



## **DISAPPOINTING FISHING TOURNAMENT VALUABLE LESSON FOR FISHERIES MANAGEMENT**

A DISAPPOINTING fishing tournament in Central Queensland – where catches were down on previous years despite a complete ban on net-fishing – holds valuable lessons for future fisheries management throughout the State.

Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) President Keith Harris said disappointing catches in last weekend's Barra Bounty fishing tournament had forced recreational fishing lobbyists to concede that weather and seasonal conditions were the main factors influencing angler catch numbers – not professional fishing.

"In the past, whenever angling catches were lower than expected, the recreational fishing lobby has blamed commercial net-fishing," Mr Harris said.

"But now, with no net fishermen allowed in the Fitzroy River system for the past 12 months, they have been forced to admit the poor catches are the result of weather and seasonal conditions.

"Bill Byrne, the local Rockhampton State Member of Parliament and a former Fisheries Minister, has also admitted fishing conditions reduced catches of barramundi in this year's tournament."

Mr Harris said these admissions were "hugely significant" for fisheries management throughout Queensland.

"In well-managed fisheries like those in Queensland, where catches are sustainable and reasonable numbers of fish are always available, seasonal conditions and weather play a far larger role in determining recreational fishing catches than commercial fishing does," he said.

"However, the recreational fishing lobby is prosecuting a campaign to ban net-fishing from all Queensland inshore waters, and so blame net-fishing whenever there is any hiccup in angling catches.

"This year's Barra Bounty catch in the Rockhampton region was the worst for at least six years and – guess what? – they can't blame net-fishing because Bill Byrne banned that a year ago.

"The results of the Barra Tournament have demonstrated commercial fishing is not to blame when anglers can't catch as many fish as they want. That fact should be applied when authorities are responding to more demands from recreational fishing lobbyists for commercial fishing bans elsewhere in Queensland.

“This is a very significant outcome and proves the point that the QSIA has been arguing in fisheries allocation debates for years.”

Mr Harris said this year’s total barramundi catch by 138 anglers fishing for two days was just 256 fish, around a third of the average catch of the previous five years.

“Last year, with professional fishermen still operating in the river and catching fish for the Rockhampton community, the same number of Barra Bountry competitors caught 409 barramundi and 516 king threadfin. In 2014, they caught 440 barra, 667 in 2013, 669 in 2012 and in 2011 they caught 1,210 barra.

“Recreational fishing lobbyists can no longer argue net fishing is the main influence on recreational fishing catches. That argument is simply not credible. This year’s Barra Bounty results have proved that argument is simply wrong, wrong, wrong.”

“Some final thoughts for the community, you know, those Queenslanders that rely on commercial fishers to access fresh local seafood. The net bans limit not only local but also regional and national supplies of fresh local seafood. Whether the seafood harvest in central and northern Queensland is sold domestically, interstate or overseas the economic impact is positive for central and northern Queensland. The money comes back to where the fish was caught.”

“The net-fishing bans have been successful in one selfish respect, delivering a resource that is accessed by the few at the cost of the broader community. This level of selfishness is a message more Queenslanders are becoming aware of and industry will continue to ask on their behalf – is a local recreational angler’s right to access local seafood more important than the community’s right to have their share of the sustainable fisheries resource in this great State,” Mr Harris said.

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