



Burdekin Shire Council

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FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

23rd April 2015

Committee Secretariat
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Burdekin Shire Council - Submission to the Inquiry into Opportunities for Expanding the Aquaculture Industry in Northern Australia

The Burdekin Shire is situated on the Pacific coastline, centred 80km south of Townsville where climatic conditions are warm to tropical. The Shire is in excess of 5000 square kilometres and home to an estimated 17,784 people. Queensland Treasury forecasts the region's population will reach approximately 19,500 by 2031.

The Burdekin region is centred on the rich Burdekin River Delta. Abundant water supplies, fertile soils and an average of 300 days of sunshine per year have resulted in the Burdekin becoming one of the strongest agricultural regions in Australia. The dominant crop is sugar cane, where the region produces over one quarter of the nation's harvest. However, the Burdekin also boasts multimillion dollar horticulture and beef cattle industries. The total value of all output in the Burdekin is \$2.2 billion.

The Burdekin has an established aquaculture industry through Pacific Reef Fisheries (PRF). Aquaculture is a relatively new industry for the region, servicing the Australian domestic market. PRF is a large, fully integrated prawn farming operation, with grow-out and processing facilities near Ayr. Having commenced operations in the Burdekin in 1998, the family-owned business is now capable of growing over 1000 tonnes of premium Black Tiger Prawns and North Queensland Cobia fish annually. PRF has recently received Council approval to increase production of its prawn farm from 68 hectares to 98 hectares, allowing for 30 existing, one hectare ponds to be used as part of the operations. It is expected that this expansion will employ an additional 6 permanent staff plus additional seasonal staff. PRF has won five gold medals in the Sydney Royal Fine Foods Show, plus the Champion Prawn Product for 2012 and the Champion Fresh Fish Product for 2015, and supplies fresh prawns to the Coles supermarket chain. PRF employs a wide range of people including marine science graduates from James Cook University in Townsville. During the growing season staff numbers swell from a base of about 50 to anything up to 100 once processing gets under way. PRF is currently seeking to expand its nearby Guthalungra operations in order to become the largest single prawn farming operation in Australia.

We are also fortunate to have MBD Energy, in partnership with Pacific Reef Fisheries and James Cook University, commercialising ground breaking aquaculture waste water treatment systems in the Burdekin. These bioremediation systems provide the dual benefit of water treatment as well as an additional crop from the system, in high value marine macro-algal (seaweed) species. As such novel systems will be integral to further aquaculture development adjacent to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, we believe it is logical that the Burdekin should be a focus of any such development.

MBD Energy is also planning to establish an astaxanthin project, using micro-algae techniques.

Burdekin Shire Council was pleased to hear that this inquiry is currently underway to inquire and report on opportunities for expanding the aquaculture industry in Northern Australia.

More specifically, addressing the terms of reference:

- Even when a company with credential is well-funded, commercialisation is difficult because of the environmental regulatory process. In order to attract new investment, it is critical that these processes are streamlined;
- We do not see any issues in the development process except for the permit and licensing approvals;
- Aquaculture is a global market. Many Australian professionals work overseas on large aquaculture projects. New markets are also not difficult to source with premium product.

The Burdekin is well positioned to establish a development area with access to abundant suitable land and waterways, as well as support from a well-developed aquaculture industry. The Burdekin also has access to research and expertise in the aquaculture field, marine science and engineering through James Cook University. We would welcome any further investigation of our region as a development zone for aquaculture in Northern Australia.

Yours faithfully,

Bill Lewis
MAYOR