



BOUGHT-OUT FISHERMAN STILL WORKING A “NON-STORY”, SAYS SEAFOOD BODY

The fact a commercial fisherman who has sold a licence back to the Queensland Government is still fishing is a “non-story”, according to the State’s peak seafood body. Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) President Keith Harris says the State Government’s current net buyback scheme is designed to remove net-fishing licences, not get rid of individual fishermen.

Mr Harris was responding to media reports about a North Queensland fisherman, Wally Keating, who has sold a net licence under the scheme but continues to fish with his son’s licence.

“Recreational fishing lobbyists campaigning to remove all net fishing from all Queensland waters are searching for any issue to criticise the industry,” he said. “In this case, their criticism reflects their poor understanding of fisheries management.”

Mr Harris used an analogy of reducing traffic congestion by buying back motor vehicles.

“Let’s pretend the State Government wanted to reduce traffic congestion and so decided to offer to purchase privately-owned motor vehicles while not allowing any extra vehicles to be put on the road.

“If a man sold his car back to the scheme but then borrowed his son’s car to get around, the fact is that there is one less car on the road and traffic congestion has been reduced.

“The net buyback scheme has reduced the number of nets that can be in the water at any one time. The buyback scheme is designed to take nets out of the water, not take out individual fishermen.”

Mr Harris said the net buyback scheme was not about sustainability or the environment, both of which were protected by existing fisheries regulations.

“This net buyback scheme reflects the fact the State Government has banned net fishing in a large area of water off Rockhampton, Mackay and Cairns – taking the local barramundi and other-caught fish species there away from seafood consumers and giving them to keen anglers – and is now trying to absorb some of the net fishing licences that have been displaced from those three areas.”.

Mr Harris also dismissed WWF comments about net fishing.

"WWF's ideal level of commercial fishing is zero. We have tried to work co-operatively with WWF in the past but they simply try to eliminate commercial fishing at every opportunity. Industry have no faith in WWF, its views and spokespeople that distort the truth to promote the myth that everything in the marine environment needs to be protected from commercial fishing."

"Commercial fishers are conservationists by nature or the marine resource would not be there year after year providing Queenslanders and Australians with fresh local seafood. Unfortunately, WWF is philosophically opposed to all forms of fishing but will work with anglers to get rid of commercial fishing first, before turning on the recreational sector" said Mr Harris.

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Attachments:

1. Background information regarding the NFZs issue omitted from the 7.30 Report segmented titled, '*Commercial fisher keeps fishing despite being paid \$210,000 to stop*'; link: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2017/s4628830.htm>
2. Catch data for the Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton NFZ regions.

ATTACHMENT 1

Sixteen months on from the Queensland government's introduction of its net free zone (NFZ) policy.

The following material provides facts omitted in the 7.30 Report segment titled, '*Commercial fisher keeps fishing despite being paid \$210,000 to stop*'.

Fact 1 – Bad Policy and No Public Debate

The NFZ policy was introduced by the ALP when in opposition and was released to the public only 48 hours before the 2015 Queensland State election. There was almost no time to debate the policy. Under the ALP's sustainability fishing policy it promised to set aside \$10 million in public funds to buy out commercial net fishers to implement a policy that was never based on sustainability concerns.

Fact 2 – So called 'Compensation'

The misunderstanding of how so called government 'compensation' is very simple. When the State government decides to undertake a resource reallocation process, from commercial fishing access to recreational, the State fisheries act provides for a degree of compensation for the loss of access for commercial fishers. The compensation process was inadequate as the State government does not include commercial fishing vessels or equipment which fails on every level to compensate commercial fishers for their investment in their fishery.

Fact 3 – Operation of Commercial Fisheries

Under Queensland fisheries laws most but not all fisheries symbols allow commercial fishers to work anywhere in the State with the exception of marine parks and recreational only fishing areas. QSIA estimates that almost 65 percent of commercially viable fishing grounds are lost to industry and the seafood that could go to Queenslanders and Australians. The NFZs simply add more area unavailable for commercial fishing leading to less fresh caught local fish for the community.

Fact 4 – WWF and Fisheries Management

Another failing of the 7.30 Report's segment was not capacity for industry to respond to the claims made by WWF. Despite repeated claims by the State government and special interest groups like WWF that the NFZs are being pursued along sustainability lines were baseless. The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries indicated through its contribution to national fisheries statistics that that the fisheries targeted by the NFZ policy are sustainably fished.

At no time has any credible, scientific data been presented that the Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton NFZs were under any sustainability threat. This never seems to concern WWF because their long-term goal is no commercial fishing. The inclusion of WWF in last night's 7.30 Report was a transparent attempt to justify a NFZ policy that was a political handover of a public resource to anglers who simply want more time to undertake their hobby.

Fact 5 – Consumer Impacts

Over the 2004-05 to 2013-14 Queensland and Australian consumers have lost, on average over 73 t of Barramundi from the Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton regions. Put another way, seafood consumers have lost over 294,000 (150gm) Barramundi serves which means the local and regional economy has lost the income generated from Barramundi sold regionally, income generated from restaurants and retail seafood outlets.

Before the introduction of the NFZ policy and again, over the 2004-05 to 2013-14 period, the Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton NFZs had produced 2,243 t of catch or over 8,900,000 serves of fish.

The Fitzroy has always been an extremely productive commercial fishing region which generated local business activity while still providing fish of all species to the recreational fishing sector. The NFZs are a selfish policy instrument that simply stopped net fishing for the benefit of recreational anglers and nothing more, there were never any sustainability concerns related to the NFZ areas.

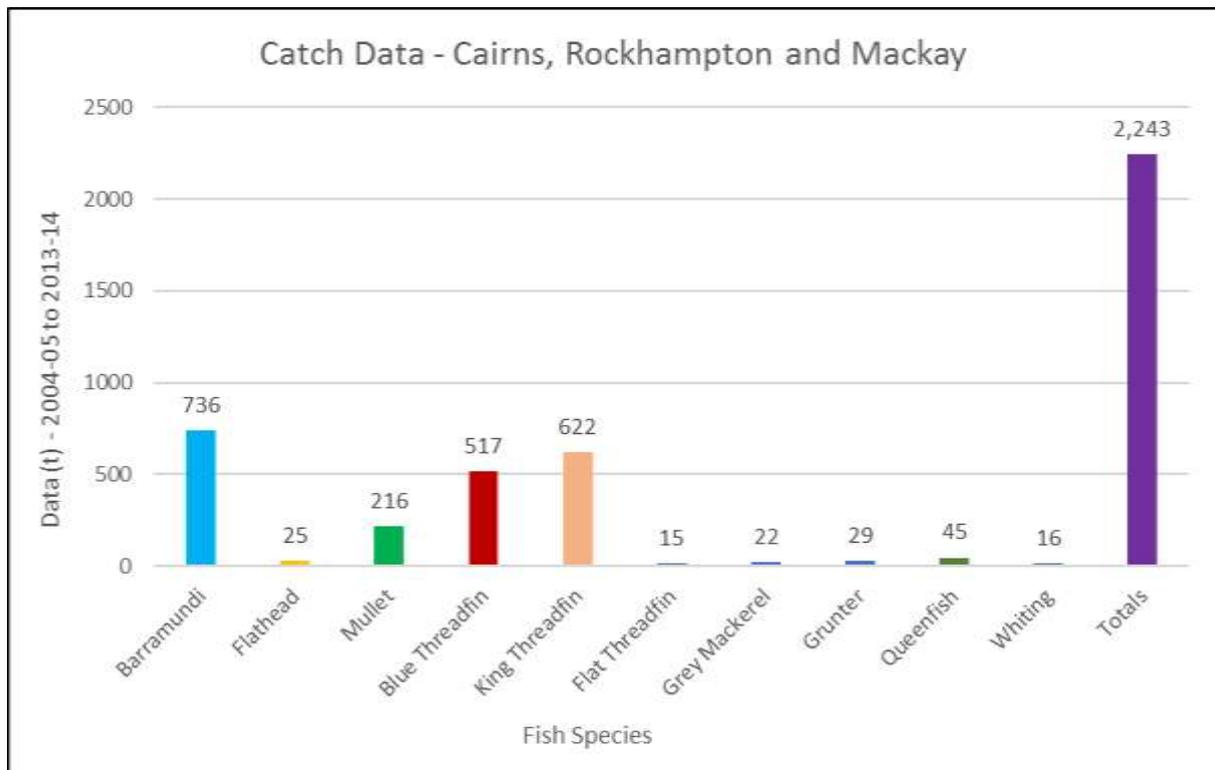
The policy has not worked for the benefit of the employment in the Cairns, Mackay or Rockhampton and is denying fresh local seafood to the local, State and national seafood consuming public.

ATTACHMENT 2

Graph 1 – With respect to commercial catch:

- Over the 2004-5 to 2013-14 period 2,243 t of fish were harvested in the Cairns, Rockhampton and Mackay regions.
- On average the State has lost 224.3 t of local caught fish not only going to local supply chains but also exported to other states and overseas.
- In terms of the iconic Barramundi – the average yearly catch was 73.6 t per year and with the NFZs this will fall to 48.6 t per year with the remaining potential catch lost to the Queensland and Australian seafood market but freely open to minimally monitored recreational fishing take.

Graph 1. Catch Data Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton NFZ Regions

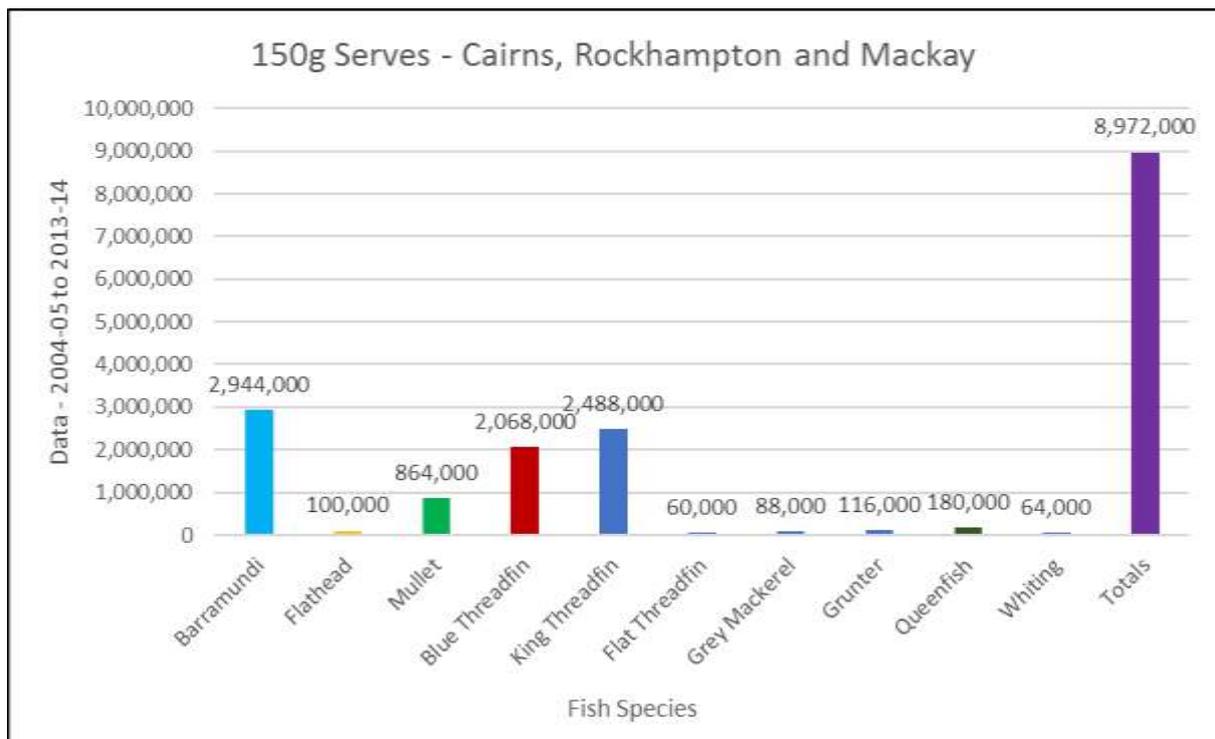


Source: QFish website – commercial catch data 2004-05 to 2013-14.

Graph 2 – In terms of fish serves lost to the community:

- Over the 2004-5 to 2013-14 period 8,972,000 serves of fish were harvested were produced in the Cairns, Rockhampton and Mackay regions.
- On average the State has lost 897,200 serves of local caught fish not only going to local supply chains but also exported to other states and overseas.
- In terms of the iconic Barramundi – the average yearly fish serve was 294,400 serves per year and with the NFZs this will fall to 197,248 serves per year not going to retail and wholesale seafood outlets.

Graph 2 – Fish Serves



Source: QFish website – commercial catch data 2004-05 to 2013-14.

QSIA used the experience of local commercial fishers, wholesalers and retailers to determine the following metrics:

- The average serve size was estimated at 150g. This was based on restaurant and retail fish and chip businesses and typical serving sizes. QSIA also examined the Heart Foundation and Queensland Health recommend 150g and 100g serves.
- QSIA also obtained advice from retail and wholesale businesses with respect to product retention rates with an average retention rate of 60% being applied to the statistics in this document and the attached excel spreadsheet.

The QFish website allows Queenslanders to analyse and present Queensland commercial and recreational fisheries data through the use of cubes (interactive tables) and maps.

QSIA has used this publicly available data to create the tables and excel spread sheets linked to commercial fishing grids:

- Cairns (H16).
- Mackay (O24 and N24).
- Rockhampton (R28, R29 and R30).