

# Queensland SEAFOOD

2023 NUMBER 3

A smiling female fisherman with blonde hair, wearing a light blue jacket, a pink neckerchief, and a tan cap with 'YETI' on it. She is wearing black gloves and holding a large, silver fish. She has a black harness with 'ORMLINE' and 'STON' visible. The background shows a body of water and trees.

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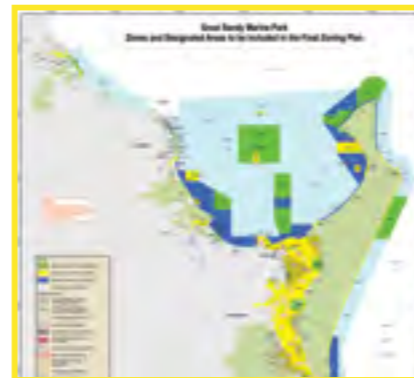
UNESCO sets environment agenda. (Page 6.)



Hundreds at Ayr protest rally. (Page 14.)



Parliament hears industry anger. (Page 18.)



Great Sandy bans mapped out. (Page 28.)

## In this edition ...

IN the three months since the previous edition of this magazine, fisheries management in Queensland has been turned on its head. The United Nations is now dictating management of primary industries in the Great Barrier Reef catchment and adjacent waters, and consultation with industry has been replaced by the dictates of special-interest groups.

President Allan Bobbermen sets the scene by assessing the recent actions of what he describes as a “dysfunctional” State Government, including bans on net-fishing along most of the east coast and threats for huge net bans in the Gulf of Carpentaria, plus the prospect of reductions in the line fishery. (See page 4).

CEO David Bobbermen points out in his column on page 5 that the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy framework for consultation and input from all stakeholders, plus input from the Independent Expert Panel, has been

abolished and “has now fallen victim of a clear and unmasked political agenda”.

Just before this edition of the magazine went to print, the State Government proposed shock fishing bans in the Gulf of Carpentaria. For what little was known of the plans, see page 13.

The proposed N2 and N4 bans have led to big protests in Ayr and Brisbane. For photos and reports, see pages 14 and 18.

We have extensive coverage of the N2 and N4 bans and related issues and events in this edition of the magazine – expanded from the usual 32 pages to 40 pages to accommodate the many aspects of this story. QSIA members will receive further news as it happens direct via email.

And after a century-and-a-half of sustainable net fishing that has provided fresh local seafood while retaining an abundance of fish and other wildlife in the Great Sandy region, the Queensland Labor Government has decided netting bans are needed to “protect marine wildlife and great lifestyle”. (See page 28.)

**Front cover:** Burdekin-based net fisher Sienna Green is one of at least 100 along the GBR coast who will be banned from using N2 or N4 nets from November 1 in a joint Federal and State Government move that Queensland Fisheries Minister Mark Furner believes (see page 25) will save “Save the Reef” from UNESCO actions that would damage the tourism industry. (See page 6.)  
**To share a video showing the fishers’ point of view on this issue – funded by the QSIA and featuring Sienna Green – go to this link:** [www.gofundme.com/f/save-queensland-commercial-fishing](http://www.gofundme.com/f/save-queensland-commercial-fishing)

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## PRESIDENT ON THE LINE

### What next from dysfunctional Queensland Government

HELLO all. I hope you are all coping with the actions of this current dysfunctional State Government.

There appears to be no future for the majority of net fishers on the east coast of Queensland and with the future of the net fishery in the Gulf of Carpentaria yet to be decided.

More disturbing is the prospect of further reductions in the line fishery..

It is becoming obvious our fishery managers do not want a net fishery at all – or, more to the point, any commercial fishing industry at all.

It appears the formation of the so-called task force has superseded the expert scientific panels.

The task force is made up of bureaucrats and a so-called independent chair – an ex-WWF senior international leader. This is nothing other than foxes guarding hen houses

#### What QSIA is doing

Our CEO has sought advice from a legal and accountancy firm to establish a pathway forward for members who are going to be affected by the proposed closures in the GBR region and the GSMP and Gulf of Carpentaria.

We had the formation of a Trawl sub-committee, which is having success with resolving issues with fishery managers.

QSIA have put out expressions of interest for the formation of a Crab sub-committee.

#### Membership

It has been encouraging to see the increase in membership. Industry needs to be united in the push back against this green agenda. and nonsense being peddled by environmental non-government organisations.

If you have colleagues who are not members, I urge you to encourage them to join.

#### Conclusion

It appears that all forms of fishing are under threat or will be restricted further. There is obviously going to be a shortage of fresh seafood.

With an election year looming, who knows what this State Government will come up with. One that comes to mind



Wild-caught barramundi and other seafood is in strong demand – but under threat – all over Queensland, including from this van at Emerald.

is the reintroduction of the old Section 35, where rec fishers could sell their surplus catch.

In the meantime, stay safe, and good fishing.

Allan

**Allan Bobbermen**  
Chair QSIA

### Management by media release: net ban announcement with zero consultation

BANS on use of N2 and N4 gillnets were announced on 5 June 2023 in a joint media release from Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek, Cairns-based Senator Nita Green, and Queensland Fisheries Minister Mark Furner and Environment Minister Leanne Linard.

Their media release said “destructive” gillnet fishing injures and kills threatened dugongs, turtles, dolphins and protected shark species.

Over \$160 million would be delivered to significantly reduce net fishing “and other high risk fishing activities impacting the Reef”. This included “ensuring the Great Barrier Reef is gillnet free by mid-2027”.

As part of these reforms, the Albanese Government will request the Palaszczuk Government to declare threatened hammerhead sharks a no-take species for commercial fishers within Queensland waters.

The funding will also be used to:

- ❑ Create net-free zones including in the northern third of the Great Barrier Reef and parts of the Gulf of Carpentaria to better protect threatened species that move between the Reef and the Gulf.
- ❑ Accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy
- ❑ Introduce legislation to mandate the use of independent data validation on commercial fishing vessels to ensure we balance sustainable fisheries with protecting threatened species.

A quote specifically attributed to Ms Plibersek said “One of the most immediate threats to health of the Reef is unsustainable fishing practices.”

A quote attributed to Mr Furner said: “This is an investment in the future of the Reef and a more sustainable future for its commercial fishing industry. Protecting good jobs in the fishing industry is crucial for the livelihoods of thousands of Queenslanders who depend on the State’s seafood supply chain.”

## FROM THE CEO

### Fishing industry being attacked from all angles

DEAR Members, as illustrated by the articles in this edition, it has been a challenging and eventful period since our last magazine.

The sad fact is that these events are not unique to Queensland. Around the shores of this great continent, your fellow fishers are being unrelentingly attacked from all angles.

A strong peak body to represent your interests is important. It is good to see so many new members join QSIA in support of our efforts.

Honestly, at times it is hard to know if those efforts are bearing any fruit but the option of doing nothing is far worse.

By way of example, QSIA was mentioned many times during the Queensland Parliament Estimates. One might think that we were being used as an excuse but to me this indicates that QSIA views are (at times) being listened to.

It is apparent that, on many occasions, meetings appear to be held merely to give bureaucrats the opportunity to “tick the box”.

As I am writing this report, industry has just learnt of the proposed net-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria. If implemented as tabled, this will all but destroy the inshore gillnet fishery in the Gulf. The Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy has a framework for consultation and input from all stakeholders. Further, it requires input from the Independent Expert Panel.

It is obvious that this framework has been abolished, and the significant amount of time and knowledge all participants of the working groups have contributed, in good faith, has now fallen victim of a clear and unmasked political agenda.

I would like to thank all working group members for their efforts over the years.

QSIA has been working hard to rebuild its relationship with Government and will continue to do so. But this is at times difficult, when we appear to be hamstrung or ignored.

An example of this is QSIA wrote

to the Government asking for funding to increase our resources to be able to better inform industry as to the significant amount of reform occurring. This request has politely denied.

Then the Taskforce has the audacity to place in a communique that no submissions were received from peak bodies/

While a significant amount of focus is on gill-netting, we have to ensure that the remaining professional fishing methods remain viable.

Trawl is rapidly approaching the renewal of its Wildlife Trade Operations (WTO) renewal. One condition in the last approval was the development of a robust Independent Data Validation (IDV) method.

The loss of WTO approval for the East Coast Trawl industry would be unfortunate and needs to be avoided, as significant quantities of prawns from this fishery are exported.

The biggest issue with this approval is the need to have the trial of onboard cameras underway. A two-day meeting was held in early August to help break the deadlock in the “Data Model”, particularly around the Queensland pro-release Right to Information Laws.

While a model was developed, a month later we are still not much further progressed.

QSIA has written to the Department of Fisheries to encourage them to request an extension in time for the WTO approval deadline. We have not yet received a response.



The industry is under fire but we are getting our messages out through the media.

Trawl operators are experiencing a tough year, with depressed prices and increased fuel prices.

A recent proposal by a “Consortium of Mud Crabbers” has been circulated.

QSIA is currently developing a response to this document, using the significant amount of feedback provided by industry participants.

Line-fishing appears to be under attack from stock assessments and harvest strategies.

The saddletail snapper stock assessment clearly states that, as it predicts stocks could be between 17 per cent and 70 per cent, it should not be used for management purposes.

Rumours are that in spite of this disclaimer, it may well be.

This stock assessment suffers from many of the faults identified in the Independent Review of the East Coast Spanish Mackerel Stock Assessment.

Further, as this fishery is 60 per cent recreational take, its enormous range of possible stock level is a result of the poor understanding of the recreational effort and take. This issue must be addressed by the Department of Fisheries as a matter of priority.

On a final note, it has never been more important for the industry to be united.

History is littered with cases of poorer outcomes for those who take a quick decision, or feel they have no option. If you do feel like this, please contact me for advice before committing to anything.

Until next time, stay safe.

**David Bobbermen**  
CEO  
QSIA

## UN suspends threat to list GBR “in danger”

THE United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has suspended its threat to damage Australia’s international reputation and tourism industry by listing the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) as “in danger”.

However, this is only a temporary reprieve. UNESCO has demanded a progress report from the Australian Government by 1 February 2024, so it can again consider listing the GBR as “World Heritage In Danger” next year.

In a media release on August 1, federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek welcomed the interim decision from UNESCO.

“This confirms the Albanese and Palaszczuk Labor Governments are acting on climate change, working hard to protect the Reef, and that the rest of the world has taken notice,” her media release said.

“As the draft decision makes clear, Australia’s environmental policies have fundamentally changed under Labor, for the better.

“The draft decision cites ‘significant progress’ being made on climate change, water quality, and sustainable fishing – all putting the Reef on a stronger and more sustainable path.

“As sources close to UNESCO recently told the French newspaper *Le Monde*, on climate change and the environment ‘...the approach (from the Australian government) has changed completely. Between the new government and the old one, it’s a bit like night and day’.

“The Australian Government has:

- ❑ Invested a record \$1.2 billion in the Reef.
- ❑ Legislated to reach net zero, with a 43 per cent emissions reduction target in 2035 and committed to reaching 82 per cent renewable energy supply by 2030.
- ❑ Invested \$150 million to improve water quality through projects such as revegetation, grazing management and engineering work like gully stabilisation.
- ❑ With the Queensland Government, announced the phase-out of gillnets

in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park with a \$160 million package.

- ❑ Rejected a coal mine that could have direct impacts on the Reef.
- ❑ Withdrawn federal funding for dams that would have had a detrimental impact on Reef water quality.
- ❑ Invested an extra \$163.4 million in the May budget to guarantee the future of the Australian Institute of Marine Science, doubling funding for Reef science.
- ❑ Committed to rewriting Australia’s broken environmental laws.
- ❑ Engaged more Indigenous Rangers to manage sea country, including combatting crown of thorns starfish outbreaks, marine plastics and ghost nets.

“Of course, this decision doesn’t mean the Reef is in the clear. If we don’t deliver on the goals of the Paris Agreement, every coral reef in the world is vulnerable.

“But this draft decision confirms Labor’s policies are making a difference.

“We need to act on climate change. We need to protect our special places and the plants and animals that call them home. And that is precisely what we are doing.

“We will continue to work with UNESCO and International Union for Conservation of Nature to ensure the protection of the Reef and all World Heritage properties impacted by climate change, right around the globe.”

The UNESCO draft decision can be found here: <https://whc.unesco.org/archive/2023/whc23-45com-7B.Add-en.pdf#page26>

*Quotes attributable to Minister for the Environment and Water, Tanya Plibersek MP:*

“We’re committed to better protecting our precious Great Barrier Reef – and this decision is evidence of that.

“Scott Morrison’s bad policies on climate change and the environment showed the Liberals and Nationals didn’t care about the reef.

“UNESCO’s draft decision acknowledges that, under Labor,



Australia is once again serious about protecting the Reef and acting on climate change.

“Our government will always support Australia’s precious places, and the plants and animals that call them home. And we will always support the Australians who rely on a healthy environment for their jobs. That’s why I have raised this issue every time I have met with UNESCO and my counterparts on the World Heritage Committee.

“Our Great Barrier Reef is one of the planet’s most outstanding natural wonders. I encourage people from around the world to come and see our beautiful Reef for themselves – you’re very welcome.”

*Quotes attributable to Special Envoy for the Great Barrier Reef, Senator Nita Green:*

“I am pleased by UNESCO’s decision today, but I know there is still work to do. This is particularly welcome news for regional communities in Queensland where the Reef supports local jobs and local economies.

“Although this is a draft decision, it recognises the work of our partners, agencies and stakeholders who have worked together over the past twelve months supported by a Government committed to protecting the Reef.

“The Liberal Nationals put the Reef a risk for a decade and continue to demonstrate disregard for future of the Reef. I will continue to work alongside organisations, Traditional Owners and the broader community to keep our Reef beautiful and vibrant for generations to come.”

*Quotes attributable to Queensland Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Leanne Linard:*

**Continued on next page**

## Time line for N2 and N4 net bans

THIS is a timeline for events related to the N2 and N4 net bans.

### 2016 and 2017

What is regarded as “severe” coral bleaching occurs at points along much of the Great Barrier Reef, due to weather conditions causing the water to be warmer than usual. (Smaller bleaching events follow in 2020 and 2022.)

### 2019

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority – in its five-yearly *Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report* – downgrades the overall outlook for the GBR to “very poor” (from simply “poor” in 2014).

### June – August 2021

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) threatens to list the GBR as a World Heritage site “in danger” but suspends the move after then Coalition Environment Minister Sussan Ley negotiates a deal that includes a joint UNESCO / IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) delegation visiting the Reef in 2022.

### March 2022

UNESCO / IUCN delegation makes a 10-day visit to Queensland and returns overseas to prepare a report and recommendations.

### Continued from previous page

“The Great Barrier Reef is one of the world’s truly special places. It is one of the wonders of the natural world and home to a vast array of marine life including fish, coral, marine mammals, sharks and sting rays, just to name a few.

“It injects billions of dollars into state and regional economies every year through the tourism sector. It is estimated to support more than 60,000 jobs, most of which are in regional towns the length of Queensland’s east coast, in cafes, restaurants, hotels and of course on a flotilla of reef boats.

“Because of its environmental, cultural and economic importance the Palaszczuk Government, in consultation with science, industry,

### May 2022

Federal election brings a Labor Government to power. Anthony Albanese becomes Prime Minister and Tanya Plibersek is denied her preferred portfolio of education but is given environment instead.

### July 2022

PM Anthony Albanese meets Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO’s Director-General. As a result, UNESCO experts and Australian representatives discuss plans to implement what UNESCO describes as “10 priority measures, including costs and timetable”. (Those 10 UNESCO demands would not become known to the general public until publication of the UNESCO report in November 2022.)

### November 2022

UNESCO publishes a report on the delegation’s visit to Queensland, and includes 10 demands, or “priority recommendations”, with a clear inference UNESCO will return to the “World Heritage In Danger” threat for the Great Barrier Reef unless the Australian Government demonstrates an intention to meet the UNESCO demands. Only two of them relate to fishing: one wants faster implementation of Queensland’s fisheries policy; and one wants N2 and N4 gillnets “retired”.

### April 2023

While fishers never considered it possible that the Federal or State Governments would close an entire fishery, impacting hundreds of fishers and other business operators, and seafood consumers, at the behest of UNESCO, QSIA hears rumours the published UNESCO recommendations are being discussed, and writes to

conservation and other experts, has taken strong action to protect the Reef.

“We have welcomed the opportunity to work with the Albanese Government since its election. Like our government, they believe in the science and are committed to working to protect the reef.

“The draft recommendation to not list the reef as being “in danger” is an acknowledgement of the work we have been doing.

“However, this is an area where we cannot afford to rest. We will continue to work with the Albanese Government, the science community, industry, conservationists and the community to protect this natural wonder so it can be enjoyed by future generations.”

Environment & Water Minister Tanya Plibersek, requesting a meeting to have input into the discussions. No reply has ever been received from Ms Plibersek.

### 5 June 2023

As the Australian offering for International Environment Day, a joint media release headlined by Ms Plibersek and Queensland Environment Minister Leanne Linard announces N2 and N4 gillnets – N2 being the main suppliers of barramundi and other inshore fish and N4 used further offshore – will be banned from 31 December 2023. There has been zero consultation with industry.

### 6 June 2023

UNESCO issues a media release welcoming the Federal and State Governments’ announcement, and also revealing that Ms Plibersek had written to UNESCO head Audrey Azoulay advising that the process of establishing an implementation plan for UNESCO’s 10 priority measures, including costs and a timetable, had just been completed: “Tanya Plibersek (told UNESCO in the letter) that the urgent new measures for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef UNESCO had requested, would be carried out”.

### June-July 2023

After providing no consultation in developing the net ban plans, the Federal and State Governments ignore requests for information beyond what is provided in the June 5 media release, and rejects journalists’ requests for interviews with the Environment Ministers and the State Fisheries Minister.

### 15 July 2023

More than 400 fishers, related small business operators and their families – plus concerned seafood consumers – attend a rally at the Ayr Showgrounds protesting the bans and hearing about the impacts on individuals and coastal communities.

### 17 July 2023

It is announced John Tanzer – someone well known to the Queensland fishing industry – has been appointed as chair of Queensland’s “Future Fishing Taskforce”. John Tanzer held senior roles in the Queensland Fish Management Authority and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority before joining WWF (International) from 2012 till 2021. At the same time, the taskforce of public servants – with no industry members – is announced. It will consider a wide range of issues and produce a report within six weeks (by the end of August).

## UNESCO REPORT

### UNESCO demands fishing bans, farming controls

The UNESCO report – *Report on the Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef (Australia), 21-30 March 2022* – was released late last year and demands bans on gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) and further controls on management of the GBR catchment. The report runs to 103 pages. This is a summary of the major recommendations.

THE summary of the report says, in part, that the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) World Heritage property in Australia was inscribed in 1981 as the world's most extensive coral reef ecosystem. The array of biodiversity and seascapes collectively provide some of the most spectacular ecological biomes and marine scenery in the world.

“However, over the past decades, and particularly in recent years, the GBR has faced considerable pressures that threaten the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property,” it says. “These pressures are related in particular to climate change, coastal development, degrading water quality resulting from sediment and pollutant run-off from agricultural activities, and unsustainable resource use, among others.

“Since 2010, the World Heritage Committee has raised concerns that activities within the GBR and its surrounding coastal areas are irrevocably threatening the OUV of the property. A joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission (RM mission) was conducted in 2012. It says that, after continuing concerns in intervening years, “the World Heritage Committee noted with utmost concern and regret the conclusions of the 2019 GBR Outlook Report (compiled by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority) that the long-term outlook for the ecosystem of the property had further deteriorated from ‘poor’ to ‘very poor’, that the deterioration of the ecological processes underpinning the property’s OUV had been more rapid and widespread than was previously evident, and the property had suffered significantly from consecutive mass coral bleaching events in 2016, 2017 and 2020”.

Another joint WHC/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the Great Barrier Reef took place from March 21 to 30, 2022, with four key objectives.

Review the status of the Reef 2050 Plan’s review and update, which was made available in December 2021, and assess the revised contents in light

of the conclusions of the 2019 Great Barrier Reef Outlook Report, including accelerating action at all possible levels to address the threat from climate change and other factors affecting the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and integrity of the property.

Assess Australia’s progress towards addressing the impact of climate change on the OUV of the property, and how the revised Reef 2050 Plan addresses the threat posed to the property by climate change and determines a pathway for accelerated actions in other areas affecting the conservation of the property.

Assess Australia’s progress towards meeting key targets of the Reef 2050 Plan, in particular, but not limited to, the water quality and land management targets.

Assess any other relevant issues that may negatively affect the OUV of the property, including its conditions of integrity and protection and management.

In their report, the two people who comprised the WHC/IUCN mission said that “the OUV of the property is significantly impacted by climate change factors”.

“The resilience of the property to recover from climate change impacts is substantially compromised, in particular – but not exclusively – due to degraded water quality.

“While both comprehensive and thorough, the management frameworks, strategies and plans that are in place to protect the OUV of the property (a) are lacking clear climate change targets and implementation measures which are of utmost urgency to protect the OUV of the property, and (b) are not fully implemented, particularly in relation to water quality and fisheries activities.”

#### Priority Recommendations

The delegation made 10 priority recommendations that they say

“require to be implemented with the utmost urgency” and 12 additional recommendations that would further strengthen the resilience of the property in the face of climate change.

Below are the 10 priority recommendations. (For the remaining 12, go to the full report. See the link at the end of this article.)

#### Recommendation P1

Identify priority areas of grazing land for gully repairs and associated restoration and remediation activities, and significantly scale up activities in these priority areas through extensive mobilization of the necessary engineers and associated personnel, equipment and materials, alongside key engagement with relevant farmers and grazers to achieve existing WQIP targets.

#### Recommendation P2

Require proposed and in-progress dam developments to show clear alignment with water quality improvement for the GBR as a condition for approval under relevant legislation, including mandatory compliance with the 2018 Reef 2050 Net Benefit Policy, industrial guidelines associated with the reef protection regulations, and climate-ready design considerations to be assessed by appropriate environmental impact assessment, which also includes consideration of indirect impacts such as associated agricultural expansion. Mechanisms and innovations should also be developed and implemented to address existing dam sediment impacts (from build-up and release) in priority catchments vulnerable to sedimentation (as prioritized for management in the WQIP).

#### Recommendation P3

Increase significantly the scale and pace of adoption, monitoring and enforcement of best management practice in sugarcane and banana farming to achieve WQIP targets; and advance the upscaling of land restoration activities, including where feasible the purchase and/or buy-back of land areas for restoration and return to wetland or riparian ecosystems.

#### Recommendation P4

Prioritise the protection of remnant native vegetation across the GBR catchments through strengthened native vegetation clauses under existing laws, and through improved identification and enforcement of permissible activities in areas of high conservation value (HCV) forests and woodlands. This would include review of sites where clearing is currently



The UNESCO report recommends buying back sugar cane land and converting it to wetland.

allowed without permits (Category X under the Vegetation Management Act 1999) and updating zonation and corresponding permits which limit conversion of HCV areas. Such advances should also incorporate full consideration of traditional owner land management principles.

#### Recommendation P5

Ensure Reef 2050 WQIP water quality targets, to be updated in 2023, and actions implemented through the WQIP are sufficient to ensure the OUV of the property is not further adversely impacted by low water quality, including through hitherto overlooked sources of poor water quality, such as dams, emerging crop industries and marine debris, with associated legislative compliance strengthened.

#### Recommendation P6

Review and strengthen, by 31 December 2022, the Reef 2050 Plan to include clear government commitments to reduce greenhouse emissions consistent with the efforts required to limit the global average

temperature increase to 1.5°C above preindustrial levels.

Commitments should harness the State Party’s significant capabilities to take accelerated action on this issue, at all possible levels, and should include timebound, actionable and practical steps to limit the impacts of climate change on the OUV of the property, including the following actions:

- Continue to comprehensively assess and report on the impact of climate change on the property, and to include in this process an evaluation of the impact of the implementation of national climate change and emissions reduction strategies, based on best available science and information.
- Develop and implement ambitious emissions reductions activities consistent with limiting the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, taking into account the above assessments and the additional ‘climate related activities’

concerning emissions reductions as recommended by the Independent Expert Panel (IEP), in its letter to the State Party in March 2022.

- Establish a formal mechanism for the IEP and Reef Advisory Committees to advise the State Party on the required carbon emissions reductions to attain the goals set out in the Reef 2050 Plan.

#### Recommendation P7

Ensure that the carbon and water quality related credit schemes being deployed in the GBR catchments deliver overall net benefits to the OUV of the property and are monitored and regulated by the relevant agencies through fully transparent, science-driven and evidence-based management to that end.

#### Recommendation P8

Continue support for scientific research and increase financial resources to enable deployment of climate adaptation mechanisms developed through this research at the required scale to be effective in mitigating and adapting to climate change impacts across the property, including initiatives undertaken by AIMS (SeaSim and associated research activities), as well as wider restoration initiatives that directly support the rehabilitation of habitat and concurrent carbon sequestration.

#### Recommendation P9

Accelerate the implementation of the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy, including the finalization of harvest strategies for all key species as a priority, and ensure management mechanisms outlined in the Strategy (including temporary closures of some fisheries areas to enable recovery and promote restocking, particularly in areas of spawning aggregations) are implemented in collaboration with the fisheries industry to achieve the target maximum economic yield (60% biomass) by 2027.

#### Recommendation P10

Phase out destructive gill net fishing in the property through appropriate mechanisms, including purchasing, and/or retiring all remaining industrial (N4) gill-net licences; retiring of other gill-net fisheries (N2) and the establishment of net-free sub-zones in areas of high conservation value for protected species.

To read the full report, go to: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/197090>

## Industry disputes recommendations from Queensland visit

The QSIA analysed the report of the World Heritage Centre - IUCN (UNESCO) delegation that visited Queensland last year and disputed a number of the report's findings and recommendations. This is the analysis forwarded to Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek.

THE Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) has serious concerns with the "Report on the Joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef".

The QSIA fundamentally disagrees with one recommendation in particular: that N4 and N2 nets should be phased out (of the GBR region). This issue will be explored in more detail later in this analysis.

Overall, the QSIA believes the WHC/IUCN report and/or its process of preparation have:

- ❑ denied commercial fishers natural justice;
- ❑ provided no opportunity for commercial fishers to discuss the report's conclusions or potential impacts on fishers;
- ❑ led to demonisation of commercial fishers, with consequent impact on their mental health;
- ❑ unnecessarily placed at risk the livelihoods of commercial net fishers and their families throughout central and northern Queensland, along with related onshore jobs;
- ❑ ignored or disregarded Queensland

Government or Commonwealth Government initiatives to further reduce risk of net fisher interactions with species of conservation concern, such as the Queensland Government's Protected Species Management Strategy for the East Coast Inshore Fishery;

- ❑ ignored or disregarded other management options, instead promoting the blunt instrument of fishery closure and consequent job losses in Queensland regional communities; and
- ❑ failed to consider the likely benefits of government-funded research and industry training already underway to ameliorate any risk of interaction with species of conservation concern.

Overall, QSIA believes the delegation's recommendations (phasing out the N4 and N2 gill net fisheries) go far beyond what is required to address perceived issues in these fisheries – in fact, beyond even the previous demands of some of our industry's staunchest critics in the environment movement.

It is clear from the WHC / IUCN report – and also from the GBRMPA 2019 Outlook report – that by far the

greatest threat to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the Great Barrier Reef region is climate change, followed by land use in GBR catchments. The QSIA is concerned that, politically, a ban on gill net fishing within and adjacent to the GBR offers the appearance of decisive action in response to the report when in fact adequate responses to the genuinely significant challenges to the GBR's OUV require very great amounts of time and massive amounts of money.

The QSIA supports government-funded research and training already underway to address concerns about the N4 and N2 fisheries. QSIA is also working directly with the Queensland Government on implementation of Electronic Independent Data Validation (cameras) that will put to rest any argument of alleged under-reporting of interactions with species of conservation concern.

Given the opportunity, QSIA is committed to working with government to find solutions to any perceived problems in the N4 and N2 gill net fisheries. The QSIA would welcome opportunity for this organisation and its members to be engaged in future discussions about addressing the recommendations of the WHC/IUCN report.

### Discussion

Reviewing the "Report on the Joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef (Australia)", it is obvious the WHC/IUCN delegation held numerous discussions about Queensland commercial fishers. However, there is no evidence the delegation held discussions with Queensland commercial fishers, and nor have fishers been included in discussions about the report since that time.

This is despite the fact that commercial fishers and other seafood-related business operators are the only individuals who would potentially lose their livelihoods if the delegation's recommendations were implemented (ie, "phase out ... gill net fishing").

This represents a fundamental denial of justice. Commercial fishers have been afforded no opportunity to

answer the concerns of the delegation about net fishing and other forms of fishing in the GBR region that are reflected in their report. It also means commercial fishers have not been able to suggest alternatives to the blunt instrument of shutting down the businesses of at least 100 artisanal fishers in the GBR region who operate gill nets. (There is no net fishing in the GBR region that any international fisheries manager would classify as "industrial", despite the delegation's use of that term – inherited from the language of environmental non-government organisations [ENGOS] – in the report.)

Over the 10 days of their visit to Queensland in March 2022, the delegation visited Brisbane, Monto, Lady Elliot Island, Townsville, the Burdekin and Cairns, and met with a considerable number of people. These included Federal and State Ministers and advisors, State and Federal Government Department senior staff, a large number of GBRMPA staff, researchers from AIMS, JCU and UQ, Traditional Owners, cattle producers, cane farmers and numerous tourism operators, representatives of environmental non-government organisations and even a recreational fishing representative in Cairns who has led a campaign to exclude net-fishing in far north Queensland.

However, there is no indication the delegation sought to meet working commercial fishers. This is despite the fact commercial fishers are the only stakeholders who potentially would lose their livelihood (should the delegation's recommendations to phase out gill nets be implemented).

The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) believes the report's recommendations on commercial fishing are far harsher than required.

In particular, the report recommends (Recommendation P10): "Phase out destructive gill net fishing in the property through appropriate mechanisms, including purchasing, and/or retiring all remaining industrial (N4) gill-net licences; retiring of other gill-net fisheries (N2) and the establishment of net-free sub-zones in areas of high conservation value for protected species."

QSIA does not believe it necessary to phase out gill net fishing.

In making this recommendation, the delegation went far beyond what other agencies and organisations have considered appropriate.

Even the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) and WWF Australia (WWF) – longtime critics of commercial fishers who over decades have advocated a range of restrictions on commercial fishers, including net-free zones – did not recommend impacting the livelihoods of commercial fishers by phasing out N2 gill nets.

The combined AMCS and WWF briefing to the delegation, while wanting to see the N4 nets removed (by purchasing and retiring the remaining [at that time, three] licences, did not recommend phasing out N2 licences. AMCS and WWF suggested a range of other management tools that would apply to the N2 fishery.

There is much in the AMCS-WWF submission the QSIA takes issue with but it is surprising to see the Mission report make recommendations far beyond even those suggested by such staunch industry critics – surprising and, frankly, something the QSIA could not anticipate before the Mission report was released in November 2022.

It is worth noting that WWF and AMCS are both currently conducting separate public campaigns, through conventional media and particularly social media (including advertising on

YouTube) to have netting banned from the GBR region. These campaigns include online petitions and emails. WWF and AMCS no doubt have been emboldened and encouraged by the Mission report recommendations. WWF is conducting the campaign for "A Net-Free Reef" with the theme "... A Reef without nets is a thriving Reef". Once again, commercial fishers are being demonised – this time (in the rhetoric of the campaign) for "taking the life out of the Reef". AMCS is campaigning on the theme of "Let's make 2023 gillnet free" and claiming "commercial gillnets catch (dugongs, turtles, dolphins and sawfish) in their thousands".

And, once again, commercial fishers' livelihoods are under direct threat – if the report recommendations were to be implemented or the WWF-AMCS campaigns had the desired impact on government decision-makers. Commercial fishers and their families, along with related seafood business operators and families, are under extraordinary stress. Research has found that commercial fishers experience twice the base-rate of psychological stress compared with the general population, and a nationwide program (supported with funding from both the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments) currently



Gillnet fishers young and old on the GBR coast are being put out of business at the direction of the Paris-based UNESCO.

## LAW essentials

### Hot Issues

1. **MORETON BAY - WHITE SPOT DISEASE CLASS ACTION - NO WIN, NO FEE**  
The claim is well advanced. We are in the process of finalising witness statements and sorting out the range of experts required. The Court has also recently approved our side to make some important changes to the statement of claim to improve the case for the fishing industry.
2. **GLADSTONE PORT DREDGING CLASS ACTION - NO WIN, NO FEE**
3. **CLARENCE RIVER (NSW) - WHITE SPOT DISEASE (POTENTIAL) CLASS ACTION - NO WIN, NO FEE**  
Sadly another white spot disease issue in NSW. Early stages yet to determine if a class action can be commenced. Impacted business should register their interest with Law Essentials if they wish to be a part of it.
4. **GREAT SANDY MARINE PARK PLAN - COMPENSATION**  
Once details are released from government regarding their "proposed" compensation package, Law Essentials will be assisting fishers with any claims, including potential claims that are NOT part of the package.

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- (ii) Share Fishing Agreements
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- (iv) Family Law, Conveyancing, Wills/Estates, Business Law.

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is underway to try to improve fishers' mental health. Issues such as powerlessness, failure to be consulted and threats to their livelihood – all demonstrated in the way the report has been compiled, and in the language and recommendations of the report – are significant factors in the deterioration of mental health amongst fishers, their families and others in the seafood industry.

The QSIA is supportive of actions already underway by government to address any perceived issues in fisheries such as the N4 and N2 fisheries; for example, the Queensland Government's East Coast Inshore Protected Species Management Strategy. (See <https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/ckan-publications-attachments-prod/resources/38dcb9a7-219e-489e-8e36-4324b19f1e50/east-coast-inshore-protected-species-management-strategy.pdf?ETag=c1ad0ba4f4265b87203cbb0c3b9b684d>)

The WHC/IUCN delegation has criticised some government fisheries-related initiatives for not being progressed faster. It does not seem a reasonable alternative simply to phase out the fisheries (as they have recommended).

QSIA is aware of at least two research projects in train which will further improve the selectivity of gill nets and mitigate bycatch – at James Cook University in Townsville and Charles Darwin University in Darwin, and these have both received funding through the Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Also, the government- and industry-funded organisation OceanWatch Australia is well advanced in producing a code of best practice for the East Coast Net Fishery (with direct funding for the project from the Queensland Government). This will then be used to create a Cert II – Master Fisherman Course.

As already stated, QSIA is also working directly with the Queensland Government on implementation of Electronic Independent Data Validation (cameras) that will put to rest any argument of alleged under-reporting of interactions with species of conservation concern.

Net fishers have extraordinary knowledge, skills and experience that could be engaged to help address any perceived ongoing issues in the N4 and N2 fisheries.

Commercial fishers self-evidently

spend their working days in the marine environment, observing marine life of all types, including on occasions species of conservation interest (SOCl), including dugongs, dolphins and turtles. They have special knowledge of these animals' behaviour and movements.

This knowledge – and a strong desire among net fishers to avoid any interactions with SOCl species – has previously seen fishers approach government authorities to have special management arrangements and gear modifications introduced to negate the risk of incidental capture of SOCl species in the GBR region.

For example, as part of a special regional management program in 2010, 15 inshore N2 fishers working in the Burdekin region agreed to implement a closure in Bowling Green Bay to protect dugong from the risk of incidental capture. The fishing closure was applied in what became a special management area in Bowling Green Bay (see map) where fishers had observed dugong travelling between a "wonky hole" and feeding areas on seagrass flats. (A "wonky hole" is a spring where fresh water from now buried Pleistocene river channels is released into the surrounding sea water.)

At the same time, fishers designed and introduced a special net for this area. The overall length of the net was reduced from 200 metres to 120 metres and the depth of the net (measured in meshes) was reduced to a maximum of 16 meshes (whereas, previously, nets of up to 50 meshes deep had been used).

Fishers supported introduction of this spatial closure even though it had been a highly-productive fishing area and even though some 75 per cent of accessible waterways in the district were already closed to net fishing by previous zonings.

The QSIA also rolled out a series of "Environmental Management Systems", or EMSs, including codes of practice and related training, on how to avoid any interactions with dugongs and turtles in particular.

These initiatives were widely praised by government authorities, including the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA). GBRMPA had worked closely with fishers on this regional management project. In 2015, GBRMPA nominated one of the principal fishers involved in developing the management intervention for a Queensland environment award, which he won.

Spatial and/or seasonal closures are far more acceptable to fishers than the blunt instrument of phasing out a valuable and significant fishery that would impact the livelihoods of large numbers of commercial fishers and their families and the livelihoods of related seafood business operators.

The QSIA strongly believes the use of gill nets should continue to be allowed in the GBR region. It is fully mindful of the responsibility that this places on industry. Fishers understand that they are one of the custodians of this World Heritage "Property" and it is incumbent upon them to ensure that their activities are not detrimental.

As stated, given the opportunity, QSIA is committed to working with government to find solutions to perceived problems in the N4 and N2 gill net fisheries. The QSIA would welcome opportunity for this organisation and its members to be engaged in future discussions about addressing the recommendations of the WHC/IUCN report.

Note: This analysis was sent to Federal Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek and to Queensland Environment Minister Leanne Linard and Fisheries Minister Mark Furner prior to the June 5 announcement of net-fishing bans in the Great Barrier Reef region. No response has been received.

## GULF FISHING

### Shock net ban proposals for inshore fishery

GULF of Carpentaria fishers are in shock after proposals for extensive fishing bans were unveiled on September 4.

Proposals so drastic they could destroy the Gulf's inshore commercial fisheries – and hundreds of jobs – were developed with no input from professional fishers.

The broader industry only became aware of the Fisheries Queensland proposals after Claudine Ward, Secretary of the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association (GoCCFA), messaged disbelieving members and other industry representatives.

"Attached is the map that was shown to commercial fishermen from the commercial fishery representatives on the GoCIF working group yesterday,

(Monday) 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023, at an industry meeting between commercial reps and Fisheries Queensland managers," Claudine said.

"We were given no opportunity to discuss this proposal or meet with the Future Fishing Taskforce prior to this map being presented to them. We were advised that we should get a letter into the Taskforce before their scheduled meeting this Friday (8<sup>th</sup> September) asking for time to put together a submission on these proposed closures.


GoCCFA Chairman David Wren, from Wren Fishing, told ABC radio that the proposals would put his company out of business, with the loss of 50 employees' jobs and the loss of six million portions of fish in the Cairns, Townsville and Mackay markets.

To listen to the full interview on the ABC Regional Queensland "Drive" show (the interview begins at around the 1 hour 40 minute mark), go to: <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/north-ql-d-drive/drive/102819144>

A number of business owners in towns round the Gulf, particularly in Karumba, have expressed concerns about their viability if the multi-million-dollar inshore fishery was shut down.




The areas proposed to be closed on the map shown to industry (the map was photographed by GoCCFA Secretary Claudine Ward but apparently not made available outside the "reveal" to meeting attendees): 1. Albatross Bay (Weipa), 2. Wenlock / Ducie Rivers 3. Norman River (Karumba) 4. Bynoe River 5. Flinders River 6. All rivers and creeks 7. Mitchell River 8. Kirke River 9. Pormpuraaw 10. Northern Closure\* 11. Mornington Island.



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## BURDEKIN RALLY

### Hundreds of industry supporters rally in the Burdekin

Hundreds of commercial fishers and other small business operators – towing a flotilla of at least 150 boats – have taken part in a rally in the Burdekin region, as Leanne Green reports.

ON Monday, June 5, 2023, at approximately 4.15pm, every N2 and N4 fisher in the GBR area received an email containing a joint media release from Tanya Plibersek, Federal Minister for Environment & Water, Senator Anita Green, Special Envoy for the Great Barrier Reef and Senator for Queensland, Mark Furner, Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry, Development & Fisheries, and Leanne Linard, Queensland Minister for Environment and the Great Barrier Reef.

The media release stated that N2 and N4s in the GBR area will be phased out by 31 December 2023 – to protect the Great Barrier Reef. They acted on advice from UNESCO and other environmental non-government organisations (ENGOS), who claim “destructive” gillnets on the reef injures and kills threatened species, in particular dugongs, turtles, dolphins and protected shark.

Who nets on the reef? How did we get portrayed as doing this? This meant our businesses will be wiped out, based on propaganda from ‘Green’ groups.

How is it possible for any government to consider doing this to a well-managed, sustainable fishery, particularly after all the hoops we have jumped through over lots of years?

We have worked through and adapted around the introduction of dugong protected areas, green zones and yellow zones, netting changes, attendance rules, introduction of quota, and vessel monitoring systems (VMS) – all in the name of protecting species of conservation interest (SOI) and a better managed fishery.

We even developed a dugong friendly net which won a State Environment award, yet no-one has recognised this, just painted us as a destructive industry with no care for the environment – and that is far from the truth. We aren’t any different to farmers on the land: we need to look after the environment we work in.

The news about the N2 and N4 bans caused shock waves to not only our family but all fishing families along the GBR coast. Lots of tears from this insensitive and heartless way of closing

down our businesses with no warning, science or consultation. All this to appease green groups and UNESCO, and, from a government point of view, trying to gain votes in the cities.

In the first few days after this announcement, it was impossible to get anyone from government to talk to us. Even the media couldn’t contact any of the Ministers, which makes you think they had something to hide or couldn’t defend this decision.

To then find out the “newly elected” Prime Minister had signed off on UNESCO’s 10 recommendations 12 months before this ban was announced was another bitter pill to swallow.

After the initial period of shock and anger, talking with other fishers up and down the coast, consulting with onshore associated businesses, the impacts to our small towns were something they overlooked.

My husband, Neil, who is part of an Economic Advisory group to the Burdekin Shire Council, provided the group and the local Mayor with an overview of the press release and the impacts this would have on local businesses, the economy and the wider community.

The recommendation from the group was to write to both the Federal and State Ministers and taskforce, stating the impacts these netting restrictions will have on our district. (A letter has been sent from Council.)



Around 150 vehicles, many towing boats, travelled in convoy along the Bruce Highway to join a rally in Ayr.



More than 400 people filled – and spilled out of – the Ayr Showgrounds hall to protest net-fishing bans throughout the GBR coast.

From there, an idea developed to conduct a rally. It would involve towing boats from Home Hill to Ayr, concluding with a meeting in the Ayr Showgrounds hall. It was decided the rally would be held in a month’s time: Saturday, July 15.

Lots needed to happen quickly: like arranging a permit for the rally, posters and flyers to be printed and put in shop windows to advertise this event, contact media, talk on radio prior to the event, send invites to all sitting Members of Parliament along the GBR coast, arranging associated businesses in the town to speak at the meeting on the impacts to them, consulting with Indigenous Elders to speak in support with the net fishing in our area, etcetera, etcetera.

Needless to say, we got there. The support for this was overwhelming. The distance some commercial fishers travelled to attend showed how this industry unites when Government takes something from them.

Fishers travelled from Kurumba, Cairns, Cardwell, Ingham, Bowen, Mackay and even as far south as the Sunshine Coast, together with our local fisher folk and a huge support of recreational fishers from this area. Between us all, we estimated there were 150 boats in the rally and another 30 or so vehicles, with everyone wanting to express their dissatisfaction in the decision that had been made. It was on the lips of many, “What industry is next? Farming, grazing or

recreational fishing?”

At the meeting, there were a number of presentations. Our guest speaker, Keith Payne, VC, at almost ninety years young, travelled from Mackay to tell his story of how commercial net fishing helped him overcome his mental demons when he returned from war.

Fishers, young and old told their own individual stories of the loss they are facing, along with seafood retailers from Mackay to Townsville. A letter was read from a shocked retailer / wholesaler in Brisbane. There were owners of an outboard dealership, an aluminium welding and boat building businesses, ice making business all talking about the losses of income and jobs that these bans would cause. Two very supportive local Indigenous Elders and a representative from the cane industry also spoke.

More than 400 hundred people attended this meeting. The word around town afterwards was it was a well-presented meeting capturing the full story on what is happening – something the Government does not want out there.

Out of all the federal, State and local politicians invited, only three turned up: Andrew Willcox, Federal Member for Dawson; Dale Last, State Member for Burdekin; and our Mayor, Lyn McLaughlin. All have offered their support. It certainly was disappointing not to get an acknowledgement of the invitation from the two relevant

ministers, Tanya Plibersek and Mark Furner. This rally was organised to be politically neutral.

QSIA President Allan Bobbermen and CEO David Bobberman made a huge effort to attend the rally, which was organised as a QSIA event. Both spoke at the event and their attendance was appreciated by all the fishers in attendance.

I also want to mention Martin Bowerman, who made a huge commitment to travel up and be the MC at the meeting.

All in all, the rally ended up an amazing success, spelling out to both Governments and the task force, there are far more people than simply fishers being affected by these decisions.

Since this meeting, some members of the QSIA and organisers of the rally have had the opportunity to speak directly with the taskforce in Brisbane. It remains to be seen if anyone cares or has been listening.

From the Burdekin rally, it was decided another rally would be held on August 22 on the lawns at Parliament House in Brisbane.

Many thanks to all who attended. The fight isn’t over yet!

\*Leanne Green is a commercial fisher based at Alva Beach in the Burdekin region and one of the organisers of the rally.





Boats gathered at Home Hill.



A sign that says it all.



The hundreds who packed out the meeting ...



... included business-owners and seafood consumers.



Seafood vans and trucks also took part ...



... including these two impressive vehicles.



Speakers included rally organiser Neil Green ...



War hero and retired net fisher Keith Payne, VC ...



Specially-built net reel boats ...



... were also prominent in the convoy.



... scientist, fisher and marketer Dr Andrew Tobin ...



... and seafood retailers Peter and Heather Bradford.

## BRISBANE RALLY

### State Parliamentarians hear industry anger

Seafood industry representatives have rallied outside Parliament House in Brisbane to voice their opposition to the State Government's soon-to-be-introduced ban on N2 and N4 gillnet fishing from Bundaberg to Torres Strait.

MORE than 100 fishers, marketers, other business operators and consumers gathered opposite Parliament House in George Street on August 22 to demonstrate their opposition to the State and Federal Governments' net ban.

They were joined at various times during the two-hour demonstration by State Members of Parliament – plus visiting federal politicians – but no member of the State Government was to be seen.

The closest Government MPs came to fronting the fishers they have so far managed by media release was to venture a furtive glance or two from the shadows of the colonnades and arches high on the upper level of the 150-year-old sandstone building.

It continues a pattern of the State Ministers responsible for fisheries and the environment refusing to meet with net fishers and other affected business operators, and in fact refusing interviews and dodging questions even

from the media – traits they share with their federal counterparts.

#### Seafood caught by mates

Lucas Dansie, operator of North Shore Seafood Co. in Townsville and principal organiser of the Brisbane rally, told the crowd that seafood consumers are facing “the complete obliteration” of opportunities to eat wild-caught fresh seafood.

“I have grown up in the seafood industry from fishing as a kid in a little seaside town to actually going out and catching the very seafood you and the rest of the country love to eat,” Lucas said.

“Now in the later part of my 30s, my partner and I have our own little seafood shop and we specialise in locally-caught seafood, and we believe it's right up there with the very best seafood in the world.

“We strive to bring our customers locally-caught sustainable seafood

direct to their plates and, best yet, caught buy our mates. These are people I have grown up with, fished with and others we consider close friends and even some we consider family.”

Lucas said he believed wild-caught fish is a superior product.

“We are talking about the local fish the stuff you buy because you know it's fresh, you know it's quality and you know it's wild! The reason wild is so special is because it's unmodified, not farmed, not fed things you can't pronounce. It is simply natural and grown in its natural environment and then harvested by locals for you to eat,” he said.

“What we are facing here is the complete obliteration of your seafood industry with regards to fish,” Lucas said. “Don't let the government try and lie to you and convince you that this is a change for the good and try and sell it to you under the guise of saving the Great Barrier Reef. That's simply not true.

“Some time ago, UNESCO threatened to raise the threat level of the Great Barrier Reef to endangered unless certain measures were met, like water quality and coral growth.. But, in June this year, a bombshell was dropped on fishermen and women and anyone in the industry in the form of a heartless and gutless and, quite frankly, unprofessional email stating that as



Industry supporters travelled from throughout the State to protest outside Parliament House.

of December 30th of this year, the inshore gillnet industry was over.

“This is an industry that has been through 30-plus years of hard reform, every year being scrutinised and mandated with changes for the better of the fishery and all in the scope of making inshore net fishing a safe and sustainable practices that is well managed and controlled.

“It's not common public knowledge what the fishing industry has to do in order just to survive. We are made to wear personal GPS devices, we prior report catches by phone and have strict catch quotas, catch records coupled with surveyed vessels and rigorous safety devices. We work closely with the fisheries department measuring and statistical data works to ensure we are using our resource responsibly and sustainably.

“So, to go through all of these hoops and be told you are doing the right thing and have government spend billions on an exceptionally managed fishery and one of the best in the entire world to be told that, hang on, we are going to cancel your entire fishery with the stroke of a pen.

“Outrage is the nicest word that comes to mind. Now, the real kick in the teeth. To hear that it was in a brief from UNESCO, an overseas organisation that dictates to Australia what it should and shouldn't do with its own resources, that we should remove

all gillnets from the GBR region, and it will be done by 2027. Absolute garbage!”

Other industry speakers included QSIA director Dale Vener, NQ fisher Sienna Green and QSIA CEO David Bobbermen.

#### “Absolutely gutting”

Hinchinbrook MP and Katter's Australia Party Parliamentary deputy leader Nick Dametto said that it was “absolutely gutting” to hear the State and Federal Governments' announcement in June that they had decided to shut down the gillnet fishing industry along Queensland's east-coast.

“The reality is that UNESCO is pushing a message through our Governments to try and shut down our wild local caught seafood in the name of preserving the Great Barrier Reef,” Mr Dametto said.

“They are also trying to do things when it comes to the agricultural industry but I believe there is a larger agenda underway here.

“This rally isn't just going to send a clear message to the State Labor Government who are trying to shut the industry down, it is also going to inform the consumers out there who are yet to realise the full impact of this Government's decision.

“If these gillnet bans continue to be

enforced, consumers won't be able to purchase local, wild-caught, sustainable Australian seafood in the future. All that would be on offer would be farmed or imported seafood from unknown locations, caught using unknown fishing practices.”

He said a parliamentary petition is currently running on the Queensland Parliament website.

“Through the petition, industry is calling for the following:

- to allow a buyback of licenses for the people that want to leave the industry;
- have a remaining net licence for the people that want to continue to feed Australia; and
- for Government to sit down and do proper consultation going forward to have an agreed outcome, and not simply cancel the fishery altogether.”

The link to the petition can be found here: <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/Work-of-the-Assembly/Petitions/Petition-Details?id=3938>

There is also a Go Fund Me page setup by the Queensland Seafood Industry Association to help fund the media campaign and help urge the Government to reconsider the decision. Here is the link to the Go Fund Me page: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/save-queensland-commercial-fishing>



Brisbane rally organisers Lucas Dansie and Steph Moore from Townsville.



LNP MPs Dale Last (left) and Tony Perrett with QSIA CEO David Bobbermen.



Whitsunday MP Amanda Camm (far right) talked with industry members.



State KAP parliamentary leader Robbie Katter (left) and LNP Senator Gerard Rennick met with fishers.



Lucas Danzie (left) with KAP MP Nick Dametto, who helped arrange the event.



Marketer Don Chou with fishers Bill Gilliland and Neil Green.



George and Sue Davenport from Wonga Beach got their message across.



KAP MP Shane Knuth (left) has spoken in defence of net fishers.



Burdekin-based fishers Sienna Green and Dale Vener spoke at the rally.



Government MPs never emerged from the shadowy alcoves of Parliament House.



The rally attracted great radio and TV coverage broadcast throughout Queensland.



Federal MP Michelle Landry (left, green shirt), whose electorate of Capricornia stretches along the coast from Rockhampton to southern Mackay, supported the rally.



Neil Green being interviewed at the rally.

## Andrew Willcox: Minister should talk to fishers

MACKAY-BASED federal Member of Parliament Andrew Willcox has called on Environment Minister Tanya Willcox to visit North Queensland and talk to professional fishers.

The federal and State Labor Governments had taken a decision to persecute professional fishers, the Member for Dawson said in a speech to Parliament recently.

“In June, a joint media release from federal and Queensland Labor said they’re going to ban gillnet fishing – no consultation with the community, no consultation with our fishermen, and short time frames.

“This is going to happen by the end of this year. Then we’ll see at least 90 licensed fishermen having significantly reduced incomes or being wiped out totally. It’s simply not right. We’re talking about people’s lives here: fishermen and fisherwomen’s lives, fish-and-chip shops, and fishmongers.

“I was talking to one of these fishermen. He happens to have a daughter who’s in Grade 12 and a

straight-A student who wants to go to university to become a doctor, a GP. Now, with the stroke of a pen in Canberra, this dream is being taken away. It’s absolutely disgraceful.”

Mr Willcox also highlighted the flow-on negative impact on related business, such as chandleries, ice suppliers, boat-builders and boat repairers, and also said taking an estimated 2,000 tonnes of wild-caught fish out of the marketplace would force up prices and draw in lesser-quality imported fish.

“I’m not taking this lying down,” he said. “I’ve written to Minister Tanya Plibersek. Surprise, surprise: I haven’t received a reply. I’m calling on Minister Plibersek to come to my electorate, do some community consultation, talk to the fishermen, have a discussion and see how the fishermen fish.

“This absolute rubbish about looking after the Great Barrier Reef – these nets don’t go within 60 kilometres of the Great Barrier Reef – is just another Labor lie.

“I have a big message for all the recreational fishermen out there. I’m a recreational fisherman myself. I love to recreationally fish with my family and friends. We have an absolute ball. When this cruel Labor Government punishes and persecutes professional

fishers have been blindsided by this change – fishers in the electorate of Herbert, like Lound’s Seafood owner, Colin Lound, who has owned and operated a net licence for 40 years. He is set to lose 30 per cent of his annual turnover with this change. “This decision is cutting off the hand that feeds the nation, resulting in a loss of jobs and closure of businesses who rely on this source of seafood product.”

Mr Thompson said consumers will be forced to eat farmed and imported fish from unregulated overseas fisheries.

“I have written to the Minister for Environment & Water, and I’m yet to receive a response. I wrote to the Minister some six weeks ago.

“I also take this opportunity to ask the Minister: what happens to the fishers, their employees and their families? Where do they go? What do they do?” But it’s not just about the fishers or the local fish shops that will be affected by this change. Townsville-based fishers, like Paul Ryan, have informed me of the ripple effect that this decision will have: the nets, the boats, the parts suppliers; ancillary trades and personnel; and the entire tourism industry will see a negative repercussion because of this change.”



fishermen, we’ll be next. They’ll be coming for us.”

Mr Willcox said the wild-caught fishing industry in Queensland deserves to be protected and deserves to be supported. It is sustainable, in good condition and heavily regulated.

“Australia, we must stand up and support our professional fisher men and women. Do not let this cruel Albanese Labor government destroy our primary industries.”

To read the full speech, go to: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Hansard/Hansard\\_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/27157/&sid=0161](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/27157/&sid=0161)



Mr Thompson also asked what happens to their equipment that is now obsolete? “One of the responses that the Minister has given is that we don’t want gillnet-fishing on the reef. But we don’t have net-fishing on the reef: you can’t put nets across the Great Barrier Reef. It simply doesn’t happen.

“The Minister needs to answer these questions.”

To read the full speech, go to: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Hansard/Hansard\\_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/27158/&sid=0305](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansardr/27158/&sid=0305)

## Comments from Federal Minister “embarrassing”

ONE thing that’s become obvious since the announcement of the N2 and N4 bans in June is that the Federal and State Ministers are all over the shop in trying to explain why they are needed.

By and large, both Federal and State Ministers have actively avoided taking any questions from the media about this issue and at least one journalist has complained on air that he could not get any response from the relevant Ministers, despite several attempts.

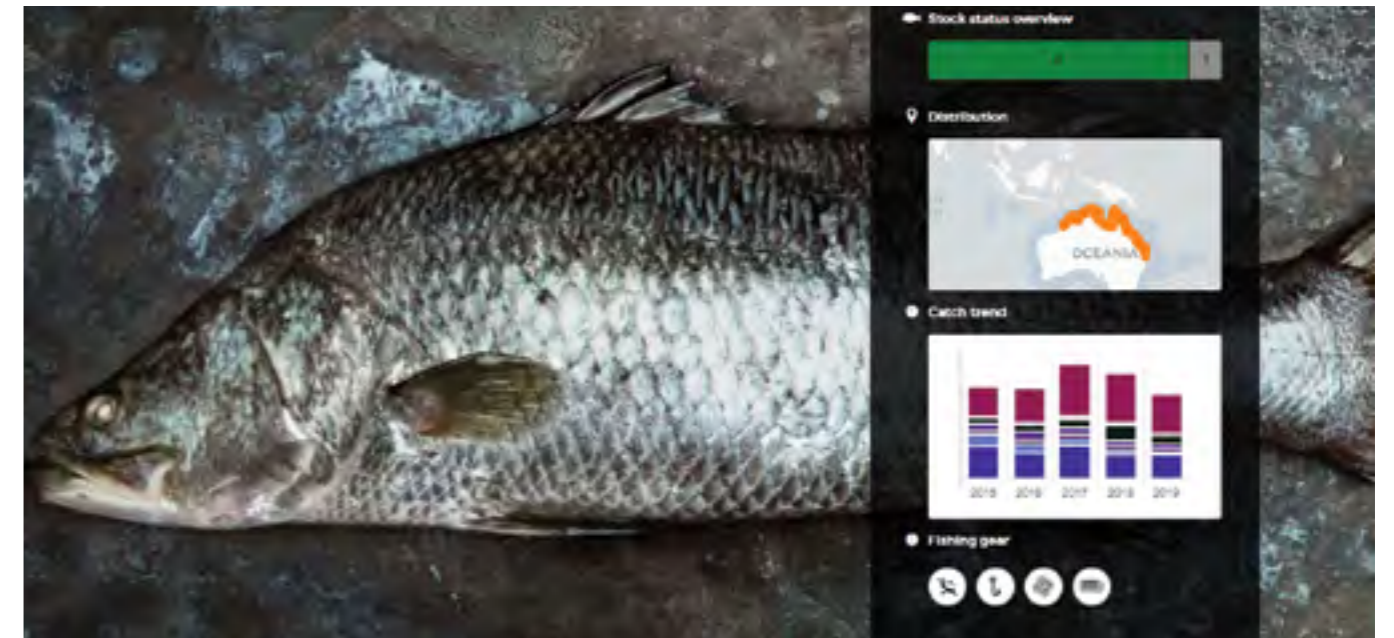
When you listen to what was said by the one Minister who was questioned about this by a journalist, you can understand why they have been ducking and weaving.

Comments on ABC Radio in July by Federal Fisheries Minister Murray Watt to justify the looming net-fishing bans in North Queensland were embarrassing, just nonsense.

These net-fishing bans cannot be justified and both the Federal and State Governments are making up excuses on the run.

When Senator Watt was asked about the bans during an interview on mostly other issues, he simply made up answers as he went along.

It was an embarrassing performance for someone who holds the federal fisheries portfolio. He just answered the reporter’s questions like a politician. It was all politics.



Federal Fisheries Minister Murray Watt’s on-air comments about over-fishing of net species like barramundi are contradicted by his own Department’s publicly-available information.

There is a simple reason net-fishing is being banned.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization, UNESCO, heaved the Federal Government to ban us, the Federal Government heaved the State Government to ban us, and now the State Government is banning us.

UNESCO is influenced by environmental activists who don’t like fishing, or conventional farming either for that matter. UNESCO threatened to declare the Great Barrier Reef as a “World Heritage Site In Danger” if the Federal Government didn’t impose bans on net fishing now and restrictions on farming by 2025.

That declaration would be an enormous international embarrassment for the Federal Labor Government and they buckled.

These are the simple facts. It is all documented. That’s why the Federal and State Governments can’t defend the decision. There’s no science. They’ve just given in to UN bullying.

Senator Watt made claims about “over-fishing” that are contradicted by his own Government’s fisheries research data.

The Senator said if more controls aren’t placed on commercial net fishing, there won’t be fish in the future for recreational anglers. That’s nonsense. He’s grabbing at any excuse.

None of the fish species we target in the net fishery is over-fished. As an example, the main species we catch is barramundi. In the

Federal Government’s own official stock assessment for barramundi, researchers say the eight barramundi stocks round northern Australia are not being harmed by current levels of commercial fishing, are all in good shape and are all categorised as “sustainable”.

The rally I organised in Ayr – Home Hill on July 15 brought together over 400 fishers and related business operators and their families from all along the Queensland coast, plus plenty of seafood consumers worried about losing fresh local fish.

We heard how these bans will cripple businesses in the north and in fact put a lot of hard-working people out of business entirely.

The Federal and State Governments can’t find a coherent reason for imposing the bans and they should pull back now and examine the real impacts and reconsider what they plan to do.

Develop a spine, call UNESCO’s bluff and don’t punish Queensland professional fishers and other small business operators.

**Neil Green**

Note: To read the Australian Government’s detailed assessment of barramundi stocks, click on: <https://fish.gov.au/report/331-Barramundi-2020>

To hear the interview with Senator Watt, listen here (from 39’ 00”): <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/qld-country-hour/queensland-country-hour/102607292>

## Minister questioned on fisheries issues

**Fisheries Minister Mark Furner has been questioned by fellow Parliamentarians during the Budget Estimates hearing process.**

ALONG with senior bureaucrats from the Department of Agriculture & Fisheries (DAF), Minister Furner was questioned by members of the State Development & Regional Industries Committee and other MPs at a hearing on August 2.

Issues raised during the questioning included:

- appointment of a former senior staffer of WWF as Chair of the Future Fisheries Taskforce and membership of the Taskforce;
- management of the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery;
- stock assessment of king threadfin in the Gulf of Carpentaria;
- the timing of bans on net-fishing in the GBR region;
- future gillnetting in the GBR region by Indigenous fishers; and
- payments to fishers and other seafood-related business operators impacted by fishing bans in the Great Sandy region.

In response to a question about the gillnet bans, Mr Furner said in part: “In regard to the reference the Member (of Parliament) made to the World Heritage Committee and the decision to phase out gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef, that was a decision made on 28 November last year by UNESCO and the IUCN released its Reactive Monitoring Mission report which identified 10 priority areas and 12 additional recommendations for urgent implementation to address its concerns.

“In particular, recommendation 10 recommended the phasing out of gillnet fishing in the GBR.

“I note that, on 31 July 2023, UNESCO released its draft decision recommending the World Heritage Committee not inscribe the Great Barrier Reef on the List of World Heritage in Danger, which is positive news not only for Queensland but for the tourism sector.

“This acknowledges the actions undertaken and the commitments made to implement the Reactive Monitoring Mission recommendation in relation to phasing out gillnet fishing and to also accelerate the implementation of our

Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027.

“The Reef’s economic, social and iconic value was estimated to be \$56 billion in 2015-16. Prior to COVID, it supported more than 64,000 jobs and contributed \$6.4 billion annually to the Australian economy. The vast majority of that comes from tourism, with a value of \$5.7 billion annually.”

Mr Furner went on to say: “We have also met with the Queensland Seafood Industry Association on a number of occasions this year. They will be invited to attend, as well as other people, as advisers to the committee process. I am assured that the chair and the expert senior representatives on the committee and industry people like the QSIA will be beneficial in providing the best advice to government in regard to the actions that will be taken as a result of the UNESCO decision.”

### King threadfin

After extensive questioning about Spanish mackerel, KAP leader Robbie Katter and LNP fisheries spokesman Tony Perrett both asked about estimates of stock levels of king threadfin in the Gulf of Carpentaria, where official stock estimates were low but anecdotal reports said catch quantities remain high.

DAF Deputy Director-General of Fisheries & Forestry Graeme Bolton said in part: “In 2020-21, we completed our first stock assessment of king threadfin to determine its sustainability and inform future decisions around how we would manage that fishery, particularly within the Gulf of Carpentaria.

“While the stock assessment estimated that king threadfin on the Queensland east coast is at a sustainable level, the stock assessment did identify that the Gulf Carpentaria had stock levels of approximately five per cent. Under federal and Queensland harvest strategy guidelines a biomass of less than 20 per cent is the national trigger for urgent management action to be taken to rebuild those stocks.

“We are engaging with the working groups to determine what an appropriate level of management action should be. We have taken on board

some of the concerns or observations raised through the reviews of the Spanish mackerel stock assessment, and we are currently looking at that and how that may or may not apply to the Gulf of Carpentaria king threadfin stock assessment. We will be releasing that in the near future.”

### Spanish mackerel

Answering further questions about Spanish mackerel stock assessment and management, Mr Bolton said: “With everything that we do, the Department is very much about continual improvement. We will look to incorporate the observations that were made on the construction of the Spanish mackerel stock assessment in other stock assessments that we do.

“It is important to note that the Klaer review did not find any fault with the data. That was the original review we commissioned through the ex-CSIRO scientists. The data was used appropriately.

“There were concerns raised through the industry-funded review around the misspecification ... We will look at that as we bring forward the next stock assessment. In addition to that, we have a number of research projects underway through the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation. We expect the first parts of that research to be available towards the end of this year, so we will look to incorporate that data as well.

“In addition to that, we will have an additional four years’ worth of catch data, biological data, which we can feed into the new stock assessment, and that will give us a much more robust assessment as we move forward.”

### Time line for bans

In response from Mr Perrett about the time line for the net-fishing bans, DAF Director-General Chris Sarra said: “The answer is: buy out and remove all N2 and N4 licences by 31 December 2023; buy out, remove and condition a limited number of N1 licences by 31 December 2023; and phase out the remaining limited N1 licences to make the Reef gillnet-free by 30 June 2027.

Mr Perrett asked: “As a follow-up, will netting used by traditional owners also be affected by the changes to gillnetting?” Dr Sarra: “I will just check with the Minister but I am quite certain that is the case.”

Mr Perrett: “Is that a yes?”

Dr Sarra: “It is yes for commercial operators and no for cultural activity.”

### Great Sandy Marine Park

In response to a question on why – despite the State Government having 10 months to prepare for fishing bans in the rezoning of Great Sandy Marine Park – there is no budgeted allocation for the compensation package, Minister Furner said that issue sat with the Minister for Environment, not the fisheries portfolio.

Note: This article represents just a very small proportion of all the questions and answers. To read the full transcript, go to [https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/SDRIC-F506/C20232024-784C/2023\\_08\\_02\\_EstimatesSDC.pdf](https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/com/SDRIC-F506/C20232024-784C/2023_08_02_EstimatesSDC.pdf)

(The relevant session begins on page 45; see in particular pages 62-69 for fisheries issues.)

## Furner: \$7B at risk from UNESCO without net bans

FISHERIES Minister Mark Furner has claimed in State Parliament more than \$7 billion in tourist income was at risk from UNESCO action unless N2 and N4 gillnets were banned from the Great Barrier Reef region.

After contradictory statements from various State and Federal Government MPs about the reasons for the bans – ranging from reducing bycatch to giving more fish to recreational anglers – Minister Furner has admitted the reason was fear of what UNESCO would do.

“We had the UNESCO report delivered,” he said. “It is important that we recognise the value of the Great Barrier Reef. Had we not taken this action, the Great Barrier Reef could well have been declared in danger, putting in jeopardy the jobs of Queenslanders ... thousands and thousands of jobs.”

Mr Furner was responding in State Parliament to a question without notice by KAP MP Nick Dametto on August 23, the day after the industry rally in Brisbane.

Mr Dametto said: “The State Government’s response to pressure from UNESCO is to put Queensland’s wild-caught seafood trade in jeopardy with the imminent banning of N2 and N4 licences.

“Given the ban is to reduce bycatch on the GBR World Heritage area, can the Minister provide the number of dugongs and sea turtle deaths in the past five years which have been

## What are the Estimates?

THE Queensland Parliament website says that, since 1994, committees of the Parliament have undertaken the estimates process, which is one of the key mechanisms to examine government expenditure, performance and effectiveness.

“It holds Ministers to account and provides a level of transparency to the public. Budget Estimates aids the Parliament in its scrutiny of the Government’s proposed expenditure by examining and reporting on the proposed expenditures contained in the Appropriation Bill and the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill.

directly attributed to gillnets used by Queensland fishers?:

Mr Furner responded: “No doubt the Australian Government and the Queensland Government took decisive action when we had the UNESCO report delivered.

“It is important that we recognise the value of the Great Barrier Reef. Had we not taken this action, the Great Barrier Reef could well have been declared in danger, putting in jeopardy the jobs of Queenslanders – the thousands and thousands of jobs that the Great Barrier Reef supports through tourism.

“The Great Barrier Reef generates billions of dollars. Over \$7 billion per annum was indicated to be at risk had we not taken this action.

“I can inform the House that on 5 June we received that information and acted, as I indicated, decisively on that, designating \$160 million – \$100 million from the Queensland Government and \$60 million from the Commonwealth – to deal with a structural adjustment on those particular N2s and N4s.

“We will be working with industry to develop a new N1 licence as well to make sure there is sustainability of those fishery sectors up in the Great Barrier Reef and around that area.

“I will make this point: we will not be going down the path that the previous LNP Government did in regards to denying the facts from science by refusing to accept the MRAG report and develop the sustainable fishing strategy that we are so proud of doing. In fact, we are nationally renowned for the action we are taking on sustainable fisheries. I want to see, as the Minister for Fisheries, that we have sustainable

“In 2023, the examination of the Appropriation Bill will be carried out by the 7 portfolio committees, with each committee examining the budget estimates of its responsible portfolios. The examination of the Appropriation (Parliament) Bill will be carried out by the Economics and Governance Committee.

“During the estimates process (from 1 to 10 August 2023), each portfolio committee will hold a public hearing at which the Speaker and Ministers (and certain senior public servants and officers) will be questioned regarding the proposed expenditures for the relevant portfolio areas. Other Members of the Legislative Assembly who are not members of the committee may also ask questions, with the leave of the committee.”

fisheries into the future for our children and grandchildren. By taking this action, we will see that happen.

“We will continue engaging through the industry process. A designated taskforce has been confirmed and I believe they have met on two occasions. I will be meeting with the chair shortly. I met with him only recently to make sure he was privy to the position that the government would like to take in regards to the sustainability of those N1 licences.

“Once again, member, I am more than happy to keep you engaged as well.”

At this point, Mr Dametto made a point of order: “Mr Acting Speaker, I rise to a point of order on relevance under the standing order 118(b). My question was about the number of bycatch deaths.”

The Acting Speaker responded: “Minister, I bring you back to that point of the question.” Mr Furner said: “The catch data is available on the Fisheries website, the same as it is for other species that are caught by our apparatus or commercial fishers’ apparatus. Those designated figures are readily available on the internet, and I encourage the member to look those up.” Mr Dametto interjected: “One per year?”

Mr Furner said: “The Member talks about one per year, but it is well-recognised that gillnets are a dangerous apparatus, and that is why you will see in other sectors around the world that people are taking actions to eliminate or reduce them, and that is the case in regards to the decision which has been taken by UNESCO on this particular case.”

## Graziers, growers warned: UNESCO is coming for you

FEDERAL Shadow Minister for Northern Australia Susan McDonald and Shadow Environment Minister Jonno Duniam have warned the same UNESCO demands behind a gillnet ban will impact graziers and growers as well.

“The Albanese Government’s determination to appease UNESCO will result in food shortages, higher costs and more pain for primary producers,” the two Senators said in a joint statement ahead of the August 22 seafood industry rally in Brisbane.

They echoed fishers’ concerns that the Federal Government’s ill-advised decision in June to ban gillnet fishing would be exacerbated by an accompanying harsh crackdown on primary production, especially in North Queensland.

The two Coalition frontbenchers welcomed UNESCO’s recent decision to continue to leave the Great Barrier Reef off its “in danger” list.

However, they also made clear they are deeply troubled that the gillnet fishing ban was just one of 10 priority recommendations devised by UNESCO – and subsequently endorsed by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek.

“In addition to the gillnet ban, the

agreed recommendations include the ‘significant’ scaling up of adoption, monitoring and enforcement of various cane and banana farming best practice, land buybacks, grazing land restoration and dam restrictions,” they said.

“We are calling on Ms Plibersek to reveal exactly how and when the Federal Government plans to implement all of the 10 recommendations.

“She should also finally sit down with commercial fishers and strike a far more balanced outcome.”

Senator McDonald added: “UNESCO says the Environment Minister has signed off on a timetable and budget for implementing these recommendations, so when is the Government going to reveal what these are?”

“Mr Albanese and Ms Plibersek also need to explain exactly how hard – if at all – they pushed back against UNESCO’s directives.

“UNESCO’s recommendations will radically change how we farm and fish in this country, so Labor must come clean with the Australian people. Time and again, Labor doesn’t want to know the impacts of their laws; they just dictate and push them through.”

The Senators said the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) still has not been consulted by the Federal Government about the imposition of the gillnet ban – an extraordinary decision that means about 2,000 tonnes of wild-caught fish

will disappear from the market once the ban takes effect.

“This will force up prices for table favourites such as barramundi, salmon and grunter, and will drastically impact fish-and-chip shops, restaurants, wholesalers and retailers.

“There will also be flow-on effects for equipment suppliers, ice makers, chandlers, boat sellers, mechanics, delivery drivers, wholesalers and retailers plus the economies of small fishing towns throughout the north.” Senator Duniam said: “As usual, Labor have shown they don’t care about people, only their radical green agenda. We’ve seen it with Reef regulations on farmers, renewable energy projects in places people don’t want them, and now restrictions on people’s access to fresh Australian seafood.

“About 100 fishing families in North Queensland will be forced to find other jobs – which is heartbreaking, given that many of them run family-owned businesses that have operated for generations.

“What’s more, and despite the fact that they have gone to great lengths over many years to minimise by-catch and harm to dugongs, turtles and other species, they have been given no warning and no chance to have any input into Labor’s actions.

“If you want local, fresh, wild-caught fish, sustainably raised beef and fresh produce (rather than being forced to eat imported food), you should be furious about what Labor is doing to the Australians who provide it.”



UNESCO wants greater controls on cattle graziers and farmers in the GBR watershed.

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## GREAT SANDY MARINE PARK

### Great Sandy bans to “protect marine wildlife and great lifestyle”

After a century-and-a-half of sustainable net fishing that has provided fresh local seafood while retaining an abundance of fish and other wildlife in the Great Sandy region, the Queensland Labor Government has decided netting bans are needed to “protect marine wildlife and great lifestyle”.

**AFTER a review of earlier draft zoning plans for the Great Sandy Marine Park, State Environment Minister Leanne Linard** recently confirmed in a media release that: “The Palaszczuk Government will implement a range of zoning and management changes within the Great Sandy Marine Park (GSMP) to enhance the protection of the unique marine environment while maintaining the region’s fishing-based lifestyle.”

Ms Linard said the proportion of marine national park (green) zones within the GSMP would increase from 3.9 per cent to 12.8 per cent, meaning a total of 28.6 per cent of the marine park would be within “highly protected” zones: that is, green and yellow (recreational-fishing-only) zones.

“The Government is supporting projects to help create new jobs and opportunities in the nature-based tourism and recreational fishing sectors,” she said.

“Financial assistance will be available for eligible commercial fishers and operators directly impacted by the re-zoning.” However, questioning of the Fisheries Minister and senior bureaucrats during Estimates Committee hearings in State Parliament in early August suggest no plans whatsoever had been developed for financial assistance to anyone impacted by the re-zoning. (See separate article.)

“The Palaszczuk Government is delivering on its commitment to protect marine threatened species and their habitats while supporting regional economies by increasing environmental protections within the Great Sandy Marine Park (GSMP),” Ms Linard said.

“The Government has endorsed the outcomes of the GSMP Zoning Plan Review, which will now be included in the final zoning plan for the marine park.

“The final plan will also include the removal of commercial large-mesh

gillnets and ring nets from the yellow zones within Baffle Creek, Elliott River, Burrum River system, the Great Sandy Strait and Tin Can Inlet.

“Tunnel netting and set pocket netting will continue in various parts of the Great Sandy Strait and Tin Can Inlet to ensure a supply of fresh local seafood and bait.” She said the Palaszczuk Government will also implement extra measures to further protect threatened species and the area’s cultural and amenity values, and increase funding for management of the marine park including community education, compliance and enforcement, given the increase in highly protected areas within the GSMP.

“As part of this, the Government will increase management capability, through a grant to the Butchulla Native Title Aboriginal Corporation, whose Country covers much of the marine park, for an Indigenous Land and Sea Ranger program.

“To further support tourism and recreational fishing in the Wide Bay, the Palaszczuk Government will invest in new and enhanced boat ramps and artificial reefs in the region.

“The increased protections will support the long-term conservation of threatened and iconic species and their habitats while supporting nature-based tourism, recreational, charter and sport fishing across the region.”

Ms Linard said the GSMP Zoning Plan Review involved “consultation with the fishing sectors, First Nations peoples, scientists, local communities and conservation groups as well as local governments and representatives from the tourism sector”.

“Feedback gathered during the consultation period indicated strong support for the majority of the proposed changes to the marine park zones.

“In response to community feedback, the boundaries of some specific green zones have been modified to

reduce impacts on commercial and recreational fishers.

“To address impacts to commercial fishing and seafood processing/wholesaling businesses, a comprehensive mitigation package will be developed.

“The Palaszczuk Government will now work to update legislation to remake the zoning plan by 2024.

Quotes attributable to Environment Minister Leanne Linard:

“The Great Sandy Marine Park is a truly special place. It is home to vulnerable seagrass meadows and mangrove communities, some of the world’s most southerly coastal fringing coral reefs and species of international and national conservation significance such as shorebirds, grey nurse sharks, turtles and dugongs.

“However, the GSMP is currently the least protected marine park in Queensland.

“The zoning and management changes the government will implement will enhance protections for the region’s exceptional marine biodiversity, while also enhancing tourism and recreational fishing in the Wide Bay Burnett Region.

“The government undertook extensive consultation as part of the GSMP Zoning Plan Review which clearly showed that the majority of those consulted wanted enhanced protections for the Great Sandy Strait.

“The government acknowledges that there will be some impact on the commercial fishing operators who work these waters, as well as local seafood processors.

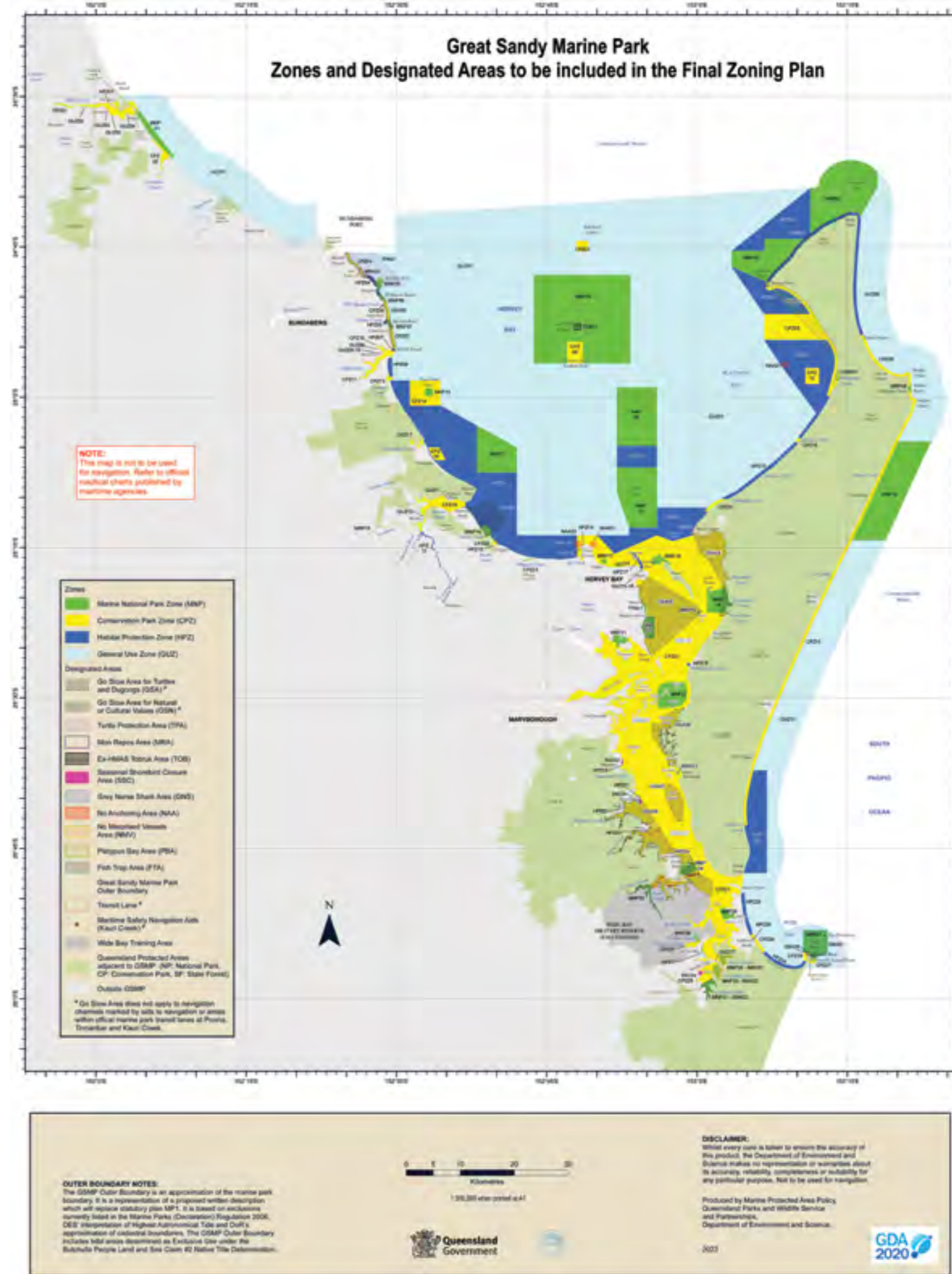
“That is why the government is funding a targeted compensation package as well as a regional economic enhancement package which will support new jobs in tourism, in servicing the recreational fishing sector and in aquaculture.

“This includes funding for new and enhanced boating infrastructure and artificial reefs.”

Quotes attributable to Member for Hervey Bay, Adrian Tantara:

“Fraser Coast locals and tourists to the area know how unique the Great Sandy Marine Park is.

“In October 2019, the Hervey Bay region was named the world’s first



Whale Heritage Site by the World Cetacean Alliance.

“The public consultation undertaken on the draft zoning plan identified overwhelming support to further protect the area.

“Enhancing protections for the GSMP provides an opportunity for the region to become an international hub for marine scientific research and education, in addition to being a popular destination for tourists and recreational fishers.

Quotes attributable to Member for Maryborough, Bruce Saunders:

“The zoning changes being made are great news for recreational fishers.

“Under the final zoning plan, some 87.2 per cent of the Great Sandy Marine Park will remain available for recreational fishing and crabbing.

“The evidence shows that the rezoning will also improve fish stocks. After the rezoning of the Moreton Bay Marine Park in 2009, there was a considerable increase in catch rates.

“The Palaszczuk Government’s investment in new and enhanced boat ramps is also welcomed as it will make it easier for locals and visitors to get out on the water.”

Further information:

❑ The Great Sandy Marine Park is located in the Wide Bay-Burnett Region and extends from Double Island Point in the south to Baffle Creek in the north.

❑ The marine park covers an area of more than 6,000 square kilometres and includes Hervey Bay, the Great Sandy Strait, Tin Can Inlet and Queensland coastal waters.

❑ The Great Sandy Marine Park surrounds the K’gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Area and is an area of exceptionally high natural and cultural value.

This includes:

❑ The Great Sandy Strait—a Ramsar Wetland of International Significance.

❑ Species of international and national significance—marine turtles, dugongs, grey nurse sharks, humpback whales, Australian humpback dolphins and migratory shorebirds.

❑ 11 declared Fish Habitat Areas protecting key fish habitats to support the state’s recreational and commercial fisheries.

❑ Culturally and spiritually significant

## Need for change

THE document providing information on the Great Sandy Marine re-zoning says, under the heading “The need for change”, that: “Globally, marine biodiversity is under threat from a range of factors including climate change, population growth, pollution and increasing use. The Great Sandy Marine Park is being impacted by these global trends.

“The Great Sandy Marine Park:

❑ boasts 23 broad habitat types, however several of these are under-represented in the highly protected zones of the existing zoning plan, placing the marine park’s biodiversity and critical species at risk;

❑ has seen a significant decrease in its extent of seagrass habitat;

❑ is seeing a significant increase in mature marine turtle and dugong strandings resulting from a range of causes including boat strike, poor health and flooding;

❑ includes the only known gestation site on the east coast of Australia for the critically endangered grey nurse shark, however the existing zoning plan does not effectively protect sharks at this key aggregation site from being hooked or accidentally caught by recreational and commercial line fishers;

sea Country for the Butchulla, Bailai (Byeellee), Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng, Taribelang Bunda and Kabi Kabi First Nations peoples.

The management and use of the GSMP is guided by the Marine Parks (Great Sandy) Zoning Plan 2017 which is subordinate legislation under the Marine Parks Act 2004.

The Palaszczuk Government undertook a comprehensive review of the zoning plan to assess its continued need, effectiveness and efficiency at conserving the environment.

In September 2022, a Consultation Regulatory Impact Statement, which incorporated the draft revised GSMP Zoning Plan was released for public consultation.

During the consultation period the Department of Environment and Science held more than 40 stakeholder meetings and received 1245 online survey responses and 215 written submissions. Two additional written submission ‘campaigns’ were received, by the Australian Marine Conservation Society (4056 letters)

❑ is seeing a decrease in the numbers of many migratory shorebird species, some by more than 10 per cent per year;

❑ is subject to increasing coastal impacts from severe weather events caused by climate change; and

❑ is subject to a range of demands from competing uses.

“Changes need to be made to the Great Sandy Marine Park zoning plan in order to address threats to the long-term conservation of wildlife and their habitats and preserve and enhance the region’s lifestyle and economic strengths.”

### Comment

So, the major identified problems are: under-representation of some habitat types; loss of seagrass; dugong strandings caused by boat strike, poor health and flooding; accidental hooking of grey nurse sharks by line-fishing; decreasing numbers of shore birds; and severe weather events caused by climate change – nothing that is caused by net-fishing.

The Queensland Government’s solution to those problems? Ban fishing with gill and ring nets. It’s a farce.

and the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (1066 letters). One submission was received from the Great Sandy Alliance which represented the views of 26 organisations primarily from the conservation sector plus a number of tourism businesses.

The Decision Regulatory Impact Statement and summary document is available from [www.qld.gov.au/greatsandymarinepark](http://www.qld.gov.au/greatsandymarinepark).

Note: To read the full statement, go to: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/98200>

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## DUGONG

### What kills dugongs in Queensland?

**The risk of killing even one dugong in a commercial gillnet has been seen as reason enough for environmental activists to lobby for fishing bans. But what kills dugongs in Queensland? Previous studies of dugong deaths puts net-fishing in perspective.**

FOR 20 years, up till at least 2015, the Queensland Government maintained annual records of marine wildlife strandings and mortalities.

The program was referred to as StrandNet and it was managed by the then Department of Environment & Heritage Protection.

A search of State Government sites has produced reports for the years 2011 and a summary for the years 2013-15.

Given the importance of potential dugong mortality in environmental activists – acting both locally and through their membership of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and its influence on UNESCO – lobbying for net-fishing bans, it is worthwhile examining what the Strandnet records show as the causes of dugong mortalities in Queensland.

#### 2011 summary

The summary of the 2011 report says 199 records were received by

the Queensland Strandings program during 2011, relating to 250 dugongs (including 10 unconfirmed reports). Of the 240 confirmed cases of dugongs; two were released alive in situ, and a third was alive and left to natural processes.

“Eighteen per cent of the dugongs (44 dugongs) were recorded in southern Queensland (Hervey Bay to Moreton Bay), which corresponds to 24 per cent, excluding hunting,” the report says. “The Bowen to Cardwell region accounted for 40 per cent of all dugongs recorded in 2011, or 51 per cent excluding hunting.

“Of the 237 records of dugong



### Hervey Bay showed impact of flooding

NATURAL weather events, especially flooding, can have massive impacts on dugong.

That was dramatically demonstrated in the Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait region in 1992, when flooding and subsequent loss of seagrass led to the dispersal and-or deaths of hundreds of dugong, in fact perhaps more than a thousand.

The impact of the 1992 floods and seagrass destruction was reported by dugong researchers Helene Marsh and Tony Preen in a paper entitled “Response of dugongs to large-scale loss of seagrass from Hervey Bay, Queensland Australia”, published in the scientific journal *Wildlife Research* 22(4) in January 1995.

A summary of the research paper says that a survey in August 1988

found southern Hervey Bay contained an estimated 1,753 dugongs, and the regional (Hervey Bay plus Great Sandy Strait) population was estimated to be 2,206.

“Following two floods and a cyclone in early 1992, more than 1,000 square kilometres of seagrass were lost from Hervey Bay,” the authors say.

“Approximately eight months later (November 1992), southern Hervey Bay contained only 71 ... dugongs.

“In December 1993, 21 months after the floods, the regional dugong population was estimated to be 600.

“The proportion of calves in the population declined from 22 per cent seen in 1988 and 1992, to only 2.2 per cent in 1993.

“A total of 99 dugong carcasses was recovered. Most dugongs died six to eight months after the floods, and most were emaciated as a result of starvation.

mortalities, 57 were attributed to indigenous hunting, 33 were attributed to natural causes, six were attributed to other human activities and the cause of death was unidentified in the remaining 141 dugongs.

“Of the three records of live dugongs, one was released alive after net entanglement, one was reported to have been entangled in plastic debris and was left to natural processes, and the third was released after stranding for an unknown reason.

“Of the 33 dugongs which died of natural causes, 12 dugongs died after extended ill health and had poor body condition. Pneumonia was associated with the deaths of three dugongs, and a further 15 died of unidentified disease. Shark attack or unidentified natural causes were suspected to have caused the death of three dugongs.

“The poor condition of many of the stranded dugongs, and the location of the stranded dugongs in areas

*Continued on next page*

“Some dugongs travelled up to 900 km south of Hervey Bay before dying, although some animals successfully relocated to other areas.”

In other words, the numbers of dugong in southern Hervey Bay and Great Sandy Strait crashed following the flooding and seagrass loss – from an estimated 2,200 dugong before to just 600 dugong afterwards.

An estimated 1,600 dugong died or moved to other areas, with the carcasses recovered representing probably just a fraction of those that died and were never found.

Note: After the 1992 flooding, a longtime professional fisherman found a dugong carcass in Jervis Bay, on the New South Wales south coast. He had never previously seen one.

The full report is available here: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248883343\\_Response\\_of\\_dugongs\\_to\\_large-scale\\_loss\\_of\\_seagrass\\_from\\_Hervey\\_Bay\\_Queensland\\_Australia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/248883343_Response_of_dugongs_to_large-scale_loss_of_seagrass_from_Hervey_Bay_Queensland_Australia)



## SPANISH MACKEREL

# QSIA CALLS FOR HALT TO SPANISH MACKEREL CATCH CUTS

## Report shows management plan flawed

The QSIA in June called on the State Government to halt its drastic cuts to Spanish mackerel catches for professional and recreational fishers. This followed release of an independent scientific report questioning the fisheries department figures behind the planned catch cuts and saying the figures should not be used for management decisions.

QUEENSLAND Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) CEO David Bobbermen said the “unscientific” catch cuts would cost professional fishers and seafood marketers millions of dollars over the next 12 months.

Mr Bobbermen said he has written to Fisheries Minister Mark Furner asking for the new East Coast Spanish Mackerel Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) Declaration to be withdrawn, as the information upon which it is based has been questioned by independent reviewers.

“The cuts should not go ahead until the Queensland Government has called in experts to completely review the work that the fisheries department, Fisheries Queensland, has carried out to come up with their catch cuts decision for the 2023-24 financial year.”

### Continued from previous page

impacted by the extreme weather events (tropical cyclone and floods) of summer 2010-11 suggested that seagrass loss was the main contributing factor to elevated dugong mortality in 2011.

“Despite the large number of necropsies undertaken in 2011, the number of deaths attributable to anthropogenic (ie, human) activities (excluding hunting) was similar to previous years in the StrandNet program.

“Three dugongs were entangled in nets used in the Queensland shark control program. The number of reported fisheries-related interactions was less than in 2010, with two suspected cases of mortality from net entanglement and a third which was released alive.

“The number of stranded dugongs with vessel-related injuries was less than that of previous years, and only one dugong was suspected to have been killed by an interaction with a vessel, in this case a large vessel.

“Fisheries Queensland is cutting the total allowable catch for professional fishers on the east coast from 578 tonnes this year to just 165 tonnes in the 2023-24 financial year,” Mr Bobbermen said.

“From Saturday, professional fishers will be allowed to catch less than one-third of the fish they caught this year.

“And now an independent analysis of the Fisheries Queensland figures has concluded the figures are unreliable and should be thoroughly re-examined.

“On the basis of what has been found to be dodgy figures and unreliable work, Fisheries Queensland is prepared to cause serious financial hardship to fishing families throughout the east coast.

“The number of mortalities associated with indigenous hunting was elevated compared to previous years; this was likely to be because of increased reporting rather than an increase in hunting.”

The full report is available here: [https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/202337/dugong-report-2011.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/202337/dugong-report-2011.pdf)

### 2013-15 report

The summary of the report of dugong strandings and mortalities in Queensland waters from 2013 to 2015 says a total of 42 cases were reported in 2013 (including four that were rescued or escaped alive), 49 in 2014 (including three that were alive) and 21 in 2015 (including two that were alive), which represented a decline from the average over the past 10-year period.

“The total number reported in 2015 was the lowest since comprehensive reporting of strandings commenced in 1996,” the report says.

“Across the reporting period, a total of nine carcasses were examined by

“That’s not how our fisheries resources should be managed or primary producer livelihoods should be manipulated.”

Mr Bobbermen said QSIA had commissioned an independent analysis of the facts and figures behind Fisheries Queensland’s catch cuts and the report had just been received.

“The analysis was conducted by Simon Hoyle and Alistair Dunn, eminent fisheries scientists based in New Zealand, experienced with management of species like mackerels and tuna.

“Their report says in part: ‘We find that the model shows signs of misspecification, with residual trends in the decadal CPUE (catch per unit effort) time series, age structure and length composition data, bias apparent in the estimated growth curve, and instability in model fits and the likelihood profiles. These problems may largely be driven by the lack of recovery in the CPUE index after the large reduction in estimated catch from 2005. These issues should be resolved before the model is used for management advice.’

“While the report is couched in scientific language, the bottom line is clear to anyone: What Fisheries Queensland has relied upon in reaching decisions about future Spanish mackerel

staff or veterinarians (2013: three necropsies and one post-mortem examination; 2014: two necropsies and one post mortem examination; 2015: two necropsies).

“In 2013, the cause of death was identifiable in 12 cases; in 2014, the cause of death was identifiable in 29 cases and in 2015 the cause of death was identifiable in nine cases.

“Overall, the main identified cause was indigenous hunting (30 records), followed by net entanglement (two mortalities and two released alive), vessel strikes / fractures (four mortalities), disease (three mortalities), predation (two mortalities), incidental catch in the shark control program (two mortalities) and entanglement in a crab pot (one released alive). An additional six mortalities were suspected to have been caused by a human activity based on evidence such as linear cuts and / or rope securing the carcass.”

The full report is available here: [https://www.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/202336/dugong-report-2013-15.pdf](https://www.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/202336/dugong-report-2013-15.pdf)

catches simply should not be used in its current form for management of the fishery.”

Mr Bobbermen said both professional and recreational fishers would be impacted by Fisheries Queensland’s planned catch cuts for Spanish mackerel.

“While the total allow commercial catch will be slashed by more than two-thirds, recreational anglers will suffer similar cuts.

“The daily trip catch limit for anglers will be cut from three Spanish mackerel per person or six per boat (when there are two or more anglers on board) down to just one per angler or two per boat.

“The catch for charter-boat operators will also be cut, significantly impacting their businesses.

“No-one in professional or recreational fishing trusts the so-called ‘science’ behind the Fisheries Queensland Spanish mackerel cuts.”

### Report discussion

In the “Discussion” section of the report, the authors said: “We have considered many aspects of the stock assessment for Spanish mackerel. It is a difficult stock to assess, with a complex spatial domain, likelihood of hyperstability in the CPUE, and uncertainties about fish behaviour.

“We note that a considerable amount of work has been undertaken by the stock assessment scientists, QDAF, and the scientists and fishery experts involved in the assessment.

“In conclusion, we find that the model shows signs of misspecification, with residual trends in the decadal CPUE time series, age structure and length composition data, potential bias in the estimated growth curve, and instability in model fits and the likelihood profiles.

“Some of these issues relate to the way in which observational data were determined and supplied to the assessment model, and some to the model assumptions and structure. We think these issues should be resolved before the model is used to develop management advice.

“Overall, the diagnostics would suggest that the misspecifications in the model would likely lead it to over-estimate total mortality and therefore under-estimate total biomass.

“These problems may largely be

## Scientists will always differ, says Furner

HAVING disregarded the QSIA report into the Spanish mackerel assessment and imposed the catch cuts on July 1, Fisheries Minister Mark Furner defended the decision in the Estimates Committee hearing in Parliament on August 2.

Answering a question from Rob Katter of Katter’s Australia Party about the report, Mr Furner said in part: “You will always get differing opinions when you put scientists together in relation to outcomes and looking at any aspect of science.

“In particular, with fisheries, we explored and examined the QSIA’s report into the stock assessment of Spanish mackerel. Some of those technical issues raised by the department related to differing scientific opinion on various parameters in the model and were not incorporated in the final report.

“The department has examined the QSIA-funded review and does not consider the matters raised to be significant enough to rescind or reconsider the recent changes to the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery.

“However, as a result of reviewing the stock assessment, in early 2025 we will work with industry to consider and incorporate technical feedback from both reviews to make sure we are in a better place.

“I make the final comment that, had we not taken action last year when the assessment of east coast Spanish mackerel was considered at 17 per cent—which is below the national trigger of 20 per cent to take action—people were calling out to close the fishery.

“We did not take that step. We could have done that but we took a considerable step in regard to striking a fair balance in Queensland

driven by the lack of recovery in the estimated CPUE after the large reduction in estimated catch from 2005. Nominal CPUE does recover after 2005, but after the processes of CPUE standardization and adjustment for fishing power, the trend becomes a steady decline.

“The methods currently used for CPUE analysis are likely to bias results towards a more depleted outcome, unless the rate of mixing of the entire

between commercial fishers and recreational fishers to end up with the arrangements we have in place at

Mr Katter then asked: “So, you specifically acknowledge the misspecification that has been outlined in that review?”

Mr Furner responded: “The misspecification refers to the situation where the model assumptions or specifications may not fully capture the true dynamics of the fishery population being assessed.

“Misspecification can occur due to various reasons including simplifying assumptions, inadequate data or lack of understanding of the underlying biological process. For example, if a stock assessment model assumes that there is a linear relationship between fish population size and specific environment variability but the relationship is actually non-linear then it may be misrepresented.”

LNP fisheries spokesperson Tony Perrett also asked about Spanish mackerel with a question to newly-appointed Director General Chris Sarra: “I refer to the 2020-21 east coast Spanish mackerel stock assessment, which has been questioned by three leading scientists as mentioned previously. Why has DAF not undertaken a review, given widespread concern with the integrity of the data?”

Dr Sarra responded in part that the Department examined the QSIA-funded review and did not consider the matters raised to be significant enough to rescind or reconsider the recent changes to the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery.

“That said, in response to (the QSIA review and a separate review), we will bring forward the next full stock assessment to early 2025,” he said.

“We are determined to work with industry to consider and, where appropriate, incorporate their technical feedback from both reviews.”

east coast Spanish mackerel population was high.

“The methods used for composition sampling are affected by the same issue. Studies of Spanish mackerel in northern Australia suggest that population mixing is likely to be relatively low north of Townsville, and rapid random mixing appears unlikely south of Townsville.

“We recommend changes to the



Spanish mackerel quotas have been slashed.

CPUE standardisation process in several areas, including the probability model, the spatial weighting process, and the adjustments for fishing power.”

### Recommendations

The authors made eight recommendations in their report.

1. We note that the model show signs of misspecification and recommend that these issues should be resolved before the model is used in the development of management advice.
2. We recommend that analysts resolve indications of model instability and poor fit to the data: residual trends in the age structure, historical CPUE data, and length composition data which suggest data conflict; a growth curve that estimates unrealistically low length at age; an unusual pattern of multiple optima in likelihood profiles; and instability in model fitting.
3. Reducing uncertainty about the degree of mixing among areas is a high priority. Available information about Spanish mackerel behaviour should be used to develop hypotheses about population structure, and to design a research programme.

Analysts should allow for the implications of incomplete mixing in their data preparation and selection of stock assessment methods.

4. CPUE: review and update approach

to the development of the CPUE index, including but not limited to the following:

- a. Explore and characterize the catch and effort data, including factors associated with targeting, to identify patterns likely to affect CPUE.
- b. Change approach to weighting by latband, to weight by the product of relative habitat area (or an appropriate proxy) and density rather than by catch or the number of records.
- c. Review the fishing power estimates and their relevance for the fishing methods included in the CPUE index before using them in the base case assessment model. Consider whether search-related factors should be included in the catch rate or the probability model.
- d. Produce indices without data from the Latitude 19 area where spawning schools concentrate and hyperstability is most likely to affect CPUE.
- e. Allow for the effects of targeting on catch rates. Run models that standardize the CPUE of vessels that exclusively target Spanish mackerel.
- f. Drop runs that include the probability model until issues with it have been addressed.
- g. Produce a separate document with

a comprehensive overview of CPUE methods, results, and diagnostics.

#### 5. Auxiliary analyses:

- a. Explore the long-term monitoring length and age data set to identify spatial, seasonal, and sectoral effects on age and length composition of the catch.
- b. Check for evidence of spatial patterns in length-at-age, and spatial and temporal patterns in age-at-length.

#### 6. Catch and related issues:

- a. Review approaches used to develop time series of recreational catch; and explore sensitivity of assessment outcomes to alternative time series.
- b. When preliminary estimates of depredation rates become available, we recommend testing their effects in the assessment.

#### 7. Input parameters:

- a. For steepness, we recommend applying a range of values from 0.45 to 0.95, with a median value close to the 0.69 FishLife estimate for Scombridae.
- b. For recruitment variability ( $\sigma_R$ ), the commonly assumed value of 0.6 should be used when fitting the model to estimate recruitments, instead of 0.35.
- c. For natural mortality we recommend
  - i. updating the prior mean to  $M=5.4/A_{max}$ , based on Hamel and Cope (2022), who identified a modelling error in the approach of Then et al (2015);
  - ii. replacing constant M at age with the biologically well-justified Lorenzen approach of setting M inversely proportional to body length (Lorenzen, 2022); and
  - iii. fixing M in the model at a range of values across the prior, rather than estimating it in the model.

- d. We recommend applying the Schnute-Richards (1990) growth curve rather than the von Bertalanffy.

8. Model structure: Update the approach to modelling selectivity to better fit the composition data; separate the commercial and recreational fisheries; consider spatial and/or seasonal structure; and non-asymptotic selectivity, particularly for the commercial fishery.

Note: To read the full copy of the report, contact the QSIA.

## ADJUSTMENT

### Queensland Government announces plan for “fisheries adjustment” taskforce

AFTER announcing plans for extensive professional fishing bans in the Great Sandy region and along the Great Barrier Reef coast, the Queensland Government released information about a committee to consider “fisheries adjustment”.

The statement said the Government has committed to deliver impact mitigation measures for commercial fishers and to provide support to post-harvest seafood businesses and impacted workers in the commercial fishing sector that are directly affected by the Great Sandy Marine Park zoning changes.

This would be in addition to the Australian and Queensland Governments’ announcement to commit “more than \$160 million to phase out gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area by mid-2027 and transition to more sustainable fishing practices”.

“A ‘Future Fishing Taskforce’ (the Taskforce) has been established to provide advice to government on the best approach, design and implementation of the Great Barrier Reef and Great Sandy Marine Park fisheries structural adjustment package, and impact mitigation measures,” the statement said.

It said John Tanzer would be the independent chair and other members would include senior representatives from:

- ❑ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries;
- ❑ Department of the Environment and Science;
- ❑ Department of the Premier and Cabinet;
- ❑ Queensland Treasury; and
- ❑ Queensland Rural Industry and Development Authority.

“The Taskforce will seek input from subject matter experts, stakeholders and peak bodies and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Targeted consultation will be undertaken with affected commercial fishers and processors.

“The Taskforce will focus their discussions on investment and initiatives to protect the Reef, including the following issues:

- ❑ adoption and trialling of sustainable fishing methods and alternatives to gillnets;
- ❑ business advice, management, and disposal of stranded assets, and retraining and reskilling;
- ❑ investment for expansion into new aquaculture and oyster mariculture initiatives, line caught fisheries, charter and indigenous fishing businesses;
- ❑ growing nature based sustainable economic opportunities;
- ❑ investigating ‘reef safe’ accreditation for export markets;
- ❑ managing other potential high risk fishing activities affecting the Great Barrier Reef;
- ❑ the operation of the limited life net fishery licences for the Great Barrier Reef (that will expire in June 2027);
- ❑ the ongoing operation of gillnet licences operating south of the Great Barrier Reef (management region 5), taking into account the Great Sandy Marine Park rezoning; and
- ❑ other potential gillnet free zones on the east coast and in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

“The Taskforce will also consider assessment of impacts and the development of an impact mitigation package for industry participants who are directly affected by the Great Sandy Marine Park zoning plan changes.

“The impact mitigation package will include:

- ❑ financial mitigation for eligible fishers;
- ❑ buyback of fishing entitlements (primary licences and symbols) to address displacement of fishing effort and to provide an opportunity for affected fishers to exit the industry
- ❑ purchase of quota units for some species; and
- ❑ some support for eligible post-harvest seafood businesses to adapt to changed or reduced seafood supply.

“The Taskforce intends to conclude its deliberations by the end of August, with advice being presented to government for consideration.

“Fisheries Queensland staff will be contacting industry directly to seek their input and advice from those who wish to continue to fish during the

transitional phase (between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2027).

“Government will consider the advice received by the Taskforce and release the details of the structural adjustment package being offered for each type of licence / symbol, eligibility criteria for payments, and support being offered for non-licence holders by November 2023.

“Payments and management of the structural adjustment packages will be delivered by agencies or through the Queensland Rural & Industry Development Authority (QRIDA).”

#### Further information:

Fisheries Queensland - Future Fishing@daf.qld.gov.au <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/commercial/future-fishing>

Department of Environment and Science - marine.policy@des.qld.gov.au [www.qld.gov.au/greatsandymarinepark](http://www.qld.gov.au/greatsandymarinepark)

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## “Communique” from net ban committee

THE committee planning implementation of the Federal and State Governments’ N2 and N4 net bans has released a report, or “communique”.

The report covers the committee’s fourth meeting, which was held on August 18, and was released on August 24.

The report said: “The fourth meeting of the Future Fishing Taskforce was held in-person and via videoconference on 18 August 2023 in Brisbane, and was chaired by Mr John Tanzer.

“The taskforce discussed the risks of gillnetting in the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) World Heritage Area and Gulf of Carpentaria on threatened, endangered and protected species. While all gillnet fishing would be phased out by mid-2027 in the GBR, a level of risk will remain from gillnet fishing south of Cape Bedford during the

transition period between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2027.

“The taskforce sought expert advice from a number of recognised academics and scientists from:

- James Cook University;
- CSIRO;
- University of Tasmania;
- University of Queensland;
- Department of Environment and Science; and
- Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

“They provided input from published papers and research currently underway, and summarised relevant advice for the taskforce to consider when developing recommendations to government.

“The taskforce acknowledged there is already a complex network of zones and management areas within the GBR, consisting of marine park zoning, Dugong Protection Areas (DPA) A and B, and recreational-only fishing areas. They noted that the GBR is home to six species of turtle (all of which are classified as endangered or vulnerable) and dugong, humpback and snubfin dolphins (all also classified as

vulnerable). Hammerhead sharks are nationally classified as ‘conservation dependent’ and are currently under reassessment for uplifting their status to vulnerable / endangered. The taskforce noted that the population of dugong is likely continuing to decline in central and southern GBR, and that entanglement in gillnets is one of several threats to dugongs in the southern GBR (along with habitat loss and vessel strike).

“The taskforce noted that, in the Gulf of Carpentaria, sawfish are classified as vulnerable or migratory and three species of turtle nest, forage and migrate between the Gulf and GBR waters. Of particular concern to the taskforce was that there is no network of marine parks or protected areas offering refuge to endangered or protected species in Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria waters, meaning their consideration of gillnet free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria may be critical to mitigating the risks to these species. The taskforce noted that there are existing net closures in the Gulf of Carpentaria within select rivers and creeks.

“The taskforce noted that DPAs

*Continued on next page*

fisheries and marine protected area management. Of special interest is the role of protected areas in contributing to fisheries sustainability. He was Chairman and Chief Executive of Queensland Fisheries Management Authority before becoming Executive Director of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. “John has served as Director of WWF’s Global Marine Program based in Geneva, Switzerland between February 2012 to November 2016.

“Following a major restructuring of WWF International in November 2016 and following a global search process John was appointed as Leader of WWF’s Ocean Practice and the role was relocated to Australia.

“The WWF’s Oceans Practice strategically directs and coordinates the organisation’s marine and coastal work in over 65 countries involving approximately 400 expert staff. His career has been defined by developing partnerships and strong advocacy for community engagement in conservation. “In October 2021 John left WWF International. As a policy and management consultant he is assisting organisations from the private, NGO and government sectors progress their sustainability endeavours.”

## AMCS view on Qld fisheries management

INDEPENDENT Future Fishing Taskforce Chair John Tanzer last year prepared a report for the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) that was submitted to the visiting UNESCO delegation and subsequently referenced in their report.

The report for AMCS is described as an independent desktop analysis of the Queensland Government’s progress against their Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027.

The report says in part: “Fisheries that have been long known as unsustainable with growing levels of fishing effort and ecosystem impact are not being dealt with urgently enough or with sufficient measures to address their status.

“Clearly, much improvement is needed in addressing the impacts of fishing on other species especially vulnerable, threatened, and protected species if the (Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy or QSFS) is to achieve its targets and overall intent.

“How the (Queensland) Government addresses the precarious state of stocks of saucer scallops, Spanish mackerel, king threadfin salmon, snapper, and pearl perch, and the impact fishing is having on vulnerable, endangered and threatened species, such as pipefish, sawfish, scalloped hammerhead sharks,

*Continued from previous page*

in the GBR represented important habitat to not only dugongs but also turtles, juvenile hammerhead sharks and sawfish. Research shows that most of the medium / high / very high dugong density recordings overlap with DPAs, and that dugong populations can only sustain extremely low levels of mortality due to their population recovery capacity.

“The taskforce also noted that DPAs (particularly DPA Bs) represented an important area for commercial fishing, producing around 40 per cent of the harvest within the GBR from the east coast inshore fishery. The taskforce recommended further detailed analysis be undertaken to assess the relative importance of the DPAs, with the risks posed from continued gillnetting until mid-2027, the expectation of UNESCO in protecting critical habitats, and the value and importance of the commercial fisheries resources harvested from the areas. They

snub fin dolphins, turtles and dugongs, will set the standard for the remaining five years of this strategy.”

It also says: “Overfishing and destructive fishing is increasing the erosion of the (Great Barrier Reef’s) resilience, adding to decline resulting from climate change and pollution.

“The GBR 2050 Plan emphasises the key role the implementation of the QSFS has in the achievement of its objectives. The slowing of progress around the implementation of the QSFS shown in this assessment should be of concern to the GBRMPA and other Commonwealth agencies given their statutory responsibilities for protecting world heritage values.”

### Key recommendations

The report says that, “given the implementation of the strategy is now mid-term, the following measures should be urgent priorities for Queensland Government and all stakeholders to ensure its effective achievement”.

1. To ensure compliance with statutory protections for threatened, endangered and vulnerable species and better monitor impact on non-target species, require the installation of electronic monitoring on commercial gill net and otter trawl vessels ...
2. Urgently develop harvest strategies to rebuild stocks to 60 per cent reference point for at-risk fisheries, including Spanish Mackerel, Rocky Reef and the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Finfish Fishery.

considered that other measures in addition to further closures may be required in the interim period up to mid-2027, such as independent data validation or monitoring (cameras or observers), more stringent net attendance or different hang ratios. These issues would be considered in more detail at a future taskforce meeting.

“The taskforce was pleased to note many commercial, recreational and other stakeholders have taken the opportunity to make a submission through the consultation Ehub, and expect to receive all of these at the conclusion of the consultation period on 28 August 2023.”

Note: Communiqués from the committee can be found at: <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/commercial/future-fishing>



3. Systematically address latent effort across Queensland’s commercial fisheries.
4. Review licence fee structure to better reflect the cost to the public of effective implementation of the QSFS.
5. Fisheries and GBRMPA to take steps to implement management measures to reduce high risks identified in Environment Risk Assessments (ERAs), in particular for threatened, endangered and protected species (TEPS). Measures should include improvement of the East Coast Inshore Fishery (ECIF) Protected Species Management Strategy (PSMS) and development of a PSMS for trawl; and spatial/temporal closures in areas of high conservation value.
6. Progress implementation of recreational fishing licence with an appropriate fee structure to contribute to cost of fisheries management.
7. Government agencies involved in management of fisheries (Commonwealth, State and local) should ensure there are dedicated programs to provide transparency and public communication more widely around contentious issues, science, and the need for and purpose of management actions.
8. Given lack of progress in key elements, and the QSFS is now mid-term, the need to accelerate implementation should be a matter for urgent high-level consideration by responsible State and Federal management agencies; especially the GBRMPA and Queensland Fisheries and their Ministers.

Note: This article presents just a fragment of the 40-page report. The full report – entitled *Implementing the Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017 – 2027: A Review of Progress* – can be read in full at: <https://www.marineconservation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Implementation-of-the-Queensland-Sustainable-Fisheries-Strategy-2017-2027-Progress-Final-JT-.pdf>

## Independent Taskforce Chair named

IN a joint statement on July 15, State Fisheries Minister Mark Furner and Environment Minister Leanne Linard announced the independent Chair of the Queensland’s Future Fisheries Taskforce would be John Tanzer, someone well known to North Queensland professional fishers.

The Ministers’ statement said: “Mr Tanzer was Chairman and Chief Executive of Queensland Fisheries Management Authority before becoming Executive Director of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.”

Mr Furner added: “John Tanzer brings experience to this role and I welcome his appointment.

“As a previous Chair of the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority, John has the skills needed, along with the other members of the Taskforce, to bring a strong set of recommendations to government.”

Ms Linard added: “The phasing out of gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef and the rezoning of Great Sandy

Marine Park are important reforms which will ensure these areas are protected so they can be enjoyed by future generations.

“The Government acknowledges that there will be some impact on the commercial fishing operators who work these waters and that’s why we have established an independent taskforce to advise on how best to support them.”

The Ministers’ statement omitted much of John Tanzer’s CV. His LinkedIn entry reads in part: “John grew up alongside the Great Barrier Reef in North Queensland, Australia, where he developed a deep and lifelong interest in the marine environment.

“He originally trained in geography and economics and James Cook University. He also holds a Masters degree in environmental law from the Australian National University and has completed courses in negotiation at Harvard Law School. During his career he has worked in both terrestrial and marine environmental management and gained experience in research, field management, strategic policy and organisation management.

“John’s focus since the mid-nineties has been marine and coastal environments, particularly



## Parody of fisheries management

SOMETIMES over the years, I have used this column to parody fisheries management, even employing the humour of the absurd to make a point. But, this time, I have been trumped, beaten at my own game.

Nothing I might say could better parody and mock genuine fisheries management than what the State and Federal Governments are doing right now. What a piece of satire. It is absurd. And they've done it with a straight face.

Governments that have vowed to make openness and consultation their hallmark have found that vow suddenly inconvenient. Then, they turn out to be tricky and sneaky – and secretive.

Where there are supposed to be industry committees and expert panels helping shape fisheries management decisions, suddenly there were just media releases announcing decisions already made – “management by media release”.

And there is secrecy. One radio presenter has complained that a dozen requests to responsible Government Ministers for interviews about the net-fishing bans have been ignored.

The UNESCO report, mirroring WWF and AMCS' opposition to gill-netting, wasn't released till late in 2022 but Prime Minister Anthony Albanese had already met with the head of UNESCO in July 2022 and agreed to implement the report recommendations – including bans on N2 and N4 nets.

We found out about the bans – via a media release, of course – in June this year.

Why would the Federal Government do this? I can only guess. But having UNESCO declare the Great Barrier Reef “in danger” – something they could still do next year even though they have suspended the threat for now – would be a massive blow to their environmental credentials.

And that matters to the Federal Government, especially to PM Albanese and Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek. Both hold inner-city seats in Sydney, and at the 2022 federal election the second-most popular candidates weren't Liberals

but Greens. In both electorates, the Greens polled about 33 per cent of the two-party-preferred vote. With similar inner-city seats already held by the Greens in Melbourne and Brisbane, both the PM and Environment Minister realise they need to keep proving their environmental credentials to their local constituents.

Besides, “protecting” the Great Barrier Reef always plays well in capital cities and in southern cities in particular. North Queensland literally doesn't count for the federal Labor Government. Of the 30 federal seats in Queensland, Labor holds just five. The most “northern” federal Labor seat in Queensland is Blair, based on the city of Ipswich, just west of Brisbane. It runs north to somewhere roughly in line with Noosa. Of the entire Queensland coastline, the only strip of coast in a Labor electorate is a tiny piece between the Brisbane River and the Pine River – about 20km I'd reckon.

Federal Labor can win government by a considerable margin without winning a single Queensland seat north of Brisbane – so why should they care what damage is done to North Queensland communities when there are no electoral repercussions.

It's different for the State Labor Party. Three seats around Townsville are particularly at risk at the next State election, scheduled for October 2024. But Minister Furner has trumpeted he wants to make Queensland the “aquaculture capital of the world”. (China and Vietnam and other massive aquaculture producers must be having a quiet giggle at that suggestion.)

Getting rid of the wild-catch industry would sure give aquaculture a boost. Cynic that I am, I suspect even the promise to have some sort of net fishing continue along the GBR coast till June 2027 is being done just to let fish farms build up production to try to cover the wild-fish shortfall. Too cynical? How could any idea be considered too cynical in the light of what is happening in management right now ...

One thing that left me puzzling is the possible fate of commercial net-fishing licences that were bought by WWF Australia (and effectively shelved to reduce net-fishing).

The report of the Future Fishing

Taskforce (FFT) meeting from August 25 says in part: “WWF (World Wildlife Fund) noted that they also held commercial fishing licences and would like to explore how they may support Traditional Owners and First Nation initiatives in partnership with the Queensland Government, holders of Traditional Use of Marine Resources Agreements, the Cape York special fisheries working group and other First Nations communities.”

Both the Federal and State Governments are funding a wonderful mental health project for the professional fishing industry called Stay Afloat. Irony is, the Federal and State Governments are a big part of fishers' mental health challenges. The best thing both governments could do for the mental health of professional fishers is not contribute money to treatments but instead stop ruining their lives in the first place.

After listening to Federal Fisheries Minister Murray Watt fumble and bumble his way trying to answer unexpected questions about the net bans on ABC Radio's Queensland Country Hour, I can understand why Ministers from both Governments have been ducking interviews.

Issues around net bans have been getting a lot of coverage on ABC Radio in regional Queensland, especially on the Drive program hosted by Adam Stephen. After interviewing Gulf fisherman David Wren recently about looming fishing bans there, Adam Stephen said he had tried a dozen times to get responses from the State and Federal Environment Ministers and the State Fisheries Ministers on these issues but they had refused,

“Call me crazy,” he told listeners across the State, “but I would have thought, if they were about to remove pretty much all wild-caught barramundi from the Queensland market, that we were entitled to hear the reason why from the Minister that's made the decision but it seems Mark Furner, and not only Mark Furner, to be fair, but also the Environment Minister in Queensland and the Federal Environment Minister don't feel like they need to explain to any of you why this decision has been made or be accountable for what implications this will have for anyone that enjoys seafood or for the hundreds of families now that are going to be impacted by this decision.”

I'll tell you why they won't: because they can't explain their actions and decisions in any way that makes any sense to any rational, fair-minded Queenslander.



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