



Position Statement #7 Mental Health

1. Introduction

A recent report released by the Productivity Commission notes that approximately one in five Australians experiences mental ill-health and that the cost to the national economy of mental ill-health and suicide falls somewhere between \$43 to \$51 billion per year¹.

The Association seeks better mental health outcomes through strategic fisheries policy development.

2. Rationale

Two key reports, one taking a national perspective and the other, a Queensland perspective provide a view of mental health in this industry.

2.1. King et al (2019)

The report explored the mental health and stress levels of Australian commercial fishers led by Dr Tanya King of Deakin University and her colleagues.

The report noted the following physical and mental health findings²:

- 60% of fishers who responded to the survey had moderate to very severe bodily pain. This is higher than reported by the ABS on the general population at 46.5%.
- Over half of the respondents said pain had interfered with their normal activities.
- The most common health symptoms experienced by the fishers surveyed included back pain, joint pain, fatigue, stress, trouble sleeping, sunburn, infections, and hearing problems. Over 30% of surveyed fishers experienced these health symptoms.
- Surveyed fishers reported being diagnosed with a number of conditions at a higher rate than the general population, particularly high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, type 2 diabetes and cancer.
- Commercial fishers who responded to the survey experience significantly higher levels of 'high' and 'very high' psychological distress than the Australian population as a whole. High or very high levels of psychological distress were experienced by 16.0% and 6.2% of fisher respondents respectively, compared to 8.0% (high) and 3.7% (very high) of Australians aged 18 years and over.

¹ Productivity Commission, Mental Health, Draft Report (2019, p. 2). Approximately \$130 billion is associated with the costs of diminished health and reduced life expectancy for those living with mental ill-health.

² King T, Abernethy K, Brumby S, Hatherell T, Kilpatrick S, Munksgaard, K & Turner R. 2018. Sustainable Fishing Families: Developing industry human capital through health, wellbeing, safety and resilience. Report to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation Project No. 2016/400. Deakin University, Western District Health Service, University of Tasmania and University of Exeter. Canberra, October. CC BY 3.0, pp. 2-3.

2.2. Shaw et al (2011)

Commercial fishers are seemingly under continuous pressure. Shaw and her colleagues noted³:

- Fishers and families are feeling the strain from the many changes to which they have worked to adapt.
- This is clearly shown in this response from one of the wives concerned about her husband's health, the family's financial position, and criticism from the community, 'Fishers are not recognised as doing a valuable job, as though they are providing for the community. Their job and position and person are devalued'.

3. Conclusion

3.1. Course of Action

Significantly more work is needed to improve mental health outcomes for commercial fishers.

3.2. Solution

Cooperation between government and industry to develop targeted mental health interventions that focus on commercial fishers.

4. Authorisation

The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) is the peak industry body representing the Queensland seafood industry. Our members include professional fishers, seafood processors, marketers, retailers and other business associated with the seafood industry. Our representation to members and the community at large is to promote the consumption of wild caught Queensland seafood.

Approved and Endorsed by: QSIA Board
November 2019

For Review: November 2020

³ Shaw S, Johnson H & Dressler W, 2011. Identifying, Communicating and Integrating Social Considerations into Future Management Concerns in Inshore Commercial Fisheries in Coastal Queensland. Report to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation Project No 2008/073. Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, Canberra, and the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, Clayfield, Queensland, pp. 79-80.