

INQUIRY INTO COMMERCIAL FISHING IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Markwell Fisheries

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Parliamentary Enquiry into Commercial Fishing in NSW

SUBMISSION

PRESENTED BY RICHARD BROWN ON BEHALF OF MARKWELL FISHERIES

- MARKWELL FISHERIES ARE PROCESSORS AND EXPORTERS OF A VARIETY OF SEAFOOD HARVESTED ALONG THE COASTLINES OF NSW AND SOUTH EAST QLD. WE HAVE REMAINED INDUSTRY LEADERS AND INNOVATORS IN THE PROCESSING OF SEA MULLET PRODUCTS TO REGIONAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL MARKETS FOR MORE THAN 30 YEARS. THE FAMILY HISTORY OF FISHING IN NSW NORTH COAST AND SE QLD WATERS EXTENDS BACK TO THE 1930'S IN THE BEACH HAUL FISHERY, INDICATING THE CONTINUED SUSTAINABILITY OF THIS SPECIES AND THE HARVEST TECHNIQUE.
WE SEASONALLY EMPLOY UP TO 70 STAFF DURING OUR PRIMARY PROCESSING SEASON, THIS IN A REGION THAT CONTINUALLY STRUGGLES TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES.
THE DOWN LINE STAKEHOLDERS THAT RELY ON US TO PURCHASE THEIR GOODS AND SERVICES ALONG THE NSW COASTLINE INCLUDES FISHING FAMILIES, TRANSPORT BUSINESSES, ICE MANUFACTURERS, PACKAGING SUPPLIERS, FUEL PROVIDERS, ACCOMODATION HOUSES, FOOD SERVICES, AIRFREIGHT, BANKS, REFRIGERATION REPAIRS AND SERVICES, GAS SUPPLIES, TYRES, MECHANICAL REPAIRS ETC. WE ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO NSW FISHERIES THROUGH PERMIT FEE'S, TO EMPLOYEE SUPERANNUATION FUNDS AND THE AUSTRALIAN TAXATION OFFICE.
- WE REQUIRE CONTINUITY OF SUPPLY TO FULFILL OUR ORDERS AND TO MAINTAIN OUR EXPORT AND DOMESTIC MARKETS. THIS ALSO ENABLES US TO RETAIN TRAINED STAFF, AS THEY WILL BE PRESSURED TO MOVE ON BY THEIR WORK PROVIDERS IF CONTINUOUS WORK FLOW IS UNAVAILABLE. GIVEN THAT OUR TARGET RESOURCE (MULLET) IS A NON RECREATIONAL CATCH SPECIES, WHICH HAS CONTINUALLY BEEN PROVEN OVER DECADES TO REMAIN AT SUSTAINABLE LEVELS, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE IS NO REASON TO REMOVE FISHERS WHO WISH TO CONTINUE WORKING, AND THEREFORE, SUPPLYING US. WE BELIEVE THAT FUNDING SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO REMOVE THOSE FISHERS WHO CHOOSE TO EXIT THE INDUSTRY AS WELL AS FOR THE PURCHASE OF LATENT EFFORT.
- WE FIND IT UNCONSCIONABLE THAT GOVERNMENT WOULD FORCE COMMERCIAL FISHERS TO PAY FOR MORE SHARES TO REMAIN AT THEIR CURRENT LEVEL OF EFFORT. THERE IS NO VALID REASON TO FORCE THIS HARDSHIP ONTO INDUSTRY WHEN THERE ARE LESS THAN 1000 COMMERCIAL FISHERS OPERATING IN NSW WITH THE RESPONSIBILITY TO FEED A STATE POPULATION OF OVER 7 MILLION PEOPLE, AS WELL AS A MASSIVE TOURISM INDUSTRY.

- PRESSURE ON NSW FISHERIES MANAGEMENT FOR FURTHER COMMERCIAL CUTBACKS OR CLOSURES FROM A GREEDY MINORITY WITHIN THE RECREATIONAL FISHING SECTOR IS CONTINUAL. THIS PRESSURE IS OFTEN DRIVEN BY MEMBERS OF THE RECREATIONAL FISHING TRADE SUCH AS EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS, WHO DIRECTLY BENEFIT (FINANCIALLY) FROM HAVING MORE CUSTOMERS PURCHASING THEIR GOODS. THEIR PERCEPTION IS THAT IF THEY REMOVE COMMERCIAL FISHING THERE WILL BE MORE PRODUCT AVAILABLE FOR THEM TO TAKE. CURRENTLY THEY REMAIN LIGHTLY MANAGED AND WITH NO CREDIBLE CATCH DATA RECORDING OR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ACCREDITATION. THIS COMES AT THE COST OF REMOVING THE HARVESTERS OF A CLEAN, NUTRITIOUS FOOD SOURCE FROM THE PLATES OF THE OWNERS OF THIS PUBLIC RESOURCE, THE NSW SEAFOOD CONSUMER. IT CONFOUNDS INDUSTRY AS TO WHY GOVERNMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO INCREASE FISHING ACCESS TO THE RECREATIONAL SECTOR WHOM ONLY REPRESENT 16% OF THE NSW COMMUNITY, YET ALREADY ACCESS MORE THAN 30% OF THE RESOURCE.
- THE COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY HAS CONTINUALLY BEEN UNDERVALUED BY FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENTS WHEN CALCULATING FINANCIAL BENEFIT TO THE COMMUNITY. A RECENT (2014/16) TWO YEAR RESEARCH PROJECT BY THE FRDC ON SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY WELLBEING FOUND THE TRUE ANNUAL REVENUE VALUE TO BE IN EXCESS OF \$436 MILLION AS OPPOSED TO THE \$90 MILLION QUOTED BY THE NSW FISHERIES MINISTER AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF THIS PROPOSED REFORM. THIS STUDY ALSO REVEALED THAT 94% OF COASTAL RESIDENTS AGREED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRODUCING OUR OWN SEAFOOD, AND 96% BELIEVED BUYING LOCAL WAS FAR MORE BENEFICIAL FOR THEIR COMMUNITIES. THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF CONSUMING FRESH SEAFOOD IS IMMENSE, AND HAVE BEEN EXTENSIVELY DOCUMENTED VIA THE MEDICAL FRATERNITY. IT ALSO FOUND THAT 78% OF RECREATIONAL FISHERS PREFERRED LOCAL BAIT HARVESTED BY THE COMMERCIAL SECTOR.
- THE HEALTH IMPACTS THIS PROCESS HAS CREATED AMONGST OUR FISHERS/SUPPLIERS ARE OF GREAT CONCERN TO US, AS THE UNCERTAINTY OVER FURTHER DEBT, AND THE AVAILABILITY OF SHARES THAT WILL BE REQUIRED TO BE PURCHASED TO MAINTAIN THEIR CURRENT EFFORT LEVELS, HAVE STRESSED FISHERS DRAMATICALLY. I HAVE PERSONALLY WITNESSED THE EMOTIONAL BREAKDOWN OF ONE FISHER UPON REALISATION THAT HE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO AFFORD TO CONTINUE WORKING DUE TO HIS FINANCIAL SITUATION AND HIS INABILITY TO RAISE THE REQUIRED FUNDS TO PURCHASE THE EXTRA SHARES HE WOULD REQUIRE. THE CREATION OF THE REFORM HAS CAUSED PANIC BUYING AND INFLATED SHARE PRICES IN VARIOUS FISHERIES, DEFEATING THE VERY PURPOSE IT WAS ORIGINALLY DESIGNED FOR.
- MARKWELL FISHERIES HAVE CONTINUED TO INVEST IN NSW FISHING LICENCES, TRUCKS, COMMERCIAL MOTOR VEHICLES, FISHING EQUIPMENT, PLANT AND MACHINERY, STAFF TRAINING AND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT OUR FISHERIES WOULD BE SUSTAINABLY MANAGED,

THEREFORE ENSURING WE WOULD HAVE A CONTINUED SUPPLY CHAIN TO SATISFY CONSUMER DEMAND AND GROWTH. THIS REFORM PROCESS HAS BEEN MISMANAGED FROM THE OUTSET, AND HAS CHANGED ITS GUISE FROM BEING THE CREATOR OF FISHERS BUSINESS VIABILITY, TO THAT OF REMOVING THE LATENT EFFORT CREATED BY PREVIOUS MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNMENTS. THIS PROCESS WILL RENDER OUR BUSINESS UNSUSTAINABLE, AS THE COSTS TO MAINTAIN A LARGE PLANT WITH REDUCED THROUGHPUT WILL BECOME INSURMOUNTABLE SHOULD SUPPLY LEVELS REDUCE.

- MARKWELL FISHERIES PROVIDES NSW FISHERIES MARINE BIOLOGISTS ACCESS TO OUR FACILITIES ANNUALLY TO UNDERTAKE STOCK/SPECIES RESEARCH. THIS RESEARCH CONTINUALLY INDICATES A HEALTHY STOCK LEVEL, WHICH WE REQUIRE TO SATISFY BOTH DOMESTIC AND EXPORT DEMAND. THE REMOVAL OF FISHERS/CREW THROUGH THE INABILITY TO SOURCE EXTRA SHARES OR FUNDS TO PURCHASE SHARES, WILL UNNECESSARILY IMPACT ON OUR SUPPLY OF A SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE.
- AS OWNERS OF A NUMBER OF NSW FISHERIES LICENCES, WE ARE DISMAYED THAT THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF OUR LICENCES WILL BE REDUCED VIA THAT EFFORT NOW BEING SHARED WITH NON ACTIVE FISHERS UNDER THIS PROCESS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE INDUSTRY SHOULD CONTINUALLY PAY TO RECTIFY THE MISMANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES BY PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS. THERE IS ALSO A HUGE CONCERN THAT THE EXTRA EFFORT PURCHASED FROM LATENT EFFORT LICENCES WILL NOW BE TRANSFERRED INTO FISHERIES, THEREFORE EXTENDING ACTIVITY AND CREATING CONFLICT IN AREAS PREVIOUSLY UNAFFECTED.
- IT IS OUR BELIEF THAT ACCESS TO FRESH NUTRITIOUS FOOD IS A NECESSITY FOR HUMANITY, AND ALONG WITH WATER, SHOULD BE PROTECTED AND SECURED. FISHERS HARVEST FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL COMMUNITIES, BE THEY STATE, NATIONAL OR GLOBAL. IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT STEPS BE TAKEN IMMEDIATELY, IN A WORLD EXPERIENCING FOOD SHORTAGES AND CLIMATE CHANGE, TO SUPPORT THIS INDUSTRY FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

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