

**MEDIA RELEASE
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Net Free Zones the policy failure the public keep funding

DISTURBING is today's media release titled, 'Rockhampton net-free fishing zone performing well' from the Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, Hon Mark Furner. Since the introduction of the net free zones (NFZs) the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) indicated the zones would do nothing more than increase recreational fisher satisfaction.

'This outcome suggests that the NFZs have not attracted increased tourist numbers or increased investment by locals. It must be hard for a stunningly bad policy to be sold as a winner when the key finding is that local recreational fishers are feeling happy' said Kevin Reibel, QSIA Treasurer.

The Minister's media release noted the following:

As NFZs age, they might produce stronger effects on recreational fishing catches, but these effects will vary between regions due to the area covered by the NFZ, environmental factors such as floods and drought, and the reproductive and migratory capabilities of the targeted fish and their prey.

'I have a few questions for the Minister and anti-commercial fishing State government is a simple one – (1) How long do NFZs need to age before the Queensland economy benefits, I mean other than making local recreational anglers happy? (2) As the zones age should we keep in mind that a lack of tourism investment in the zones is either nature's fault or the behaviour of local fish species?'

The release also mentions an increase the size of fish being caught, the more fish grow in the Fitzroy River the larger fish, like Barramundi, will start to deplete juvenile and breeding stock. The commercial fishing sector has never harvested barred javelin in the Fitzroy River in any numbers.

The Minister's media release notes that the number of fish has not increased in the Mackay or Cairns. Seemingly the only reason for the Mackay and Cairns was to allow local anglers an exclusive opportunity to access fish – a policy outcome that fails the economic and tourism generation test.

The number of trailers counted at boat ramps in all their zones has remained steady in Rockhampton according to the Minister's media release. 'Again, the issue is the exclusion of commercial net fishing was wholly unnecessary and an insult to over 50 commercial fishers in North Queensland'.

Public funds are still being used to conduct boat ramp surveys not to mention Fisheries Queensland officers time to analyse what seems to be little to no increase in local economic activity or increased tourism visits.

'The government keeps investing public funds to promote the benefits of a politically motivated fisheries policy introduced by a previous fisheries minister who was happy to tell industry that the NFZs were created to court the recreational vote. The zones need to be reconsidered and commercial net fishing reintroduced which actually generates economic activity locally and for the State' said Mr Reibel.

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