cannot close the lake on the figures published in this 12 month research period" and the Minister replied "... I am a steam roller Les and I am going to run right over the top of fishermen get on board ".

The above survey and Ministerial response is just a small example of the disgraceful behaviour professional fishermen have had to endure over the past 30 yrs.

Another major event occurred in 2007-8 when both the volume and value of imported fish exceeded that of AUSTRALIAN WILD FISHERIES which today is now over 80%.

On the 19th October 2016 there was a media release on the true value of N.S.W. COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY, it was a two year study by the UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY OF SYDNEY. It revealed the importance and significant social and economic value that professional fishermen bring to the N.S.W. communities.

We contribute more than 436 million in revenue annually to N.S.W. economy and generate about 3,290 full time jobs in fishing operations, service operations and industry, sales, marketing etc...

The study also showed that 89% of N.S.W. residents expect to eat local seafood when they visit the coast and 64% indicated that they were interested in finding out and watching the workings of a professional fisherman's business.

The calculated environmental knowledge held by individual fishers' and fishing families, some of whom have been working in the particular waterways for multiple generations, is a significant historical body of knowledge and resource.

I have represented Region 4 in NSW and been a Minister's advisor for 30 years in all Management meetings back as far as Minister for Fisheries Ian Armstrong and up till I had to persevere with Eddie O'Beid and Ian McDonald going to sleep at some meetings.

The fisheries reform was never discussed with professional fishermen as it was done behind closed doors on the assumption that {fishermen and fisheries} should "...not talk to fishermen as they do not know what they want".

I am still going to meeting as the representative on our Council for the Management of our Estuaries and Lakes and the representative that oversees the opening of our lakes when they become too full and have to be opened to the ocean manually (SMITHS LAKE).

## CASE STUDY PERSONAL IMPACT

Our family has diaries spanning from 1930 until recent which proves and explains the sustainability of our local lakes. See Fishing Family member in the University Of Technology Of Sydney study (member 061114 - 1a Great Lakes)

The impact of the reform has been a tremendous worrying time to our family which has a history of 5 generations. We prepared our business for the future in a very viable way after we had to have 125 shares for each of our fishing methods. Then out of the blue we have to invest (for our family to catch and earn the same amounts of income) we have to invest for both sons \$500,000.00 going on what the shares are selling for now.

I have three sons that love the Fishing Industry. They are fortunate that they have the invaluable knowledge of their fishing family before them, but unfortunately if this reform continues the way it has started they will not be able to stay in the Industry they love. I feel for the young people that would like to make professional fishing their business.

(1) My son Micheal is 40 yrs old and already has borrowed (when we had to have 125 shares in each fishing category) he has a house to pay off, he has a young son with a disability which will have future expenses for his son how can he stay viable and keep fishing it is a complete shame that a family that has contributed so much time effort knowledge and research in the Industry will go under.

(2) My son Paul entered into the fisheries by obtaining a Father-Son fishing Licence. This is a licence where the son has to be in the same boat as his father (the boat is only 5.8 metres long) and be his apprentice and half the income for a period of 5 years. We achieved the 5 years, we informed Fisheries that the 5 years was up, showed them the information and said he was now able to have his own boat and licence. Fisheries then said " ...the rules have been changed- no licence".

(3) My son Jamie sold a fishing boat not realising that by selling the boat the whole history of his fishing experience goes with the boat. (the history of the boat has to be recorded when he puts in his agriculture reports each month). This was not the only fisherman this happened to.

This is a complete travesty of justice, the rules and regulations of the Commercial Fishing Industry are very complex and difficult to understand and in some cases over the years we have had to see a solicitor to help us understand these many regulations.

Fishermen just want to fish and provide seafood from our pristine lakes and estuary which we manage so well.

We need continuity, constancy and regularity.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We should not be subject to the numerous changes by Government agencies with no consultation with the fishermen.
2. Regional representation and liaison must be improved with consultation with active fishers. Significant elements of industry advice has been ignored.
3. Much of D.P.I consultation listened to the fishers but did not follow through with what the fishers suggested. We are intelligent people and run successful businesses and understand that we must have change, but not to the detriment of peoples livelihoods.
4. The market will operate to reduce numbers of fishers, provided incentives include minimum shareholdings.
5. There must be effective Consultation and decision making processes from elected professional fishermen by their peers from each region with huge input from the experienced fishermen in that specific region.
6. There is still no managed fisheries advisory council, no peak industry body, no DPI Liaison body.
7. Catch history must be taken into account when any new shares are issued.
8. The buyouts from Marine Parks and RFHs have not achieved what they should have. Everyone that was bought out is back fishing by leasing licences from other working fishermen.
9. What we need is a level playing field.

## CONCLUSION

The information I have written about in this submission was written by a man who has given up trying to make the Commercial Fishing Industry an Industry that the public and commercial fishermen can be proud of. I have now retired and handed it all over to my sons and all I can say is "...good luck if the reform does not change".

There was a failure in the delivery of the reform and there is strong justification for a Parliament Inquiry. I believe this must be investigated and addressed by the N.S.W. Government as soon as possible to alleviate the total confusion and stress imposed on this industry.

I hope that the independent review of N.S.W. will take into consideration all of the above as not helping our family fishing businesses that has caused nothing less than an ongoing nightmare for over 30 yrs. In those 30 yrs I represented the commercial fishermen in N.S.W. in management from meetings right back to the Minister for Fisheries, Ian Armstrong, and up until Mr O'Bied and Mr McDonald which was a useless exercise when those two could not have cared at all without Industry. I am retired now but am still on the Estuary Committee of our local lakes and council and still attend most meetings representing our Industry.

I would be more than willing to speak at the enquiry to tell my story.

LES CHEERS

KATH<sup>V</sup> CHEERS.  
29th NOVEMBER. 2016.