

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Trade and Investment Growth
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into supporting Australia's exports and attracting investment

Dear Sir / Madam,

Seafood Industry Australia (SIA) appreciates the opportunity to provide information regarding the export growth opportunities for the Australian seafood industry. As the national peak body for the Australian seafood industry, representing the wild-catch, aquaculture and post-harvest sectors, we welcome improved trading terms and export growth for a broader range of domestic seafood products. Not only does the seafood industry employ many thousands of Australians and make a significant economic contribution, to particularly rural and regional Australia, we are also responsible for providing more than 1 billion meals each year. With aspirations to rapidly grow this figure to 1.5 billion meals each year, our industry takes seriously its responsibility to contribute to the domestic economy and to contribute to the global food task.

Unfortunately, our sector faces increasing barriers to growth. Not the least of which is the ongoing erosion of security of resource access. It is this matter that I wish to raise to the attention of the Committee as the solution sits clearly within the remit of our Federal, State and Territory governments.

I also wish to recognise and support the submission of our member, Queensland Seafood Industry Association.

The absence of secure access to resources, both aquatic and terrestrial, is a major threat and looming impediment to the growth, prosperity and export potential of the Australian seafood industry. Flow on effects from continued resource access restrictions also affect our post-harvest businesses, freight companies and local communities across Australia. It is also a significant impediment to attracting and retaining investment. When our fishers can have their resource access significantly reduced or removed, often without appropriate compensation, it is difficult to see how we can be seen as a good investment.

This lack of surety is not a new problem, but despite debate, discussion, lobbying and advocacy for more than two decades, it remains an existential threat to the Australian seafood industry.

So significant is the current pressure on our industry that it crisis talks were held in February 2019 in Fremantle. In an unprecedented show of unity industry leaders from every state and territory participated in the "Tipping Point" meeting to discuss pathways to address the constant erosion of access to resources and the associated the devaluation and destabilisation of the commercial seafood industry around the nation. The timing and location of the "Tipping point" meeting was designed to focus on and demonstrate support for the WA Western Rock Lobster (WRL) quota holders whose investment and future was under threat from intervention by the Western Australian Government. Not only did that iconic, profitable export industry experience significant destabilisation through this

intervention, there were ramifications right around Australia. Fishers on the other side of the country received calls from their bankers regarding the likelihood of similar interventions.

The WA WRL industry is not an isolated incidence. There have been recent reforms in NSW, reforms are currently occurring in Queensland and Victoria. While there are different drivers, the results have much in common – the loss of access security for our industry.

SIA has responded to this existential threat by establishing a Resource Security Task Force to identify and execute strategic priorities, and through advocacy improve security of access to the renewable natural resources underpinning the operation of the Australia's wild-catch, aquaculture and post-harvest seafood businesses.

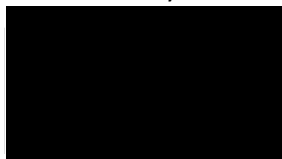
The key objectives of the Task Force are to develop:

1. a commercial fishing access rights system that delivers strong, secure, transferable, long term access rights to be enshrined in and protected by Commonwealth and State/Territory fisheries legislation, and recognised and accepted as 'collateral' by financial institutions.
2. a policy framework which:
 - i. Underpins the long term security of commercial fishing access rights as described above
 - ii. Recognises and provides for the principles of S51(xxxi) of the Commonwealth Constitution to apply in all circumstances where unjust acquisition and/or reallocation of commercial fishing rights occurs (i.e. the right to compensation where unjust acquisition and/or re-allocation occurs).

The Task Force is currently investigating best practice legislative and regulatory frameworks to provide security of access for our industry. I would welcome the opportunity to share the outcomes of our research with the Committee in due course.

At a time when it seems unpopular to sustainably use resources, the future of many in our industry rests with ability of our politicians to provide leadership based on science and a well-informed world view. It is through policy settings that reduce red tape and empower industry that we will have the ability to meet our responsibilities to contribute to the domestic economy and global food task, with export being one of the critical pathways for our industry to achieve its potential.

Yours sincerely



Jane Lovell
CEO