

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

Name: Mr Grant Saunders

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Hello

My name is Grant Saunders, I am the son of Raymond Saunders and an apprentice fourth generation fisherman as well as a documentary filmmaker.

I have only been fishing with my father for a little over a year now but I have indirectly and directly been involved and affected by fishing and fishing "management" for over 40 years.

My grandfather Horry Saunders in the year 2000 won the NAIDOC award for holding the longest running owned and established Indigenous fishing business on the east coast of Australia; starting the business at a time when Aboriginal people were not even considered citizens in their own country.

The Saunders family is a proud fishing family and owe their autonomy of the welfare state and economic independence to the fishing industry; without fishing our family may have suffered poor health, unemployment, lack of education and a myriad of other poor social determinants experienced by a majority of Aboriginal people today.

When the initial restrictions to our traditional waterways came into effect in 2002, our family could not continue the age old practice of traditional cyclic fishing practices, because all of a sudden two thirds of the river was closed to commercial fishing and consequently over 20 different prawn and fish digs. Not only did these closures affect our family economically, like every other fishing family, it was another act of dispossession of traditional Biripi hunting grounds as well the ruin of a once balanced ecologically sustainable and healthy river system.

My father once loved and cherished the act of fishing his traditional hunting grounds, inherited by his father and forefathers. He once enjoyed the healthy lifestyle of maintaining an economical and ecological sustainable Aboriginal commercial fishing business. Now, because of wrong headed policies and restrictions imposed by an ever-changing and apathetic government ministry, he feels that the joy of fishing and his economic independence has been stolen from him and his family; a business that once provided him and his family a healthy sustainable livelihood.

As a fisherman's son, I fear for my father's mental and physical well-being because of the financial and mental stress he has been made to endure through ever-increasing policy changes in restricting water, increasing fees and other unreasonable requirements of small fishing businesses.

As a newcomer to the game, I was looking forward to a future in fishing and maintaining the legacy as a fourth generation Aboriginal fisherman but I can only do this while my father is fit and willing to stay in the industry so that he can teach me the decades of knowledge and experience he holds. With the damaging changes continuing to be imposed by the state government onto small fishing families like ours, I highly doubt that my father will last in the game much longer and with him will sadly be lost an intimate knowledge of sustaining a healthy river and lake system that can continue to provide healthy local seafood for the Australian community as well as overseas markets.

As a documentary filmmaker I am also interested in seeing and documenting the impacts that these policies have on small fishing families, like my own, and am keen to have the film broadcast nationally and internationally because I believe the public have a right to know how this industry is being mismanaged and how fishermen's voices seem to not be heard. It is my intention in this film, that I am currently producing, to give these fishermen a voice to expose a side to the industry that a majority of the public are not aware of.

I implore those who have the power to reverse policy decisions, that hinder the sustainability of small fishing and Aboriginal family businesses, to really listen to what fishermen and their families have to say and their generations of experience of working on NSW waterways. Fishing families who have been active in this industry for generations hold invaluable in depth knowledge, experience and ideas to keep our waterways healthy and ecologically safe as well as a local Australian industry alive and thriving.

For Aboriginal fishing families like ours to maintain self-determination, economic sustainability and cultural maintenance, we need this industry to remain viable for small fishing families.

Please do not allow another great local industry to die by making it impossible for small fishing families to survive.

Yours sincerely

Grant