



**Submission to “Developing the North” Inquiry
From
Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd**

Summary

. We fully support the submission from the Northern Prawn Fishery Industry Pty Ltd (NPF) to the Inquiry, as one of the major stakeholders in that fishery, and in NPF;

. We seek the Inquiry’s support to provide direction and clarity so that Australian operators can continue to develop fisheries resources of the Coral Sea region; and,

. We seek clarity of direction and transparency of Government policy in the North, in order to provide certainty for our Company to make future plans and investments in the Coral Sea Fishery.

Background

Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd is an Australian company, with significant operations in the North of Australia.

We currently hold in excess of 20% of the Statutory Fishing Rights for the Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF), and operate 10 prawn trawlers in that fishery, with our operational base at our Cairns office. We provide employment for numerous contractors in those operations, both at sea and on shore during the vessel refit periods and off season fishing periods, with in excess of 100 people either as employees or contractors reliant on our continued operations in the North.

We have undertaken extensive fisheries development and exploration in the Coral Sea Fishery region over recent years, using chartered local Queensland vessels, as well as our Commonwealth registered vessels, and both local and international personnel in fisheries development and exploration.

This exploratory work has been put “on hold” pending the extensive, time consuming, and convoluted process of developing a network of marine reserves around Australia, including for the entire Coral Sea region. Clearly we have not been prepared to continue investing substantial funds and resources into a fishery, when our access rights to the Coral Sea may have been removed with a Ministerial decision, with minimal compensation identified to even cover the direct losses we would incur (let alone the flow-on impacts to crew, contractors and others who would also be impacted).

More details on our company can be found on our website (australfisheries.com.au) and particularly our central ethos of sustainable seafood production. It is this central plank which has driven our desire to ensure all fisheries which we are involved with are managed in an ecologically sustainable manner, for the long term.

The NPF for example is regarded as one of the prime examples globally of a sustainably managed fishery, having received approvals from the Commonwealth government (under the Australian Fisheries Management Authority), as well as from the Department of Environment (the Environment

ABN: 71 008 989 982, **Correspondence:** PO Box 42, Mt Hawthorn, Western Australia 6007

Perth: Level 4, 50 Oxford Close, West Leederville Western Australia 6017

Phone: +61(8)9217 0100 **Fax:** +61(8)9381 5200

Email: austral@australfisheries.com.au **Website:** www.australfisheries.com.au



Protection and Biodiversity Convention Act, Strategic Assessment), and also has been independently certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) as a well managed and sustainable fishery. As one of the major stakeholders in the NPF, we fully support all aspects of the submission from the NPF Industry Pty Ltd.

We have also been very involved with discussions over recent years in relation to the development of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around Australia. One area of direct concern to the Inquiry is that of the Coral Sea region. We hold one (of only two) licenses to trawl and pot fish in the Coral Sea area – a region in excess of 1.5 million square kilometres of water.

While we fully support sustainable fisheries resources development, and MPAs where goals are clear and appropriate, we are very concerned at the impost the process of developing the marine reserves network, including the Coral Sea Fishery has had on fisheries resources exploration and development in the North.

As an Australian fishing company, we have explored the Coral Sea resources and opportunities using local vessels, our international vessels, and both local and international expertise to better understand and develop the fisheries in that region. We would hope the Inquiry may be able to provide greater certainty and scope to facilitate the development of those resources.

The development we undertook has been placed on hold for several years, pending clarity of Government direction and regulation for the Coral Sea. As an Australian company, we have invested several million dollars already in exploration and development of that region, and hope the Inquiry could provide clear recommendations to facilitate fisheries resources development in the Coral Sea region.

We would ask that the Inquiry consider mechanisms to:

- Provide clarity of direction for the seafood industry and rights holders in the Coral Sea by resolving the debate over MPAs for the region;
- Provide scope to expand and further develop the potential of the seafood industry in the Coral Sea region, based on the exploration and development already undertaken by our vessels and company; and to
- Consider the potential positive regional employment and multiplier effects of an expanded seafood industry presence in Northern Australia, based from Cairns.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry. I would be pleased to provide additional details, and expand on this brief submission if that were to be possible.

Yours Sincerely

David Carter
CEO