

# QUANTAS ISLAND STATE RURAL AWARDS

2024 NUMBER 2

- Net buybacks don't live up to pollies' promises
- Net bans imposed in Gulf of Carpentaria
- QSI submission on mud crab fishery

**KATE LAMASON HOOKS  
STATE RURAL AWARD**



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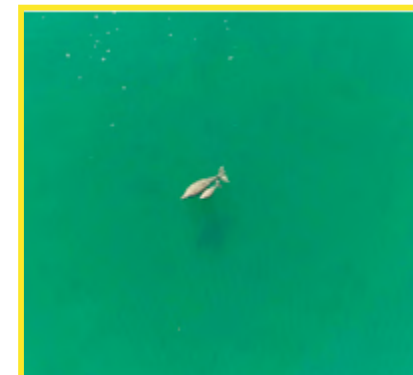
*QSIA opposes crab "reforms". Page 10.*



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*More demands from UNESCO. Page 23.*



*Hervey Bay dugong. (JCU photo.) Page 26.*

### In this edition ...

A SADLY constant theme in this magazine in recent years has been the damaging issues facing the fishing industry and, as President Allan Bobbermen points out in his column on page 4, at a time now when industry is facing a host of issues in all fisheries, under the harvest strategy the powers of Fisheries Queensland have been expanded, broadening the ability of the department to amend regulations without going to Parliament.

CEO David Bobbermen has been examining the amount of money estimated to have been paid to displaced net fishers and calculated it is substantially less than the amounts promised in various politicians' media statements. (See page 5.)

The QSIA has lodged a submission prepared by the QSIA Crab Sub-Committee opposing the so-called "reforms to manage the transfer of effort" in a discussion paper from Fisheries Queensland (See page 10.)

New net bans have been imposed in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and have also come into force with the rezoning in Great Sandy Marine Park designed to transfer fish from the majority of local residents – seafood consumers – to a tiny minority of skilled anglers. (See pages 12 and 14.)

NQ fishers have taken the net-ban protest to Canberra, with a barbecue of wild-caught barra in the grounds of Parliament House showing politicians and journalists what's being lost. (See page 16.)

UNESCO has recommended keeping the Great Barrier Reef off the "World Heritage In Danger" list – for now – but has come back to Australia with a long list of ongoing demands that will affect both fishers and farmers. (See page 23.)

While no-one is pretending that dugong are not facing a number of issues in tropical Australia – particularly periodic losses of seagrass caused by flood events – a number of surveys have confirmed a historic comeback for dugong numbers in Hervey Bay after a catastrophic population crash in the early 1990s. This story should provide encouragement for a public jaded and despondent from a seemingly relentless negative narrative about the state of the marine environment. See the feature article on pages 26-31.

The Queensland Seafood Marketers Association has hosted the biennial Queensland Seafood Awards and selected a terrific team of industry representatives ready to battle for national honours in September. (See page 34.)

**Front cover:** Kate Lamason from Cairns-based company Little Tuna has won the Queensland 2024 AgriFutures Rural Women's Award, firing up her ambition to see locally-caught tuna on supermarket shelves. Turn to page 20 for all the details.

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

### Heavy-handed changes forced on industry

Hello all

I HOPE you are coping with the changes that have been heavy-handedly forced on our industry. What appears to be more frustrating is there is very little coming from the cross-bench in State Parliament to show support for our industry.

A good example of this is we had a cross-bench polly recommending an administrative law firm to seek advice on the closures in the Great Barrier Reef and the Great Sandy Marine Park industry spent the money to seek this advice, which resulted in a report from two senior silks, with a short list of recommendations.

One of the recommendations was an inquiry into the process of these closures. This report has been made available to the cross-bench and there seems to be nothing coming back except radio silence.

Minister Furner made a statement, when these unnecessary closures were announced, that there was a generous package on offer. Industry is yet to see this generosity..

A good example of this supposed generosity has been demonstrated in the round three of this scheme of boat refits and stranded assets.

QSIA was told verbally by the independent chair that \$12 million was to be set aside for net buybacks. If you do some calculations, with what is on offer, just \$6 million will do it. The question has been raised: where is the remainder?

Fisheries Queensland (FQ) can only blow bubbles when this was put to them. You can let your imagination run wild on this. For example, are the ALP contemplating more closures as an election commitment, funded by these surpluses they are trimming off?

QSIA has been receiving calls from NX fishers about the reviewing of camera footage and compliance. There is a strong rumour that footage of the NX fishery is there for all to see, when industry was told that it would be reviewed independently by a third party. If so, this is unlike the trawl fishery, where their footage is locked up under a written agreement.

QSIA has taken this concern up with fishery managers and is awaiting a formal response.

FQ have given a verbal commitment that the reef line quota will remain unchanged and the Spanish mackerel will also remain unchanged for 2024-25.

The proposed crab fishery and the Gulf net fishery harvest strategies are yet to be unveiled. It will be interesting to see what gems they have in store for these fisheries.

QSIA has received confirmation that John Tanzer has been appointed as a special advisor on fishing to Environment Minister Leanne Linard. It will be interesting to see what will be rolled out here, going by the track record that if the Environment Department get the sniffles, Fisheries Queensland catch a cold.

Seafood prices are at an all-time low. There are numerous arguments to why this has occurred, however the cost of living I believe is a big factor

#### Conclusion

There are a host of issues industry is facing in all fisheries and what is problematic is that, under the harvest strategy, the powers of the CEO of Fisheries Queensland have been expanded, which broadens the ability of the department to amend regulations without going to Parliament.

With an underbelly of green bureaucracy that has infiltrated FQ, who are anti-commercial fishing, this power is being abused, resultingly we now have foxes guarding hen houses.

Let's hope for a change of government and I urge you to lobby your local MP.

Stay safe and good fishing.

**Alan Bobbermen**  
President  
QSIA

## FROM THE CEO

### Net "buy out" falling far short of promises

Dear Members

RECENTLY, I've been reflecting on the significant reduction in the scope of the promises made to net fishermen over the past 12 months.

On 5 June 2023, a joint media release was published by the State and Federal Governments outlining the decision to phase out gillnets within the Great Barrier Reef marine park, labelling gillnet fishing as being destructive, injuring and killing threatened dugongs and other creatures. A budget of \$160 million was allocated. The terminology used in this press release was to "buy out" licences.

Following the receipt of the report from the Future Fishing Taskforce, on 16 November 2023 the State Government issued a press release further detailing how the phasing out of gill nets would occur and what compensation would be available to fishermen.

This included \$90 million to financially adjust eligible fishers and supply chain businesses to undertake the process, with money also allocated for re-skilling and retraining support for deckhands and skippers, and compensation for the making of hammerhead shark a no-take species.

Skipping forward to today, there is no doubt that the three stages of the structural adjustment package thus far fall significantly short of the promises made in press releases.

After a recent conversation I had with a person at the centre of a lot of these decisions, I have come to the conclusion that, while the policy may have been well intentioned, the team implementing it have significantly reduced the scope.

I really do not understand their motivation. Stage three of the structural adjustment package really brings this to light, with the lack of foresight in the decision of capping the amount of gillnet compensation allowed to fisherman.

If gill nets are such a bad and

destructive apparatus, surely policy has to encourage full participation, regardless of the budget consequences; otherwise, how serious is the Government in trying to protect threatened, endangered and protected species.

Furthermore, the conditions imposed on our other elements of the structural adjustment package – including payments to skippers and deckhands, affected businesses and boat refits – fall well short of the press releases and conversations had with government. Nothing has happened to date in relation to re-skilling; I think that train has left the station.

Given that, until recently, only around \$40 million of the approximately \$100 million allocated had been distributed by the Queensland Rural & Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) to applicants, there appears to be no budgetary constraints for a more considered compensation package to businesses that have being forcibly closed by the Government. For example, what about the other stranded assets that fishermen now have or businesses impacted by these reforms like suppliers and wholesalers?

After nearly five months of operation, over 500 fishing trips, with observers and cameras peering at NX fisherman's operations, I understand no mortal entanglements of threatened,

endangered and protected species have been recorded or identified in the NX fishery. This is a great news story and those fishers should be congratulated.

We eagerly await the consultation report from Fisheries Queensland in relation to the crab fishery discussion paper. Hopefully, this will be available in the not too distant future, so that crab fishermen have a better idea where their fishery may be headed.

QSIA is approaching all political parties in the lead up to the October State Government election seeking commitments from them to support the wild-catch seafood industry in Queensland, an industry important to many rural communities and the seafood-consuming public (which includes the significant number of visitors to this State).

One of the commitments being sought is the funding for a 10-year road map for the industry. The purpose is to rebuild certainty for the industry.

The QSIA AGM has been set for mid-October, somewhere on the Sunshine Coast. The constitution requires Director nominations to be received well before this. If you believe that you have something to contribute, please consider nominating.

Other activities will be held in conjunction with the AGM, details of which will be announced well in advance.

Until next time,

**David Bobbermen**  
CEO

## EVENTS

### Seafood Directions in September

THE biennial Seafood Directions conference and exhibition will be held in Hobart in September.

Focusing on "Futures of Seafood" this year, what is described as "the premier ideas, innovation and networking event for the Australian seafood industry" will be held from September 10 to 12.

Organisers say the national forum



provides an opportunity to promote the seafood industry, discuss industry issues, workshop solutions, teach best practices, share knowledge and plan for the future of the seafood industry.

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

## LAW essentials

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- Conveyancing
- Family Law
- Wills/Estates,
- Business Law

#### UPDATES

**MORETON BAY - WHITE SPOT DISEASE CLASS ACTION** - the claim is still powering along. Big litigation like this takes time as it is complex. The current target to complete is by the end of 2025.

**GLADSTONE PORT DREDGING CLASS ACTION** - much more complex than the White Spot case, however this is likely to complete around end of 2025 as well.

*GET ADVICE from someone who understands the fishing industry.*

2000 - Trawl Plan	2009 - Moreton Island Oil/Container Spill
2004 - GBRMP RAP	2012 - CWTH Adjustment Assistance
2006 - Fishing Future Package	2015 - Net Free Zones Compensation
2006 - CRFF quota allocations	2017 - Qantas Toxic Spill Compensation
2008 - Latent Effort Symbol Removal	Current - Gladstone Dredging Class Action
2008 - Moreton Bay Buyback	Current - White Spot Disease Class Action
2024 - Fisheries Structural Adjustment Package	

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## VALUE OF SEAFOOD

### Seafood production expected to rise to \$3.56 billion in 2023-24

The value of seafood production in Australia is expected to rise to \$3.56 billion in 2023-24, according to figures released by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural & Resource Economics & Sciences.

THE Australian Bureau of Agricultural & Resource Economics & Sciences (ABARES) released its annual outlook for fisheries and aquaculture earlier this year, predicting an increase in value in 2023-24 and relatively steady annual values through to 2028-29.

In the current year, the value of salmonid (salmon and trout) aquaculture is expected to fall slightly to \$1.32 billion, still contributing 37 per cent of the total value of Australian seafood production.

Prawn production – wild-caught and aquaculture – is expected to fall slightly to \$484 million, following a bumper season for wild-caught catch in 2022-23.

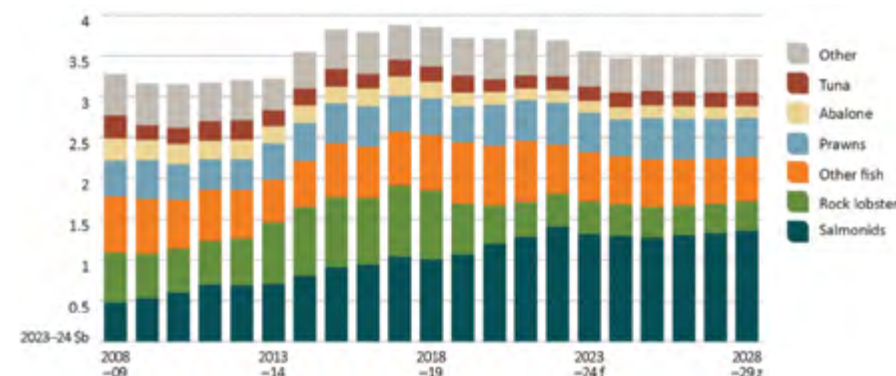
#### Report summary

In summary, the report said the nominal value of Australian fisheries and aquaculture production is forecast to rise in 2023-24 by 0.5 per cent to \$3.56 billion.

Despite differences across individual commodities, the real value of Australia's fisheries and aquaculture production is projected to remain steady over the period 2024-25 to 2028-29, averaging \$3.48 billion.

Across the sector, softening real average prices are expected in the period 2023-24 to 2028-29, due to increasing global supply and an appreciating Australian dollar.

Salmonid's share of Australia's



Seafood production values and predictions, 2008-2028.

Over the period 2024-25 to 2028-29, the real value of fisheries and aquaculture production is projected to remain steady, averaging \$3.48 billion.

Over the medium term, the composition of real fisheries and aquaculture production value is expected to change slightly – with increases seen in salmonids and prawns, and falls in rock lobster. Other commodity groups remain steady in terms of their contribution to sector real value over the period.

Declining prices for key species are expected to be offset by an overall increase in production volumes.

Declining prices are expected to result from slow growth in export demand for Australian seafood, following an expected appreciation of the Australian dollar.

Production volumes are projected to rise by around 4 per cent over the medium term, reaching 307,000 tonnes by 2028-29. Growth in volumes produced is driven by further growth in salmonids and prawn aquaculture and increased tuna production.

#### Prawn production

The ABARES report said that, in 2023-24, the production value of prawns is forecast to decrease by 3 per cent to \$484 million following a bumper season for wild-caught catch in 2022-23, then decline by a further 3 per cent to \$467 million in 2024-25 as a result of lower wild-caught catch and lower international prawn prices.

Over the medium term, real production value of prawns is forecast to peak at \$514 million in 2025-26 as a result of the planned expansion of prawn aquaculture, before declining to \$481 million by 2028-29 as the expected rise in the Australian dollar increases import competition and dampens domestic prices.

#### Further information

The report is *Australian fisheries and aquaculture outlook to 2028-29* by Harrison Tuynman, Michael Dylewski, Angela Cao and Robert Curtotti from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural & Resource Economics & Sciences.

To read the full report, go to: [https://daff.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en\\_AU/search/asset/1035608/0](https://daff.ent.sirsidynix.net.au/client/en_AU/search/asset/1035608/0)

## NET BANS

### Miles' Government puts a price on saving the Reef

IN June 2023, the Federal and State Governments announced the closure of the gillnet fishing industry within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

At the end of 2023, the Queensland Government abolished three types of gillnet fishing licences, impacting communities along the east coast of Queensland. In May this year, bans were extended into the Gulf of Carpentaria with the establishment of net-free zones there. The commercial fishing industry has been drip-fed details of any compensation that they were due because of these "reforms".

On 16 November 2023, Fisheries Minister Mark Furner stated any compensation would be "generous". (see ref 1 below) This has not been the case, and the latest stage of the Structural Adjustment Package clearly demonstrates that the Government is not serious about the removal of now-redundant gillnets from the community to help save the GBR from being placed on the In-Danger List.

Stage 3 of the Structural Adjustment Package includes the buy-back of gill nets from fishers. QSIA believes that the purpose of this buy back is to:

- ❑ Form part of the compensation promised to affected fishers who had their businesses forcibly closed by the State and Federal Governments as part of a suite of commitments made to IUCN / UNESCO which helped keep the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage area from being placed on the endangered list; and
- ❑ Remove gillnets from the community, ensuring there is no transference of the risk to Threatened, Endangered and Protected Species from the highly regulated Queensland commercial fishing industry to other lesser regulated (and unregulated) activities.

The current Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA) Scheme (ref 2) for the gillnet buyback falls significantly short of meeting these objectives.

This will result in gillnets remaining in the community, which has the potential of them being used illegally, increasing the threat to Threatened,

Endangered and Protected Species – the very opposite to what the Federal Government promised IUCN / UNESCO as part of the negotiations to keep the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area off the Endangered list.

QSIA President Mr Allan Bobbermen explains: "The Government has released a very limited gillnet buy-back scheme. Some previous gillnet operators will not be entitled to one cent. Other commercial fishers will have significantly more nets than the Government is willing to pay for.

"I am told by Fisheries Queensland that they do not want the 'budget to blow out'. This is nonsense. The commercial fishing industry has been short-changed through this whole process, and now, in the final stages, the Government continues to want to put the knife in and twist it.

"For years, gillnets have been demonised, and the State and Federal Governments have been spruiking what a great job they are doing to save the Great Barrier Reef. And yet, here we are, on one hand they are pork barreling, but, on the other, penny pinching, putting the Great Barrier Reef's status on the World Heritage Register at risk.

"This clearly indicates that this Miles' Labor Queensland Government is more interested in buying votes than doing what it has promised and fairly compensating hard working commercial fishers."

#### Background

The press release of 16 November 2023 stated: "The phasing out of gillnets and transition to more sustainable fishing practices is a key measure to prevent the GBR from being listed as 'in danger' by UNESCO." QSIA has always argued that the buying back of all gillnets by the Queensland Government was a critical piece of this "key measure".

Stage 3 of the Structural Adjustment Package contains an offer from the Queensland Government to buy some gillnets back from commercial fishers. This offer is priced at \$12.50/metre, which is less than 50 per cent of the

replacement cost of nets. Income received will be taxable. It has a cap depending on the licence type the fisher previously held. This cap is:

Authority type	Cap Amount in \$	Equivalent net length <sup>3</sup> cap in metres
N1	\$15,000	1,200
N2	\$45,000	3,600
N3	\$30,000	2,400
N4	\$60,000	4,800

If fishers have more than the arbitrarily assessed cap, they can choose to gift it to the Government or retain it for some future purpose. There is no logical explanation for an N1 or N3 net to be able to have the Government buy the same amount of nets back than an N2 net authority. Many fishers have more nets than the cap, due to experiencing supply issues during and post-COVID period.

Other issues QSIA identified with this net buy back include:

- ❑ Restricting compensation to only certain licence types (N1,N2,N3 and N4). It is not illegal for any commercial fisher to own a gillnet. To ensure that gillnets are removed from the community, all commercial fishers ought to be eligible for the buy back.
- ❑ Restricting compensation to only licences with history during a defined period. As mentioned above, commercial fishers may legally own nets but, for a multitude of reasons, they may not have used those nets between 1 September 2021 and 30 June 2023.
- ❑ There is no price adjustment for the Gulf of Carpentaria gill net operators who, due to their remoteness, have a significant freight burden.

1. <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/99165>
2. <https://www.qrida.qld.gov.au/program/fisheries-structural-adjustment-scheme-stage-3>
3. At \$12.50 / metre

Note: This statement was distributed to media and politicians by the QSIA on June 11



## BUDGET

### Government says Budget will boost Queensland's critical primary production

QUEENSLAND Premier Steven Miles says the State Budget – released in early June – allocates spending of almost \$715 million into Queensland's vital agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries “to further protect and strengthen this critical economic sector of production and employment”.

“The 2024-25 Queensland Budget includes \$125 million for Future Fisheries reforms, which support greater protection of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and a more environmentally sensitive and sustainable fishing industry,” Mr Miles said.

“The funding covers a structural adjustment package for fishers affected by the phase-out of commercial gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef, the parallel rezoning of the Great Sandy Marine Park, and increased protection

from gillnet fishing in the Gulf of Carpentaria.”

The Premier said the Government was also enhancing management of biosecurity threats and upskilling the agricultural workforce with \$20 million over four years from the \$30 million Backing Bush Communities Fund.

“In addition, there is \$6.5 million over four years and \$1.6 million ongoing annually to strengthen our capability across Queensland's and Australia's biosecurity systems, including enforcement, investigation and prosecution functions.

“Community safety is a major priority with \$7.3 million over five years to further promote responsible dog ownership and implement stronger laws in response to dog attacks.

“Another important budget feature



Premier Steven Miles.

is \$3.3 million in 2024–25 for Round 7 of the Rural Economic Development Grants program, which enhances regional employment opportunities and stimulates agribusiness development in regional Queensland.

“We also have \$2.4 million in additional funding over three years for the collective action to manage *Varroa destructor*.”

He said other highlights included:

- ❑ \$1.6 million to upgrade the Wild Dog Barrier Fence;

- ❑ \$1.4 million to upgrade infrastructure and equipment at Gatton Smart Farm to support horticulture, productivity and profitability;
- ❑ helping Queensland agribusiness to lower greenhouse gas emissions through the Queensland Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap 2022–2032;
- ❑ continued support of smart farms dedicated to advancing Australia's agriculture and food industries through the AgTech Roadmap 2023–2028;
- ❑ leading the Fresh and Secure Trade Alliance program to help protect and grow Australia's horticultural exports;
- ❑ helping Queensland producers prepare for future droughts;
- ❑ eradicating fire ants through the National Fire Ant Eradication Program, in collaboration with the Fire Ant Suppression Taskforce; and
- ❑ maintaining swimmer safety through the Shark Control Program, while advancing research into innovative shark mitigation technologies and boosting community education efforts.

#### Shoulder to shoulder

“Agriculture is one of Queensland's economic pillars, which is why we stand shoulder to shoulder with our producers,” Premier Miles said.

“My first budget as Premier supports a range of critical services and programs including the uptake of technology and the transition to a low emissions future while maintaining our competitive edge.”

Deputy Premier and Treasurer Cameron Dick said: “The first budget of the Miles Government is doing what matters for Queensland's primary producers, with a strong investment in a range of economic development programs.

“We're skilling Queenslanders to work in agriculture, we're bolstering our frontline to protect against biosecurity threats, and we are supporting Queenslanders no matter where they live in our great State.”

Fisheries Minister Mark Furner said: “The Miles Government stands with our primary producers in the face of

the challenges that our climate and market conditions throw at us.

“That's why our budget has such an unwavering focus on biosecurity, climate and market conditions, and supporting producers through industry changes.

“There is no greater demonstration of this than the \$125 million we're providing for fisheries reforms.

“Our ongoing support of the Backing Bush Communities Fund will help to further build rural and regional capacity and resilience to proactively manage biosecurity threats and upskill Queensland's agricultural workforce.

“We're helping our producers in their ongoing move towards a low emissions future through our Low Emissions Agriculture Roadmap.

“Producers can be assured we're doing all we can in the fight against fire ants, with effective treatment of almost 300,000 ha achieving a greater than 99 per cent confidence that fire ant nests have been destroyed from those identified areas.”



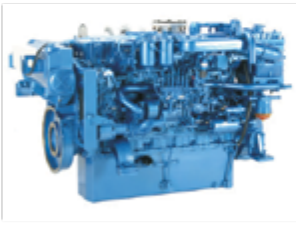
In its 2024 Budget, Premier Steven Miles said, the State Government is standing “shoulder to shoulder” with Queensland primary producers.

ISUZU

MARINE PROPULSION AND  
MARINE POWER GENERATION

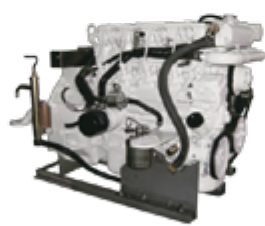
**PROPULSION**

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## QSIA lodges submission opposing proposed mud crab changes

The QSIA has lodged a submission prepared by the QSIA Crab Sub-Committee in response to the discussion paper released by Fisheries Queensland in early 2024 entitled “East Coast and Gulf of Carpentaria crab fishery (C1) – Consultation on fishery reforms”.

QSIA does not support the proposed “Reforms to manage the transfer of effort” included in the C1 crab fishery discussion paper.

The proposed reforms are primarily targeted at the mud crab fishery, with the impacts more likely dramatically felt on the east coast.

Several months after the abolition of the gill net authorities in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, there is no evidence of large scale fishing effort transfer. There is also no scientific evidence, economic modelling available to suggest the proposed reforms will deliver enduring economic, social and environmental benefits to the fishery.

Instead, QSIA argues, the proposed reforms are likely to decrease profitability, increase fishing effort, increase pressure on stocks, and force fishers out of business.

While noting the lack of evidence of large-scale fishing effort transfer negates the need for any reform, QSIA does not support the identified proposed reforms because of the following reasons:

### ❑ Reducing the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) of mud crab

- Primary reason
  - The Queensland Mud Crab Fishery Harvest Strategy is in its infancy and no issues have been identified in relation to sustainability.
  - The 70 per cent “break out” rule in the harvest strategy has not been triggered for either the east coast or the Gulf of Carpentaria mud crab fishery.
  - The Mud Crab Fishery Harvest Strategy should be allowed to “run its term”.
- Other reasons
  - Recent east coast catch levels of just over the 70 per cent “break

out” rule trigger are mainly due to decreasing effort and not decreasing stock performance or concerns surrounding the data/methodology used to set the TACC.

- The TACC must remain as set out in the Harvest Strategy to account for environmental variability, allow for fishery growth, and improve access for under-represented communities such as Indigenous owned and operator professional fishing businesses.
- B- and C- grade crabs are important economically and there are, in our multicultural society, established markets for these crabs.

### ❑ Increasing the minimum quota holding from 1.2 tonnes to 3 tonnes

- Primary reason
  - With a government investment warning on the fishery, it is unconscionable for the Government to force fishers to further invest in the fishery.
- Other reasons
  - Increases localised effort, leading to localised depletion of stocks and increased TEPS-interaction risk.
  - Increases the reliance on the take of low-quality crab.
  - Reduces the economic flexibility of fishing operations, increasing financial burden for fishers.
  - Reduces the accessibility of the fishery to new operators.
  - Disproportionately affects older fishers leading to a loss of experience, knowledge, and skill.

### ❑ Requiring two C1 symbols to be held on each fishing licence

- Primary reason
  - The fishery is principally managed by output controls (ie, quota).

- Imposing further input controls is not necessary.
- The fishery has an investment warning as noted above
- Other reasons
  - Activates dormant symbols and effort.
  - Increases the number of pots deployed by operators, leading to more intensive fishing pressure, which in return increases effort and TEPS interactions.
  - Increased conflict between commercial operators and with the recreational sector.
  - Reduced accessibility to enter the fishery and reduced economic flexibility.

QSIA is generally supportive of three of the other proposed general fishery reforms, namely:

- ❑ increasing the number of pots on trotlines,
- ❑ closure of all crabbing activities in Eurimbula Creek,
- ❑ clarification of the scope of the C1 fishery.

These proposed reforms are largely uncontroversial and either could provide some benefit to industry or will have a negligible impact on current fishing operations. The review of escape vent sizes for commercial pots comes as a concern to QSIA, given that less than three years ago it had to adjust, destroy and purchase new pots, due to escape vent management actions that were not informed by appropriate scientific evidence.

Any new changes to escape vent sizes must come with either compensation, grandfathering or alternative mechanisms to ensure that the change does not impose a financial burden on industry nor its suppliers.

Queensland’s mud crab fishery is large and complex, and there are several issues and areas of concern that continue to hamper current fishers and prevent additional investment by future and current operators. The three non-supported proposed reforms do not address these issues and would exacerbate existing issues.

Instead, QSIA suggest four possible alternative solutions that aim to address current and persistent issues directly affecting the mud crab, and broader C1, fishery.



### Removal of investment warnings

Removal of the 2014 investment warning that is preventing future and current fishers from investing into the fishery.

This addresses:

- ❑ Lack of confidence to investment in the fishery.
- ❑ Ageing workforce and lack of new operators.
- ❑ Improves access of the fishery.

### Symbol buyback

QDAF to offer voluntary symbol buybacks to mud crab symbol holders, with compensation set above the current market price.

This addresses:

- ❑ Unutilised symbols.
- ❑ Lack of commitment by non-participating symbol holders.

### Permitting take of female crab

Under heavy restrictions and quota, permit the take of female crab as is suggested by the best available scientific evidence and occurs in other jurisdictions.

This addresses:

- ❑ Reduce localised fishing pressure and potential depletion.
- ❑ Improved economic outcomes for commercial fishers.
- ❑ Reduce reliance on the take of B- and C-grade crab.
- ❑ Improve the competitiveness of Queensland’s mud crab fishery with other jurisdictions.

- ❑ Reduced conflict with recreational sector.
- ❑ Improved recreational experience.
- ❑ Reduce the workload of QBFP.

### Tagging of commercial crab

Introduce the compulsory tagging of commercially caught mud crab.

This addresses:

- ❑ Significantly reduces the sale of black market mud crab.
- ❑ Improved traceability of mud crab.
- ❑ Improved marketability of Queensland mud crab and economic opportunities for fishers.
- ❑ Significantly assist stock management and research.

Note: This is a brief summary of the QSIA’s 68-page document. The full document is available from the QSIA and has already been distributed to Members.

In preparing the submission, QSIA undertook two polls and had numerous conversations with industry. The QSIA Crab Committee would like to thank all industry members who have provided feedback on this submission.



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## NET BANS

# New net bans imposed in Gulf of Carpentaria

The threatened new net bans have now been imposed in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

EXTENSIVE new net bans in the Gulf of Carpentaria came into force on May 17. The QSIA has condemned the new bans, which it says are unnecessary and will have a serious impact on professional fishers.

The areas now closed to all commercial gillnetting include:

□ **Northern Gulf of Carpentaria**—all waters within the defined area from Boyd Point north to Cape York.

□ **Western Gulf of Carpentaria**—all waters within the defined area from the border with the Northern Territory east to Point Parker, including all N3 waters around the Wellesley Islands.

– Outside of the defined Western Gulf of Carpentaria gillnet-free area, fishing with gillnets can continue between Point Parker and John's Creek.

– The existing Wellesley Islands Protected Wildlife Area has important measures in place to protect interactions with protected wildlife, and these will be extended into the adjacent rivers and creeks on the mainland areas open to fishing west of Burketown.

□ **Norman River**—all remaining waters of the Norman River and associated tributaries.

□ **Pormpuraaw**—all waters within the defined area from north of Balurga Creek to south of the Chapman River.

□ **Topsy Creek**—all waters within the defined area between north of the South Mitchell River to south of Horse Creek.

### Prohibited activities

In the gillnet-free areas, a person cannot:

□ possess a cast net, mesh net, seine net or set pocket net for taking a fish for trade or commerce, unless the net is stowed and secured on a boat

□ possess a relevant net to take a fish for trade or commerce.

### Other Gulf measures

The State Government has announced other measures considered during the [Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery consultation](#) will be progressed during 2024–25, including:

□ short to medium-term actions to rebuild king threadfin stocks;

□ implementation of a new harvest strategy for the Gulf;

□ new commercial catch limits and improved reporting arrangements; and

□ implementation of independent onboard monitoring.

### Extra banned zone

Fisheries Minister Mark Furner claimed that “extensive consultation” – with commercial and recreational fishers, Traditional Owners, local communities and conservation groups – was undertaken to finalise the zones where gillnets would be banned.

“The consultation process identified the need for a fifth gillnet-free zone in addition to the four zones originally proposed,” Mr Furner said.

Mr Furner said the netting bans would give commercial fishers certainty.

“The gillnet-free zones we’re implementing in the Gulf of Carpentaria will give the commercial fishing industry the certainty it needs to plan for a sustainable future,” he said.

“It will also enable us to meet our obligations to conserve important marine species and protect one of Queensland’s most precious marine ecosystems.

“We conducted a rigorous consultation process in formulating these zones and believe they strike the right balance between the environment, Traditional Owners and local economies.

“We are putting \$12 million on the table to support impacted commercial

fishers and will work with industry on implementing this package.

“In recognition of the community and industry feedback we received, we have shifted the boundaries of three of the four proposed gillnet-free areas to better support the commercial fishing industry and better align with known geographic reference points.

“The additional gillnet-free area at Topsy Creek was added to support First Nations community members’ desire to build ecotourism and recreational and charter fishing opportunities.”

He said there were 84 N3 commercial fishing licences in the Gulf, with 59 of those being used by fishers.

“The areas to be covered by the new gillnet-free areas represent less than 10 per cent of the commercial fishing take from N3 symbols in the Gulf.

“Important measures already in place to minimise interactions with protected wildlife in the Wellesley Islands Protected Wildlife Area will be extended to the adjacent rivers and creeks on the mainland areas open to fishing west of Burketown.

“Fishing with gillnets can continue between Point Parker and John’s Creek outside of the defined Western Gulf of Carpentaria gillnet-free area.”

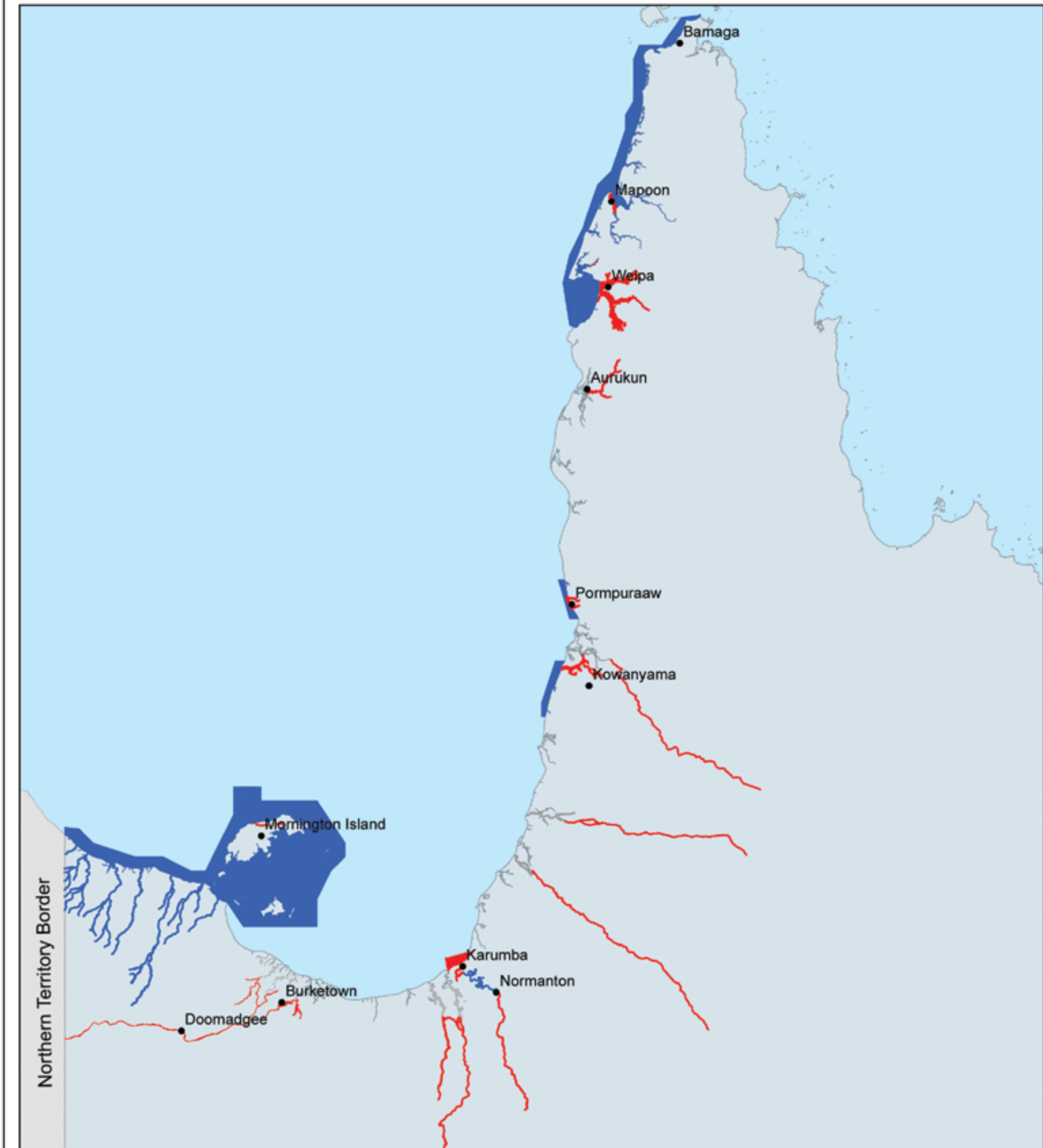
QSIA President Allan Bobbermen said: “The Government is shutting down sustainable, world-class fisheries in the Gulf and on the east coast, and QSIA has opposed these closures all the way.

“Now that they have been imposed, it is our top priority to make sure fishers receive proper compensation from the Government.”

### Further information

For more information, including maps of the areas where gillnets are now banned, go to: <https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/fisheries/alerts/gillnet-free-areas>

## Gulf of Carpentaria net bans



Author: Department of Agriculture & Fisheries

Date: 10/04/2024

Co-ord Sys: GCS\_GDA\_1994  
Datum: GDA\_1994  
Units: Degree



0 145 290 Km

### Legend

- Existing net closures
- New gillnet-free areas
- QLD Coastline



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## NET BANS

### Barra BBQ takes Queensland net ban protest to Canberra

Professional fishers and other industry representatives have attended a “net-ban protest barbecue” at Parliament House in Canberra organised by Shadow Minister for Northern Australia Susan McDonald.

SENATOR McDonald said wild-caught seafood supplies were under threat unless the Queensland and Federal Governments stand up to a UNESCO demand to ban net fishing and instead back the State’s well-regulated and sustainable commercial fishers.

Senator McDonald who has been campaigning against the bans since mid-2023, invited Queensland seafood representatives and business operators to Canberra to discuss the issue with Members of Parliament and the media.

The visit featured a barramundi barbecue in the grounds of the Senate Chamber in Parliament House, attended by a large number of Parliamentarians and journalists.

Those who made the trip to Canberra included fishers Neil Green, Sienna Green and Dale Vener, A. Raptis & Sons Chief Operating Officer Stefan Diacos, Normanton-based transport operator and businessman Noel Scott and QSIA CEO David Bobbermen.

Senator McDonald said the demands of international environmental activists were being put ahead of the interests of Queensland small businesses and seafood consumers.

“The Queensland Government – with the full support and encouragement of the Labor Federal Government – has rushed to do the bidding of UNESCO and completely ignored the people involved in the industry, the jobs it provides and the regional communities it supports,” she said.

“This is appalling overreach and it’s not backed by research funded by the Federal Government’s own Fisheries Research & Development Corporation, which shows all the main net-caught species as sustainable on Queensland’s east coast.

“I invited fishers to Canberra to cook barramundi burgers for politicians and journalists to highlight that the wild-caught variety of this fish – a table

favourite around the country – will be more scarce and more expensive because of this net ban.

“For once, Labor must put Australia’s interests above those of unelected international activist bodies who don’t just want to regulate fishing, but stop it altogether.”

Neil Green told media at the event that banning net fishing was a gross over-reaction that would have severe impacts on fishers, consumers and retailers.

“There is no net fishing anywhere near the Great Barrier Reef, and the creeks, rivers and foreshores that are fished make up just 0.2 per cent of Reef waters. This leaves 99.8 per cent of the World Heritage waters closed to net fishing,” he said.

“Barramundi licences in Queensland this year have been reduced from over 90 to 23, robbing consumers, restaurants and retailers of wild-caught



Also attending the barbecue were: (far left) Gulf transport operator Noel Scott, (second from the right) QSIA CEO David Bobbermen; and the Nationals federal leader David Littleproud.



Sampling wild-caught barra and discussing latest developments with the net bans were Queensland-based federal MPs Andrew Willcox (left) and Bert van Manen (right).



At the Parliament House barra barbecue: (from left) Dale Vener, Neil Green, Sienna Green and Susan McDonald. (Photos on these two pages courtesy of Senator McDonald’s office.)



Also wanting to hear from Senator McDonald about the net bans was federal MP Dai Le (who holds the Sydney seat of Fowler as an independent.)

barramundi. It will potentially deny them the opportunity entirely after mid-2027, when these 23 licences expire.

“The treatment of professional fishers is a warning to other primary producers because UNESCO has advised the Federal Government that all food production in reef catchments must be further regulated, and the Government has agreed.

“All primary industries and associated businesses in regional and coastal areas of Queensland need to band together before the Government comes after them.

“We’re calling on the Government to reverse this net ban and stand up to UNESCO before this and other important food producing primary industries are sent to the wall.”

QSIA CEO David Bobbermen said the Queensland Government had ignored fishers’ input and the industry’s moves to reduce impacts on non-target species and improve sustainability.

“There is a lot of science that supports the use of gillnets as one of the most targeted and low carbon emitting fishing methods,” he said.

“Many small regional and remote community economies are struggling, and the loss of net fishing is simply another nail in their coffin.

“The decision to remove gillnets from waters of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park is ideologically driven by faceless organisations after years of campaigning, key government decision-makers using outdated and erroneous data, and the Federal and State Governments being blackmailed with threats to Australia’s tourism industry to place the Reef on the UNESCO ‘In Danger’ list.”

Stefan Diacos from seafood marketers A. Raptis & Sons said tonnages of all fish affected by the net bans were down and prices were up.

“It’s simple supply and demand. With fewer people fishing, consumers will pay more for their favourite wild-caught fish,” he said.

“We’re at risk of this product only being available to the wealthy, and that’s not how it should be.”



## CROCODILES

### Parliamentary inquiry into crocodile Bill

THE Queensland Parliament's Health, Environment & Agriculture Committee (HEAC) is conducting an inquiry into the *Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2024*.

A Committee spokesman said recently that on 22 May 2024, Mr Shane Knuth MP, Member for Hill, introduced the *Crocodile Control and Conservation Bill 2024* into the Queensland Parliament and referred it to the HEAC for examination. The Committee is required to report on its examination of the Bill by 20 September 2024.

The stated objective of the Bill is to eliminate from State waterways any crocodiles that pose a threat to human life, while continuing to protect crocodiles from becoming extinct as a species.

He said the Bill would establish a Queensland Crocodile Authority to be based in Cairns and appoint a director of the authority with the following functions:

- a. to take measures to minimise injuries and deaths caused by crocodiles in the State
- b. to authorise persons, in any part of the State, to operate a crocodile farm, or a crocodile sanctuary
- c. to decide the number of crocodile eggs that may be harvested each year in any part of the State
- d. to authorise persons to harvest crocodile eggs in any part of the State
- e. to decide the number of crocodiles that may be culled each year in any part of the State
- f. to authorise persons to carry out the culling of crocodiles in any part of the State
- g. to authorise persons to, for the prompt management of crocodiles, kill or relocate crocodiles in any part of the State
- h. for Aboriginal land or Torres Strait Islander land—to authorise the owner of the land to—
  - i. kill crocodiles on the land, or

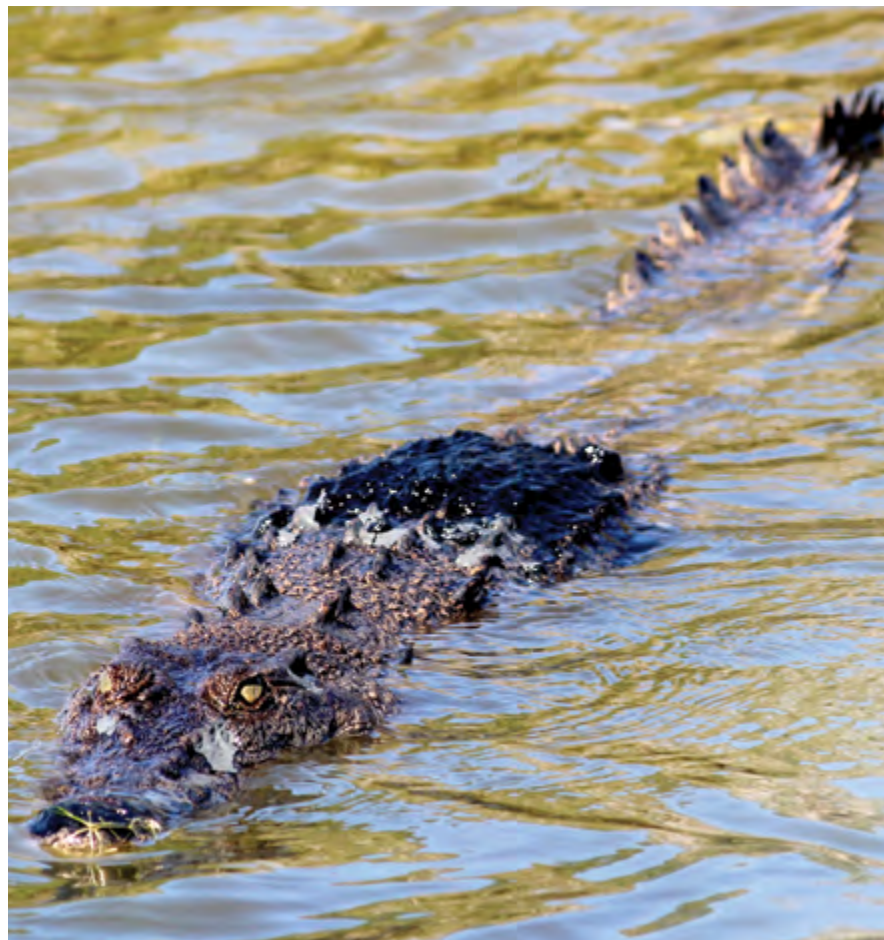
- ii. allow other persons to kill crocodiles on the land, for payment of a fee or free of charge, or
- iii. relocate crocodiles on the land to a crocodile sanctuary or crocodile farm, or
- iv. harvest crocodile eggs on the land, or
- v. otherwise manage crocodiles on the land
- i. for State leasehold land or other land that is not State land—to authorise a person to, with the consent of the owner of the land, enter the land to—

- i. kill crocodiles on the land, or
- ii. relocate crocodiles on the land to a crocodile sanctuary or crocodile farm,
- iii. harvest crocodile eggs on the land
- j. to authorise persons to otherwise display, interact with, keep, or use crocodiles or crocodile eggs in any part of the State
- k. if requested by the owner of land, to authorise a person to remove a crocodile from the land



Shane Knuth.

- l. to ensure the carcasses of all crocodiles killed under an authorisation granted by the director are dealt with so that, as far as practicable, no part of a carcass is wasted
- m. to refer the suspected commission of offences relating to crocodiles or crocodile eggs to the police service
- n. to coordinate research into, and the routine surveying of crocodile, and crocodile egg, numbers and distribution in the State



An inquiry is being held into draft legislation that would bring in more controls on crocodiles in Queensland.

- o. to promote the farming of crocodiles and the harvesting of crocodile eggs in the State
- p. to investigate viability of the use of State land to farm crocodiles or as crocodile sanctuaries
- q. to declare and manage crocodile sanctuaries and populated waterways
- r. to make recommendations to the Legislative Assembly about crocodile management in the State
- s. to manage the authority's affairs.

#### Call for submissions

The Committee invites submissions addressing any aspect of the Bill from all interested parties. Guidelines for making a submission to a Parliamentary Committee are available here.

The easiest way to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry is to do it online.

To be considered by the Committee, submissions must include:

- the author's first and last name
- if the submission is made on behalf of

an organisation, the level of approval (eg, a local branch, executive committee or national organisation), and

at least two of the following:

- email address
- mailing address, and
- daytime telephone number.

Please ensure your submission includes the above or it may not be considered by the Committee.

Please note: Your name and submission may be published on the Committee's inquiry webpage, which will mean it can be viewed on the internet. You can request for your name to be withheld from your published submission, or for both your name and your submission to be kept confidential (ie, not published). Decisions about whether and how submissions are published are at the discretion of the Committee.

#### Public hearing

The Committee has scheduled a public hearing in Brisbane on Monday 19 August 2024 to hear from invited witnesses. If you are interested in

participating in the public hearing, please indicate your availability when making a submission to the inquiry. Further details about the public hearing will be published on the inquiry webpage.

#### Further information

For more information about the inquiry process, visit the inquiry webpage or contact the Committee secretariat on 07 3553 6626 or [HEAC@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:HEAC@parliament.qld.gov.au)

### NT fatality

NORTHERN Territory Police have located the remains of a 12-year-old girl taken by a crocodile in early July near Palumpa, about 300km south-west of Darwin.

Senior Sergeant Erica Gibson said: "This is devastating news for the family, the community and everyone involved in the search. Police are providing support to the family and community, along with the first responders who attended the scene."

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## AWARDS

### Tuna entrepreneur Kate Lamason wins 2024 Queensland Rural Women's Award

Cairns-based tuna industry icon and business entrepreneur Kate Lamason has been named Queensland's 2024 AgriFutures Rural Women's Award winner.

QUEENSLAND Fisheries Minister Mark Furner described Kate Lamason as "an inspiration to so many women in the seafood industry",

"Her example of success will add to the shining light of women's contributions to primary production in Queensland, as also exemplified by the other Queensland finalists," Mr Furner said.

"That contribution is growing every year, and the innovation, creativity and leadership being shown by Queensland women will help to lift our \$23 billion industry to even greater heights."

Mr Furner said Kate – who is an accountant and runs a tuna business, called Little Tuna, with her husband in Cairns – was selected from a field of four finalists who epitomised the significant impact women have on rural industries, businesses and communities.

"Kate has broad experience across the seafood industry, not-for-profit sector and local government. She is a graduate of the National Seafood Industry Leadership Program and is a board director for Tuna Australia.

"She is the co-founder and director of Little Tuna, and opened Australia's

first canned tuna company since large-scale production shifted offshore."

The other finalists were Burdekin senior secondary agricultural science teacher Louise Nicholas, Aussie Helpers CEO Natasha Kocks from Gladstone and Gloriously Free (GF) oats founder Kylie Hollonds.

He said all finalists join a 300-strong alumni that collaboratively works to shape the perception of women in regional and rural Australia, and provide a network to support their future endeavours.

Kate will receive a \$15,000 Westpac grant and will represent Queensland at the national awards in August where she has the chance to win an additional \$20,000 Westpac grant.

He said Westpac has been a platinum sponsor of the Rural Women's Awards for over 15 years.

Queensland's new state sponsor, the Queensland Country Women's Association, will provide a \$2,000 grant to Queensland's finalists. Finalists also gain access to professional development opportunities and alumni networks.

In addition to the Rural Women's Awards, AgriFutures Australia offer

the Rural Women's Acceleration Grant as a leadership and development opportunity for rural women who feel they are not quite ready to apply for the award.

The Rural Women's Acceleration Grant provides a bursary of up to \$7,000 for professional development, driving innovation in rural industries, businesses and communities.

AgriFutures Australia Managing Director John Harvey said the AgriFutures Rural Women's Award is Australia's leading award in acknowledging and supporting the essential role women play in rural industries and communities.

"This announcement highlights the exceptional contributions of the four finalists and serves to highlight them as role models for the next generation of rural leaders."

Maxine Austin, Westpac Regional General Manager Northern Queensland, said the Award is an opportunity to champion the business achievements of women in Queensland's rural industries.

"The winners, alumni and nominees of the highly respected Rural Women's Award reflect the quality of innovation, drive and passion that our rural women possess," she said.

"Congratulations to Kate for being awarded the State title. She is a great ambassador for our rural industries and a beacon for its future success."

Further information: [agrifutures.com.au/opportunities/rural-womens-award/](http://agrifutures.com.au/opportunities/rural-womens-award/)

### Inspiration to see Queensland tuna on supermarket shelves

Kate Lamason says her success in the 2024 AgriFutures Rural Women's Award has inspired her to see Queensland tuna on the shelves of major supermarkets across Australia.

KATE Lamason said that when she first came into the tuna industry, she was shocked to learn that 99 per cent of the 50,000 tonnes of tinned tuna Australians eat every year is imported.

Kate said that, when husband Rowan Lamason pointed out Australia's reliance on imports to her six years ago, he was tuna fishing off the Cairns coast using cameras, electronic logbooks and vessel monitoring systems to meet strict Federal Government sustainability standards.

"I was astounded by what Rowan was telling me, so I set out to do some research," Kate said. "I went to the supermarket, and I searched all the shelves and realised that none of that tinned tuna is Australian.

"This didn't sit well with me at all, considering how much tuna we were consuming as a family and how much tuna I know households consume, so we started manufacturing our own in glass jars.

"That's when we founded Little Tuna, using our own albacore tuna, and developing recipes we developed in our kitchen and taste-tested on willing friends.

"It took a lot of trial and error to perfect our recipes. We had a high benchmark and we wanted to hit that. We wanted the product to be absolutely perfect."



Kate and Rowan Lamason. (Top:) Little Tuna's longliner moored at Cairns.



At the announcement of Queensland's 2024 Rural Women's Award (from left): Maxine Austin, Westpac NQ Regional General Manager; John Harvey, AgriFutures Australia Managing Director; Queensland Governor Dr Jeannette Young; Kate Lamason; and Queensland Country Women's Association President Sheila Campbell.





Albacore is a popular product line for Little Tuna.



The company offers a variety of products – but not yet through major supermarkets.

Kate said that, while she concentrates on fresh seafood exports, Little Tuna's all-female processing team of five works in a flexible environment around their family and community commitments.

"We've got this beautiful team of females that love what they do," she said. "They know what's going to be done each day, they know the orders, and they get the job done."

Kate said Little Tuna sells its high-end tuna in glass jars online and in more than 150 health food, seafood and independent stores across the country – though it's not easy.

"Running a 100 per cent Australian manufacturing business comes with challenges," she said. "It's not an easy place to manufacture or even to have a business that is 100 per cent Australian."

"Australians look at price point a lot, so we constantly have to be very aware of what we're spending to ensure that we're still remaining profitable and sustainable."

"My ambition now is get processed Australian tuna into Woolworths, Coles and Aldi."

"We have the luxury of having a great supply of fish but there is still no Australian tuna sitting on our supermarket shelves, which is shocking. It's a \$400-million industry to Australia."

"We are so proud of what Little Tuna has become. It was refreshing to see that we weren't the only ones searching for sustainably-caught Australian tuna," Kate said.

"We've had so many people call and tell us how they stopped eating tinned tuna because it's not Australian."

"We love being able to support our Australian fishers so that they can feed their families, and showcase how passionate and how driven and how good they are at their job and how well they look after our oceans."

For further information, go to: [www.littletuna.com.au](http://www.littletuna.com.au)

## GREAT BARRIER REEF – UNESCO

### Great Barrier Reef has been saved from "in danger" listing – for now

The Great Barrier Reef has been saved from UNESCO's "in danger" listing – but the Paris-based international environmental arbiter has demanded more actions from Australian authorities that would impact fishers and farmers.

THE Great Barrier Reef looks likely to avoid being listed as "World Heritage In Danger" following a widely-reported recommendation in late June from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

UNESCO's draft decision will be forwarded to the related World Heritage Committee (WHC), meeting in July, which will make the final ruling. However, UNESCO recommendations to the WHC are almost always accepted and so this one is also expected to be accepted, leaving the GBR off the "in danger" list for now.

However, UNESCO has made a number of further demands, and is requiring Australia to make progress reports in February 2025 and February 2026.

Fearing that such a listing could seriously damage international tourism to the GBR, Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek responded that "(The) draft decision is a huge win for ... the thousands of people who rely on the Reef for work."

#### Draft decision

In its draft decision, UNESCO said it "notes with utmost concern the continued threat to the property posed by climate change, and the negative impacts on its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) suffered through mass bleaching events, including the most recent and ongoing event in 2023-2024, and reiterates that securing the resilience of the property is of essential importance to give it the best chance to withstand the effects of climate change".

UNESCO said it welcomes the delivery of mapped priority areas for gully repairs, the commencement of a comprehensive programme to repair and restore gullies of the highest priority, and the significant increases in compliance activity across sugar cane, banana and cattle farmers.

It "urgently requests" Australia to maintain its efforts toward achieving the 2025 water quality targets, in particular for sediment and dissolved inorganic nitrogen, in line with the recommendations of the joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to Queensland in 2022 and the commitments made by Australia in 2023.

It "notes with serious concern" the remaining high rates of land clearing which are deemed inconsistent with the objectives set out to achieve the water quality targets, and has requested Australia to take urgent action to:

- ❑ continue early detection and intervention to halt illegal land clearing; and
- ❑ strengthen clauses under existing laws to ensure that all remnant and high value growth areas are protected ... and other high priority areas, including riparian zones, lands vulnerable to degradation and areas contributing to sediment and nitrogen pollution.

UNESCO has welcomed the process to update the Reef 2050 Water Quality Improvement Plan (WQIP) on track for delivery in 2025, and urged Australia to ensure that water quality targets, and actions implemented through the WQIP, are sufficiently ambitious to ensure the OUV of the property is not further adversely impacted by low water quality.

It commended the "decisive action" to phase out gillnet fishing in the (GBR World Heritage Area) and requested it be fully gillnet free by mid-2027 at the latest, that new net-free zones in key habitats for species that represent attributes of OUV are established, and that all aspects of the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy are fully implemented.

UNESCO noted with appreciation the climate change addendum to the Reef 2050 Plan, and requested Australia



unesco

World Heritage Convention

to ensure the Plan is effectively implemented to limit the impacts of climate change on the GBR WHA, and to set further ambitious targets to limit temperature increases to 1.5° C above pre-industrial levels and align its policies accordingly.

It requested Australia to maintain adaptation programmes, including the Crown-of-Thorns Starfish Control Program and the Reef Joint Field Management Program, and increase funding for innovation and scaling up of priority solutions.

Finally, UNESCO requested that Australia submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2025, a report on progress achieved in the implementation of the above, "including the impacts of the 2023-24 bleaching event", for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session, and an updated report on the state of conservation of the property by 1 February 2026, for examination by the Committee at its 48th session.

#### Not off the hook

In related commentary, UNESCO warns that the World Heritage Committee "could consider the inclusion of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger at its 48th session in (February) 2026".

"It is clear that the property remains under serious threat, and urgent and sustained action is of utmost priority in order to improve the resilience of the property in a rapidly changing climate ..." UNESCO said.

"... The continuing and unprecedented sequence of bleaching events negatively affecting the (GBR WHA), including the reported ongoing significant (bleaching) event in summer 2023-24, make clear that there is a need for the Committee to also

**Continued on page 37**



## LINE FISHERY

### Shark depredation hits the headlines

**Shark depredation – sharks robbing fish off the hooks of line operators – something professional fishermen have been complaining about for years, is finally receiving significant media attention.**

MEDIA coverage of shark depredation includes a recent ABC radio segment about the issue that has featured on *The Country Hour* and a number of other regional programs.

It also features in a related but separate roundup report from ABC Rural, available online.

The coverage highlights the increasing number of sharks being seen in Great Barrier Reef waters, including bull sharks that professional fishers have said for a long time are spreading from inshore waters out to the GBR.

The ABC stories – compiled by reporter Jennifer Nichols – begin with professional fisherman Richard Gilmore showing underwater video vision of sharks taking fish off his lines.

Richard, who operates as Pristine Reef Fish, works the Great Barrier Reef between Cairns and Lizard Island using handlines, reported he was racing sharks pretty much every day.

“There’s a lot of areas that we just can’t go and fish anymore, purely because of the shark numbers,” he said. “On any given day, if the sharks are switched on, you just won’t beat them.”

“It’s not possible, so we change tactics, change species. We don’t sit there and keep feeding sharks, we move on.”

“The shark interaction’s phenomenal these days, which makes it very difficult when you look at stock assessments; shark depredation in a lot of those stock assessments is not interpreted.”

The segment also ran comments from Ben Diggles, a marine biologist who filmed an encounter with circling sharks from his 4.8-metre tinny in Moreton Bay.

“There is a tuna, that I just hooked before, that is being chased by these sharks,” he said on the video. “There you go, they’ve got him. It’s why we’re

not swimming in Moreton Bay at the moment.

“They look like adult bronze whalers in a large pack and there’s a few extra marks on the boat now where they bounced off.”

Dr Diggles has kept personal fishing logs since the 1980s and says shark interactions had considerably increased.

“Based on what we used to have, say, in the ‘80s, in the ‘90s, it’s more like eight to 10 times more interactions that’s in my logbook,” he said.

“I certainly wouldn’t have been, you know, sticking my hands or feet in the water the other day. It’s quite dangerous when sharks switch and turn into that feeding frenzy mode.”

The aquatic animal health expert said he believed fisheries management had worked, and it may be time to allow targeted catches of some smaller, more prolific shark species.

“Grey nurses and white sharks are vulnerable to fishing because they have quite low reproductive rates,” Dr Diggles said.

“But there’s quite a lot of other species that are far more productive

and some of them can be problematic in large numbers.

“I think there would be no trouble targeting and dispatching those smaller ones humanely to eat.

“If something’s not done, where are we going to end up in another five or 10 years?”

The ABC report also quoted a recreation angler, Alan Ladru, who discussed a recent “close encounter” with big sharks.

“We were fishing the shipping channel 13 kilometres offshore from Bribie Island,” Mr Ladru said.

“After catching a big kingfish and trying to haul it in, one shark arrived, then two, three, and they were just jumping out of the water in a frenzy. They would have been two to two-and-a-half-metre sharks.

““We said to each other ‘We’re going to need a bigger boat’.”

QSIA CEO David Bobbermen was also interviewed, telling the ABC that he believed bans on gillnet fishing would see shark numbers increase further.

“They will no longer harvest sharks in gill nets and we anticipate that will see a growth in the numbers of sharks in years to come.

David said that, if sharks were taking fish, and fishers were still taking their bag limits or quotas, there would be major implications for managing fish stocks.



*Fish-stealers like this big bull shark sometimes get accidentally hooked themselves.*

“That has a massive impact on the way fisheries scientists look at the take of fish, and whether the stocks will be able to sustain that level or whether, in fact, there needs to be a reconsideration and a factor put in the stock assessments to assume shark depredation rates.”

The report said that, for the first time, the Queensland Department of Agriculture & Fisheries is researching shark depredation.

Marine biologist Jonathan Mitchell – two years into a three-year project collecting data from the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery – is also assessing the percentage of catch lost to sharks in both the recreational and commercial sectors.

“We’ve done 40 observer trips on commercial fishing vessels, where we recorded a depredation rate of approximately seven per cent of all the fish that are being hooked being taken by sharks,” he said.

“And then we’ve had a group of recreational fishers collecting data for us through a citizen scientist program.

“They’ve sent us data from 57 of their recreational trips and they experienced a depredation rate that was a fair bit higher, around 35 per cent.”

Asked whether it was a case of increasing shark numbers, or sharks getting smarter about associating boats with food, Dr Mitchell answered “both”.

“Definitely in areas where there’s a lot of fishing effort, and particularly an

overlap of commercial and recreational fishing effort, the sharks are getting this constant opportunity to feed on hooked fish or discarded fish,” he said.

“That’s really driven a change in their behaviour.

“But in terms of shark abundance, at this stage we don’t really have very good long-term data sets to look at the abundance of most of these species and that’s something that we’re really trying to address.”

Dr Mitchell said researchers were using both DNA swabs from catches that had been bitten by sharks, and underwater cameras, to identify shark species involved in depredation.

“Those two methods have allowed us to identify at least 12 shark species now around Australia that are responsible for this,” he said.

“It does tend to vary depending on the location and the time of year and the depth of fishing as well.”

The scientist said that, in Queensland, researchers were finding the four main species involved in depredation were bull sharks, pigeye sharks, spinner sharks and sandbar sharks – all species in the whaler shark family.

Environmental activist organisation Humane Society International (HSI) was also contacted for the ABC segment and, in a statement, HSI spokesperson Lawrence Chlebeck said he did not believe that sharks should be commercially fished in Queensland.

“They are one of the most imperilled groups of fishes globally



*Sharks aren’t above eating their own. (Photo courtesy of DigsFish Services.)*

### FRDC study

THE Fisheries Research & Development Corporation (FRDC) has published an interesting, detailed article on Spanish mackerel research led by Dr Jonathan Mitchell from the Queensland Department of Agriculture & Fisheries.

It discusses how commercial and recreational fishers and seafood processors are assisting researchers to collect DNA samples from Spanish mackerel.

One component of the project is investigating how environmental variables, including ocean temperatures, currents, climate drivers and major weather events, affect the recruitment success of the east coast population. Preliminary analyses suggest sea surface temperature and rainfall patterns can affect the success of Spanish mackerel recruitment.

To read the FRDC article, go to: [Novel research taking stock of the East Coast Spanish Mackerel population | FRDC](https://www.frdc.gov.au/our-work/research-and-development/2024-2025/novel-research-taking-stock-of-the-east-coast-spanish-mackerel-population)

and are cornerstone apex and meso-predators that are absolutely critical to maintaining the health and resilience of marine ecosystems,” Mr Chlebeck said.

“While depredation has definitely increased in recent years, it could be attributed to a decline in their prey species.

“Changing our fishing behaviour and reducing the take of sharks’ prey species is a better solution to the issue of depredation than an open season on the species that maintain the health of our oceans.”

To read the original report from ABC Rural – and see video vision and photographs – go to: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2024-06-17/shark-depredation-fishing-catch-recreational-commercial/103735258>

To hear related audio interviews, go to *The Country Hour* site (the segment commences at about 23 minutes 30 seconds into the broadcast on June 17) at: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/qld-country-hour/country-hour-listen-back/103988860>



## Surveys confirm remarkable comeback of dugong numbers in Hervey Bay

After severe flooding in Hervey Bay in the early 1990s triggered an unprecedented plunge in dugong numbers, aerial surveys have confirmed a remarkable comeback in the population, something that surely deserves to be celebrated.

IN August 1988, an aerial survey estimated the Hervey Bay region – broader Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait – held 2,206 dugong plus-or-minus 420; so, somewhere between 2,626 and 1,786. (Conducting an aerial census of dugong numbers was, and remains, an inexact science.)

In early 1992, a cyclone (Cyclone Betsy) and two floods hit Hervey Bay, churning the seafloor and pouring out silt from the Mary, Burrum and other rivers in the region.

Approximately 1,000 square kilometres of seagrass was lost from Hervey Bay. This was an immense loss: it represented almost a quarter of the seagrass along the entire east coast of Queensland. According to local records, nothing equivalent had occurred in the past century.

Researchers said the seagrasses in deep water (at least 10 metres deep) apparently died as a result of light deprivation caused by a persistent plume of turbid water that resulted from the floods and the resuspension of sediments caused by the cyclonic seas. Seagrasses in shallow water (less than 10 metres deep) were uprooted by the heavy seas.

Ten months after these events, virtually no recovery was detected. Nearly two years after the floods, there was substantial recovery, apparently from seed germination, in deep water areas.

However, there was virtually no recovery in shallow-water areas. Researchers suggested sediment disturbance associated with the cyclone may have deeply buried the seeds in shallow areas or they may have died after being abraded by the churning sediment.

With seagrass providing the primary food for dugong, it was expected destruction of a massive area of seagrass would have a massive negative impact on dugong. And it did.

A survey about eight months later estimated just 71 dugong in southern Hervey Bay, where in 1988 there had been some 1,750 in the same area.

Another aerial survey – in December 1993, 21 months after the floods – estimated the Hervey Bay regional dugong population at just 600.

This was 1,600 fewer dugong than the basic estimate from 1988. Two-thirds to three-quarters of the dugong in the region had disappeared.

Some had probably successfully migrated to areas like Moreton Bay. Dugong numbers in Moreton Bay did increase – but only by 100 to 200, nowhere near enough to match the population plunge in Hervey Bay.

Certainly, many died. In 1992-93, a total of 99 dugong carcasses were recovered in and around Hervey Bay and coastlines north and south.

Dead dugong were even found in New South Wales, far beyond their normal range. Twenty-one were found along the New South Wales coast, including five around Sydney. In fact, another carcass was found at Jervis Bay, more than 100km further south.

How many others died but were never recovered can't be known. Common sense suggests that number would have been substantial.

The effect of the weather events on the dugong that had previously populated the Hervey Bay region were obviously severe.

The impacts of the 1992 cyclone and floods were examined by researchers Tony Preen and Helene Marsh (then with the Department of Tropical Environment Studies & Geography at James Cook University) in a paper published in January 1995. (See reference below.)

They said most dugongs died six to eight months after the floods, and

most were emaciated as a result of starvation. Some dugongs travelled up to 900 km south of Hervey Bay before dying, although some animals successfully relocated to other areas.

They were also concerned about the impacts on the next generation of dugong: the proportion of calves in the population declined from 22 per cent seen in 1988 and 1992 to just one-tenth in 1993: just 2.2 per cent.

One of the conclusions of the 1995 Preen and Marsh paper was that full recovery of the dugong population in the Hervey Bay region to the 1988 population level may take more than 25 years.

### Remarkable comeback

It seems that the Hervey Bay region dugong population has made a remarkable comeback in the last decade or more – though still fluctuating, depending in particular on the state of seagrass beds there.

A report released late last year by James Cook University (JCU) presents the results of aerial surveys conducted along parts of the Queensland coast in 2022.

The surveys included the Hervey Bay – Great Sandy Strait region, with flights conducted in November – December 2022. (The surveys also covered the coast from Mission Beach to Bundaberg and Moreton Bay, again during November-December 2022.)

It says the 2022 surveys were based on the same design as aerial surveys conducted by researchers at JCU since the 1980s.

As well as presenting the results of the 2022 surveys, this report also has figures for surveys conducted by JCU in 2005, 2011 and 2016.

By 2005, dugong numbers in the Hervey Bay region were estimated at around 1,400 and in 2011 around the same. This was a substantial, sustained



Dugong numbers in the Hervey Bay region have seen a historic comeback since the population crashed in 1992, when Hervey Bay (upper left) and Great Sandy Strait (centre-right) were flooded with sediment from the Mary River (foreground), and other rivers in the region, killing seagrass and starving dugong.

recovery on the low figures in 1992 and 1993.

However, the numbers jumped significantly between the 2011 and 2016 surveys. In 2016, the estimated numbers for the dugong population in the Hervey Bay region totalled 2,055.

This figure of 2,055, plus or minus 382, was close to the 1988 calculation of 2,206, plus or minus 420.

It represents a remarkable comeback for the Hervey Bay dugong population and – 23 years after the 1993 survey – impressively close to the Preen and Marsh prediction of a 25-year recovery period to the 1988 population figure.

Surely this is a recovery to be celebrated?

It does not quite rank up there with the marine mammal success story of the last century – the recovery of the Australian humpback whale population from probably just hundreds in the 1960s to certainly tens of thousands today – but is very good news nonetheless.

Of significance to the fishing industry, and in particular to fishers who work in the Hervey Bay – Great Sandy Strait – Tin Can Bay region, is that this strong recovery in dugong numbers occurred while commercial fishing was conducted throughout the region, including use of large-mesh gillnets.

What the 2016 recovery – and a

slight reversal of numbers indicated by the 2022 survey – indicates is the pivotal role seagrass plays in determining where and in what numbers dugong are likely to be found across their range.

### Report of 2016 surveys

The results of the 2016 aerial surveys along the Queensland east coast were presented in a JCU report published in 2017.

The authors of that report struck a refreshingly upbeat tone for the east coast results overall.

In their overview of results, the authors said: “The results of this survey add to the evidence from StrandNet and seagrass monitoring to indicate that the dugongs and their habitats in the survey region from north of Hinchinbrook Island to the Queensland – New South Wales border are in much better condition than at the time of the last such survey in 2011.

“The improvement is especially evident in the survey region in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR), where the estimated numbers of dugongs have significantly increased, especially north of the Whitsundays.

“The percentage of calves has increased from zero per cent in 2011 to 10.1 per cent in 2016, a percentage that is above the averages for the historical survey data to 2011 for all regions except Hervey Bay.

“Intertidal seagrass percentage cover has increased, except in the Wet Tropics, and the number of dugong carcasses reported to the Queensland marine wildlife stranding program StrandNet has declined.”

The authors said the magnitude of the increase in the southern GBR population estimates (“southern GBR” does not include Hervey Bay but is an area further north) was too high in the 2016 survey to be explained by natural increase, given that the maximum rate of increase for a dugong population is likely to be only about 5 per cent a year.

Therefore, at least some of the differences between 2011 and 2016 must result from immigration into the southern GBR area, “presumably from further north”.

“In contrast,” the authors say, “the dugong population estimates for Moreton Bay and Hervey Bay have not significantly increased over the 2011 values, and the percentages of calves have also remained relatively stable over this time period.”

One of the conclusions in the 2017 report was that the impact of weather on seagrass has a major influence – what the authors described as a “profound influence” – on dugong numbers.

“The data collected by the 2016 aerial survey of dugongs from the region from north of Hinchinbrook Island to the Queensland – New South Wales border add to the previous evidence



that indicates climate and weather have profound influence on the abundance, distribution and fecundity of dugongs at sub-regional scales, mainly as a result of the impacts of climatic drivers of their seagrass habitats,” they said.

“Water quality is a major environmental driver of seagrass and dugong health ... Thus, the management of water quality in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area must continue to be an essential component of dugong conservation in the region, along with the zonal management of activities that cause dugong mortality such as gill-netting, vessel strike and Indigenous hunting.”

## 2022 surveys

The late-2023 report, based on aerial surveys in November-December 2022, noted a decline in estimates of dugong numbers – and also triggered a return to the familiar narrative of a need for greater controls on fishing to protect dugong.

JCU Tropwater itself issued a media release headed “Long-term decline in GBR dugong populations confirmed”.

It began: “A new report from James Cook University (JCU) TropWATER reveals a long-term decline in dugong populations along the Great Barrier Reef, spanning from Mission Beach to Bundaberg, and Hervey Bay in the Great Sandy Strait.

“Aerial surveys conducted in 2022 confirm that this declining trend has persisted for almost two decades, despite Australia’s renowned global status as the host of the world’s largest population of these marine mammals.

“Released this week, the 2022 *Dugong Aerial Survey: Mission Beach to Moreton Bay* report is part of a series of aerial surveys conducted every five years to monitor the distribution and abundance of dugongs along Queensland’s coast. The 2022 survey focused on the Mission Beach to Moreton Bay region ...”

It quotes the lead researcher, JCU’s Chris Cleguer, as saying the report shows a clear declining trend since 2005, with an estimated annual population decline of 2.3 per cent from Mission Beach to Bundaberg.

“We observed a decline in overall dugong numbers, with the area of most concern being the southern

section of the Great Barrier Reef from the Whitsundays to Bundaberg,” Dr Cleguer said.

“Alarmingly, we observed very few calves in this region, and only two mother-calf pairs spotted in the Gladstone area. Our report reinforces the urgency in addressing threats to dugongs.”

The JCU media release also quoted Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek, who said the Government is committed to putting a stop to biodiversity decline.

“This research, sadly, draws a clear picture of what we already know: that more needs to be done to address species decline in Australia, including on the Great Barrier Reef,” Ms Plibersek said. “I want to see this majestic creature on a path to recovery.

“That’s why we’re restoring important blue carbon ecosystems like seagrass, which dugongs call home, and investing \$1.2 billion to protect the Great Barrier Reef.

“We’re also supporting the Queensland Government to phase out gill nets in the Great Barrier Reef, which are a key threat to dugong populations.”

## Hervey Bay figures

Hervey Bay was specifically mentioned in the JCU media release, with concerns raised about a fall in dugong numbers there in the selected period between 2005 and 2022 (but no mention of its recovery from the drastically low numbers of 1992-93).

“Hervey Bay, located south of the Great Barrier Reef, showed the most significant estimated rate of population decline, at 5.7 per cent per year between 2005 and 2022,” the media release said.

At face value, this is a confusing statement.

The media release says there was a 5.7 per cent per year decline in Hervey Bay between 2005 and 2022, yet the report itself says in part: “In 2022, the dugong population size in Hervey Bay was estimated to be 1,533  $\pm$  se 634 animals ... This estimate is equivalent to the population size estimates from the 2005 (1,388  $\pm$  se 323) and 2011 surveys (1,438  $\pm$  se 438).”

The 2022 Hervey Bay figure was dragged down by the fact the observers performing the aerial survey did not see a single dugong throughout the entire length of Great Sandy Strait (GSS) and so, for the first time in any recent survey, estimated a zero population of dugongs for the GSS.

Even so, the figure of 1,533 for the 2022 survey is still higher than the 2005 figure of 1,388 (and 250 per cent higher than the 1993 figure of 600.)

A simple interpretation of a “5.7 per cent per year decline” for 17 years (2005-2022) would represent a total decline of 96.9 per cent – reducing the 2005 figure of 1,388 dugong to just 43 dugong in 2022. (Forty-three is equivalent to 3.1 per cent of the 1,388 in 2005.)

**Note:** A closer reading of the 127-page report – including the lengthy appendices – suggests the “5.7 per cent per year” figure could refer to the number of dugong per square kilometre surveyed, but this is uncertain as the area surveyed is consistent over time. We approached JCU for clarification and were directed to the lead researcher, who was overseas at the time this article was being completed and the magazine prepared for printing, and so was not able to adequately respond. We anticipate this issue will be clarified in the next edition of *Queensland Seafood*.

Nonetheless, the way this figure has been used in the JCU media release seems, at best, confusing for the average reader, including the average journalist.

## The answer is the seagrass...

Stepping past any confusion about rates of decline and over what period of years, there certainly is a fall in estimated numbers between 2016 and 2022, and the reason is clear.

The JCU media release says: “These findings are linked to back-to-back flood events in early 2022, resulting in extensive seagrass loss and depriving dugongs of their primary food source.”

Dr Cleguer said: “Seagrass habitats are very sensitive to extreme weather events like cyclones and flooding, and often healthy meadows can deteriorate within a matter of weeks or months following an event.

“It’s highly likely that some dugongs

would have died from starvation, while others would have moved away to habitats near Gladstone in search of food. We found the dugongs that did stay found refuge right in the heart of Hervey Bay, where pockets of deeper seagrass were still holding out.

“The case of Hervey Bay serves as a warning of what may continue to occur under future climate conditions. It underscores the urgency in preserving and understanding seagrass habitats, particularly the deeper water ones.”

The report notes that: “Hervey Bay seems particularly prone to extensive seagrass loss after extreme flood events, which emphasises the need to reduce non-climate impacts on dugongs and their seagrass habitats in this region as well as the southern section of the GBR.

“The Townsville area also needs particular attention, given the proximity of the seagrass meadows on which dugongs depend to coastal development, including port development. A baseline on the spatial-temporal dynamics of habitats use by dugongs in the region is required to help detect any deviation from the ‘norm’ due to added stressors.

## Population estimate

Under the heading “Dugong population size estimates”, the report notes: “In 2022, the dugong population size in Hervey Bay was estimated to be 1,533  $\pm$  se 634 animals using the Hagihara method.

“This estimate is equivalent to the population size estimates from the 2005 (1,388  $\pm$  se 323) and 2011 surveys (1,438  $\pm$  se 438).

“Nonetheless, the 2022 estimates represent a 1.3-fold decline in the estimated number of dugongs since the last survey conducted in 2016.

“Changes in dugong distribution in Hervey Bay ... influenced the estimates of dugong abundance across the area; for the first time in recent surveys, we did not detect any dugongs in the Great Sandy Strait ... and thus no population size estimate could be generated for this block. Similarly, there was a 3.7-fold decrease in the estimated number of dugongs present in the southern section of Hervey Bay ... since the 2016 survey.

“Contrastingly, there was a near two-



Observers counting dugong from a light plane. (JCU photo.)

fold increase in the estimated number of dugongs in the middle, deeper part of the Bay ... from an estimated 610 ( $\pm$  se 272) to 1,025 ( $\pm$  se 592) dugongs.

## Advice for policy-makers

Under the heading “Advice for policy makers”, the 2023 report says: “The findings from the 2022 survey add to the evidence highlighting the significant impact of climate and weather on the abundance, distribution, and reproductive capacity of dugongs. This impact is primarily attributed to the influence of climatic drivers on seagrass habitats, which are essential ecosystems for dugongs.

“The results highlight the need to reduce non-climate impacts on dugongs and their seagrass habitats by improving water quality, decreasing the risk of incidental capture of dugong in gillnets throughout the east coast of Queensland as recently agreed by the Commonwealth and Queensland Ministers, and working with Traditional Owners to manage their dugong populations.

“Hervey Bay seems particularly prone to extensive seagrass loss after extreme flood events, which emphasises the need to reduce non-climate impacts on dugongs and their seagrass habitats in this region as well as the southern section of the GBR.”

## Familiar narrative

Despite the confounding recovery of the dugong population in the Hervey Bay region while mesh-netting for fish was in operation there, fishers are accustomed to seeing netting referred to as a significant threat to dugong.

In announcing commencement of

zoning changes in the Great Sandy Marine Park in May, Queensland Environment Minister Leanne Linard said the changes were aimed at protecting its unique habitats, and highlighted the removal of commercial large-mesh gill and ring netting from the yellow conservation park zones within Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River system, the Great Sandy Strait and Tin Can Inlet.

In June 2023, when announcing widespread netting bans throughout the GBR Marine Park, Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek said: “We know one of the most immediate threats to health of Reef is unsustainable fishing practices. It causes damage throughout the Reef, as threatened marine life like dugongs, turtles and dolphins are caught in nets and drown.

“Destructive gillnet fishing injures and kills threatened dugongs, turtles, dolphins and protected shark species.”

An ABC news story, based on the JCU media release about the 2023 dugong survey report, opened with a paragraph that said: “Dugong numbers are falling in coastal areas along the Great Barrier Reef and researchers warn floods and fishing pose an ongoing threat to the species.”

It went on to say “Degradation of seagrass habitats and gill netting are among the major threats to dugong populations along the Queensland coast, the report found.”

The ABC reporters did not approach the fishing industry for comment but did give the Australian Marine Conservation Society the opportunity to criticise fishing and say: “The Queensland Government



has already committed to phasing out gillnets from the Great Barrier Reef, which is a fantastic outcome, but that won't happen completely until 2027. We need urgent action now."

Across Queensland, fishers will be disappointed that there is such a continuing focus on net-fishing in relation to dugong numbers when governments seem unable to ameliorate more significant impacts, particularly runoff smothering seagrass beds in flood events.

They will be disappointed too that the opportunity seems to have been overlooked to acknowledge and celebrate the victory for the marine environment, albeit fragile, represented by the significant recovery of the Hervey Bay dugong population from the once-in-a-century disaster of 1992.

While no-one would pretend that dugong are not facing a number of issues – particularly periodic losses of seagrass caused by flood events – a number of surveys have confirmed a historic comeback for dugong numbers in Hervey Bay after a catastrophic population crash in the early 1990s. This story should provide encouragement for an Australian public potentially jaded and despondent from a seemingly relentless negative narrative about the state of the marine environment.

**Martin Bowerman**

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**What can be done to protect dugong?**

THE James Cook University (JCU) report on dugong numbers has made a number of recommendations on protecting the species in Queensland waters.

The report authors said the 2022 aerial survey confirmed the long-term importance of the following sub-populations of dugongs in the survey region: Hinchinbrook; Townsville region; Shoalwater Bay; Hervey Bay; and Moreton Bay.

"The trends in the times series of aerial surveys for the urban coast of the Great Barrier Reef, Hervey Bay and Moreton Bay, all suggest long-term declines in dugong abundance in all three survey regions," they said.

"Nonetheless, this conclusion is more robust for the urban coast of the GBR than for Hervey Bay or Moreton Bay ..."

**Advice for policy-makers**

Under the heading of "Advice for policy-makers", the researchers said findings from the 2022 survey add to the evidence highlighting the significant impact of climate and weather on the abundance, distribution and reproductive capacity of dugongs.

"This impact is primarily attributed to the influence of climatic drivers on seagrass habitats, which are essential ecosystems for dugongs.

"The result highlights the need to reduce non-climate impacts on dugongs and their seagrass habitats by:

- improving water quality;
- decreasing the risk of incidental capture of dugong in gillnets throughout the east coast of Queensland, as recently agreed by the Commonwealth and Queensland Ministers, and
- working with Traditional Owners to manage their dugong populations.

"2022 Dugong Aerial Survey: Mission Beach to Moreton Bay", *JCU Centre for Tropical Water & Aquatic Ecosystem Research Publication 23/44*; Cleguer C, Hamel M, Rankin RW, Genson A, Edwards C, Collins K, Crowe M, Choukroun S, Marsh H (2023).

Under the heading "Advice for Traditional Owners", the authors said the status of the dugong in coastal areas of sea countries surveyed in 2022 is "very concerning".

"Thus, we suggest that discussions should be initiated for a moratorium on traditional hunting within communities until the situation improves," they said.

"Consider partnering with researchers in the design and implementation of local-scale research relevant to the management of dugongs and seagrasses in sea country."

The issues raised in this report echo views held by dugong researchers at least since the 1990s.

For example, the 1995 report by researchers Helene Marsh (who is also one of the researchers involved in the 2023 report) and Tony Preen referred to habitat loss, incidental capture in nets and traditional hunting.

In discussing the implications for conservation of severe flooding, loss of seagrass and subsequent dugong mortalities and population decline in the Hervey Bay region, Marsh and Preen said: "The events of 1992 were unusual. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the loss of seagrass and dugongs from Hervey Bay is unprecedented in the past 100 years.

"Nevertheless, these events have significant implications for the conservation of dugongs. Habitat loss or modification resulting from a natural disturbance, in this case exacerbated by poor catchment management, can have a massive impact even on a very large dugong population.

"Previous concern about dugong conservation has tended to focus on traditional hunting and incidental drowning in gill nets. It is apparent that effective conservation management must address all impacts, including habitat loss and modification."

For more information on the 1988 survey, go to *Dugong aerial survey (dugongs) Hervey Bay, August 1988* at: <https://research.jcu.edu.au/data/published/a8986b07f0fde323d4935bc42a408e9a/>

**Calculating population estimates**

AS the dugong census reports make clear, calculating dugong numbers from aerial observations remains an inexact science.

As the 2017 report says, the dugong population size in Hervey Bay during the previous year's survey was 2,055 (± 382) using what is known as the Hagihara method – but 2,647 (± 648) using the alternative Pollock method.

"Dugong population size estimates

are presented here for the Hagihara method and ... for the Pollock method. These methods are superior to the Marsh and Sinclair method because the more recent methods consider the spatial heterogeneity in the availability correction factors," the report says.

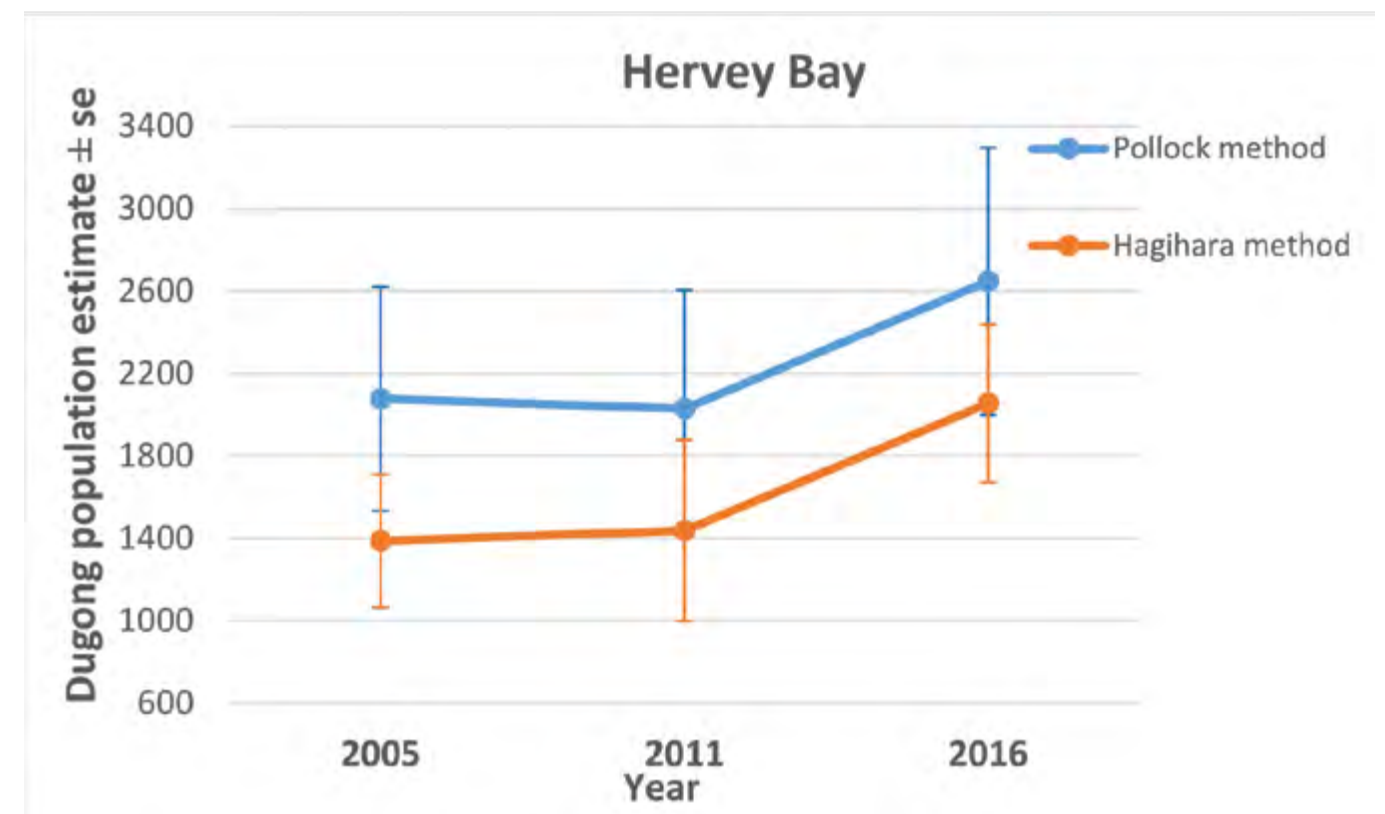
It points out that the surveys before the year 2000 (including the 1988 and 1992 and 1993 Hervey Bay surveys) used the Marsh and Sinclair method only.

The number of dugong seen by observers from the air is extrapolated to an estimate of the number of dugong believed to actually be in the area, allowing for a variety of conditions.

For example, the 2023 report notes that: "We used the method developed by Hagihara et al. (2014, 2018), henceforth the Hagihara method, to estimate dugong relative abundance and density.

"The method attempts to correct for availability bias (animals not available to observers because of environmental conditions and animal diving behaviour) and perception bias (animals visible in the survey transect but missed by observers due to imperfect detection)."

For more information, check out the appendices in the 2017 and 2023 reports



Region	Pollock method			Hagihara method		
	2005	2011	2016	2005	2011	2016
Moreton Bay	422 (± 60)	700 (± 156)	654 (± 133)	453 (± 97)	696 (± 106)	601 (± 80)
Hervey Bay	2077 (± 543)	2029 (± 576)	2647 (± 648)	1388 (± 323)	1438 (± 438)	2055 (± 382)
S-Blocks	1014 (± 302)	254 (± 124)	716 (± 254)	745 (± 192)	345 (± 229)	705 (± 239)
<b>Total southern stock</b>	<b>3,513 (± 624)</b>	<b>2,983 (± 610)</b>	<b>4,017 (± 709)</b>	<b>2,586 (± 384)</b>	<b>2,479 (± 506)</b>	<b>3,361 (± 458)</b>

Estimates of dugong numbers based on two different methods.



## Good news about seagrass in Great Sandy MP

JAMES Cook University (JCU) has reported widespread regrowth of seagrass in the Great Sandy Marine Park.

In a media release in December, a JCU spokesperson said this widespread regrowth followed a “devastating” loss of seagrass caused by multiple floods in early 2022.

JCU Associate Professor Michael Rasheed said that researchers from JCU TropWATER, in collaboration with Queensland Department of Environment & Science (DES) and rangers from Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), had conducted surveys to monitor the loss and regrowth of seagrass meadows since the floods.

“The most recent results show widespread recovery of seagrass in many sections of the Marine Park,” he said. “We have seen big increases in the deepwater seagrasses in the middle of Hervey Bay, as well as substantial expansion of intertidal seagrasses in the Great Sandy Strait that were devastated following the floods of 2022.

“This is a reassuring outcome but there is still uncertainty about seagrass meadows’ resilience and if it can sustain this recovery in the long-term.”

Assoc. Prof. Rasheed said that, to understand the seagrass meadows’ resilience, JCU TropWATER and QPWS will continue to monitor the health of seagrass in the area, including:

- ❑ examining light availability within the Great Sandy Strait;
- ❑ a “herbivory exclusion study” to look at how marine life feeding on seagrass impacts recovery; and
- ❑ seagrass seed-bank availability.

“We are really interested in the health of seagrass meadow seed banks, which is the repository of seeds in the sediment that influences the ability of the meadows to recover and remain healthy in the event of further impacts,” he said.



The fast and efficient way to check seagrass beds. (JCU photo.)

“Understanding the health of the seed bank is key to figuring out how resilient these meadows are against future pressures, such as intense feeding from dugongs and the possibility of more flooding in the years ahead.”

Back in 2002, JCU issued a media release saying that turtles and dugong were in danger from seagrass loss.

“Large-scale monitoring of seagrass

### Herbicide study in GS Strait

THE ABC has reported that commercial fishermen’s fears that herbicide run-off is killing seagrass in the Great Sandy Strait are being investigated for the first time by the Queensland Government.

Seagrass in the UNESCO-recognised marine habitat — a 70-kilometre stretch separating the mainland from K’gari (Fraser Island) — has dramatically declined since it was first mapped by James Cook University (JCU) in 1998.

According to the story, the Department of Environment, Science & Innovation (DESI) began testing for up to 50 herbicides and insecticides at 21 freshwater and saltwater sites in the Great Sandy Strait last August.

DESI scientist Andrew Moss

meadows across Hervey Bay and the Great Sandy Strait reveals there is almost no seagrass remaining across most of the previously mapped areas,” it said.

“The surveys come after two significant flood events in early 2022, and scientists are concerned that the seagrass loss could trigger an increase in dugong and green sea turtle strandings.”

returned to those sites after heavy rain in January and March this year.

“To allay these fears on the part of the local fishermen and the local population, we need to eliminate or at least determine what particular issues are the main cause of it and, obviously, herbicides are one potential cause,” he was reported as saying.

He said preliminary results showed no significant concentrations of herbicides or insecticides in the Great Sandy Strait. All results were below maximum accepted Australian standards for marine environments.

“It looks like we can probably eliminate [herbicides] as a cause, given the results so far but, obviously, we’re going to keep the study going,” he said. “It’s not finished yet.”

To see the original story, go to: [Queensland government tests Great Sandy Strait for herbicide damage to seagrass - ABC News](#)

## \$28.5M to groups for coastal restoration work

EIGHTEEN groups have received an average \$1.58 million each for habitat restoration work along the Great Barrier Reef coast,

Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek announced on June 18 that 18 projects have been awarded grants of up to \$2 million to deliver activities that include rehabilitating and restoring blue carbon ecosystems, such as

seagrasses, mangroves, saltmarsh and wetlands.

Funding will also support Reef water quality improvements, as well as better protection for vital habitats for precious Reef marine life, like dugongs and turtles.

Ms Plibersek said the projects will:

- ❑ increase resilience of seagrass meadows, which provide shelter and food to the Reef’s diverse animals including fish, turtles, dugongs and birds;
- ❑ provide Traditional Owners and community members with new skills and experience to lead and scale

restoration and monitoring projects across the Reef;

❑ improve Reef water quality by stabilising shorelines and mitigating streambank erosion to reduce sediment runoff into the Reef catchment; and

❑ support collaboration with Traditional Owners to accelerate the recovery of ecosystems, including those impacted by extreme weather events due to climate change.

“This funding will mean Traditional Owners and environment groups can help look after the Reef by eradicating feral animals, preventing erosion, and restoring critical habitat like wetlands and saltmarshes.”

### Funding recipients and projects

Funding recipient	Project	Funding
Burnett Mary Regional Group for Natural Resource Management Ltd	Mangroves and Blue CO2: Restoring Sea Country in Southern Reef Catchments	\$2,000,000
Cape York Natural Resource Management Ltd	Eastern Cape York Coastal Wetland Restoration	\$1,787,448
Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Inc	Cape York East Coast Pond Apple Maintenance and Control Project	\$40,000
Catchment Solutions Pty Ltd	Large Scale Streambank Rehabilitation on the Lower Fitzroy River	\$1,986,333
Ecosure Pty Ltd	Restoration for Balban Dara Guya (Leekes Creek)	\$1,290,775
Far North Qld NRM Ltd	Daintree Wetlands: Reef Coastal Restoration in the Lower Daintree	\$1,986,919
Fitzroy Basin Association Inc	Fitzroy Landscape-scale Coastal Wetland Enhancement Project	\$1,999,020
Great Barrier Reef Foundation	Scaling Seagrass Restoration on the Great Barrier Reef	\$1,992,275
Greening Australia Ltd	Blue Carbon Restoration: Ross, Road, Deeral	\$1,804,908
Greening Australia Ltd	Yuwi Blue Carbon Wetland Restoration Project	\$1,549,354
Jaragun Pty Ltd	Restoration of Multihabitat Mangrove Ecosystems, Russell-Mulgrave Basin	\$2,000,000
NQ Dry Tropics Ltd	Rehabilitating wetlands - innovation and Traditional Owner delivery	\$1,156,334
OzFish Unlimited Ltd	Improving the hydrology of mangrove wetlands in the Wet Tropics	\$1,072,450
Reef and Rainforest Research Centre	Building on science: Working together to deliver nature-positive outcomes	\$1,857,280
Reef Catchments (Mackay Whitsunday Isaac) Limited	Beyond Barriers: Mackay and Isaac Coastal Wetland Rehabilitation	\$1,496,275
Restore Blue Advisory Services Pty Ltd	Tropical Queensland Blue Carbon Project	\$1,535,819
The Nature Conservancy Limited	Great Sandy Strait Reef Restoration Project	\$2,000,000
Townsville City Council	Townsville’s Living Coastlines – Space for Saltmarshes Project	\$1,039,566



## AWARDS

# QSMA hosts Queensland Seafood Awards

THE winners have been announced of the 2024 Queensland Seafoods Awards.

The awards ceremony, hosted by the Queensland Seafood Marketers Association (QSMA), was held in Brisbane in March.

QSMA President Ian Hamilton said the awards ceremony honoured outstanding achievements and contributions within the Queensland seafood industry, and brought together industry leaders, stakeholders and supporters to celebrate excellence in Queensland seafood marketing, production, research and advocacy.

“As the premier event of Queensland’s seafood calendar, the awards ceremony highlighted the dedication, innovation and commitment of individuals and businesses across various sectors of the seafood industry,” Ian said.

“Among the distinguished guests was the Honourable Minister Furner, whose presence underscored the government’s continued support in driving economic growth and sustainability in Queensland.”

Below are the list of winners of the 2024 awards and judges’ comments.

### Large Business Award

Independent Seafood Producers (ISP)

Recognised for its commitment to growth, innovation, customer satisfaction and industry advocacy.

### Primary Producer Award

Australian Prawn Farms

Received accolades for its innovative aquaculture practices, commitment to sustainability and excellence in product delivery.

### Small Business Award

Little Tuna

Celebrated for its remarkable growth, dedication to quality and sustainability, and innovative marketing strategies.

### Research, Development and Extension Award

Tuna Australia

Recognised for its pioneering research efforts and innovative



Phil Ravanello, Tuna Australia receiving the Research, Development & Extension Award from FRDC Managing Director Patrick Hone.



Paul Schenk (right), General Manager of Mooloolaba Fisheries, received the Fish & Chip Award for Fisheries On The Spit.

solutions addressing critical industry priorities, particularly in tuna longline fishing.

### Health and Safety Award

Tuna Australia

Innovative research and development initiatives were recognised for their significant contributions to enhancing safety within the tuna longline fishing sector.



Shawn McAtamney (right), Independent Seafood Producers (ISP) receiving the Large Business Award from the QSMA's Marshall Betzel.



Umar Nguyen – popularly known as “The Fish Girl” – received the Promotion Award from QSMA President Ian Hamilton.

### Environment Award

Ridley Agriproducts

Received acclaim for its groundbreaking fish-free feed, contributing to sustainable prawn production and environmental stewardship.

### People Development Award

Austral Fisheries’ Austral Academy

Recognised for its commitment to cultivating the next generation of seafood industry professionals through education, mentorship and sustainability initiatives.

### Promotion Award

Umar Nguyen

Known as “The Fish Girl,” Umar was honoured for her exceptional dedication and innovation in promoting seafood and enhancing the public profile of the industry.

### Restaurant Award

Salt House in Cairns

Salt House was recognised for its unwavering commitment to excellence in seafood dining, setting a benchmark for quality and sustainability within the industry.

### Fish & Chip Award

Fisheries On The Spit in Mooloolaba

Recognised for its unwavering commitment to quality, sustainability, and customer satisfaction in serving up the finest fish and chips.

### Queensland Industry Ambassador Award

Mr Nick Schulz

Celebrated for his remarkable contributions and enduring legacy within the seafood industry.

### Young Achiever Award

Sienna Green

Recognised for her significant contributions to the industry at a young age, showcasing passion, dedication, and leadership.

The winners of these awards will now compete in the National Seafood Awards, to be presented at the 2024 Seafood Directions Conference in Hobart in September

For more information about the Queensland awards, go to: <https://queenslandseafoodmarketers.com.au/>

Note: To view a video interview with Seafood Industry Ambassador Award winner Nick Schulz (filmed by the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation), go to: [My story: Queensland trawl-fishing legend Nick Schulz.](#)



## Award-winner Sienna Green recounts recent fisher experiences

Sienna Green received the Young Achiever Award at the Queensland Seafood Awards ceremony earlier this year and, in her acceptance speech, recounted her recent experiences as a net fisher on the North Queensland coast. This is Sienna's speech.

FIRSTLY, I would like to thank Karen Miller from Malanda Seafoods for nominating me for this award. I would also like to acknowledge the Queensland Seafood Marketers Association and sponsors for enabling this event to happen tonight.

My name is Sienna Green, I'm 26 years old, from a small seaside town in North Queensland. I am a proud third-generation professional fisher and have been running my own fishing operation for six years.

On the 5th of June last year, we received the devastating news that the State and Federal Labor Governments had announced there would be no more gill net fishing in the GBR region by the 31st of December 2023.

That's right, in six months' time our businesses would be forcibly shut down. This decision came about with no warning, no consultation and no science. It was only to appease an overseas organisation, UNESCO.

After initially being in a state of mourning, Dad said, "We are not accepting this decision, it is not right, we will fight to keep our jobs and our fishing futures!" And that we did.

Organising an extremely successful protest rally in the Burdekin kick-started our fight and gained huge support from the community, Traditional Owners and local Council for us to continue contributing to the local economy, as well as supplying fresh fish. We also created a widespread social media campaign.

We never stopped fighting, whether it be taking part in media interviews or meetings, including presenting to the Task Force that was set up by the Queensland Government to oversee this process.

Fast forwarding to now, I strongly believe that had we not fought this decision, we would not have this new NX licence. I believe the turning point was presenting to the Task Force,

where we presented our community's response.

Our fight isn't over because, until the politics are taken out of fishing, we are always going to be under attack.

We wouldn't have made it this far without our amazing community's support, local Council, our fellow industry members and, of course, the people we get out of bed for every day, the seafood consumer.

After all, the consumer was the one that was going to miss out, all for political green votes. That was the heartbreaking part for me.

I hope by winning this award I am



Young Achiever Award winner Sienna Green with Stefan Diacos, Acting CEO, A Raptis and Sons.

doing our wild-caught inshore net fishery proud. Maybe this might be a step towards having our new fishery, and what we supply, showcased to the public, rather than being swept under the carpet as it is now by Fisheries Queensland.

I would just like to make the point that aquaculture is undoubtedly an important part of Queensland seafood, particularly farmed barramundi.

We supply fresh, whole, wild-caught barra and, while we share the same name – barramundi – we attract a different clientele. In doing so, I believe we complement the farmed sector; we don't compete.

In concluding, this award means a lot to me and I would like to thank my partner Dale and my parents Neil and Leanne for supporting and guiding me through this highly emotional and stressful period. What I have done could not have happened without these three important people in my life.

*Continued from page 23*

review the state of conservation of the property at the 47th session in 2025, notably in relation to the impacts of the latest bleaching event.

"Strengthening the resilience of the property as a whole is of upmost critical importance to give the property the chance to withstand repeated bleaching and extreme weather events."

It added that: "Mortality levels of the current bleaching are unclear at this stage. (Australia) is urged to make mortality rates public as soon as possible. The current bleaching occurs as part of the fourth global mass bleaching, which is likely impacting at least 30 per cent of the World Heritage-listed coral reef properties, and the implications across the World Heritage system will also need to be considered further."

UNESCO also said: "The progress made to reduce sediment and nutrient loads into the property are welcomed, in particular the concerted action to focus on priority areas with the highest sediment runoff. (Australia) should be urged to take a similar approach toward the reduction of dissolved inorganic nitrogen and announce its programme as a priority.

"Compliance with regulatory standards amongst sugar cane, banana and cattle farming is reported to be increasing, in part due to increased enforcement efforts, which are welcomed.

"Nevertheless, full compliance is required alongside accelerated adoption of best management practice, which go beyond the minimum regulatory standards, in line with the recommendations of the 2022 joint WHC / IUCN mission."

Other recommendations included that native vegetation rules should be strengthened; that plans to repair and restore coastal wetland and riparian ecosystems, alongside nutrient and pesticide pollution reduction, must be implemented; and that, while noting the Climate Change Act legislated a 43 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on 2005 levels by 2030 ... Australia "should be urged to set more ambitious emission reduction targets consistent with limiting global temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels".

## APPOINTMENTS

### UK fisheries expert new AIMS CEO

FORMER UK researcher Selina Stead has taken up the role of CEO of the Australian Institute of Marine Science.

AIMS Council Chair Beth Woods said Professor Stead is a high achiever in marine science, with expertise in coral reef ecosystems, aquaculture and fisheries.

Prof. Stead joined AIMS from the University of Leeds, where she was Executive Dean of the Faculty of Environment. She was also the UK Government's Chief Scientific Advisor for the Marine Management Organisation.

As President of the European Aquaculture Society (EAS) for 12 years, Prof. Stead was recognised with the EAS' highest honour – the Distinguished Services Award – for research on solutions for climate-smart seafood and conservation. She was also a UK Ministerial Appointed Scientific Fisheries Advisor.

Prof. Stead's appointment follows the departure last year of Paul Hardisty after six years as CEO.

Dr Woods said at the time that Dr Hardisty had led AIMS through a period of significant transformation,

#### "We want more"

While the Federal and State Governments both welcomed the draft decision, environmental activists demanded more action sooner.

The World Wide Fund for Nature - Australia (WWF) said the Federal Government must commit to an emissions reduction target of at least 90 per cent below 2005 levels by 2035, stop approving new fossil fuel projects, and support ... a global treaty to phase out all fossil fuels, and also wants deforestation and industrial logging in Reef catchments banned by 2030.

WWF also wants an "in danger" listing considered next year. Their statement said: "WWF believes it's vital that the World Heritage status



and left behind a legacy of innovation, science excellence and strategic vision that has provided AIMS with financial certainty for the coming decade.

"Under his forward-thinking leadership, AIMS doubled in size, doubled its external revenue, significantly improved safety, commenced the \$36.3 million SeaSim expansion, emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic relatively unscathed, won funding to design AIMS' next-generation of research vessel, and most recently secured \$163.4 million over the next four years and a total of \$424.3 million in Government funding over the next decade to safeguard AIMS' ability to deliver impact for the nation over the next decade."

**Note:** Dr Beth Woods has been appointed Chair of the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation. More details in the next edition.

of the Reef is considered by the World Heritage Committee in 2025, not 2026, in order for the Australian and Queensland Governments to demonstrate they are taking the urgent steps necessary on these issues."

The Australian Marine Conservation Society has said more needs to be done to tackle climate change and cut water pollution, and that "Australia must increase its ambition, action and commitments to protect the Great Barrier Reef, or an 'In Danger' listing is inevitable."

#### Further information

To read the UNESCO recommendations, go page 59 at: <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2024/whc24-46com-7B.Add-en.pdf>



## THE GULL



### I spy ...

THE contradictions with surveillance video footage of NX fishers just continue on and on, eh. I seem to recall promises that the whole-of-trip video footage all NX fishers must upload to the State Government would be viewed by third-party monitors to validate logbooks and check for interactions with species of conservation interest.

Now I hear that fisheries inspectors from the Queensland Boating & Fisheries Patrol (QBFP) are scrutinising the footage looking for potential compliance issues.

If that's the case, then what was already a massive breach of privacy – and one that the fishing industry's generally human-rights-conscious opponents surprisingly seem to have no problems with – has gone to the next level.

Is it the case that fishers have received a "letter of invitation for interview"? If so, it would be worthwhile having a talk to a lawyer like Chris Thompson about that.

I wonder what boundaries are being set internally by QBFP just to make sure there could never be potential misuse of camera footage by an over-zealous QBFP officer?

And I also hear that, instead of independent assessment and validation of camera footage, this process is being conducted internally by Fisheries Queensland – the opposite of what industry was originally told.

The final irony and contradiction is that, while all sorts of groups and departments apparently have access to the footage of fishers' operations, the one group that has NOT been given access are fishers themselves.

It just gets curiously and curiously ...

### Where next?

WHERE will the Queensland Government go next with spy cameras in workplaces? In the cabs of trucks? In the cabs of farm tractors? On the desks of public servants working from home? (Yep, I'm joking with that one – imagine what the unions would say!)

Once they have set a precedent with professional fishers' boats, what's to stop the Government installing spy cameras in other workplaces?

### Gulf bans popular

GEE, it's interesting to read the report of the public consultation conducted by Fisheries Queensland (FQ) into whether or not net-fishing bans in the Gulf of Carpentaria would be popular.

The FQ report says that a discussion paper and online survey were released on 12 October 2023, with the public consultation running over an eight-week period until 10 December 2023.

A total of 4,104 submissions were received, the report says. "Overall, there was strong support for the implementation of gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, with 93 per cent of respondents supporting the proposal."

Gee whiz, 93 per cent! That's 3,816 out of 4,104. That's a big majority, eh.

In case you are wondering what categories the respondents fell in to, well commercial fishers made up 68; recreational fishers 109; charter fishing operators 14; Traditional fishers / Traditional Owners four; seafood wholesalers / marketers 25; hospitality (restaurant, café, fish and chip shop) owners / workers 23; environmental, industry peak body or other non-government organisations 14; others 30; not-specified 11; and "interested community members" 3,813.

It's not hard to see where the support for gillnet bans came from, is it? And, just in case any more clarification was needed, the FQ report did add that: "There were 3,694 responses received in support of Australian Marine Conservation Society and Humane Society International. These responses detailed support for gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria."

If you would like to see how public consultation is done, the report can be accessed via: <https://daf.engagementhub.com.au/gulf-of-carpentaria-fishery>

### Interesting life

PEOPLE often lead even more interesting lives than we might imagine. Take Paul Hardisty, CEO of the Australian Institute of Marine Science for six years till he left in mid-2023. The past lives of the Canadian-born Dr Hardisty include "wild catting" for oil in Texas and working on drinking-water projects in Africa.

He told his story to the host of the ABC radio show "Conversations", Richard Fidler, on June 24: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/conversations/paul-hardisty-great-barrier-reef-oil/103895608>

### Imagine what if ...

TOURISM numbers are reported to be significantly down throughout North Queensland this winter, with the previously-reliable "grey nomads" from the south staying away, including from Karumba.

Imagine what if the Government disrupted the region's economy – from fishing to retail to road freight and more – with net bans to make the Gulf more attractive to anglers, and then the anglers didn't turn up.

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