

Submission into the legislation governing the Commonwealth's fisheries management system.

Submission prepared and submitted by John Stanfield.

Introduction

There has been significant frustration generated by the proposal that available quota for the small pelagic fishery be accessed by a super trawler operated by Seafish Tasmania. The issues identified in the public debate have focused attention on the inability of fisheries managers and legislation to adequately satisfy the needs and wishes of all identified stakeholders. Indeed the need to recognise and consult all stakeholders in this issue had not been adequately met when applications were made and approvals sought.

There seems to be an inappropriate weighting in decision making to those that seek to exploit available fisheries in profit based ventures. The basis of the public debate was focused in two specific areas, the method of capture i.e. capital intensive (super trawler) and the size of allowable quota.

The late notice provided to the public without any reliable data, freely available, for consideration initiated a degree of contempt for decision makers. The commentary provided into the size and availability of the fishery was undermined by observations of stakeholders not consulted and inaccuracy and age of available data. Significantly, access to the small pelagic fishery includes numerous marine species and birds that have increasing populations. There was detail missing on protections based on potential populations throughout the range of habitats for both local and migratory species.

The perception of the author is that the prospect of a profit was sufficient for expediting a decision that was likely to be found as flawed both in the short and long term.

The ability to influence local fisheries by approvals made by Commonwealth decision maker's needs to be recognised. The consequence of quota allocation of species with a migratory range inside and outside of state waters needs to be considered. The concept of local depletion was raised regularly during the public debate. The practical application of Commonwealth quota being accessed off the coast of Tasmania is that the inshore fishery suffers significantly. An example is the availability of Tiger Flathead, a species that was once plentiful inside Tasmanian State waters. Since the arrival of trawl fishing accessing the Tiger Flathead fishery beyond the three mile limit the migration to coastal bays and estuaries has been significantly reduced. Another example is access to the small pelagic fishery by Seafish Tasmania vessels working out of Triabunna on Tasmania's East Coast – the once prolific schools of Jack Mackerel have suffered depletion in the local area.

A significantly more dynamic decision making process is required, the acquisition and consideration of opinion and data needs to be considerably more efficient than is currently available. Public debate is great, right, wrong or otherwise social and other media is very useable by the average citizen and has proven to be effective in influencing decisions. The need for reasonable access to credible and current data, explanation to and education of interested parties is fundamental to achieving consensus on a way forward.

A good majority of stakeholders in this issue are not associated with the professional fishing industry or fisheries research. There is a need for all information to be presented in a way that is easily understood by the average citizen. Additionally any legislation must be drafted in a way that can be clearly understood by all (current and future) stakeholders.

Submission

I concur with the following provided on the Stop the Super trawler website.

- Australia should ban super trawlers and other fishing methodologies with a history of extensive marine biodiversity and fishery destruction.
- Australian fisheries management legislation must be updated to ensure transparency and access to information for all levels and processes of fisheries and marine resource management.
- We need increased objectivity and fairness in the resourcing of all marine research and management, including fisheries.
- It must be legislated that true ecosystems-based and precautionary approaches to fisheries management are implemented.
- Fisheries must be managed to ensure that ecological processes are maintained and fish populations are managed sustainably.

My own thoughts on the matter.

- Local considerations must be taken into account when allocating commonwealth quota.
- Species specific guidance must be provided to all stakeholders including direction to quota holders to eliminate risk of localised or generalised depletion.
- Local government should have greater influence on and responsibility for enforcement of fisheries in state waters. State waters should be extended to include all waters to a depth of 600 meters or to 1 nautical mile beyond the continental shelf, whichever is the greater distance from shore.
- Recreational fishing must be allocated a quota for all fisheries. The intent of unused quota by recreational fishers is that it remain unused.
- The practise of professional entities being able to transfer quota be stopped.
- A greater understanding of the marine ecosystem be developed in order to inform quota allocation.
- Vessel specific research be completed for all quota allocations. Specific advice be considered on all global fisheries accessed by each vessel operating in Australian waters. Non-compliance with or evidence of unsustainable practice in other fisheries, intentional or otherwise, be realised as a prohibitive factor in access to Australian fisheries.
- Maximise use of technology to increase transparency of fishing operations in Australian waters. Uninterrupted publicly available location and image of fishing operations should be mandatory for all vessels with a storage capacity of equal to or greater than 3000 kilograms.
- Mandatory percentage of total expenditure associated with each fishery be made available for research and education.

Thank you for consideration of this submission.

Regards

John Stanfield