



11 April 2018

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

Dear Minister

**Re: Conservation Groups and Fisheries Reform**

On behalf of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) I am seeking your support for changes in the legislative and regulatory environment that allow conservation groups like WWF to purchase Queensland commercial fishing licences.

I am also seeking the removal of conservation groups members from WWF and the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) on the fisheries working groups. These conservation groups are destructive to my industry and have significant negative impacts on the lives of commercial fishers and their families across Queensland.

**1. WWF and Net Licence Purchases**

The recent plans to purchase another net symbol by WWF suggests a significant anti-commercial fishing stance.

***QSIA supports:***

- The creation of legislative or regulatory barriers to WWF and similar groups from buying commercial fishing licences.
- Ongoing net fishing in any part of Queensland coastline, including far north Queensland.
- Commercial fishing arrangements that allow genuine market participants to enter our commercial fisheries for the benefit of industry and to maintain the supply of fresh, local caught seafood to the community.

***QSIA is opposed to:***

- The creation of any special zones in far north Queensland reflect the ridiculous policy position underpinning the net free zones in Mackay, Rockhampton and Cairns.
- The ongoing interference of WWF and other conservation groups in the commercial seafood industry.
- The potential loss of harvest of blacktip sharks, barramundi, garfish, grey mackerel and king threadfin – all commercially caught species will be put under threat under WWF's 'Net Free Far North Queensland'.
- Green groups buying more licences that will push net fishers from the north of the state to areas further south and create increased fishing pressure. This will lead to more

'investing' from WWF in the future and the tactic is not in the best interests of commercial fisheries or the community's access to local caught seafood.

## 2. Membership of Working Groups

The creation of working groups to progress the reform process have a range of stakeholder representatives. I was led to understand that a key part of being selected was an ability to bring a degree of goodwill to the table and to achieve an outcome that would be of benefit to all marine stakeholders.

The reform process was based on a return to profitability for the commercial seafood sector while simultaneously providing a sustainable management plan which considered all marine stakeholders – a 'Triple Bottom Line' approach. This approach is undermined by the presence of WWF and similar organisations within the working groups. The attached links (see below) should provide enough of an argument to exclude these groups from undermining my industry.

It is quite clear that WWF will continue to spew their propaganda to the community and use their funds to buy more commercial net licences. Their tactic is a simple one:

- Offer large sums of money to remove net licences;
- Continue the process along the Queensland coast;
- Become an investor in our commercial net fisheries; and
- Restrict access to quota (if this is an outcome of the reform process which is known by industry as a position favoured of conservation groups).

### **WWF**

The following is an extract from a WWF briefing paper attributed to Jim Higgs:

- Enact legislation to end commercial gill net fishing in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area between Cooktown and the Torres Strait including adjacent state waters by December 2018.
- 'Buy out' the one commercial gill net fisher based in Cooktown with access to the Princess Charlotte Bay Special Management Area that was established to protect local dugong populations.
- If required, provide structural adjustment for other commercial net fishers who use the area from time to time.
- Provide financial assistance to expand Indigenous ecotourism and guided fishing tourism opportunities in the region.

The argument from government that commercial fishers operate in an open market is a spurious one – WWF is an active purchaser of commercial net licences but not a genuine commercial fishing participant. Their ultimate goal is to destabilise and undermine what is a sustainable net fishery. The association is not opposed to an open market but how can a market operate when non-industry investors distort that market under the guise of open trade?

Does WWF publish the source of its donations and are foreign sources of funding being used to undermine an iconic Australian industry? How can individuals working for WWF and AMCS participate in government working groups when their long-term agenda is the removal of net fishing in north Queensland.

## **AMCS**

The association amongst other commercial fishing organisations called for the removal of Ms Tooni Mahto's removal from the Inshore Fisheries Working Group as a result of her comments including, 'Gillnets are invisible walls of death for some of Queensland's precious marine wildlife'.

Industry were happy to see that the department acted to maintain some integrity in the selection process of stakeholders. Yet Nick Heath, President (Qld) of the AMCS was appointed Ms Mahto's replacement.

### **QSIA seeks:**

- The removal of Mr Jim Higgs (WWF) and Nick Heath (AMCS) as representatives on any fisheries reform working groups.
- If they are not removed please provide industry with reasons why they should remain on the working groups?
- The conservation interest should be supported by Queensland government agencies such as the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing.

Industry is already under considerable stress and elements of industry are choosing not to engage with the reform process because the level trust between industry and government is non-existent.

The test for government will be what, if any action will be taken to address industry's concerns? The games played by conservation groups have, for many years, undermined land and marine based agriculture. The public good is not at risk if WWF and AMCS are not involved in the fisheries working groups but what is at stake are commercial wild harvest and post-harvest access to seafood and of course the public's right to access local caught seafood.

The environmental lobby are not the voice of the entire community on every issue and their presence in the future of my industry is an ongoing insult to commercial fishers in Queensland.

If you have any questions regarding this correspondence please contact me on M: 0417 631 353 or E: [eo@qsia.com.au](mailto:eo@qsia.com.au).

Eric Perez



Chief Executive Officer  
Queensland Seafood Industry Association

Cc:

1. Hon Josh Frydenberg, Minister for the Environment and Energy.
2. Dr Russell Reichelt, Chairman, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.
3. Scott Spencer, Deputy Director General, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.
4. Marshall Betzel, President, Queensland Seafood Marketers Association.
5. Shane Ward, Chairman, Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman's Association.
6. Ron Dickinson, President, Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Association.
7. Elaine Lewthwaite, President, Hervey Bay Seafood Festival, President.
8. Steve Essery, President, Townsville Ross River Marina.
9. Richard Hamilton, Chairman, Gold Coast Fisherman's Cooperative.

WWF and AMCS Articles

Link 1: [WWF – Net Free Far North Qld Campaign](#)

Link 2: [Net Free Far North Qld Campaign Briefing](#)

Link 3: [Fisheries Working Group Membership](#) – Letter to Scott Spencer, Deputy Director General, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.

Link 4: [eNGOs and the Queensland Fisheries Reform Process](#)

Link 5: [eNGO views of the commercial seafood industry](#)