

**Submission
No 151**

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

Name: Mr Allan Blake

Date received: 20 December 2016

Submission to General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Dear Mr Chairman,

1. I am an active commercial fisherman who necessarily has an intimate association with the legislation and government agencies impacting upon the NSW commercial fishing industry. For this reason I was excited by the prospect of your email with a subject line of "Call for Submissions - Inquiry into commercial fishing in New South Wales".
2. I anticipated such an enquiry may have given Commercial Fishing Industry members the opportunity to participate in a serious investigation into the practices and operations of Government agencies involved with daily activities of the Commercial Fishing Industry. Such an inquiry would, hopefully, have investigated how these agencies interact with the fishing community over whom they preside.
3. Unfortunately I see the terms of reference of this Inquiry restrict its scope to simply cataloguing historical events; and this includes reporting the fait accompli progress of the New South Wales Government's Commercial Fisheries Business Adjustment Program that is currently in progress. Such restrictive Terms of Reference as assigned to your inquiry consign your efforts to be another expensive waste of money for it can only report what has happened and will do nothing to expose and change the real problems facing the commercial fishing industry.
4. As noted in a recent email from DPI Fisheries to all Commercial Fishing Industry participants, "this inquiry (your GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO. 5 inquiry) will further ensure the social and economic value of the industry is recognised, but will not halt the reform". Such an official statement only reinforces the paradigm that, as with most DPI Fisheries initiatives, consultative processes are established purely to give the illusion of industry member participation in progressing bureaucratic agendas. This inquiry is guaranteed to "ensure the social and economic value of the industry is recognised" even though the reform program will continue to completion under its current structure. It would appear there is little chance of exposing the negative impacts generated from this reform process or expose the managerial incompetence that has led to the supposed need for the currently engaged reform initiatives.
5. What this enquiry will not be able to do is explain to the fishermen who have had to relinquish their multi-generational involvement with the Commercial Fishing Industry or explain to those many other fishermen who have had to spend money purchasing additional shares just so they can continue to be employed in operating a fishing business they purchased in good faith many years ago, how the "social and economic value" is to be realised in their daily lives.

6. I hope my submission sparks some concern within the parliamentary precincts and may lead to establishing a useful Inquiry into commercial fishing in New South Wales. An inquiry that can stimulate change for the better and assist us pawns in the political chess game that, to this point, has only shown benefits to those bureaucrats who operate in isolation from the coal face participants in the Commercial Fishing Industry.
7. Should this letter be a stimulus for some future inquiry I would like to offer at the end of this letter some starting points for consideration when drafting any future Terms of Reference.

Yours Sincerely

(Allan Blake)

Key Issues

a. It has been my experience over many years that it is extremely difficult to identify responsible persons who have the capacity and desire to influence policy and operations within the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Fisheries Branch which produce direct benefits to fishermen. I have attempted on many occasions to correspond when I wish to raise points of concern regarding practical operations but inevitably I am brushed aside with polite rhetoric or simply ignored. This is not to say there are not advertised telephone contacts on the DPI website however it is the subsequent procedural roadblocks that causes suggestions or complaints to stagnate and not be followed through to a satisfactory conclusion.

b. There does not appear to be a clearly defined process within the DPI for handling industry generated initiatives for amendments to legislation that directly affects fishermen. If there is then it is not widely advertised and is certainly not promoted or understood by those members of DPI with whom we fishermen have to interact. The introduction of advances in technology and new operating procedures are being unnecessarily hampered or prohibited by out dated legislation. When DPI officials are presented with requests for change there is no incentive for DPI to explore the possibilities with the status quo being the easiest solution that facilitates the administrative perspective from which the DPI functions. There needs to be an

independent body and proactive effort from within the DPI or other authoritative bodies to investigate proposals and drive the administrative and legislative changes.

c. There appears to be a lack of accountability and feedback in many of the research programs that are initiated within the DPI. With fishermen being increasingly targeted for cost recovery in industry management it is very important the public has clear and unrestricted access to publicly funded research documentation; both from seeing how public funds are being allocated and spent to being able to access results and recommendations of any research project. There also needs to be accountability in ensuring comprehensive research reports are actually generated and disseminated.

d. There needs to be an advertised and up to date register of departmental employment positions aligned with the responsibilities of every position manned in the DPI. This point goes not only to the need for access as indicated in sub paragraph a. above but also allows access to the most appropriate path when there is the need to escalate proceedings on matters being presented to the DPI which are considered to have not been adequately addressed at the current level of discourse.

e. There is no clear and simple avenue available for fishing industry participants to appeal findings made by first point of contact officials in the DPI. Typically this involves request for assistance from DPI Compliance Officers which may involve matters ranging from alleged infringement of legislative requirements to simply requesting the introduction of new operating procedures or equipment.