

John E. Hill

## **Submission to the Review on Australian Fisheries Management Legislation**

Dear Sir or Madam:

I would respectfully like to make a brief submission presenting some suggestions and comments about ways to develop truly sustainable fisheries industries in Australia.

While I have not made a career in fisheries research, I have worked in the field, and retained a life-long interest. I spent a year and a half in 1962-63 working as a Biological Aide for the International Pacific Halibut Commission (funded by the Canadian, American and Japanese governments) in Alaskan waters. A full year of this time was spent aboard a chartered 80 foot, wooden-hulled fishing boat collecting data in the North Pacific and Bering Sea. I then spent a full fishing season ashore - in Sandpoint, Alaska, at the entrance to the Bering Sea, collecting data from the Canadian and American halibut fleets.

Many years later, in 1994-1995, I worked with the people of Lockhart River Community on the far northeast coast of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland develop ideas for Alternative Governing Structures which included helping to prepare a community marine resources plan. This was published as: "Caring for Country: Our Coast and Sea. Lockhardt River Sea Plan," prepared by Jo Wynter and John Hill with the Lockhart River Community, August 1995. I mention these things so that you will be aware that I do have some practical experience and knowledge of what I am talking about.

The most important (and difficult) issue that needs to be tackled is to ensure the fisheries industry in Australia survives into the future is to make absolutely certain that the whole planning process is realistically, honestly and fairly done — without political or commercial bias. This has been the great failing of many attempts to protect fisheries around the world.

Most of the world's major fisheries which have largely been destroyed by short term greed and a misunderstanding of the complexities involved in proper scientific research and effective application of measures which will truly protect the future of our marine stocks. Almost all major fisheries that still remain are showing severe signs of strain to maintain even their present, much-depleted condition.

One thing to realise at the outset is that there is nothing that could really be called a "scientific" estimation of the size of different stocks of fish or other sea creatures. At best, they are informed "guesstimates" (usually based on sightings or recent catch levels). For example, estimates of whale stocks presented to the International Whaling Commission were regularly about three times as large in studies done by whaling nations such as Japan, Iceland, and Norway, than the estimates given by non-whaling countries. This blatant deception continued for decades. Unfortunately, this sort of misuse of so-called "science" is very common — the rule rather than the exception.

Most scientists (and fishermen), if they are being honest, will agree that bottom-trawling - such as done by "super trawlers" and our own prawn fishing fleets (where nets are dragged across the sea floor) is probably the most destructive form of fishing known - as it destroy s the integrity of the sea floor by destroying seaweed and grasses and other important features

such as breeding places for fish. It also removes a massive percentage of the fish out of a specific area at one time and catching and killing many other creatures other than the target species (“by-catch”), and removing food and nutrients — severely limiting the ability of stocks to recover. Bottom trawling is the maritime equivalent to clear-felling forests and destroying the topsoil.

In general, the bigger the ship, the bigger and heavier the nets that are dragged across the sea floor, and the longer the ship can fish without taking breaks (smaller trawlers often cannot fish 24 hours a day, and they also have to take breaks to transport their catch somewhere else to be processed). Smaller boats also tend to spread out somewhat and thus not to completely strip a large, continuous area. Therefore, one large trawler can be expected to do far more damage than a number of smaller boats.

All across the world we have watched the major fisheries destroyed by overfishing and greed - so severe that many industries have been completely shut down and catches have decreased rapidly in the past 50 years. Stocks of edible fish are now vastly depleted almost everywhere in the world, and those that are left are in rapid decline. This is largely due to the organised large fleets and “super-trawlers” using sophisticated equipment and techniques to ensure they catch the maximum quantity of fish. The devastating effects of this industrialised mass slaughter have been amply demonstrated repeatedly around the world.

Of course, destruction caused by overfishing has been greatly amplified by other factors such as: pollution, movement of pest species around the world by the huge amount of international shipping (especially, but not solely, from discarded bilge water), climate change, acidification of the seas, and increasing efforts in “recreational” fishing.

So, now we are in the alarming situation of having less and less high-grade protein to feed an exploding population and the grim fact is that, unless we enforce very severe restrictions and careful management on a world-wide scale, we will have less and less food for a larger and larger population available in the future.

Finally, I should add that the hopeful predictions that this tragedy can be compensated for by farming fish has turned out to a fanciful delusion and, in fact, fish farming is often very harmful in itself and, in the long run, will probably lead to even less fish being available in the future. I don't need to go into details to prove this here as presumably your experts will have all that information easily to hand. But, I am certain that if this is examined honestly and carefully the escalating disaster will be clearly seen.

To conclude, we are facing a catastrophic world-wide disaster for short term profits. Narrow-interest groups must not be allowed to continue removing so much fish in such destructive ways that there will be nothing left for future generations. This global crisis is already upon us.

Thank you very much for considering my brief submission.

Sincerely,

John Hill  
24<sup>th</sup> October, 2012.