



21 March 2018

Hon Mark Furner
Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
GPO Box 46
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Minister

Re: Fisheries Reform Survey

On behalf of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) I would like to convey issues raised in a recent, industry driven survey regarding the reform process to date. The questions were drafted to illicit open feedback from QSIA members and non-members regarding the reform process. The feedback should be viewed for what it is – a point in time view from industry regarding real fears, concerns and issues held by industry.

Under a process that was initiated by government and that continues to cause stress to an entire industry, its more than appropriate to provide you with our perspective on your government's reform process. The fears cited in the report are real and have not been helped by some of the information products developed by the department.

To summarise the feedback received by the association:

- This reform could spell the end of small scale commercial fishing businesses that are the backbone of this industry;
- The financial and mental stress already caused by this reform process is very real and is unacceptable; and
- The reform will lead to more not less regulation and this needs to be avoided.

On behalf of the Board, I would like to organise a meeting with you regarding the feedback in the attached report. If you have any questions regarding this correspondence please contact me on M: 0417 631 353 or E: eo@qsia.com.au

Eric Perez

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Eric Perez', is positioned above the printed name.

Chief Executive Officer
Queensland Seafood Industry Association

Cc:

1. Scott Spencer, Deputy Director General, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries.

QSIA SURVEY RESULTS

21 March 2018

INDUSTRY VIEWS ON THE QUEENSLAND FISHERIES REFORM PROCESS

PART 1. INTRODUCTION

The association invited members and non-members to provide their views on the reform process. The responses reflect a point in time view from industry regarding the reform process has impacted commercial fishers and post-harvest businesses. Industry views are critical to understand as the reform process has the capacity to both build and undermine the viability of commercial fishing businesses.

QSIA received 100 responses completed between 8 and 18 March 2018. The responses are broken down in Table 1 below. The majority of respondents were commercial trawl fishers (34 respondents) followed by commercial fishers who indicated work across multiple fisheries (32 commercial fishers).

Table 1. Response Demographics

	No of Respondents	% Respondents
Trawl	34	34
Net	6	6
Crab	9	9
Line	7	7
Multiple-Fisheries*	32	32
Wild harvest and Post-Harvest**	8	8
Post-Harvest***	4	4

Notes: * Respondents indicated participation across a combination of net and crab, line and trawl fisheries. ** Respondents indicated wild harvest and post-harvest business interests. *** Respondents indicated ownership of a post-harvest fishery business.

PART 2. SURVEY RESPONSES

Question 1.

Are you concerned with the speed at which Fisheries Queensland is undertaking the reform process? *Response: Yes – Too Fast; No – Too Slow*

In terms of concerns regarding the speed of the reform process, 86 percent of respondents indicated the process was rushed. Fourteen respondents indicated that the process is progressing too slowly.

Question 2.

Do you want the process slowed down to give you more time to consider the impacts on you and your business? *Response: Yes; No*

In terms of slowing down the process, 84 percent of respondents indicated that they wanted more time to consider the impact of the reform on them and their businesses. Sixteen percent of respondents did not want the process slowed down.

Question 3.

Do you have concerns regarding how Fisheries Queensland are engaging with the commercial fishing industry? *Response: Yes; No. If yes – respondents were asked to list concerns*

With respect to engagement between Fisheries Queensland and industry 87 percent of respondents noted concerns. Thirteen percent of respondents did not highlight concerns with the engagement process.

A range of themes emerged from the responses including:

- A feeling amongst participants that the reform process has pre-determined outcomes despite the current level of engagement with commercial fishers.
- Consultation sessions that seem to involve being told what will happen as opposed to seeking views.
- No ability to change thinking around some reform elements – vessel monitoring systems (VMS) were noted.
- A feeling that department officers are not listening to industry views.
- More consultation needed including:
 - More one on one meetings;
 - More open industry forums; and
 - Booking venues and meeting times that suit industry.
- A fear that environmental and recreational fishing representative's will coerce the department and government to further restrict commercial fishing access at a time when the majority of Queensland fish stocks are sustainable.

Question 4.

Please detail any other concerns you have on your future under this reform process. A range of themes also emerged from the responses including:

- Suspicion across majority of respondents that they do not trust the process.
- Small scale commercial fishers in the inshore and trawl fisheries feel that the process will marginalise them.
- Respondents noted that the sustainability of the fisheries is not the key driver for reform but how each fishery is managed. Why then the speed of the reform and why (perceived) need to reduce commercial effort?
- Reform can be achieved but that outcome does not have to come at the expense of small scale fishers and massive (unscientifically determined) reductions in effort.
- Rumours persist across that effort reduction may see 30 to 50 percent reductions in catch when there is no sustainability crisis.
- Fear amongst multi-endorsed, small scale commercial fishers that their business model is under threat as part of the reform.
- Past reform process have tended to focus on resource reallocation from commercial to recreational fishers – fear that the current process will lead to more of the same.
- Zoning has little support as it will restrict the ability of small trawl operators (other commercial fishers if adopted in other fisheries) to make a living.
- Distrust of the expression of interest (EOI) process used by the department.

PART 3. ADDITIONAL ISSUES

The themes and issues raised amongst the respondents provide a view that trust building requires more attention. The current engagement process undertaken by Fisheries Queensland is not viewed as adequate or promoting trust between industry, the department and other stakeholders.

Working Group Communiques

The amount of information provided on the department website is needed to ensure the full scope of the reform is understood. However, the usefulness of the meeting communiques is questionable. The documents provide a summary of meeting details which of course are not a verbatim copy of deliberations.

The 10-11 January 2018 inshore working group communique (specifically page 3) generated considerable angst and fear amongst commercial fishers in the net fishery by providing a list of options. There was little detail behind any of the options to allow for any meaningful discussion or debate regarding the business and market implications of each option. It is understood more information will be provided to industry through discussion papers.

Selection of Working Group Members

Trawl fishery respondents stated distrust of commercial fishery members and the process by which they were chosen. This feedback was expected and is unfair to applicants on the following grounds:

- Industry operators were asked to apply and respond to an EOI process and were chosen based on the strength of their applications;
- Individual fishers and post-harvest applicants have limited capacity to contact an entire industry sector;
- No formal communication process (other than communiques) were established to allow commercial fishing working group members to provide feedback to industry.

It should be noted that the government's selection process was undertaken as an EOI for specific fishery advisory groups. No Queensland commercial fishing industry body had a say in how the process was administered or the selection criteria used to make final decisions. The reform process was initiated by government so the manner in which they select industry across the wild harvest and post-harvest sectors was never going to be a process led by an industry group.