

INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL FISHING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Name: Mr Peter Christensen

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Submission - Commercial fishing in NSW

Key Issues:

- Forced to buy own business back to be able to continue fishing.
- No security for future – management fees are regularly increased by NSW Fisheries for full cost recovery, without regard to the actual profit margins or operating costs of commercial fishers.
- Definition of ‘active commercial fisher’ - NSW Fisheries, for the purpose of the Commercial Fisheries Adjustment Program, has decided an active commercial fisher is a person who owns a fishing business but may only fish one day per year. Minimum requirement to be classed as an active fisher should be at least 150 days per year – allowing for loss of time to bad weather, breakdowns, illness or injury, no commercial catch, bad prices at market (Super trawlers create glut of fish and bring prices down).
- No benefit for true active commercial fisher. Only those who bought fishing businesses as speculators will profit by being bought out at the expense of a true commercial fisher.
- Loss of a large number of jobs due to fishing cooperatives closing down as only part-time fishers will be left in the industry therefore fish supply cannot be guaranteed on a regular basis. Only full-time commercial fisher supplies local product on a regular basis.
- Loss of jobs in other support industries, such as fishing gear suppliers, boat and motor sales, mechanics, bait suppliers, retail sales-outlets of fish products, etc as commercial fisher numbers are reduced.
- Commercial fishers are unable to make an informed decision on their future - After taking part in the ‘preview share trading’ round, NSW Fisheries has not yet provided assessment to commercial fishers regarding outcome and potential cost to the fisher to buy their own businesses to continue to produce an income. NSW Fisheries had guaranteed assessment of possible cost of ‘shares’ would be released one to two weeks after the preview round closed – it is now six weeks later and still no advice provided to fishers.
- No guarantee by the Government that it, or the next Government, won’t change things again and continue to force share purchase and forced debt onto fishers in the future. Adjustment has been going on since 1994 therefore cannot trust NSW Fisheries to get it right this time nor in the future.

Evidence:

- NSW Fisheries have changed the amount of ‘shares’ required in each share-class forcing commercial fishers to go into debt to purchase their own business to continue to fish.
- If the additional shares are not purchased by the commercial fisher then they have been advised by NSW Fisheries that they can no longer work after 1 July 2017.

- NSW Fisheries cannot guarantee that there will be enough 'shares' for sale for existing full-time fishers to purchase leaving the fisher in a precarious position possibly unable to make an income after 1 July 2017. Forced closure of business with no compensation.

Case study:

I have been a full-time career commercial fisher for thirty-eight (38) years and am being forced by NSW Fisheries to go into debt to be able to continue fishing to make an income in the future. However, there is no guarantee that enough shares will be available for sale for me to purchase to continue being able to fish which would lead to me being unemployed after 1 July 2017.

It is my opinion that NSW Fisheries are very successfully killing the sustainable commercial fishing industry with this decision.

Decisions by NSW Fisheries to approve super trawlers in our waters have already affected market prices negatively which has impacted on my current income. Why have they approved super trawlers which are known to indiscriminately kill all fish, no matter size or species, with absolutely no penalty, yet NSW Fisheries target the individual sustainable commercial fisher with threat of not being able to fish if I do not buy additional shares in the industry?

I am a sustainable fisher – only catching fish by rod and reel which means the fish I catch are alive and must be a certain size to be kept – anything not of size is released alive to continue to grow for the future. Super trawlers kill these fish.

Being forced by NSW Fisheries to go into debt at this time of my life so as to continue doing what I have always done – which is produce an honest income from a very hard and dangerous day's work – is criminal in my opinion.

NSW Fisheries cannot guarantee any long-term future for me in the industry due to the structure of this Commercial Fisheries Business Program.

After 38 years in the industry, I do not feel it is right that my business (which is my only form of income and was supposed to be my superannuation) is being devalued by NSW Fisheries because they have not, and cannot, get the process right and fair for fishers like myself.

It is extremely stressful not knowing whether I will have a business after 1 July next year. What am I to do if I can no longer fish as I have always done? It is all that I have known and all I can do. It is an extremely hard and dangerous job but it is my life.

Changing goal-posts, forcing debt onto fishers in later life, and not being able to provide any form of guarantee that costs by NSW Fisheries will not continue to increase in the future is completely wrong. My fishing business was supposed to be my nest-egg when I am too old to work (it is my only form of super) – NSW Fisheries have taken that away from me with their decisions.

Recommendations:

1. No increase to the number of shares required to operate as a commercial fisher.

2. NSW Fisheries to buy-out latent fishing businesses that were purchased by speculators in the first instance.
3. Offer buy-out to true commercial fishing businesses based on catch history at a premium price.
4. New entries into the commercial fishing industry to purchase two (2) current businesses to commence fishing.

Peter Christensen

3 December, 2016