

Queensland SEAFOOD

2023 NUMBER 1



- **QSIA AGM held at Mackay**
- **Industry criticises quotas**
- **Spanish mackerel changes**
- **Master Fisherman project**

**CONSUMERS TO LOSE GREAT
SANDY STRAIT SEAFOOD**



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Big rollup to AGM. Page 4.



Crab fisher workshops. Page 8.



Seafood lovers losers. Page 12.



Retailers awarded. Page 24.

PRESIDENT ON THE LINE 4
FROM THE CEO 5
INDUSTRY CRITICISES QUEENSLAND QUOTA FISHERIES 6
REPORT ON RESPONSIBLE CRAB FISHER WORKSHOPS 8
PLANS FOR WORK TO PROTECT WHALES OFF QLD 10
NET FISHER GUIDES COMING FOR EAST COAST 11
CONSUMERS TO LOSE GREAT SANDY SEAFOOD 12
FISHING BANS TO COST HUNDREDS OF JOBS 14
MAP OF PLANNED GREAT SANDY FISHING BANS 16
IMPACTS OF FISHING BANS ON INDUSTRY 19
CHANGES FOR SPANISH MACKEREL MANAGEMENT 22
GOVT REPORT CONFIRMS FISH STOCKS STABLE 23
TWO NQ SEAFOOD BUSINESSES RATED NATION'S BEST 24
CROSSINGS: PROF SHAWN SOMERSET 26
FEDS SEEK FEEDBACK ON C.O.O.L. FOR RESTAURANTS 27
BOATS & GEAR: NEW NQ NET AND REEF BOAT 28
THE GULL 30

In this edition ...

THE QSIA annual general meeting in Mackay on January 20 attracted members from literally one end of the State to the other – from Karumba to the Gold Coast.

Members were drawn in part by the opportunity to put questions direct to senior staff from the Department of Agriculture & Fisheries (DAF), a rare opportunity in these times, with the once-common port meetings conducted by DAF largely replaced by shy DAF staff preferring to deal with fishers remotely.

For more information on the AGM and other QSIA news, see the President's and CEO's columns on pages 4 and 5 respectively.

Tragic news over the summer is the plan by the Queensland Government to transfer the majority of finfish resources in the Great Sandy region – and particularly in Great Sandy Strait from Hervey Bay to Tin Can Bay – from seafood consumers almost exclusively to anglers.

This means some of the favourite fish species for local seafood consumers, such as whiting, will be transferred from the majority of the community to a small percentage of expert anglers.

Front cover: Hervey Bay-based fisher Brett Fuchs – seen here with a jetboat purpose-built for shallow-water net-fishing in Great Sandy Strait – is one of the many whose catches will be severely impacted by proposed netting bans in the region. (See articles beginning on page 12.)

The current management rules for Great Sandy Marine Park, drawn up by a previous Labor Government, are planned to be changed to ban most types of finfish netting throughout the length of Great Sandy Strait.

This and other bans and restrictions will have a massive impact on commercial fishing in the region, robbing consumers of huge volumes of seafood and sacrificing hundreds of jobs.

Unless local seafood consumers can force a change of heart from the State Government, Great Sandy Strait will be added to the growing list of “net-free zones” in Queensland.

Our coverage of this issue begins on page 12.

OceanWatch Australia has conducted a series of “responsible crab fisher” workshops along the Queensland east coast, and is planning more workshops on working safely with whales and guidelines for the east coast net fishery. See pages 8-11.

In good news on the marketing front, two NQ seafood retailers have been judged the best in the nation (page 24), while the Federal Government is pushing on with plans for country-of-origin labelling (COOL) on seafood in restaurants and is seeking industry feedback (page 27).

Queensland Seafood is the official journal of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association Inc, the peak body representing the State's seafood industry.

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PRESIDENT ON THE LINE

Storm clouds on the horizon

HELLO everyone. We have kicked off the new year with some storm clouds on the horizon.

Late 2022 saw industry entering the festive season with some worrying concerns, including the proposed new management plan for the Great Sandy Marine Park (GSMP), possible closure for three years in the Gulf net fishery on questionable science, the huge reduction of the total allowable catch (TAC) in the Spanish mackerel fishery – again on questionable science – and the threat of phasing out net fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) by the UNESCO report, and other issues affecting fishers. There weren't many positives.

QSIA 2023

QSIA has kicked off the year with our annual general meeting (AGM) in Mackay, which was well attended. All directors were returned, along with a new addition of a young fisher from the Burdekin region; his name is Dale Vener.

As you are aware, we have had a change in our CEO since the departure of Eric. You will learn more about this in his CEO's report in this magazine.

At the AGM, there was an open forum where Fisheries Queensland (FQ) were present and FQ CEO Dallas D'Silva gave a presentation and attempted to answer questions from the floor.

The feedback I have been receiving is fishers would like to see these forums facilitated in the regions and be one-day forums to cover all fisheries. We will continue to lobby the department to do so.

QSIA has had an increase in members, which is encouraging, as fishers can see that a fresh approach has been taken to achieve better outcomes for our industry.

The post implementation review (PIR) is still ongoing for the vessel monitoring system (VMS), with interesting times ahead to see what the outcome will be.

We need to be mindful that FQ are obligated to start PIRs for all fisheries later this year because a regulatory impact statement (RIS) was waived. This PIR is part of the guidelines for better regulation. It will be interesting to see what benefits are put up to justify this "reform" process.

Since the implementation of the reform / harvest strategy – now entering its sixth year – look where we have landed. We have seen fishery managers shifted sideways and new managers parachuted in with fancy titles who don't seem to stay long. However, this has done little to restore the disconnect fishery managers have created with industry.

There is a reluctance by managers to revisit anomalies which have been raised in all fisheries. It seems their

standard response is "We'll have to get back to you."

The implementation of this reform and its management of the implementation could best be described as shambolic.

Farewell Eric

I want to take this opportunity to say thank-you and farewell to our former CEO, Eric Perez.

Eric worked with the QSIA in a number of roles over an 11-year period and resigned in November to take up other opportunities.

It was a long time to spend in such a demanding environment and I know fishers throughout the State really appreciate his efforts on their behalf.

Eric has been through the many trials and tribulations of our Industry serving, and I want to thank him for his contributions and earnest application to his duties.

During his time with QSIA, Eric was also to continue his university studies, including achieving a doctorate of professional studies, focussing on leadership development.

All at QSIA wish the now Doctor Eric Perez all the best in his next career move and future endeavours.

That's all for now. Stay safe, and good fishing.

Allan

**Allan Bobbermen
President**



The QSIA annual general meeting at Mackay in January attracted a good rollup of members from throughout the State.

On a steep learning curve but wanting to make a positive contribution

IN November 2022, when I was asked to take on this role, I told the Board that I would as long as I felt that I was able to make a difference. After three months and a steep learning curve (and a lot more to come), I believe, with your help, that I can positively contribute to the Queensland wild catch seafood industry and, more specifically, to QSIA members.

As you may know, your President, Allan, is my brother. I had just sold my business and had some time off when Allan approached me to take on the CEO role. I have a degree in accounting and have worked in professional services firms (Ernst & Young) and small to large corporates.

I don't particularly like accounting but it has given me an excellent foundation to have a varied career, most of which has been in management. I have worked in many industries, including retail, wholesale, IT, aviation, transport and tourism, and in many countries of the world. I hope that I can maximise the skills I have learnt in this role.

We held our annual general meeting (AGM) on 20 January 2023 in Mackay and hosted our inaugural Fisherman's Forum. Both of these were well attended. It was good to have fishers and allied industry representatives in the same room as the Executive Director and others from Fisheries Queensland.

One of the big issues flagged from this forum is the potential impacts of Marine Parks on our ability to fish. We see this already happening with the draft Great Sandy Marine Park review, comments made by Federal Environment Minister Plibersek, UNESCO reports recommending the listing of the Great Barrier Reef as endangered, and the list goes on.

Given the success of the Fisherman's Forum, QSIA intends to host similar events throughout the year at other ports. I want to thank Fisheries Queensland, Stay Afloat and commercial fishers for making this possible.

Environmental credibility

I believe the industry must improve its environmental credibility.

QSIA has applied for a Federal Government grant to research by-

catch mitigation of threatened and endangered species in gill nets.

QSIA also sits on the Great Barrier Reef 2050 Advisory Committee. We work with organisations like OceanWatch to improve our environmental impact. I am also establishing a relationship with the State and Federal Environment Departments.

Remember: perception is reality. So, we must improve the industries environmental perception.

Vessel tracking

Vessel tracking malfunctions continue to be a big issue.

The Queensland Department of Agriculture & Fisheries (QDAF) have a manual reporting procedure that should allow you to continue to work, if your unit is not operating. Make sure that you are familiar with this procedure.

On the QSIA internet site, under "Member Resources", you will find out more about the procedure. If you have any issues with resolving your vessel tracking manual procedure, please contact QSIA for help.

Also, over the coming months, the QSIA website will be overhauled, providing more resources for our members.



The Fisherman's Forum at the recent AGM included a presentation by Jo Marshall from Stay Afloat, an organisation dedicated to improving the mental health of the Australian seafood industry.

State Govt strategy

The Queensland Government's Sustainable Fishing Strategy is now into its second half.

Most reform brought about by this appears to be complete, although we find it difficult to get a commitment from Fisheries Queensland (FQ) that this is so. That does not mean there will be no changes into the future; in fact, far from it.

Stock assessments and harvest strategies will continue to be done, potentially impacting TACC and quota (up or down). If industry disagrees with the conclusions reached by Fisheries Queensland (Spanish mackerel and Region 5 king salmon for example), we should and will take the issue up with FQ.

To do this with some prospect of success, we have to prove that their assumptions and/or science is flawed. This has been achieved previously in the prawn fishery.

Cameras on vessels is also another "reform" that is being trialled. If you are asked to trial cameras, be cautious. Based on our experience with vessel tracking trials, take the time to document everything. The faded ink is better than the faded word!

The Queensland tourism industry, restaurants and consumers need a strong and profitable wild-caught commercial fishing industry.

We must keep them informed of the risks to our ability to meet their demand. Any way you can do this at a grassroots level will be helpful.

Happy fishing

David Bobbermen

Industry criticises Queensland quota fisheries

The Queensland seafood industry has criticised the State's fisheries quotas in a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural & Regional Affairs & Transport Inquiry into the Fisheries Quota System.

THE Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) made a submission to the inquiry back in 2021 and was requested to make a supplementary submission, which it lodged late last year.

This second submission also had the support and involvement of the Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Association, the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association and the Green Shirts Movement.

In the latest submission, the QSIA said commercial fishers in Queensland "have endured a hollow, unbalanced reform process over the last five years – and at its core was the introduction of new quota fisheries".

"Commercial fishers have endured the brunt of ill conceived, ideological and data poor processes."

The submission said that, to date:

- ❑ There has been no regulatory impact statement (RIS) of new quota fisheries;
- ❑ There was never a full audit of each fishery to determine catch history before quota levels were established;
- ❑ There is no policy from the Queensland Government to increase quota levels if environmental factors allow them to do so; and
- ❑ The catastrophic failure of the management of the Queensland Spanish Mackerel (SM) fishery (a quota managed fishery for almost two decades) demonstrates the flaws in quota management system.

MBSIA

The Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Association (MBSIA) said that:

- ❑ Internationally, quota-managed fisheries lead to a huge amount of waste when the commercial fisher has reached a quota limit. Fisheries managers and politicians do not care about this.
- ❑ The so-called fisheries "reforms" are highlighting flaws in stock assessments.
- ❑ There is no structural adjustment, and fishermen have to live with "reform" or get out.

- ❑ Harvest strategies have been developed with little notice paid to what commercial fishermen have said.
- ❑ One question that no-one in fisheries management will answer is "Why have total allowable catches not been tried before quota was rushed in?"

GOCCFA

The Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen's Association (GOCCFA) said that:

- ❑ Quotas are seen as an easier and cheaper management tool to reduce over-fishing and over-capacity, aimed at improving the sustainability by reducing over-capacity. Surely there are other means to reduce this over-capacity in those fisheries that are deemed overfished, without introducing catch quotas across all sectors?
- ❑ Some demonstrated negative aspects of this approach include general reductions in local employment and large regional economic impacts (especially in small-scale fisheries and remote / small communities like ours).
- ❑ It is a social and commodity issue, a shared resource that has various sectors claiming ownership – some paid for but most of the resource's users in Queensland access it for free.
- ❑ In Queensland, with our massive number of registered boat owners and the general increase in recreational fishing training by professional fishers online, module style education courses; and the massive improvement and affordability in amazing fishing power technology (outboard reliability and fish finders) these days, has shifted the extraction levels of the public resources far and wide.
- ❑ How could a government impose a catch quota system on known commercial fisheries that have operated for decades with sustainable fisheries, with data-poor information from all sectors except the commercial sector?
- ❑ It is an easy option and will in time lead to fewer and large company monopolies (non-local or even

overseas-based) that control the harvesting, processing and marketing of the catch – with the potential loss of domestic sales and all quality seafood exported. It won't be an easy option for commercial fishing families, domestic buyers, or associated small business and communities that could disappear with the advent of catch quotas.

- ❑ Please explore other catch controls across the sectors to maintain the sustainability levels, if sectors outside of the commercial sector keep increasing how could a fair and equitable quota system work.

Green Shirts

The Green Shirts Movement said:

- ❑ Terms of scientific consensus and settled science are used as the justification for imposing catch quota systems of our commercial fishing sector.
- ❑ Yet, currently, those tasked by government regulators with the job of estimating species-specific populations neglect to sample zones with enormous biomass potential.
- ❑ This selective and incomplete surveying is akin to conducting a census to estimate population but failing to recognise or include metropolitan areas.
- ❑ It is little wonder that the current modelling gives commercial fishermen little faith in the Government science behind limits, biomass baselines, or around the Government's timeframes around the rebuilding of what the sector is told are imperilled stocks.

Spanish mackerel fishery

The submission also discussed the Spanish mackerel (SM) fishery.

It said the SM fishery has been under quota management arrangements for almost two decades. The mismanagement of the SM fishery has led to displaced commercial fishers from one fishery to another and puts pressure on a different resource and increases social conflict.

If commercial SM fishers are not able to work in their chosen fishery, they are likely to move into a different fishery. This continues to speak to the urgent need for a properly funded regulatory impact statement (RIS).

There has been no assessment on the impacts of any regulatory changes on either the harvest or post-harvest sectors. A reduced quota value will lead to less fish harvested and a significant reduction in the availability of SM.

The outcome will be:



Management of quota fisheries in Queensland – like the coral trout fishery – has been widely criticised by industry representatives appearing before a Senate committee.

- ❑ The SM stock assessment and proposed changes by Fisheries Queensland has led to a significant decrease in the value of all primary licence and endorsement values under Fisheries Queensland management.
- ❑ Many long-term fisherman have already sold out and left the industry since “consultation period” started due to the management options proposed making their operations unviable.
- ❑ Fisheries Queensland stock assessment and recommended harvests in other fisheries (eg, saddletail snapper) has meant there are no alternative fisheries they feel confidence in diversifying into therefore the only alternative is to leave the industry.
- ❑ Local seafood wholesalers and retailers have already been forced to source replacement product from international suppliers (primarily Indonesia) as evidenced by the recent visit to Cairns by Fisheries Queensland upper management, where they were proud to state they had the privilege of eating SM while at a local high-end restaurant to later find out the product was actually imported from Indonesia.
- ❑ Increased imports of wild-caught

SM from countries with extremely poor or non-existent fisheries management.

- ❑ Increased imports of aquaculture substitutes containing trace elements well above the accepted levels of human consumption.
- ❑ Increased domestic aquaculture substitutes.

Feedback has been provided to the Queensland Government on the deficiencies of the science used to develop the current SM stock assessment.

Some key concerns include:

- ❑ In the SM fishery working group, members were advised that they were not there to “question the science”.
- ❑ The working group was meant to meet monthly during 2021 but a single meeting was held in May 2021 and a second meeting held in February 2022.
- ❑ In 2004, as a result of the zoning of the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), commercial fishers lost between 60 and 73 per cent of their access to SM stocks. The data collection process used to inform the current stock

assessment did not sample SM in the green zones (spawning aggregation areas) of the GBR.

- ❑ Working group members have no faith in the validity of the data used by Fisheries Queensland.
- ❑ In 2018, stocks were considered sustainable (this figure was 40 to 60 per cent of the unfished biomass), and this status was based on departmental data.

With a change in the modelling used by Fisheries Queensland, the stocks are now being assessed as unsustainable. This new form of modelling has also seen, on paper, a massive reduction in biomass estimates for several species.

Numerous scientists globally are now questioning this new modelling. It should be noted that, in the SM fishery working group, the commercial sector and most of the recreational representatives do not agree with the stock assessment and agree with a reviewer’s conclusion: “I am unable to support the conclusions regarding future harvest levels for the east coast SM stock until reservations regarding the most appropriate central value for steepness for the base-case are resolved.” (Klaer, 2021).

Essentially, the current science underpinning the SM stock assessment will lead to catastrophic reductions in the value of SM quota:

- ❑ How could a quota managed fishery that has been sustainable for almost 20 years, now face alleged collapse only after a “new” stock assessment method is used?
- ❑ How can the incompetent management of this fishery not lead to compensation for commercial fishers that have their quota allocations devalued?

Finally, the silent stakeholder (the community / seafood consumer) has been missed in the mismanagement of this quota managed fishery.

Other fisheries

The Spanner Crab, East Coast Inshore Net and Coral Trout Fisheries are also discussed in detail through examples from operators that support the view that quota-managed fisheries create significant long-term issues for commercial fishers and create markets that lead to the near monopolisation of access to quota.

Each example was provided by a working commercial fishing business operator.

Copies of the full submission are available from the QSIA.

Master Fisherman Responsible Crab Fisher 2022 workshop report

OceanWatch Australia are proud to report back on the successful delivery of the Master Fisherman program Responsible Crab Fisher workshops and promotional activities delivered along the east coast of Queensland last year.

EIGHT workshops were scheduled for professional fishers in Queensland to participate in the program in 2022.

This project was supported by OceanWatch Australia through funding from the Australian Government.

In total, 34 professional crab fishers from Townsville, Mackay, Gladstone, Scarborough and Redland Bay graduated from the workshops, and were individually recognised as an OceanWatch Master Fisherman.

Fishers feedback

Crab fishers provided great feedback, reporting workshops were an enjoyable, well-presented learning experience that provided open discussion with participants.

Fishers also commented that the workshop content was thoroughly researched and clearly explained and gave participants a wider understanding of our wonderful industry. A fisher from Mackay stated the free dinner

was good and said: "It is a good thing what you are doing with us fishermen."

Online profiling of Master Fisherman graduates

Graduating fishers are profiled online to highlight their commitment to responsible and sustainable fishing practices. These profiles may be linked with seafood product at the point of sale via QR codes, increasing the provenance of local seafood and demonstrating professionalism.

Scan the QR code with your phone to learn more about Queensland's recognised OceanWatch Master Fishermen.

Master Fisherman public relations and marketing activities

OceanWatch worked with seafood-based marketing company Fishtales to promote the OceanWatch Master Fisherman program and graduates in Queensland.

Led by John Susman, the Fishtales



Michael Wooden from OceanWatch Australia.

team facilitated introductions and opportunities beyond the average agency. Fishtales linked professional fishers with key members of the food industry and the food and lifestyle media.

Activities completed in Queensland successfully shone a light on the graduates of the 2022 Master Fisherman Responsible Crab Fishery program in Queensland and increased both industry and public awareness of the vitally important work of OceanWatch and the fishing industry in promoting sustainable fishing practices in Australia.

A daytime industry event held in Brisbane at The Golden Pig restaurant was attended by 82 people.

The event introduced recently



OceanWatch Australia has presented Master Fisherman workshops for fishers in the Moreton Bay region ...

graduated Queensland Master Fishermen to important seafood industry personnel, including chefs, seafood distributors and media. This provided fishermen the chance to address the audience and demonstrate some of their knowledge.

This event provided networking opportunities between OceanWatch, Queensland Master Fishermen and Queensland seafood consumers.

Media familiarisation experience

OceanWatch worked with Fishtales to conduct a media familiarisation experience to enable in-depth story coverage of local seafood suppliers.

Seasoned freelance journalist Jennifer Johnson was hosted onboard a Master Fisherman’s vessel in Moreton Bay, along with key OceanWatch team members.

Jennifer was offered a close-up look at a day in the life of Master Fishermen, providing key information and messaging, high-resolution professional imagery, and spokespeople for her to be able to develop persuasive pitches for high-end media outlets. The story was pitched to *The Guardian*, *The Courier Mail* (Q Weekend and Taste), *Australian Traveller* and *Delicious*.

ABC Landline feature

On Sunday, September 18, a feature segment – “Master Fishers: Promoting excellence in fishing” – written and produced by ABC journalist Sean Murphy, aired on the *Landline* program, a show with a program audience reach of 22 million and 4.1 million viewers per month.

The segment the recent expansion of the Master Fisherman Program into Queensland and South Australia.

The story followed OceanWatch Master Fisherman Troy Billin from “catch to kitchen”.

Sean was on board Troy’s boat to view fish caught at Yamba, on the NSW far north coast, followed the catch through to the Sydney Fish Market then went on to chef Neil Perry’s Double Bay restaurant, *Margaret*.

A focus of the story was on the use of the OceanWatch Master Fisherman QR code for the purposes of traceability, validation, and recognition of the fishers. An associated on-line story was later uploaded to the ABC website.

Michael Wooden
Wild Catch Fisheries Program
Manager
OceanWatch Australia



... as well as in Townsville ...



... and in Mackay.



And Queensland mud crab was then served to journalists and hospitality industry members who met fishers at The Golden Pig Restaurant in Brisbane

Project to protect humpback whales

QUEENSLAND fishers are being invited to participate in an OceanWatch co-ordinated project to protect humpback whales.

Supported through funding from the Australian Government's Our Marine Parks Round 3 Community Grants Hub, the project – called "Protecting Humpback Whales of the Temperate East Marine Park" – invites participation from Tasmania, New South Wales, and Queensland fishers to enhance fishing industry mitigation success along the east coast Humpback whale migration pathway.

Fishers' pro-active participation in this collaborative project in New South Wales has already demonstrated a strong commitment to responsible and sustainable fishing practices, and an increased individual awareness of entanglement concerns in the industry.

We are now reaching out to Queensland fishers to take part in the project.

The project stems from previous work undertaken in the NSW Ocean Trap and Line Fishery through funding from the NSW Government Marine Estate, where OceanWatch and commercial fishers, with wider stakeholder input, worked on strategies to reduce the risks associated with whale entanglement in NSW.

OceanWatch, commercial fishers, industry representatives, researchers, managers, and others worked collaboratively to consider and implement strategies to reduce the risks associated with whale entanglement in commercial fishing gear.

OceanWatch collaborated with stakeholders to identify potential entanglement risks with NSW commercial fisheries. The next step was to identify strategies that may minimise risk of whale entanglement and to encourage discussion on innovative solutions.

Fishers concluded that improvements in fishing gear and

practices could be achieved. Fishers also identified the need to develop a Code of Practice that documents best practice to minimise entanglement risk, and to improve industry knowledge of threatened and protected species reporting and requirements.

Fishers workshopped and prioritised potential strategies to minimise entanglement risks, and, working with OceanWatch and the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI), co-designed field trials to assess practical solutions.

Trials considered the practicality, safety, impacts on catch, time efficiency and crew arrangements, and potential for further uptake in the industry.

A more recent workshop held at the Sydney Fish Market identified further recommendations and opportunities to minimise risk of whale entanglement in NSW fisheries.

Follow the link to access more details on past work and recent workshop report www.oceanwatch.org.au/whale-entanglement-mitigation/

Queensland contribution

As an initial effort to enhance fishing industry mitigation success, we are



OceanWatch Australia is organising workshops for fishers to help protect the 20,000 humpback whales migrating along the Queensland coast every year from any risk of entanglement in fishing gear. (Photo: Migaloo the white whale breaching off the Gold Coast. ©Scott Bowerman)

reaching out to Queensland fishers to assist in identifying whale entanglement and interaction risk in Queensland commercial fisheries, and to document and trial potential solutions.

OceanWatch is collaborating with Martin Bowerman, someone with long experience of the Queensland seafood industry, to facilitate a co-design workshop with Queensland professional fishers to discuss whale entanglement risks and practical solutions.

The co-design workshop will provide opportunity for relevant Queensland fishers to improve awareness of whale entanglement concerns, and then to discuss and prioritise field trial options that aim to reduce risk of whale entanglement.

There is a total of \$30,000 in funding available to assist Queensland fishers to trial modified gear or options identified in the co-design workshop.

The date and location for the upcoming workshop to be advised as soon as possible.

Fishers interested in participating in the co-design workshop should email michael@oceanwatch.org.au

Michael Wooden
Wild Catch Fisheries Program
Manager
OceanWatch Australia

Best practice in the Queensland net fishery

OCEANWATCH Australia is working to develop best practice guidelines for Queensland net fisheries. An OceanWatch staff member will be visiting ports along the Queensland east coast to meet informally with net fishery endorsement-holders, business owners and fishers to discuss and identify best practice.

Discussion will focus on the identification of bycatch and threatened species interactions and practices, and behaviours that minimise these risks.

OceanWatch will also be holding follow-up workshops in five key regions to present, discuss and allow feedback of collated materials and seek further input from industry stakeholders.

OceanWatch will develop a Code of Practice and training materials to extend to industry. Delivered through the OceanWatch Master Fisherman program, participants that successfully complete training will be recognised for their knowledge and commitment to best practice.

The project aims to increase transparency in fishing operations and improve provenance of responsibly caught seafood.

For further information on this project, please telephone Michael Wooden at OceanWatch on 0422 618 248 or email michael@oceanwatch.org.au or Dave Schubert, 0418 174 912, dave@oceanwatch.org.au

Note: This project is being supported with funding from the Queensland Government's Department of Agriculture & Fisheries.





CONSUMERS TO LOSE GREAT SANDY STRAIT SEAFOOD Queensland Government announces plan to transfer seafood resources to anglers only

The Queensland Government has released its new Great Sandy Marine Park plan. The plan is designed to allocate the region's fisheries resources – currently shared between seafood consumers and anglers – almost exclusively to anglers.

FORMALLY releasing the plan, State Environment Minister Meaghan Scanlon described it as “a new blueprint ... for one of the world's most spectacular marine parks, focussing on enhanced opportunities for tourism, conservation and recreational activities” – and, for good measure, linked it to the Brisbane Olympics in 10 years' time.

“The Palaszczuk Government has released its draft zoning plan for the Great Sandy Marine Park, which sits between the world's largest sand island, K'gari (Fraser Island), and the Australian mainland, acting as a home to species including whales, dugongs, turtles and dolphins.

“The draft plan will see a further 791 sq km of the marine park protected as ‘green zones’ – an increase of 8.9 per cent – and drive new opportunities

for the local tourism and recreational fishing economy, currently valued at \$421 million.

“The Great Sandy is the gateway to some of the most spectacular places in Queensland, both for humans and marine life,” Ms Scanlon said.

“It's a popular place for tourists to go whale watching, to witness turtles nest, see dolphins, dive with grey nurse sharks, cast a line and travel to K'gari for four-wheel-driving.

“The draft plan proposes to expand areas where marine life can thrive, and in turn support local tourism operators – creating upwards of 70 new good jobs – and families who love to get out on their boat for a day on the water.

“The draft plan also includes provisions for more coastal infrastructure such as boat ramps and artificial reefs to support nature-based tourism and recreation fishing.

“With the 2032 Olympics around the corner, the marine park, Hervey Bay and K'gari are in a prime position to become a big drawcard for tourists.”

Ms Scanlon said the draft plan had been based on widespread consultation with the local community, First Nations partners and a dedicated scientific reference group.

“This has been an extensive process but it's one we want to get right. The next step is to now go out and get feedback on what's been drafted, so we can refine the final plan.

“Commercial fishing will be allowed in certain areas, and the Government will be working with the local fishing industry to create a financial assistance and re-training package to support those directly-impacted by any changes from the draft plan.

“The draft plan also proposes expanding ‘go-slow’ areas to protect turtles and dugongs, as well as existing seasonal restrictions to shorebird sites during nesting periods.”

The Minister's media release quoted Labor Member for Hervey Bay, Adrian Tantari, as saying the region, and in particular Hervey Bay, is the home of whale-watching and nature-based tourism in Queensland.

“It’s important to protect its most valuable asset for generations to come,” Mr Tantari was quoted as saying.

“Our region is only a hop, skip and a jump from SEQ, which already makes it already a popular destination for visitors.

“The draft plan proposes to strengthen what is truly great about the Great Sandy Park area and our regional lifestyle, ensuring the protection of our great nature asset for future generations, while growing our local tourism and recreational sector that injects close to half-a-billion dollars into our economy.”

This is a link to the full plan: www.qld.gov.au/greatsandymarinepark

What the Minister’s media release describes as the “recreational benefits and impacts” can be found at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/coasts-waterways/marine-parks/zoning/gsmpr/recreational-and-charter-fishing>

And what the Minister’s media release is honest enough to describe only as “commercial fishing impacts” (ie, unlike recreational fishing, having no “benefits”) can be found at: <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/coasts-waterways/marine-parks/zoning/gsmpr/commercial-fishing-and-supporting-industries>



This sign says it all.



The losers from the State Government’s proposed fishing bans in Great Sandy Marine Park will include seafood consumers, like the thousands who have flocked to the annual Hervey Bay Seafood Festival (opposite page) for the past 20 years. Industry members like Margaret Stevenson (above, left) have been warning seafood lovers about the danger.

“Hundreds of jobs at risk”: Industry responds to Government re-zoning of Great Sandy Marine Park

The Queensland seafood industry has warned that hundreds of commercial fishing jobs will be undermined at the commercial fisher, seafood worker and onshore business levels if the State Government’s draft Great Sandy Marine Park rezoning plan is implemented in its current form.



Massively reduced commercial seafood catches from the Great Sandy region will cost jobs among processing staff as well as fishers.

THE industry response to the draft rezoning plan says consultation has been based on anti-industry views and can be viewed as irresponsible, inept and deceptive.

It says the draft rezoning plan is “nothing short of a Government effort to remove commercial fishers from the Great Sandy Marine Park”.

The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) has submitted a response to the draft plan on behalf of the QSIA, Fishermens Portal Inc., Moreton Bay Seafood Industry Association, Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermens Association and Green Shirts Movement Australia, and, in particular, on behalf of commercial fishers working in the Great Sandy Marine Park.

The covering letter to the response says in part: “We know the Department of Agriculture & Fisheries has received correspondence from the community, the ‘forgotten stakeholder’ as part of the consultation process. The community is more aware of what it stands to lose from the zoning plan.

“As the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) noted in its 2019 submission to the State Government about the rezoning of the Great Sandy Marine Park, commercial fishing:

- ❑ is part of a multi-use marine park;
- ❑ is part of the community and cultural fabric of the Great Sandy Marine Park;
- ❑ provides access to the local community to their seafood resource that cannot be accessed in any other way; and
- ❑ was an acceptable activity in a multi-use marine park in 2006, and nothing has changed to make it less acceptable now.

“Industry is prepared to consult in good faith on a zoning plan that considers the multi-use nature of the marine park.”

Response introduction

In the introduction to its response, the industry group says the zoning plan as drafted “has been nothing short of a Government effort to remove commercial fishers from the Great Sandy Marine Park (GSMP)”.

“There have been significant delays in developing the GSMP Zoning Plan and consultation with industry started in 2019, then abruptly ended with no proposal for further discussions, industry and government were then impacted by COVID-19, further limiting consultation.

“Before the plan was published, stakeholders across industry were not included in consultation on the economic or social implications of the plan.

“In addition to the existing trawl fleet vessel tracking (VMS) program, Fisheries Queensland (FQ) introduced VMS on the inshore fisheries (net, crab and line) in 2020 and implemented a Quota Zoning System under the Sustainable Seafood Strategy.

“It is widely considered across industry and the community that the Department of Environment and Science (DES) waited for the introduction of VMS and quota zones in the inshore fishery to present a plan to the community that undoubtedly will lead to near total removal of commercial fishing from the region.

“The zoning plan has ignored the social and economic impacts on the commercial fishing industry. Commercial fishing representatives that recently met with Marine Park planners from DES were asked to provide the economic impacts on their own small business.

“This reflects the lack of consideration, and diligence given in the consultation brief to seek socio economic impacts of all stakeholders in the regulatory impact statement (Consultation RIS). 2) Initial submission to the review process.

“In February 2019, the QSIA submitted its concerns regarding the development of a zoning plan. An assessment of the issues raised by industry in 2019 have been ignored and this reflects a total disregard for the role of industry in the GSMP

Economic arguments

Under “economic arguments”, the industry submission says the economic contributions argument has been one in which the recreational sector has consistently claimed that their estimated cumulative expenditure of discretionary income is much greater than the contribution of commercial fishing to the economy, which they value to be production volume (kilograms x average wharf price): the wholesale price.

“However, that valuation of the respective activities is flawed. Discretionary expenditure is expenditure that a household can do without (non-essential expenditure). Discretionary expenditure can be spent on anything – chattel, interest, hobbies, etc.

“Valuing any activity according to the amount expended on that activity provides the opportunity for that activity to become elitist or even wasteful and inefficient, as those with greater purchasing power can wield undue influence simply through having greater capacity to spend.

“What this means is that the overall view of the activity’s worth and its trends can be skewed or masked by the spending of a minority of very wealthy individuals wishing to pursue their own agendas. This was substantiated by Campbell and Murphy in their ‘2000-01 National Recreational Fishing Survey Economic Report’.

“They found that ‘highly avid fishers (less than 10 per cent of total fishing effort) accounted for the largest proportion of the estimated attributable expenditure (44 per cent)’ and that ‘the highest average level of per capita expenditure of \$697 was for fishers who were fully employed in a trade’ and evidently had access to higher levels of discretionary income to spend on a hobby of whatever persuasion. (Campbell & Murphy 2005)

“Commercial fishing, on the other hand, is the start of an industry chain – a primary industry which is added to by secondary and tertiary industries, each level with additional investments and values of production.

“Even though it is often the applied approach in valuing the two sectors, making relative judgements of the values of the two competing sectors by comparing recreational fishing valued according to the expenditure by recreational fishers during their activity with the gross value of production (GVP) of commercial fisheries is fundamentally flawed, and was warned against by the Productivity Commission.

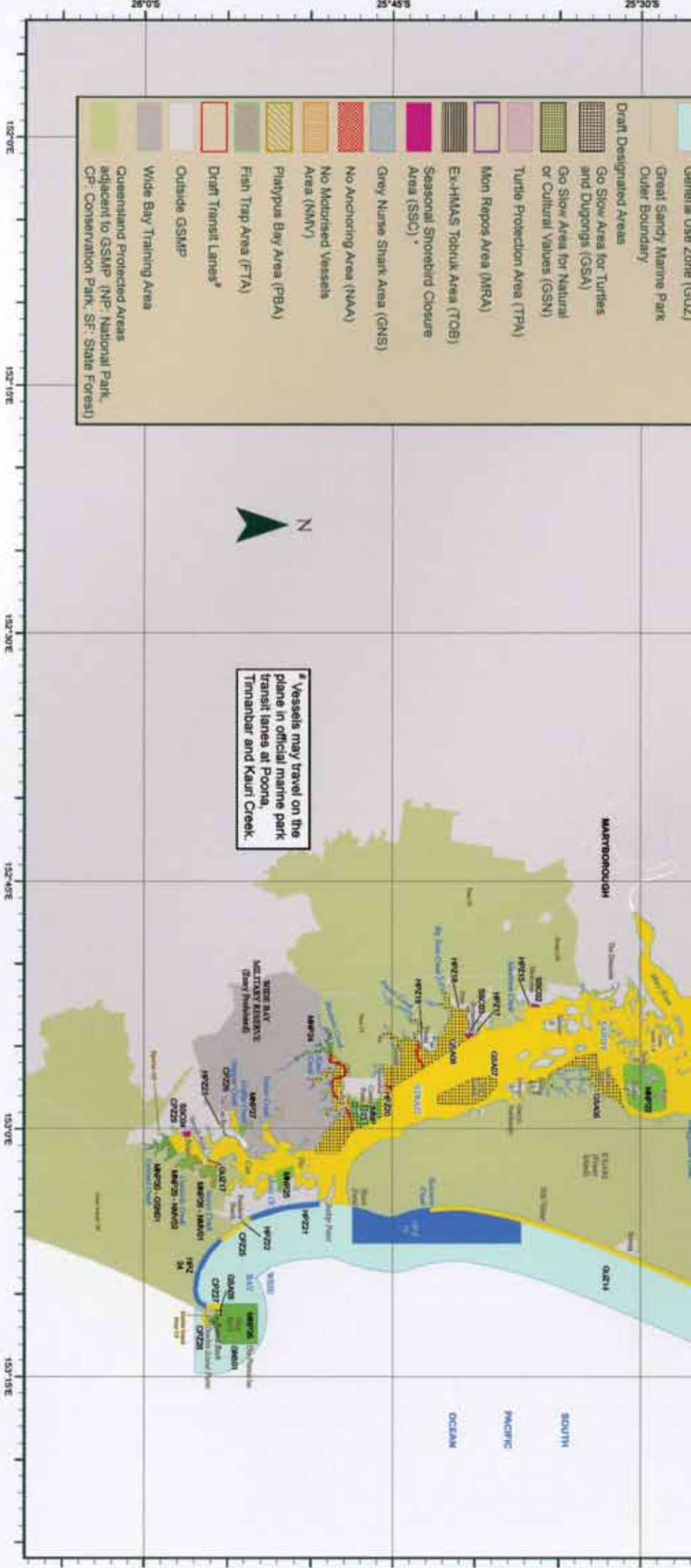
“This warning was ignored by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority when it presented its estimates of the costs of rolling out the Representative Areas Program zoning in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

“The seafood industry was valued according to annual GVP, which is simply the dollar-value paid to commercial fishermen for their product in a year.

“In accordance with the accepted recreational approach for valuing commercial fishing, it made no allowances for the initial investment by the commercial fishermen, seafood wholesalers and retailers and other



Great Sandy Strait and the Mary River seen in the early morning light from 20,000 feet. In this huge area of water, the State Government says there is no room to continue the most productive forms of traditional net fishing.



* Vessels may travel on the plane in official marine park transit lanes at Poona, Tamarbar and Kauri Creek.

* The current designated Shorebird Roosting and Feeding Area is proposed to be replaced by whole of park shorebird disturbance provisions that will extend the rules to the entire marine park. These provisions will be further complemented by a proposed new designated Seasonal Shorebird Closure Area.

OUTER BOUNDARY NOTES:

The draft GSMMP Outer Boundary is an approximation of the future park boundary. It is a representation of a proposed marine designation which will require statutory planning. It is based on existing coastal land in the Marine Parks (Declaration) (September 2000, CES) interpretation of highest Astronomical Tide and DGR's approximation of coastal boundaries. The draft GSMMP Outer Boundary includes areas determined as Exclusion Use under the Bushlands People Land and Sea Claim #2 Notice. The Determination however, has not been subject to ongoing discussion with the Bushlands Notice Title Aboriginal Corporation.

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION PURPOSES



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September 2022



GREAT SANDY MARINE PARK

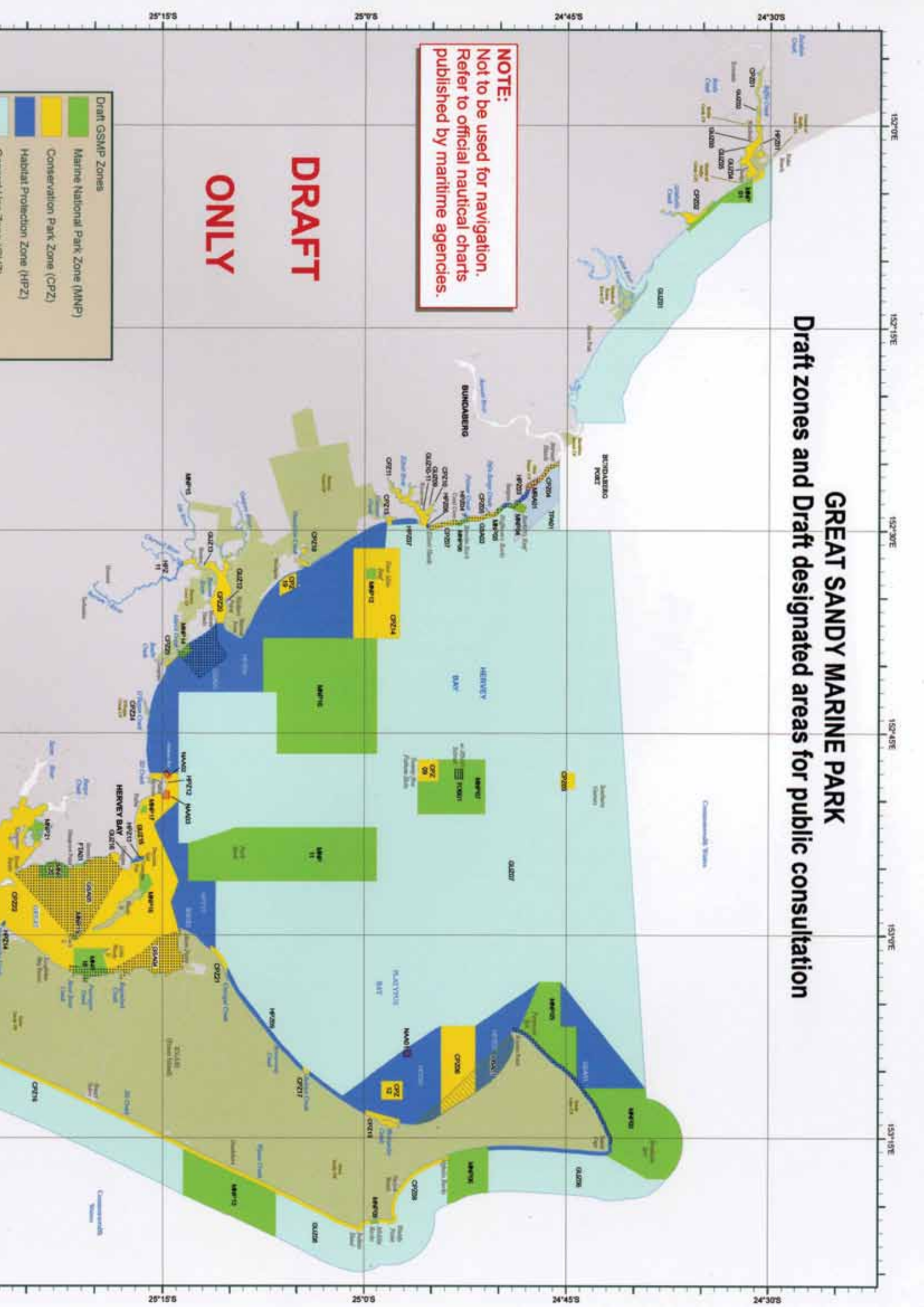
Draft zones and Draft designated areas for public consultation

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**DRAFT
 ONLY**

Draft GSMP Zones

- Marine National Park Zone (MINP)
- Conservation Park Zone (CPZ)
- Habitat Protection Zone (HPZ)



support industries set up to keep the seafood industry viable and efficient.

“Recreational fishing and tourism, however, were valued according to the amounts spent on the pursuit of these ventures, and included money spent on the same seafood provided by commercial fishermen only now at retail value when sold in snack bars and restaurants to visitors to the region.

“Expenditure on recreational fishing boats was included but expenditure on commercial fishing vessels was not.

“In summary, the Consultation RIS does not provide an economic rationale for removing access from the commercial to the recreational sector.

“Under the cover of marine park rezoning, the State Government is supporting a resource reallocation without understanding the economic impacts in the region or the supply chain impacts of the zoning plan.”

Information sources

Under “information sources”, another section of the industry response says the State Government has access to far more reports and research than any stakeholder group.

“With the Consultation RIS skewed toward environmental concerns, industry is convinced that the arguments for zoning commercial fishing out of existence is unwarranted.

“Since 2019, industry has pushed for consultation and its feedback, reports, data and representation to DES have been ignored.

“In summary, the Consultation RIS:

- ❑ is based on anti-industry views disguised as changes to zones that will remove the ability to operate viable commercial fishing businesses;
- ❑ lacks verifiable evidence and for claims by individuals and groups who may have other agendas, and places the onus back on the government, which has access to all of the records to actually set the record straight in the public square where lobbyists have been spreading misinformation regarding the so-called impacts of commercial fishing; and
- ❑ is not good or wise governance document and certainly irresponsible, inept, and deceptive.

Note: The industry response to the Great Sandy Marine Park draft re-zoning plan runs to 36 pages. This article is just a brief summary. The full document is available through the QSIA office.

Long-held industry concerns ignored

IN its initial submission to the review process, in February 2019, the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) submitted its concerns regarding the development of a zoning plan.

An assessment of the issues raised by industry in 2019 – compared with the draft rezoning plan released by the State Government – shows those concerns have been ignored. This reflects a total disregard for the role of industry in the GSMP.

The issues raised by QSIA are listed below.

That the GSMP zoning review maintains a multi-use ethos without undermining existing commercial fishing activity which has provided social and economic benefits across the region.

That the best available, peer-reviewed science is used to help determine zoning that maintains and does not limit commercial fishing activity in the marine park typical of a resource reallocation policy which is outside the jurisdiction of the review.

That no commercial fishing businesses are sacrificed in the event of “trade-offs” of closing one area in favour of another.

If any areas are to be extended for green zones, then discussions are held between government and industry on new zones that would have minimal impact on commercial fishing operations.

That decisions relate to actual environmental threats rather than personal agenda pursued for many years by those seeking to exclude others from the very fishing grounds they insist on being able to continue to fish.

Acknowledgement is required that the numbers of commercial fishers has been greatly reduced over the past 20 years and that the commercial sector’s catch data is already captured in close to “real time” and fishers’ movements in the GSMP are monitored through the VMS system, whereas the same does not apply to any other sector using the marine park. The recreational sector has no enforceable requirements to provide catch data, no effort caps apart from very generous bag limits and no tracking mechanism to facilitate checks for compliance to zoning, size and bag limits, and no restrictions on the numbers of participants or the extent of fishing effort in even straight yellow conservation zones.

Zoning decisions need to be made on a scientific, risk-based approach and not on the whim of recreational or conservation groups. It is unjustifiable, given the social and economic importance of the seafood industry, to zone commercial fishing activities out of existence in a multi-use marine park.

Areas included in draft GSMP plan

THIS is what the colours on the map on pages 16-17 indicate.

Marine National Park (green) zone – highly protected conservation area, “look but no take”.

Conservation Park (yellow) zone – significant conservation area, limits fishing, crabbing and development of

facilities and infrastructure (and bans most forms of commercial fishing but not recreational fishing).

Habitat Protection (dark blue) zone – conservation area, allows recreational and commercial fishing except trawling and allows development of facilities and infrastructure.

General Use (light blue) zone – least restrictive zone, allows recreational and commercial fishing including trawling and allows development of facilities and infrastructure.



Impacts on commercial fishing and supporting industries

The Queensland Government has released a statement on the impacts of proposed changes in management of Great Sandy Marine Park on commercial fishing and related industries.

DESPITE downplaying the impacts on commercial fishing, this statement still admits to taking seafood worth millions of dollars a year away from wild-catch fishermen and impacting several dozen businesses.

In particular, the State Government admits to reducing the current commercial catch across all fisheries within the marine park by more than \$3 million a year, including a 64 per cent reduction (by value) in the finfish net catch; a 25 per cent reduction in the blue swimmer crab catch; a 15 per cent reduction in the mud crab catch; a 6 per cent reduction in the line fishery catch; and a 1.6 per cent reduction in the trawl fishery catch.

The Government also admits to directly impacting up to 70 commercial fishing businesses (though local fishermen argue the number will be far higher).

Government statement

The Queensland Government statement says the draft Great Sandy Marine Park zoning plan proposes changes that will impact some commercial fishers and businesses

reliant on commercial fishing, such as seafood processors.

The draft plan removes the designated Great Sandy Area and includes new and expanded Marine National Park (green) zones, Conservation Park (yellow) zones and Habitat Protection (dark blue) zones.

Considerations

In developing the draft plan, consideration was given to locating zones to minimise the impact on high commercial catch areas as much as possible, while maximising the protection of key threatened species and habitat areas.

The proposed changes affecting the waterways of the Great Sandy Strait, Burrum River, Elliott River and Baffle Creek have been considered in response to broad community feedback and also maintain those forms of commercial net fishing that pose the least risk to threatened species.

Proposed changes

The following proposed changes are relevant for commercial fishing

and businesses reliant on commercial fishing.

Commercial fishing – net

Removing the designated Great Sandy Area and the associated use of commercial large mesh gill nets and ring nets in the Conservation Park (yellow) zones within Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River and the Great Sandy Strait, and within the proposed Habitat Protection (dark blue) zone in the Cherwell River and upper reaches of the Burrum River.

Tunnel netting and set pocket netting would continue within the existing fishery areas defined under fisheries legislation, within the yellow zone of the Great Sandy Strait/Tin Can Inlet and Mary River respectively.

Expanding the Marine National Park (green) zone network from 3.9 per cent of the area of the park to 12.8 per cent. In particular, establishing a green zone north of Ngkala Rocks, on the eastern beach of K'gari, is expected to impact on part of the ocean beach fishery area.

Extending the yellow zone



Net fishing for species like summer whiting has been conducted sustainably for generations in Tin Can Bay, Great Sandy Strait and Hervey Bay. Now, the State Government wants to give these fish almost exclusively to a tiny percentage of skilled anglers.



Fraser Coast restaurants will be able to access far smaller quantities of a reduced range of local seafood if proposed Queensland Government fishing bans go ahead.

boundaries seaward at the mouths of Wathumba, Coongul, Awinya, and Coonarr Creeks.

Establishing a new, and expanding the existing, designated Go Slow Areas in key dugong and turtle habitats. In particular, this includes expanding the Go Slow Area at the mouth of the Burrum River.

Note that commercial bait (small mesh) net fishing would be allowed to continue within the yellow zones of Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River and the Great Sandy Strait and all other yellow zones in the marine park (as per the standard yellow zone provisions).

Commercial fishing – trawl, line, pot and harvest fisheries

Trawl fishery

Adding green, yellow and dark blue zones within Hervey Bay and offshore from K'gari will impact on some trawl grounds.

Extending the boundary for the designated Turtle Protection Area, to approximately five kilometres offshore from the current 1.8 kilometres, where trawling is prohibited between 1 November and 31 January, adjacent to the Mon Repos turtle rookery.

Prohibiting beam trawling in the yellow zone of the lower reaches of the Mary River.

Line fishery

Adding green zones may impact some commercial line fishing grounds where both pelagic and reef species are targeted.

Allowing a maximum of two handheld lines/rods and two fishing hooks per fisher in all yellow zones. This is a reduction in the number of lines/rods/hooks allowed to be used in the waterways of Baffle Creek, Elliott

River, Burrum River and in the Great Sandy Strait/Tin Can Inlet (from three lines/six hooks) and an increase in all others (from one line/one hook).

Pot (crab) fishery

Adding and expanding green and yellow zones will impact some mud crab and blue swimmer crab pot fishing grounds however, impacts have been minimised by limiting the extent and location of green zones in prime crabbing areas.

Mud crab

Retaining commercial crabbing as a non-conforming use in the yellow zones of Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River and in the Great Sandy Strait/Tin Can Inlet, however no longer requiring a marine park permission.

Combining part of the existing green zones at Turkey, Bookar and Walsh Islands into one green zone.

Changing the western portion of Turkey Island and the small un-named green zone southwest of Turkey Island to a yellow zone where commercial crabbing can occur as a non-conforming use.

Blue swimmer crab

Expanding green zones within Hervey Bay, which is necessary to protect seagrass habitat.

Marine aquarium fish (MAF) fishery

Adding green zones may impact on some MAF collecting areas (e.g. Four Mile Reef and the reef at Pialba).

Allowing fishers that can demonstrate a history of fishing in the Little Woody Island green zone since 2006, to continue collecting in this zone as a non-conforming use (with permission). Limiting access protects the long-term integrity of this green zone.

Coral fishery

Allowing the coral fishery to continue as a non-conforming use (with permission) within a small section of the expanded green zone north of Woody Island, will ensure there are no impacts to this fishery which supplies coral to the Reef World Aquarium in Hervey Bay.

Yabby fishery

Allowing the collection of yabbies to continue in the yellow zone of Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River and Great Sandy Strait/Tin Can Inlet for fishers holding specific Department of Agriculture and Fisheries licences as a new non-conforming use provision (permission not required) will maintain existing access despite the removal of the designated Great Sandy Area.

Bloodworm fishery

Prohibiting the commercial bloodworm fishery in the yellow zone of Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River and Great Sandy Strait/Tin Can Inlet is expected to impact on a small number of bloodworm fishers, however is necessary to protect seagrass and other habitats within these waterways. Note that within declared Fish Habitat Areas the use of digging implements, which are often used to collect bloodworms, is prohibited. This applies to areas in Baffle Creek, Elliott River and large parts of the Burrum River system and Great Sandy Strait.

Beachworm fishery

Adding a green zone extending over part of the ocean beach of K'gari, north of Ngkala Rocks, is expected to impact a small number of beachworm fishers licenced to collect from the K'gari foreshores.

Potential impacts

Commercial fishers

The current commercial catch

across all fisheries within the marine park would potentially reduce by \$3–\$3.5 million annually.

Within the Wide Bay Burnett Region, the proposed changes to the zoning plan are expected to lead to a:

- ❑ 64 per cent reduction (by value) in fin fish net catch
- ❑ 25 per cent reduction (by value) in blue swimmer crab catch
- ❑ 15 per cent reduction (by value) in mud crab catch
- ❑ 6 per cent reduction (by value) in line fishery catch
- ❑ 1.6 per cent reduction (by value) in trawl fishery catch.
- ❑ Businesses reliant on commercial fishing reduction in business activity

It is anticipated that approximately 60–70 commercial fishing businesses would be directly impacted by the proposed changes in the draft plan.

A fair and comprehensive financial assistance and re-training package would be available to directly impacted commercial fishers and post-harvest businesses reliant on commercial fishing. This package would be developed in consultation with the industry following feedback on the draft zoning plan.

A fisherman's story

BRETT Fuchs is facing the loss of a fishery that has supported four generations of his family.

If the proposed rezoning plan for Great Sandy Marine Park goes ahead, Brett will lose up to 80 per cent of his fishing grounds and most of his annual catch.

His lifetime business and investment will be gone with nothing more ahead than a vague Government reference to “a fair and comprehensive financial assistance ... package” that has been neither detailed nor quantified.

“We reckon that’s just a big lie. Promise fishermen compensation, keep them quiet till after the rezoning’s done and then give them nothing – no fisherman is going to fall for that trick,” he said.

But compensation isn’t the issue: Brett wants to keep fishing.

“I’m the third generation in my family fishing Great Sandy Strait and Hervey Bay, and my son’s fishing here as well, and we have just been steamrollered by the Queensland Government.



“The plans shut me out of 80 per cent of my fishing grounds – the whole area from Moon Point through the straits to Tin Can Bay and all the best fishing grounds round the creeks on the western side of Fraser Island, plus half my blue swimmer ground off the Burrum River.

“The rezoning just shuts me down.”

Brett doesn’t regard himself as anything special. He is just one fisherman. But his story, multiplied across the whole industry in the region, demonstrates what the impact is likely to be in terms of business loss, economic impact, dislocation and stress.

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MANAGEMENT NEWS

Changes for east coast Spanish mackerel fishery

NEW east coast Spanish mackerel fishery management arrangements are now in place.

The management changes for the east coast Spanish mackerel include the following:

A northern closure in east coast waters north of 22°S (located slightly north of Stanage Bay, between Mackay and Yeppoon) for two three-week periods (six weeks total) around the new moons in October and November each year. The northern seasonal closures are designed to protect spawning aggregations. The first northern closure ran from 22 October 2022 to 12 November 2022 and 21 November to 12 December 2022.

A southern closure in east coast waters south of 22°S (located slightly north of Stanage Bay, between Mackay

and Yeppoon) for two three-week periods (six weeks in total) in February and March each year. The first southern closure will run from 1 February 2023 to 21 February 2023 and 1 March 2023 to 21 March 2023.

The Department of Agriculture & Fisheries has said the northern closure dates will be adjusted in subsequent years to align with new moon periods.

In consideration of pre-existing charter bookings made up to a year in advance, seasonal closures will not apply to recreational fishers on licensed charter fishing trips until the following season, starting on 1 July 2023.

Other key management changes:

On 1 July 2023, the recreational possession limit will change to one fish per person, or two fish per boat with two or more recreational fishers on board (the boat limit will not apply to licensed charter fishing trips).

On 1 July 2023, the extended charter trip limit will be removed (currently allows recreational fishers to take twice the in-possession limit for charter trips longer than 48 hours).



Both commercial fishers and anglers no longer feel they can believe the "science" behind management changes in the Spanish mackerel fishery.

On 1 July 2023, the total allowable commercial catch will be adjusted to 165 tonnes for the 2023 fishing season.

A new smartphone app will be developed for recreational fishers to voluntarily report Spanish mackerel catches on the east coast and shark depredation. The Department says that, by supplying catch information, anglers you also improve our data, and the accuracy of our fish stock analyses.

A new education and awareness program will be introduced to promote best practice catch, release and handling techniques for recreational fishers.

These changes are based on a new east coast Spanish mackerel harvest strategy. The link to this strategy is: <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/queensland-sustainable-fisheries-strategy/resource/c4464bde-682c-4360-a63c-b33ef0f00f1d>

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Federal Government report confirms: “Fish stocks stable and steady”

A report by the Federal Government’s Australian Bureau of Agricultural & Resource Economics & Sciences (ABARES) has described commercially-harvested seafood stocks as “stable and steady”.

THE ABARES report - Fishery Status Reports 2022 – has found that the majority of stocks assessed were both not over-fished and not subject to over-fishing.

The ABARES report, released in late November, provides an annual, independent assessment of the performance of Commonwealth-managed fisheries.

ABARES Executive Director Jared Greenville said the fishery status reports indicated that Commonwealth fisheries continue to be well-managed.

Dr Greenville said that, of the 101 stocks assessed, 69 were classified as not over-fished and 81 were classified as not subject to over-fishing.

“The reports reflect a generally

stable trend of stock status, with only six stocks changing status from last year,” Dr Greenville said.

“While the news overall is positive, with four of the six changed stocks improving in status, two domestic stocks have declined in status.

“Both john dory and eastern zone jackass morwong in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery are now classified as over-fished, which is a measure of the size of the underlying fish stocks.

The eastern zone jackass morwong is also classified as subject to over-fishing, which is a reflection of the fishing mortality rate.

“The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) has

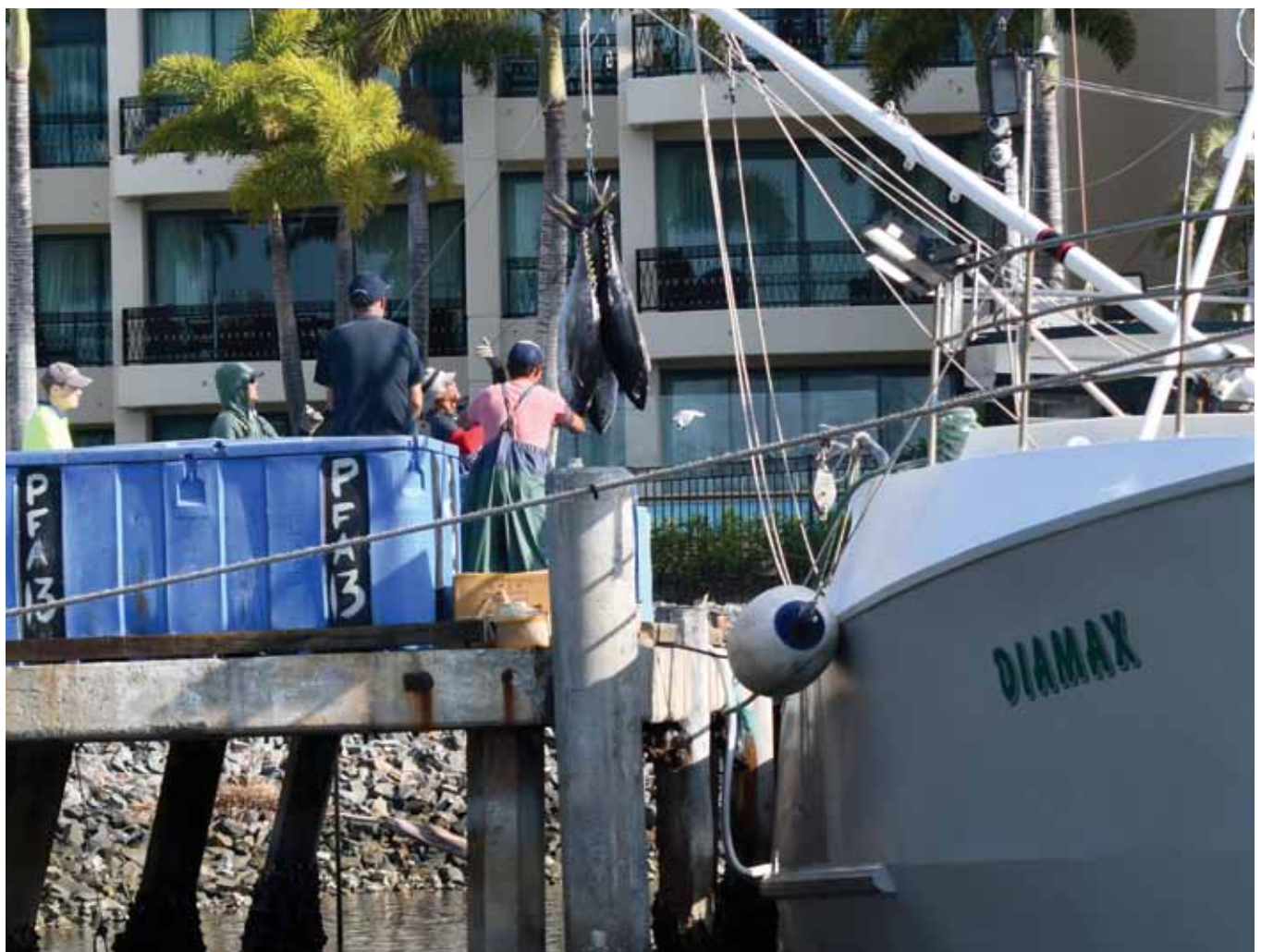
reduced total allowable catches for these stocks for the 2022-23 fishing season, and has developed and agreed on a network of spatial (area) closures to prevent fishing in areas of high abundance for at-risk species. The closures will start in May 2023.”

Dr Greenville also said there are a number of stocks which have been classified as over-fished for some time. AFMA is continuing to work with stakeholders on strategies to rebuild these stocks.

The Fishery Status Reports 2022 also looks at the economic performance of fisheries managed by the Australian Government.

These fisheries generated an estimated gross value of production (GVP) of \$374 million in 2020-21, representing 27 per cent of the \$1.39 billion GVP of Australia’s total wild-caught fisheries.

For a copy of the report, visit: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/fisheries/fishery>



An exhaustive study shows Commonwealth fisheries – like the eastern tuna & billfish fishery – are stable and steady. (This photo shows yellowfin tuna being unloaded on the Gold Coast.)

Two NQ marketers take out national titles as best seafood businesses

TWO North Queensland seafood marketers have been recognised as the best seafood businesses in Australia.

Debbie's Seafood and Malanda Seafood have been judged the best large and small seafood industry businesses respectively.

Early last year, they won the Queensland awards in these categories and late last year took out the national awards against other businesses from round the nation.

Queensland Seafood featured Debbie's Seafood in an article last year (Edition 2021 / 3) but, in brief, the business that is today Debbie's Seafood – a seafood retailer based in Mackay, Queensland – is a family-owned and operated company established in 1990 by then net-fishers Mark and Debbie Ahern.

Over the last three decades, the business has grown and diversified. What commenced as a fisherman catching local product and his wife selling it from a van by the roadside or at local markets has become a seafood catching, processing, wholesaling and retail business, plus a restaurant, employing 25 staff and serving tens of thousands of customers in Mackay and the inland coalfield towns.

When Debbie began selling Mark's catches direct to the public – a novel approach for a fishing family in the early 1990s – she quickly established a reputation as a quality supplier of seafood. This reputation has been enhanced over the years and is the foundation of the business' continuing success.

In 2005, Debbie's Seafood established a retail and processing facility, and had assembled a fleet of modern, well fitted-out mobile seafood trucks to reach the mining communities in centres like Moranbah, 200km west of Mackay.

In 2016, the business again significantly expanded, adding a dine-in and takeaway fish and chip café.

In 2021, Mark and Debbie passed on the baton to their daughter Natalie and son in law Craig. The second-generation business now has 25 employees. Mark has returned to fishing again (especially reef-fishing on the 10-metre planning-hull boat, the Kylee Ann, and a 6.2-metre boat fitted with a net reel for inshore fishing) to ensure their loyal customers have a wide selection of fresh, local seafood available.

They buy seafood from other ports along the Queensland coast and also

lease licences and quota to other fishers who supply Debbie's Seafood. This has been necessary to keep pace with the growing demand for fresh, local seafood.

After winning these awards, Debbie said she wanted to say "A big 'Thank-you' to our fishermen – this would not be possible without their wonderful products.

"Our staff go beyond our expectations every single day and certainly make our life easier. Of course, we want to thank our loyal customers for their support, and I know those customers are also appreciative of our terrific, hard-working staff and fishermen."

For more information, go to: <https://debbiesseafood.com.au/>

Malanda Seafood

Karen Miller, part-owner of Malanda Seafood, said she and husband Mark Gray decided to open a seafood shop 10 years ago.

It all began with Mark's passion of fishing seeing them provide seafood to their friends and others at events. Word of mouth quickly spread, growing their reputation for providing quality seafood and, after Karen drove past an empty Malanda shopfront a decade ago, the decision was made to open Malanda Seafood.

"I entered back into the workforce as an accounts officer and just went 'Yeah, no, this is not where I want to be'," Karen said.



Karen Miller from Malanda Seafood (left) and Mark and Debbie Ahern from Debbie's Seafood with trophies recognising their businesses as respectively the best small and large seafood operations in Australia.

GREAT BARRIER REEF

GBR could be added to “in danger” list

A UNESCO delegation has recommended the Great Barrier Reef be added to the World Heritage “in danger” list but the Albanese Federal Government has criticised the recommendation.

“I drove past this empty shop and just envisioned it what it could be and created it.

“We were already supplying seafood to our own contacts, to their friends, and their staff parties, then their neighbours ... It just snowballed.

“We are a small business but we have had a big impact in town. We are proud of the seafood we supply and the response from customers has been terrific.”

Karen said that, since starting their business, customer feedback has always been positive – however, to win this award shows the service Malanda Seafood provides is top-level.

She said that, in order to be nominated for the award, Malanda Seafood needed to be employing fewer than 10 fulltime staff, demonstrate business growth, innovation, excellence in product, service and marketing and contribute towards a positive public profile for the seafood industry.

Karen said she attributes their shop’s success to their quality control and focus on locals. With Mark having more than 30 years’ experience in fishing, he is “on deck” himself to ensure the seafood they catch is of the highest quality.

Mark works both in the Gulf of Carpentaria and on the east coast, catching fish for the shop.

“We maintain quality by staying with the same suppliers that share our same ethics,” she said.

“One of our points of difference is that Mark is actually catching product himself, so there’s that level of quality control.

“Our son has been fishing with his dad since he was probably seven. He’s now fishing with his dad this year as well, third-generation, and two daughters work with us as well, so it’s a real family business.

“We’ve always said we’re reef guardian fishers, we’re there for the sustainability, we’re not just there for the short term.”

Karen said while winning the award was great for the business, it was also a great tribute to the town who have supported Malanda Seafood over the years.

For more information, go to: <https://www.facebook.com/MalandaSeafood/>

A REPORT by a delegation from the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recommended the GBR World Heritage site be added to the “in danger” list and urged “ambitious, rapid and sustained” action on climate change to protect the site.

It says: “Despite the unparalleled science and management efforts made in recent years, the outstanding universal value of the property is significantly impacted by climate change factors.”

The UNESCO report follows an official visit to monitor the reef in March 2022, and cites mass bleaching and greater water acidity among the increased threats to corals.

It recommends the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments both adopt stronger emissions reductions policies consistent with stopping warming at 1.5C and has urged more investment in improving water quality.

Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek defended her government’s climate change policies and said the report’s criticisms focused on policies of the previous Morrison Government.

“This Government, as UNESCO says themselves, is night and day compared with the previous Government,” Ms Plibersek said. “Actions this Government took in six months are more than the previous Government took in nine years.”

Ms Plibersek said the Albanese Government has legislated a target of 43 per cent carbon pollution reduction by 2030, with “a clear path to net zero by 2050”.

“That’s the most important thing the Government can do to show willingness to address risks to the GBR.”

Queensland Environment Minister, Meaghan Scanlon, also defended the actions of the State Government.

“Since this report was written, things have changed. We finally have a government in Canberra working with Queensland and acting on climate change,” Ms Scanlon said.

“The report calls for the Federal and State Governments to undertake ‘ambitious, rapid and sustained’ action to protect the reef. That’s what we are doing.”

UNESCO actions

In June 2021, the then Environment Minister, Sussan Ley, said she was “blindsided” by a draft decision to inscribe the reef on the “in danger” list, arguing normal process had not been followed.

It was reported at the time that UNESCO decision was backed by its so-called “expert scientific committee”, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

However, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee — made up of representatives from 19 countries — over-ruled the IUCN’s scientific advice.

Instead of an immediate listing, the committee decided to send a delegation — known as the Reactive Monitoring Mission — to inspect the reef in March 2022, ahead of making a decision.

The report also says that “destructive gill net fishing” is still allowed in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, “which kills dugongs, turtles, dolphins and protected shark species”.

Richard Leck from WWF-Australia was reported as saying the recommendations should be adopted in full.

“UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are the global experts on protecting World Heritage areas. Their recommendations should be accepted by the Australian and Queensland governments,” he said.

Ms Plibersek said: “It’s important to note this is not a UNESCO proposal for listing the reef as ‘in danger’.

“This is a technical report and the World Heritage Centre is yet to make a recommendation, which would be considered by the World Heritage Committee.”

Shawn Somerset lost to the seafood industry

IN the early 1990s, I had an idea to conduct a study into the health benefits of seafood.

Unfortunately, I had no experience or qualifications in structuring or conducting health studies.

“You need to talk to Dr Shawn Somerset,” someone said to me. “He’s a scientist who knows all about healthy eating.”

They were right. I did need to talk to Dr Shawn Somerset. My original idea was about to take shape as something far more valuable than a tool to promote seafood and the fishing industry.

I tracked Shawn down at Griffith University, we talked, he developed a serious research proposal with genuine community health benefits, and we approached the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation (FRDC) for funding.

And so was born FRDC Project 1996/340.

Over the next couple of years, we developed a research report that comprehensively examined the many health benefits of seafood, giving people a guide to how to improve health through consumption of fish and other species. (See: https://www.frdc.com.au/sites/default/files/2021-07/Whats_so_healthy_booklet.PDF)

The best part of three decades later, that same report is still in use in Australia and has inspired similar work elsewhere round the world.

A separate, more recent project that Shawn was involved in with the FRDC compiled material for healthcare professionals – such as dietitians, nutritionists, primary healthcare nurses and public health practitioners – that would help them in turn inform the public about the health benefits of seafood.

Shawn wrote an evidence review that brought together international research findings about seafood and health, to underline the health benefits of seafood consumption.

It addressed not just disease-related



Professor Shawn Somerset, an expert in the health benefits of seafood, passed away late last year.

findings but also protective benefits of seafood that consumers can proactively take advantage of, to optimise their health throughout life.

Shawn and I worked on a number of projects related to the health benefits of seafood.

One of the largest looked at the specific benefits of increased consumption of seafood in Hervey Bay – an area with probably the oldest average age of any region in Queensland – where heart disease and diabetes (connected to obesity) were identified as serious health problems and a diet high in seafood was identified as one of the solutions.

It was funded by a former Labor State Government. That is ironic, really, given the determination of the current Queensland Government to drastically reduce consumers’ access to local seafood there.

The research projects I collaborated on with Shawn also yielded an enduring working relationship and a friendship that I treasured – and shall always treasure, even just as a memory.

Now, the projects we were planning next will likely never take shape. However, I am grateful for the opportunities we had and the work we were given precious time to do.

I was certainly lucky knowing Shawn. He was great to work with. Intelligent, imaginative, engaging, humorous, such a serious demeanour at times yet still so quick with a grin and a laugh in conversation. Great company.

Shawn died in November, after a relatively short illness.

Shawn had a lengthy academic career in Queensland and maintained a family home in Brisbane. At the time of his death, he was Professor of Public Health and Professor of Nutrition & Dietetics in the Faculty of Health at the University of Canberra.

Like so many, many people, I will miss Shawn. Always.

Martin Bowerman

Note: To see something of Shawn’s legacy for the seafood industry, go to: <https://www.frdc.com.au/health-benefits-seafood>

Federal Govt wants feedback on restaurant labelling

THE Federal Government is moving ahead with country of origin labelling for seafood in restaurants and wants industry feedback.

In a statement released on December 23, the Department of Industry, Science & Resources said: “We want feedback on a proposed model for mandatory country of origin labelling (CoOL) for seafood in hospitality settings in Australia.

“A form of mandatory CoOL already applies to seafood sold in retail venues, such as supermarkets.

“The Australian Government will work with the seafood and hospitality sectors to introduce mandatory CoOL for seafood in hospitality settings.

“Under the proposed model, hospitality venues would need to show if their seafood is: Australian; imported; or international mixed (if the item contains both Australian and imported seafood).

“This model will give consumers clear, meaningful information about where seafood comes from. It also aims to minimise costs and other impacts to businesses.

“We will use your feedback to refine the model and inform future labelling rules. You can respond by answering survey questions, uploading a written document, or recording a video or audio submission.

“Consultation closes at 11:59 pm AEDT on 15 March 2023.”

Joint statement

The Federal Government announced in October last year that it would provide \$1.6 million to deliver its election commitment to introduce country of origin labelling in the seafood industry.

In a joint statement, Assistant Minister for Trade & Manufacturing Tim Ayres and **Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry Murray Watt** said the Government will work closely with the seafood and hospitality sectors to improve seafood labelling and help consumers make informed decisions about the food they buy.

“The Government’s plan for clearer Country of Origin Labelling will allow consumers to easily identify if the seafood they choose at restaurants, takeaways or cafes is Australian,” Mr Ayres said.

“Australia is home to a world class seafood industry and consumers overwhelmingly want to buy high-quality fresh local produce.

“The Government backs our local seafood industry and consumers, who deserve to know where their seafood is coming from.”

Senator Watt said Australia is home to the most delicious seafood in the world and all Australians should be very proud of that.

“I’ve seen firsthand the value of our fisheries industry, both as a job creator and an economic driver in regional Australia,” he said.

“As traceability and provenance become more important to consumers, we must support the efforts our local seafood industry is making to identify their products.

“Country of Origin Labelling will ensure that the seafood grown or caught here in Australia is rightfully given its dues on menus around the country.”

Mr Ayres said consumers have had access to food origin information on most products in retail stores since 2018, when the first set of labelling reforms came into full effect.

“Some restaurants and cafes already display seafood origin information for consumers but there is no national consistency like there is for food purchased at the supermarket.

“Developing options for mandatory labelling of seafood will include consultation across the seafood and hospitality sectors.

“This will support the Australian seafood and hospitality sectors to work together to deliver transparent information to consumers, while minimising costs and impacts on businesses/

“The process will also determine a transition period, to ensure businesses have time to adjust to any new requirements.”

To read the Federal Government discussion paper, go to:

Consultation hub | Country of origin labelling for seafood in hospitality: discussion paper - Department of Industry, Science and Resources



Restaurant diners in future will be able to identify the country of origin of seafood on the menu but the Federal Government is still seeking industry feedback about labelling plans.

New boat for NQ net and reef fisheries

A new boat has hit the water in North Queensland and will work in the barra-net and offshore-reef fisheries.

THE new 6.5-metre plate aluminium outboard-powered planing hull vessel will fish from Alva Beach, just outside Ayr.

It is a three-way investment by longtime local fisher Neil Green, daughter Sienna Green and fellow Alva Beach fisher Dale Vener.

Sienna said the new boat will be used in the barra fishery initially and then used for reef-fishing day trips.

“We have already trialled it on reef-fishing trips and it’s performed very well and caught well,” Sienna said.

“We already have a larger boat for overnight or longer trips to the reef but this boat will be very efficient for quick trips when the weather might not be good enough long enough for bigger trips.

“In the reef fishery, we will be using it to catch species like coral trout and red emperor for the local fresh-fish trade.”

Dale said the boat has a measured length of 6.468 metres, moulded beam of 2.44 metres and depth of 0.54 metre.

“It’s powered by a 200hp Yamaha four-stroke outboard and will cruise efficiently at 24 to 25 knots, with a top speed of about 40 knots. It carries 280 litres of fuel under the deck.”

Neil added this Yamaha is the fiftieth he has invested in during the last 40 years.

“Yeh, I don’t mind Yamahas. The reason I’ve had 50 of them is that I have been running four to five boats at the one time and replacing the outboards after about 1,100 to 1,200 hours.”

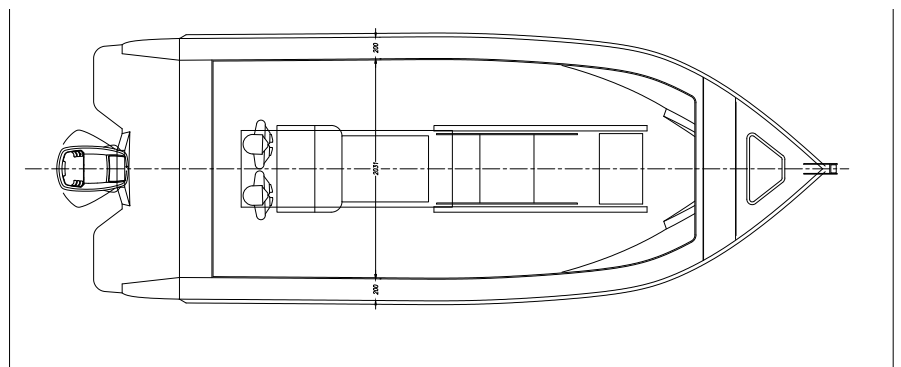
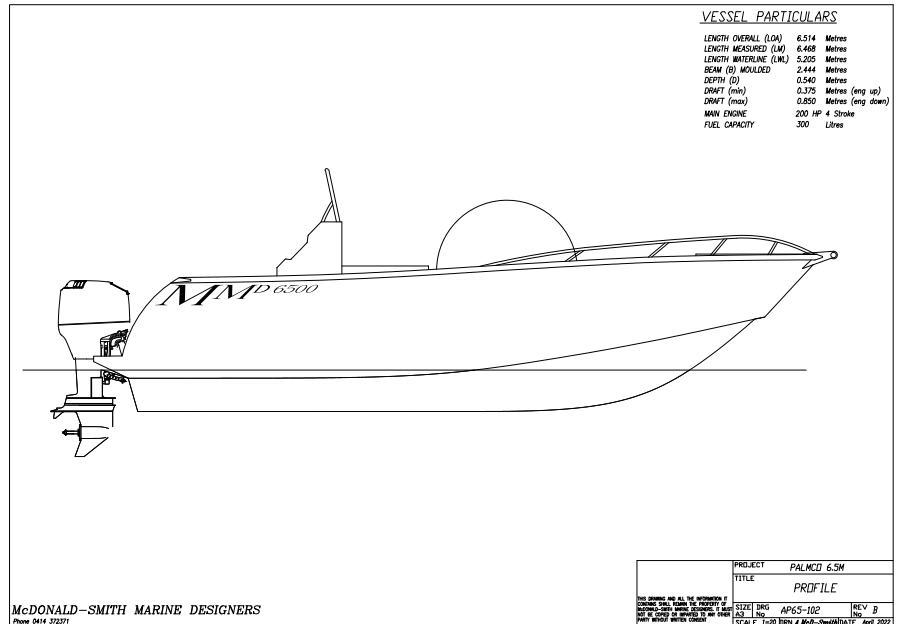
Neil said that, for barra fishing, the boat carries a net reel on the front deck.

“Net reels are a great thing for net fishers of all ages, especially those who have a few years of net-fishing behind them. Using a net reel to pick up your net at the end of the day is so much easier than hand-hauling and bagging.”

He said the boat, outboard, trailer and fittings were valued at around \$120,000 in total.

“The boat has been built by Andrew Palmer and his crew at Palmco Engineering Pty Ltd in Ayr, so it’s

providing work for local tradesmen and keeping jobs in the area, which is a good thing.”



Drawings of the 6.5-metre Palmco professional planing hull vessel.



The new boat is now ready to start work.



Three fishers based at Alva Beach near Ayr will be working this locally-built boat in the inshore net and reef handline fisheries.

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Seeing an opportunity to design and manufacture a locally designed and supported alarm monitoring system, companies within the AMI Group worked together to bring the new BridgeLink Alarm Monitoring Solution to market in 2021.

Since its release, the product has been installed on both refits and new builds, including Huon Aquaculture's pallet carrier vessel (requiring 53 connected sensors interfacing with the system), windfarm vessels in Vietnam, and refit on a tug boat operating in Cairns' busy waterways.

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Each BridgeLink system is planned in collaboration with input from the



customer, resulting in a solution ideal for the vessel, and service is supported by AMI Group's various branch locations Australia wide.

For more information on BridgeLink AMS, contact your nearest AMI branch. <https://www.amisales.com.au/contact-us/>

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THE GULL



Job-free zone

HUNDREDS of jobs have been put at risk by a Queensland Government proposal to shut down most commercial fishing throughout the Great Sandy Strait and a lot of adjacent Fraser Coast waters as well.

It's the State Government's latest "net-free zone" and it will transfer tonnes of prime fish and other seafood from consumers to anglers.

Fishermen will be put out of work but also losing their jobs on shore will be process workers and gear suppliers and all the other people who rely on the local catch.

These waters have been worked sustainably for generations, and the region remains a stronghold for dugongs, turtles, thousands upon thousands of humpback whales and a wide range of other marine life.

But the State Government is using the excuse of protecting the environment for turning Great Sandy Strait and other areas into recreational-fishing-only "yellow zones" – a cheap and easy way to create Queensland's probably largest-yet "net-free zone".

The QSIA describes the draft rezoning plan as "nothing short of

a Government effort to remove commercial fishers from the Great Sandy Marine Park".

It says consultation has been based on anti-industry views and can be viewed as irresponsible, inept and deceptive.

The plan takes fish from the seafood consumers that professional fishermen harvest it for and gives it to the tiny percentage of skilled anglers who land most of the recreational catch.

To quote the QSIA again: "Under the cover of marine park rezoning, the State Government is supporting a resource reallocation without understanding the economic impacts in the region or the supply chain impacts of the zoning plan."

That pretty much sums it up, eh.

Not what

POLITICIANS are not what they used to be.

Back around 2006, when the existing Great Sandy Marine Park zoning plan was being developed, local Hervey Bay Labor Member of Parliament – and Environment Minister – Andrew McNamara realised it would potentially hurt local fishermen, consumers and businesses.

So, with the strong support of Fisheries Minister Tim Mulherin he organised a delegation of local professional fishermen to go down to Brisbane and see then Premier Peter Beattie.

Premier Beattie listened to them and basically said to Minister McNamara: "Fix this so the environment is protected and these people don't get hurt."

The result was a yellow zone through Great Sandy Strait with a special hatched area that allowed

responsible net-fishing and some other forms of fishing to continue.

It was a sensible compromise that protected the environment, and protected the seafood community and the valuable contribution professional fishing makes to the economy.

Can you imagine getting a hearing like that from Government Ministers, let alone the Premier, these days?

Back in 1993, then Labor Deputy Premier Tom Burns was running an inquiry into recreational fishing that was expected to lead to cutbacks to professional fishermen. One of the things he suggested was a ban on the commercial take of tailor.

A pensioner telephoned Tom Burns at home and told him tailor was a tasty fish and one of the few fish he could afford to buy. He didn't want to lose it. At the next meeting of his inquiry committee, Tom told them he'd changed his mind about any tailor ban.

When was it that politicians moved so far away from the people they are supposed to represent?

When did they stop caring about the impacts of their decisions on real people and real communities beyond the George Street bubble?

Politicians are not what they used to be, certainly not in Queensland ...

Travis (Flat)Head

A FRIEND was out to dinner recently and checked the seafood options.

They included "batted" flathead.

Obviously whoever put the menu together is a bigger fan of cricket than fish.

The diners wondered whether it was Tiger, Trawl, Dusky, Bluespot or Travis (Flat)Head. Very punny!

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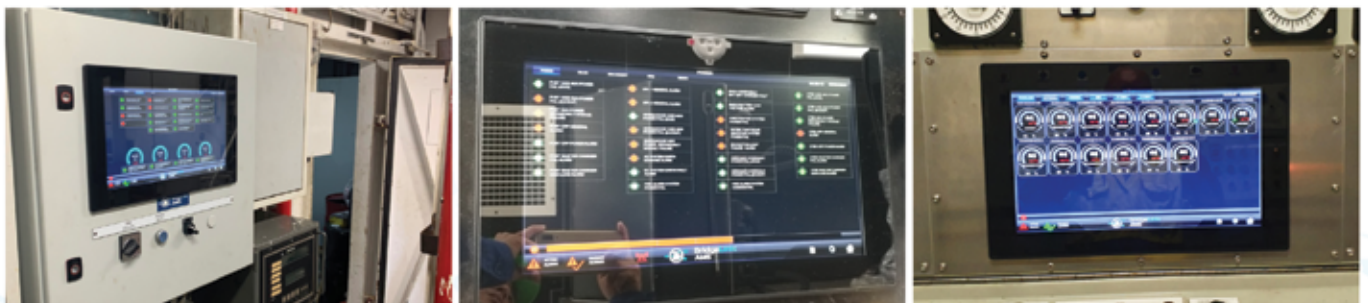
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