Monday 8th December 2014

The Marine Pests Unit
Animal Biosecurity Branch
Department of Agriculture
GPO Box 858
CANBERRA ACT 2601

HEALTHY CATCHMENTS
HEALTHY OCEANS

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: OceanWatch Australia's Submission to the Review of National Marine Pest Biosecurity

OceanWatch Australia (OceanWatch) is a national not-for-profit environmental charity that works to advance sustainability in the Australian seafood community. In early 2014, OceanWatch was recognised by the Australian Government as the Marine Natural Resource Management Group with responsibility for enhancing fish habitat and improving water quality and to work with the professional and recreational seafood sector on better practice.

OceanWatch key activities involve; enhancing fish habitats and improving water quality in estuaries and coastal environments; working with the seafood and saltwater community and land managers to minimise environmental impacts; and introducing the seafood community and coastal communities to sustainable technologies and behaviours. OceanWatch works in partnership with the Australian seafood community, federal, state and local governments, natural resource managers, business and local communities.

OceanWatch aims to build good working relationships with all levels of government to ensure the environmental concerns of the Australian seafood industry are understood and taken into account by policy makers and that environmental issues affecting the sustainability of seafood are recognised and addressed.

OceanWatch Australia's role in fighting marine pests

In 1999 the black-striped mussel outbreak in Darwin Harbour had a significant and devastating effect on the local NT fishing fleet with the one month closure of the 3 marinas. The fishing vessels that were stuck inside the marinas lost valuable fishing time, as it happened right at the start of the prawn season. This event became the impetus for OceanWatch, at the behest of the fishing industry, to become involved in the National Introduced Marine Pest Coordination Group, to represent the environmental concerns of the industry, and to protect Australian waters from marine pests. Over 250 exotic marine plants and animals have been introduced into Australian coastal and marine waters. Some have taken over native habitats, damaging fishing and aquaculture industries and impacting marine ecosystems. Like cane toads and rabbits, getting rid of marine pests is virtually impossible, although Australia has had some limited success in eradication.

The Australian seafood industry is recognised as a critical component to Australia's economy being the fourth largest primary production sector by value. But the value of the industry is not only fiscal; the sector also employs an estimated 11,000 people primarily in rural and regional Australia. This social value should not be underestimated as the long term survival of the seafood industry is dependent upon healthy coastal and marine environments, and protection for critical habitats in the coastal zone, must be recognised as a priority. OceanWatch participated with governments, researchers and industry in developing the National System, which was designed to prevent new pests arriving and to minimise the spread and impact of pests that are already established in Australian waters.

OceanWatch Australia Ltd
Locked Bag 247
Pyrmont NSW 2009
AUSTRALIA

t 02 9660 2262
f 02 9660 2786
e ocean@oceanwatch.org.au
ABN 86 071 195 901
ACN 071 195 901

Translocation avoidance communications to the fishing industry

OceanWatch through our SeaNet Environmental Extension Team was commissioned in 2009 by the Australian Government to roll-out the 'National biofouling management guidelines for commercial fishing vessels to fishermen. These guidelines, developed in collaboration between industry and government by OceanWatch were designed to prevent further introduction or spread of marine pests by this vector. The roll-out occurred in 2009-2010. Since that time a number of new fishers would have entered the industry, who would not have received the roll-out information.

Further information on the SeaNet roll-out can be found at:
http://www.marinepests.gov.au/marine_pests/taking_action_-_case_studies/pages/keeping_marine_pests_out_-_fishing.aspx

Embedding guidelines in Fishing Industry Codes/EMSs

For the adoption of voluntary guidelines to occur, it is important that they are incorporated, into industry documentation.

Between 2010-2013 the SeaNet team assisted the fishing industry to develop or review over 100 fishing industry Environmental Management Systems, Codes of Conduct or Codes of Practice.

This communication element involved working with the fishing industry and its peak bodies to incorporate provisions relating to marine species of concern management into EMS's and in all training courses for EMS. This ensures that the National System guidelines for the Australian professional fishing industry are embedded in industry practice.

It is with the above experience of working with industry that OceanWatch submit's the following responses to questions 1,2,5,7,8,9,10,12,16,17,18,19 and 24 as identified in the National Marine Pest Biosecurity Review - Issues Paper.

About the marine pest biosecurity system

Question 1: What are the key issues for your business / organisation that you would like to see addressed in this review?

The Australian professional fishing industry has a role in reducing the risks associated with the introduction and spread of marine pests in Australian waters. Professional fishing vessels have been recognised as a likely secondary translocation vector for marine pests that have reached our waters. Of the 23 non-trading sectors of the Australian domestic marine domain, professional fishing was rated as the highest risk group with the potential to facilitate secondary invasions from the initial establishment sites of marine pests. This assessment is based on a high potential for entrainment, the number of vessels (estimated up to 12,000) and the extensive range of the vessels within coastal fisheries. A key issue for fishing businesses is the understanding that all other known marine vectors MUST be trained, equipped and informed of their responsibilities with regards to marine pests. To date, roll-out of key actions to the on-water recreational sector has been very poor, even though the potential for this vector translocating pests via biofouling is high.

Question 2: How do current marine pest biosecurity arrangements affect your organisation, business or recreational activities?

The Australian professional fishing industry's greatest contribution to the fight against marine pests is the significant number eyes on the water, and the vigilance they provide to detect anything new, unusual or different. As previously stated, fishing's greatest risk is translocation via biofouling. However, vigilance is difficult if an understanding of what is present is unknown. Port/Location baseline surveys of 19 key locations around Australia have not been undertaken. Some key locations such as Port Botany and unsurveyed, despite having a vibrant seafood industry and recreational fishing haven on its doorstep. Given that the National System has been in place for almost a decade, this is disappointing. This is a key failing of the COAG agreement and reflects poorly on the National System. This lack of knowledge has the potential to greatly affect fishing businesses, leaving them vulnerable to unwitting translocation of pests.

Question 5: Does your organisation, business or activities have any difficulty implementing the current marine pest biosecurity arrangements? If 'Yes' please briefly explain what these difficulties are and how they impact you activities and / or industry.

The Australian professional fishing industry biofouling guidelines were developed in partnership between OceanWatch, the fishing industry and NIMPCG members. OceanWatch was contracted to develop materials and communications strategy to deliver the framework messaging, and guidelines to the sector. OceanWatch rolled out the communications to fishing industry operating in Commonwealth waters with support from the Department of Agriculture (DAFF). OceanWatch was only able to roll-out to state based fishing operators in Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory, following some supplementary grant support from those jurisdictions.

The rollout was not supported with grants across all jurisdictions for state-based professional fishers. New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmanian fisheries departments decided to do the rollout themselves, despite evidence that regulatory agencies have less impact with the stakeholder, than that of a third sector organisation such as OceanWatch.

Question 7: Are there cost effective compliance and enforcement arrangements for industry, governments and the community?

Fishing industry guidelines are voluntary. However, fishing industry operators are aware that good environmental practice underpins the operations of the industry. The evaluation report following OceanWatch's SeaNet roll-out of the fishing industry communications was that the Guidelines for the fishing industry were simple, clear, relevant, and did not unduly burden industry with unnecessary actions, and engaged approx 3,500 fishers.

About governance and infrastructure

Question 8: How effective is the National System for the Prevention and Management of Marine Pest Incursions as an overarching framework for Australia's marine pest biosecurity arrangements?

The National System has the potential to be a competent framework if well supported by government; commitment shown by industry; and, the awareness amongst the community, of its mission raised. Commitment from jurisdictions has fluctuated, and turnover of personnel is high. Not all jurisdictions are signed up to the COAG agreement, which creates an inherent weakness in the framework, and makes promoting actions to stakeholders far more difficult. Whilst jurisdictional ministers may have signed up to the agreement, they have not provided adequate budgets to operate the National System.

Question 9: How effectively has the Australian Government coordinated the development and implementation of harmonised, national marine pest biosecurity arrangements?

Progress via NIMPCG and more recently MPSC has been slow and difficult. The Committee and Secretariat seem to function under considerably more red tape as MPSC, than previous incarnations.

Question 10: How effectively does the Australian Government engage industry stakeholders and other environmental partners in the development and implementation of national marine pest biosecurity measures?

The most effective model for engaging with industry/environmental stakeholder would be the NIMPCG model, which had full members who were industry/environmental stakeholder. The progress made between 2005-2010 could not have occurred without their presence. Since the removal of industry/environmental stakeholder from MPSC, the progress has been very slow, and very difficult.

Question 12: How could the governance and infrastructure arrangements for marine pest biosecurity be changed to achieve better outcomes for marine pest biosecurity?

Improved governance and transparency could be returned to the MPSC processes by reverting to the NIMPCG governance system.

About prevention, eradication, containment and on-going management

Question 19: Which initiatives have delivered the best improvement to addressing marine pest risks in your sector?

It is the experience of OceanWatch that on-water users, be they professional or recreational fishers, require engagement initiatives to be face-to-face at a location and time that is appropriate for the stakeholder. The imperative should always be to put as many voluntary but informed eyes on water as possible. There are few projects supporting this kind of initiative in Australia.

About supporting arrangements: monitoring, communications, research and development, evaluation and review

Question 24: How could engagement and communication with your organisation or sector be improved to deliver positive outcomes for marine pest biosecurity?

OceanWatch currently has no funding to engage with the fishing industry around Australia on the topic of marine pests.

We thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Issues Paper towards the National Marine Pest Biosecurity Review, and look forward to the Discussion Paper proposals in 2015.

Yours faithfully,

Lowri Pryce
Executive Officer
OceanWatch Australia