



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRIMARY INDUSTRIES,
RESOURCES AND RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS**

Reference: Management of Commonwealth fisheries

CANBERRA

Wednesday, 26 March 1997

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

CANBERRA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, RESOURCES
AND RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Members

Mrs Bailey (Chair)
Mr Adams (Deputy Chair)

Mr Andren	Mr Fitzgibbon
Mr Baldwin	Mr Leo McLeay
Mr Broadbent	Mr Nairn
Mr Causley	Mr Ronaldson
Mr Cobb	Mrs Stone
Mr Crean	Mr Wakelin

Matters arising from Audit Report No. 32 1995-96 Commonwealth Fisheries
Management: Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

WITNESSES

FRANCE, Mr Murray Riche, Executive Partner, Kailis and France Foods Pty Ltd, PO Box 280, Mount Hawthorn, Western Australia 6016 and Member, Northern Prawn Fishery Industries Organisation, PO Box 35, Farrer, Australian Capital Territory 2607 494

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Mr Adams	Mrs Gash
Mr Andren	Mr Nairn
Mr Causley	Mrs Stone
Mr Cobb	Mr Wakelin
Mr Fitzgibbon	

The committee met at 10.08 a.m.

Mrs Bailey took the chair.

FRANCE, Mr Murray Riche, Executive Partner, Kailis and France Foods Pty Ltd, PO Box 280, Mount Hawthorn, Western Australia 6016 and Member, Northern Prawn Fishery Industries Organisation, PO Box 35, Farrer, Australian Capital Territory 2607

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry by the Standing Committee on Primary Industries, Resources and Rural and Regional Affairs into the management of Commonwealth fisheries. In June 1996 a report by the Auditor-General on the management of Commonwealth fisheries was presented to the parliament. The report was then referred to the committee by the House of Representatives. Our task is to review the audit report and to inquire into the matters raised by the auditors. Today we will hear from Mr Murray France, who will be representing Kailis and France Foods and the Northern Prawn Fishery Industries Organisations.

I remind the witness that committee proceedings are recognised as proceedings of the parliament and warrant the same respect that the House of Representatives demands. Witnesses are protected by parliamentary privilege in respect of the evidence they give before the committee. Witnesses will not be asked to take an oath or to make an affirmation, however, false evidence given to a parliamentary committee may be regarded as a contempt of the parliament.

The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but should the witness at any stage wish to give evidence in private he may ask to do so and the committee will give consideration to the request. We have received submissions from both the organisations you are representing here today and have authorised their publication. Do you firstly wish to make any changes to those submissions?

Mr France—There is one minor change which, unfortunately, I am not able to totally clarify. There is an inconsistency between the two submissions as it relates to where fisheries ranks in primary industries in gross value of production. In the Kailis and France submission, my information was that fisheries ranked third and in the NPFIO submission I see that we are saying it is ranked fourth. We were trying to clarify that this morning. We had the view that there was some shuffle between fisheries and meat as to position, but at this moment I am not able to confirm exactly whether we are third or fourth. But there is inconsistency between those two submissions in that regard.

CHAIR—Before we begin our questions to you, would you like to make a brief opening statement to us?

Mr France—I have read many of the transcripts of evidence from previous witnesses. This group is no doubt well exposed to the issues here. I think the two submissions I am intending to speak to are fairly self-explanatory. The only comment I would like to make is by way of assisting your understanding of my background. I have been in the Australian industry for over 35 years. Much of that time I have spent at sea.

Our operation is quite a vertically integrated business. We operate trawlers within a variety of fisheries in Australia. We operate a significant value adding factory, where we process catch from our own vessels, plus we process products that we import from other suppliers. We sell those domestically and to the export markets.

I have also been quite involved with fisheries overseas from a direct investment point of view. I have had quite some experience with some of the UN facilities, such as FAO and UNDP, et cetera, in developing fisheries in developing countries. My experience is fairly extensive and I am available to assist.

CHAIR—Given the breadth of your experience in the industry—we have noted your criticisms of the ANAO report in your submission—would you firstly be able to comment on how you regard AFMA has managed Commonwealth fisheries in comparison with some of the other organisations you just mentioned?

Mr France—I think, in a nutshell, AFMA have done quite a commendable job. Managing fisheries is a very difficult business, satisfying the various stakeholders involved in the industry. AFMA has been subjected more recently, over the last four or five years, to increasing interest from environmental groups. Much criticism directed at AFMA seems to have an environmental basis of one form or another. We believe that the whole of the government systems seem to be more environmentally aware. Therefore, it seemed to us in industry that criticism which seemed to relate to things environmental was perhaps given more credence than may have been the case had the criticism not been related to the environment.

In brief, I think they have grappled the position quite well. Certainly from my exposure to other industries, I think AFMA are as advanced as any other management agency I have had contact with. I include in that reference agencies such as the New Zealand fishing industry authorities, the UK, Canada, many Middle East countries—Saudi Arabia, Oman and countries I have had personal experience with—and some of our near neighbours, such as Indonesia, et cetera. It is perhaps unfair to compare Australia with some of the developing countries. I also mention the USA. We are well up in the rating of efficiency, not meaning that everything is perfect.

CHAIR—In what areas would you suggest that AFMA could make improvements in its management?

Mr France—As an industry person, we are never satisfied that there is sufficient consultation with industry. I think AFMA are facing the dilemma as to which section of industry they pay attention to. This industry in Australia has organised itself into, I think, fairly effective representative organisations. That does not mean that every fisherman's point of view is necessarily embraced by an organisation, but the structure is there. There are times, I think, when there are extreme differences of opinion between the various levels of industry. AFMA then has the unfortunate task of trying to sort out and weight

which one has more importance than the other. Our federal system of government certainly aggravates things, in my view, where we have the political influence of the states versus the Commonwealth—jurisdictional type issues.

I would say from where I sit that AFMA probably could be a little more mindful of the representative type of issues that come from the industry associations and perhaps be less attentive to the inevitable problems that a decision will inflict upon a certain section of the industry. You cannot satisfy all the people, and I think the problem AFMA have faced in certain fisheries—obviously you are aware of the difficulties they have had in the South East Trawl—is because of the difficulty in getting the industry to agree.

That is a function, in my view, of the different levels that industry hold within the industry. Some have more financial capacity to deal with their problems than others and have taken decisions to move along, whereas others decide to stand their ground and protest and seek legal recourse, et cetera. I think in essence, apart from talking about things like whether we should have more money for research or have better communication with environmental groups, by and large, I honestly cannot find areas to be too critical.

CHAIR—In the first paragraph on page 3 of your submission you talk about the amount of money spent on research. You say it is difficult to be precise. Are you meaning the actual amount of money, the type of research or both?

Mr France—In fact, initially I was talking about the difficulty in precision in the amount of money, but I think it is also a question of what type of research and, hence, the difficulty in identifying it. That information has come to me from people more expert in measuring money spent on research than myself. The last sentence in that paragraph states that it is assumed about one-third of this money is spent on fisheries related environmental knowledge. Again, that information came to me from the executive director of the Fisheries Research Development Corporation, who has reviewed the thing.

CHAIR—Do you have any suggestions to put forward to us about how the money that is actually being spent is able to be more readily identified—and perhaps priorities being set for that amount of money as to what areas of research it should be spent in?

Mr France—I suppose my first reaction is that I think research money should be spent to achieve a positive outcome. I am not necessarily an advocate of research for the pure and simple science of proving that you cannot do something or proving that something does not exist. My view is that there should need to be some positive result from the research which we can extrapolate into worth in the forms of productivity of the resource or more knowledge about the resource to avoid environmental degradation and those sorts of things.

I have had quite some years interacting with research agencies. For a period of 15

years our company in fact chartered fisheries research vessels to CSIRO. I am very well aware of the different priorities that research scientists place on research priorities. I have felt for some time that there have been conflicting objectives with where money should be spent on research, but I have never been able to reconcile the importance of one area of priority with another when I have been speaking to scientists.

My whole approach to money for research is: what is the end result? Can we interpret that investment in research into something meaningful? I suppose I would be criticised by many of the pure scientists, saying that that is not what science and research is really all about. But in my mind it should be the priority.

Mr ANDREN—You say there is sufficient knowledge about fish stock and habitats. You are satisfied there are. It strikes me that in a lot of the evidence we have received—even in the ANAO report—there is a suggestion that there perhaps has not been enough work in this area and that that is the very problem facing the industry, the lack of knowledge about the biomass.

Mr France—That statement was made in the context of the balance of that statement, where I say that we consider the high cost of fisheries research. I personally believe that the dynamics of the industry are such that, from a scientist's point of view, there would need to be a limitless supply of money to ever achieve a state of knowledge that totally satisfies a scientist.

It is my personal opinion that the industry generally has good knowledge of what is going on within different fisheries, usually before the scientists do. I know that may be an unsatisfactory situation, when we are looking at environmental issues, if we say we allow fishing to go on, or biological sustainable issues, before we really know what it is all about.

If we were to have that level of research funds available to totally satisfy scientists, then how do we deal with the aberrations that come into our industry frequently, often aberrations that we have no control over? I am speaking clearly here about the environmental type issues. If it were my money, I would certainly be of the view that the money that is being spent is adequate. I am not saying that it is as much as it could be, but it is adequate.

Mr ANDREN—How do you feel about the fishers themselves becoming far more part of the research effort? That would mean, I guess, lifting some of the limitations through by-catch and making it not so much a penalty as it is now, encouraging people to throw away non-targeted species and such things. Do you believe that the fishers' anecdotal information is not tapped enough and that therefore they are perhaps our best research source?

Mr France—Very definitely, I have that view. I have had the view for quite some

years that there is information available from fishermen. Perhaps it is not coming forward in the existing logbook formats and that type of thing. But fishermen have a wealth of information. Unfortunately, many of them cannot express themselves in a coherent manner. In my view, a smart fisheries scientist is somebody who relates to fishermen, sits down—we see more of this occurring these days—conducts workshops, and gets out and speaks to fishermen, trying to read between the lines of what the fishermen are saying. I do believe there is substantial room for increased knowledge from the industry itself and from the experienced fishermen.

The difficulty always with the management agency in trying to take advantage of that information is: how credible is the information and is a fisherman pushing a particular point of view for his own particular agenda? I respect the fact that that does happen with fishermen, but I believe if there is sufficient polling of fishermen's views you can produce from that a trend. It may be an alarming trend in the context of the Northern Prawn Fishery, in which I have been involved for quite some years.

It was the industry that first identified the fact that things were not going as well as they could. Certainly CSIRO responded quickly and scientifically, looking into reasons why, et cetera. Invariably in fisheries, the participants in the fishery—I am speaking there about the fishermen themselves—know when things are not performing properly before we are able to scientifically validate it.

Mr CAUSLEY—Going back to the Australian National Audit Office report, which was extremely critical of AFMA—I think you would have to say that it was very, very critical—a lot of the statements made in there have been grabbed, I suppose, by opponents of the industry to use against the industry. Most importantly, they were critical of the fact that there was no audit done of fish stocks and that therefore AFMA did not know what they were actually doing. Do you think that is a practical assessment to come from the audit office?

Mr France—My personal view of the ANAO report when it came out was that it was just bandwagon stuff. It was getting on the train of an environmental issue and 'let's bash the industry and AFMA because things environmental are popular with the people and the government is mindful of that'. Most of the substantive criticism by the ANAO of AFMA's performance seemed to have an environmental base. I think it is a fool's paradise if they think all the things they would like AFMA to do could physically be funded or that any credible government would endorse that sort of initiative. It is just ridiculous.

Some of the things they are requesting are ridiculous when it comes to costs. If AFMA had that sort of fund to invest in the sorts of things the ANAO were saying should be done, we would have just a completely distorted value for money type of approach—unless our whole agenda is to have knowledge for the sake of environmental satisfaction, of people asking questions versus whether it is value for money.

Frankly I don't think it was even necessary. In relation to environmental impact assessments and environmental impact studies—I think I made this point in my submission—from those that I am aware are involved in that process, it is a whole area that is yet to be determined. What is the criteria for determining environmental impact assessments, consequences, studies on fisheries? You certainly cannot use that which applies to the miners, the forestry industry or the manufacturing industry.

Who sets that criteria and how do you deal with variables? Is the object of the exercise to completely stifle fisheries development until we have these sorts of reports? Again, there is the question of who pays for it. I think I read in one of the previous witness's statements, the WWF, that the industry should pay for it. If that was a criteria, then you could say we will effectively shut down the industry.

Mr CAUSLEY—In your experience of the industry, would it be fair to say that quantity of catch varies considerably from season to season, from month to month, and that probably sometimes species tend to disappear but then for some unexplained reason come back again? Is that your experience?

Mr France—It is certainly the experience in some fisheries, not all fisheries. It depends pretty much on the life cycle of the species we are talking about. There are no doubt species that have shorter life cycles, higher fecundity, greater egg laying and greater reproductive capabilities. Those short life cycle species can be more seasonally influenced.

There was a view that prevailed perhaps until about 10 years ago that you could not biologically extinguish a prawn fishery because it was a short life cycle animal. The thinking at the time was 12 to 18 months, very high fecundity, and the commercial return would collapse before you affected the fishery from a biological sustainability point of view.

Mr CAUSLEY—Dr Francois's theory?

Mr France—Yes, Dr Francois held that view, but it was also generally embraced by scientists who had knowledge about prawn fisheries. Then some experience in an Australian fishery known as Exmouth Gulf confirmed scientifically that you could have what is called recruitment overfishing through fishing pressure. It caused the scientists to look more seriously at these sorts of issues.

Having said that, different species of prawns can vary significantly, depending on the season. A species called banana prawns in the Northern Prawn Fishery can vary between 2,000 tonnes and 8,000 tonnes year by year as a pure function of rainfall run-off. If you don't get rainfall run-off, you don't get any worthwhile catch volumes. Other species are, I think, not so radically subjected to environmental shifts.

I am not an expert on gemfish. I am certainly aware of much of the debate that has

gone on about gemfish. I have spoken at length to some of the industry scientists and some of the government scientists with their different views about gemfish. I think one of the things that perhaps was not given sufficient credibility in the whole gemfish debate, as much as it should have been in my view, was just how much of this apparent collapse of the resource could have been caused by environmental issues.

I know many fishermen have a tendency to dismiss any poor year by saying that it is just an environmental phenomena. If they did not, they probably would not delude themselves to remain in the fish business, but they are optimists. By and large it is an issue, but it depends on the species.

Mr CAUSLEY—Could I just address a couple of management issues for AFMA? Mr Andren touched on one in relation to the by-catch situation. I think he is probably referring to the fact that there is data missing there because people do not bring them ashore because they don't have a quota. When you get incidental catch, do you think there should be more incentive, say, by giving the fisher 50 per cent of the value with, say, 50 per cent going to research, but some incentive to bring that ashore instead of just wasting it?

Mr France—My personal view certainly is along those lines. I am very aware of the reasons AFMA has not instituted that type of arrangement. They believe it could be subject to abuse and fishermen then would target that by-catch, but it is a question of which is the lesser evil. I certainly do not advocate waste in any form. I do recognise that with some fishermen—it is the nature of the beast—the excitement of the whole process when it is happening is such that perhaps they would put more by-catch or by-products on board than perhaps they should.

I certainly agree with your comment that that should be landed and there should be some valuing basis whereby it is not sufficient incentive for the fishermen to go out and target it but it is sufficient incentive for them not to dump it and hence have the biological knowledge that we gain from just what is the volume of by-catch that is being taken.

We have regulations in certain fisheries that introduce what we call bag limits or by-catch limits. This is often a function of whether a fishery is managed by the state and/or by the Commonwealth. If the fishery managed by the Commonwealth happens to take certain species in a by-catch mode that really belongs to the management regime of another state, then we have this absurd situation where bag limits are introduced. As a consequence, quite often that bag limit is exceeded as a natural process of that fishing operation. Unfortunately, it is against the law for the boat to have in possession volumes, et cetera. So you do get waste in that area.

This is not an issue unknown to the governments of the states and/or the Commonwealth. I think they are trying to grapple with how best to deal with that. It gets back to my earlier comment about the often conflicting objectives between one state

government and another and the Commonwealth.

Mr NAIRN—One of the other highly critical things in the ANAO report was the make-up of the MACs. In the report the ANAO was basically saying there was too much of an industry involvement in the MACs. Could you comment on that? Also, there has in fact been criticism coming from various parts of the industry from a different point of view in that the industry representation on the MACs is also not really representative of the industry. If I could maybe throw in the dreaded South East Fishery as an example of that, would you like to make some comments?

Mr France—I will deal with the second question first; that is, whether the industry representatives on the MACs truly represent the industry. If you are exposed to a lot of fishermen in a room—I have been exposed to many of them in rooms and on boats and in different forums—you find that fishermen can often be intimidated. It is a curious contradiction of behaviour. They can often be intimidated in a formal gathering to the point that you do not really know what they think.

If their nominated chairperson or delegate is articulate and is able to persuade them, he will say, ‘This is what I think we are saying. Do you all agree?’ If there is no loud response, then he can leave that meeting with an impression. Then they go outside afterwards and say, ‘That really was not what I meant at all.’ That is a very difficult thing to deal with and it is a continuing part of this whole industry consultation with themselves.

I believe the criticism is probably a bit unreasonable when you look at the major fisheries in this country. I mean by that the major Commonwealth fisheries—the Northern Prawn Fishery, the southern bluefin tuna and the South East Trawl. There are industry associations set up. These industry associations were meant to nominate a delegate to the various MACs. I think that process works as well as it can work. It certainly is never going to satisfy all the disgruntled people. I have read in previous evidence that there have been a number that are disgruntled.

The other part of that question is that when the minister appoints members to the MACs—we have to keep reminding ourselves, and I sit on a few of the MACs—they are appointed because of expertise. We are not appointed because we represent a constituency. It is a strange contradiction. The association may make the nomination, but the appointment is for the person in his own right. That is for a very real reason.

In the past, there was a process where industry and MACs would meet, and industry from WA, for example, would come to a meeting and they would have a party line and that was all the delegate could talk about. Yet the person from Queensland or the NT or somewhere else had a different party line, so it was a never-ending series of meetings. So we now have this process where the delegate is nominated by an association but he sits in a MAC in his own right, for his own expertise. Hopefully, he is sitting there

without being too distorted by his own vested personal interest.

Back to the first part of the question: does the industry have too much influence? Not in my view. I think much of the reason AFMA was created was that the industry had too little influence. In my life in the fish business, I am sympathetic with why fisheries departments at times become a bit paternalistic and a bit dictatorial, because the industry does not quickly reach agreement, does not quickly come up with unanimous points of view and consensus. We had a period whereby the industry input was just being nodded at and paternally dealt with and then ignored. I do not think the industry has excessive influence at the MAC level.

I do think that the non-industry members of MAC at times flick issues back to the industry members. I think the non-industry members of the MAC have to at times stand up and be counted. The MAC is not just four industry members. If it is a MAC with a composition of eight members, there are four government members there. I think those government members at times have to try and facilitate industry disagreements at the MAC level and not just say, 'I am sorry. This is an industry problem. You guys go back and sort it out.' That is a tendency with the MACs.

Mrs STONE—You made it quite clear that you are concerned that research has difficulty in a multiple and dynamic variable type environment, with the factors changing and so on, particularly in relation to environmental issues. How should we look at setting quotas? I am thinking of the orange roughly experience, for example. An initial piece of research led to incredible expectation, a lot of gearing up and a lot of investment which is still being dealt with, with people having a lot of financial investment out there with not much else to do with it. What is the way you recommend we should go in terms of setting sustainable levels of extraction from fisheries? What criteria should we use?

Mr France—That is a complex question. I do not think ITQs or TACs are necessarily the only way to manage a fishery. We certainly have two major fisheries managed that way. I am a little bit ambivalent as to whether ITQs or TACs—that is, output controls—are really the way to go. I think we are seeing some of the problems here. If there is an output control managed fishery, then the question of the method of harvesting is often not considered by the management regime.

If you talk about big boats, small boats, hooks, lines, nets or whatever it is, the simplicity approach of ITQ management was market forces: 'We have identified the target species. The scientists and the industry have decided what the yield can be and, therefore: go for it.' So I am not an absolute advocate of the true efficiency of the ITQ system.

The fisheries that can be managed by input controls are much more complex and more difficult to adjust, but I think they have their place. As to how you set the take or the yield, be it TAC or closed down because of seasons et cetera, it obviously has to vary by species.

In relation to your example of the orange roughy species, it is an aggregating species. It is not a species that in my opinion the Australian scientists would have had any real experience in dealing with. The only area in the world where orange roughy was caught in significant quantity at the time we had those predictions from CSIRO—which, I might say, is not the reason the industry went belly up—was New Zealand, and New Zealand was modifying and modifying their opinions.

There were life cycle predictions of 20 years which became 40 years which became 100 years and which now may be not 100 years because the method of ageing, which is referred to as otolith or ring counting in ear bones et cetera, is perhaps not reliable on old creatures, so now we should be looking at other forms of carbon dating, et cetera.

The bottom line is that the resource of roughy that was there does not appear to be there now. If you asked older fishermen why that is, they would suggest that there was a resident stock of orange roughy in certain areas and a significant migratory stock of orange roughy in certain areas. Perhaps the fishing activity concentrated on that resident stock and for whatever reason those migratory movements were not there.

It is very difficult to get a handle on deep water species such as orange roughy. It is a bad example to criticise fisheries management in this country by citing orange roughy, because it is a migratory species. It is a deep water species. It can be easily taken to the surface and tagged. Then where did it move to after we caught it - not here? Did we catch it somewhere else? I think the level of knowledge on deep water species such as orange roughy and dories, et cetera, is perhaps not as great as it could be.

However from Australia's point of view, had I been looking after research in this country at the time, because my concern obviously is expense on research, I would have said, 'Our friends across the Tasman have a substantial industry. What are they doing? Let's perhaps pick up from where they have left off and start at that level.' I think we were doing a lit bit of recreating our own levels of expertise here, which is fine because I think that is what motivates scientists. It is a matter of disproving your peer and proving your own theories.

With inshore species I think the level of knowledge is reasonable, in spite of general opinions. I think with shelf species the level of knowledge is reasonable. It can never be such that they can predict El Nino type failures or environmental failures. They can often offer a point of view but they cannot scientifically validate it.

With a lot of criticism of the scientific work by the industry, I remind them that it was not that long ago that a scientist would not venture an opinion because their whole discipline is, 'I have to prove it first before I tell you what I think,' which, of course, is no good to any of us. So we now have the scientists in a culture whereby they are offering a point of view. They are not infallible.

Mrs STONE—So in terms of setting criteria for what we allow people to have, you are saying that you do not believe scientific research is going to set the parameters successfully. You are talking about a flexible approach, a species by species approach. It could be input, it could be output, and so on. That is what you are basically saying to us?

Mr France—And I think the term ‘adaptive management’ has its place. There are two sets of circumstances. You have a developed fishery and an overcapitalised fishery—that is a different problem to deal with—versus a developing fishery. We do not have too many developing fisheries in this country.

At this moment our company is involved with the sub-Antarctic. We have been the sole operator down there. That has been an interesting experience because we have been subjected to more scrutiny than I think has been known to man in the fish business in the world. I think that approach has been very precautionary. It has not been without problems inasmuch as I have personally had to participate in defending AAT appeals as to why AFMA did not issue more licences. I have sat before commissioners who were saying, ‘Is AFMA trying to create a monopolistic society here? Why are there not more participants in this fishery?’ So AFMA gets subjected to all those sorts of pressures all the time.

From a resource sustainability point of view, from an environmentally sensitive point of view, I do not believe anything more could be done in the sub-Antarctic than has been done. Granted, I acknowledge, if you speak to the major conservationists down there, they do not want any fishing there at all, full stop.

Mr WAKELIN—Do you have experience of the management of the Great Australian Bight trawl fishery?

Mr France—Yes, we are involved in that fishery.

Mr WAKELIN—What is the importance of the statutory management plan for the fishery?

Mr France—I think it is like most management plans in fisheries. It is a matter of the industry trying to know where they are going. That fishery was in fact, I think purely by coincidence, the first fishery where a management plan was actually produced because it was a relatively simple one to prepare a management plan for. The problem with fisheries like the Bight and the Western Deep Water Trawl and other fisheries is that if they go through this period of being an exploratory fishery, a developmental fishery, the industry never quite knows where they are. How long are we here for? Is there going to be another set of rules next year? Will there be another set of criteria? Curiously, a criteria is that they have performance criteria. They say, ‘If you are to have a licence there, you have to put in so many days there.’ Whether you can or cannot make any money is irrelevant. Frankly, even a developmental fishery needs a management plan. It may be just

a developmental management plan, but that is to define the rules.

Mr WAKELIN—What process exists for industry people to make change?

Mr France—The MAC structure enables that. I have the view that nothing should be sacred. I have the view that if somebody says to me, ‘The Fisheries Act does not allow it,’ and it is a good thing, then I think the Fisheries Act should be changed. The process is certainly there, as far as I am concerned. Often I think it comes back to the will to change it. It may be difficult and time consuming and have lead times and legislative drafting. We know that the opportunity is there.

Mr WAKELIN—Research funding is a big issue and you have touched on it in earlier comments, but it seems it can be almost unlimited. Can you just give us a comment on the level of research and the organisation of research?

Mr France—I would probably look at research a bit like the housekeeping money and how much money you are earning. I cannot come to grips with unlimited research budget expenditure. I do recognise that research is a little bit like, ‘We would like to do a bit more and when we have done that bit, how much more do we want to do?’

I don’t wish my comments to sound critical of research in general, but I have been exposed to what I consider to be substantial waste of research dollars. That is because I am motivated differently to those who propose some of the research. I have often thought that research agencies should be managed by non-scientists. I do not mean administered; I mean someone on top who keeps people’s feet on the ground.

I certainly had many discussions with Senator Schacht when he was looking at different amalgams. I think some of his initiatives were quite commendable. There are a variety of research agencies in this country. They do not all have the same agenda and they are all driven differently by different scientific initiatives. It is a bit like the environmental move. They can be personally driven. If Murray France happened to have a particular thing and he wanted to personally drive it, it seems to me that he could influence where research dollars go. If I leave and you come along with a different agenda, you can often change the direction.

I think research money has to be in some way cost justified. Whether it is cost justified to the community, to say that it is important that we know these things for other than just what the commercial industry wants out of it, I respect that. But I think it has to be cost justified.

CHAIR—I think time has actually caught up with us, unfortunately. We have covered a fair range of topics today, but before I actually close the hearing, is there any subject that we have not covered that you would like to raise with us?

Mr France—I raised a point with Senator Hill in what is known as the endangered species scientific subcommittee process. If you are aware generally of this process, it is a facility that allows what I consider to be a capricious, spurious nomination of anything—a species, a practice—to form in this endangered category. If this august group of, I gather, just scientific people—hence the scientific subcommittee—looks at this process and/or species and they make a recommendation to minister, in this case Senator Hill, they can decide, ‘This is an endangered species or this is a key threatening process.’ Social and economic consequences, from my understanding, are not part of the consideration.

You find, in my view, that the minister sits there having to sign off on this recommendation, which I think is completely wrong. I think the whole process for nominations to the endangered species and/or key threatening process relating to endangered species needs to be much more responsible than it currently is. It creates a huge reaction time of government agencies having to respond to it and certainly industry. I think it can have serious consequences.

The other part of that dilemma is that, if something is regarded as an endangered species or the process that gathers that species is called key threatening, then the abatement process falls under the department of the environment, which to me is ridiculous. In other words, it should go back to the fisheries department to deal with how you abate these processes. That is not the way it is presently structured. I think that is an anomaly in the system.

CHAIR—One of many. Thank you very much.

Resolved (on motion by **Mr Andren**):

That, pursuant to the power conferred by paragraph (o) of standing order 28B, this committee authorises publication of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 10.48 a.m.