

Queensland
Government

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Department of
Primary Industries and Fisheries

Committee Secretary
Joint Standing Committee on Treaties
Department of House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

To whom it may concern,

This letter is in response to HSI's submission to the Joint Standing Committee calling for the listing of *Pristis microdon* on Cites appendix 1 to prevent Cairns Marine (CM) from exporting specimens for Public Aquaria.

I have been researching Chondrichthyans, in particular Sawfish (Pristidae) in Queensland (QLD) waters for the past ten years as a Fisheries Biologist with the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI & F) and as a post graduate student at James Cook University. My responsibility with DPI & F is to investigate the distribution, abundance life history and biology of QLD sawfish. There are sustainability concerns over sawfish populations in QLD because they form part of the incidental catch in the inshore and offshore gill net fisheries. Thus my research has hinged heavily on the collaborative involvement of Industry (gill net fishermen), including Cairns Marine as collectors of these animals.

Sawfish distribution, in particular the freshwater sawfish, has been restricted to mostly remote northern Australia and in QLD the Gulf of Carpentaria. The reasons for their population decline are many however fishing pressure (commercial, recreational & Indigenous) and habitat modification (weirs and barriers) are the primary threats impacting these species. Concerns over the rate of decline in sawfish populations worldwide are testimony of their current conservation status. However, northern Australia (including the Gulf of Carpentaria) is an area known to have suitable sawfish habitat and widely distributed populations.

Operating in habitats of remote northern Australia has created many challenges when researching these animals because of cost and difficulties with project planning and management. Thus Industry involvement through the provision of immature and mature animals has allowed us to cost effectively research sawfish.

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Our knowledge of sawfish is largely attributed to the professional and trusting working relationships generated over many years of collaborative research between DPI & F and Industry. This relationship also allows us to effectively and promptly implement change in fishing practice such as the recent proposal by Industry to make *Pristis* a no take species in the Gulf of Carpentaria gill net fishery as a direct response to research findings.

Cairns Marine has been an Industry partner collaborating in sawfish research with the Department since 2001. Sawfish field operations undertaken by CM has provided researchers with the opportunity to report on sawfish phylogeny and population structure, distribution, diet, growth and movement and habitat preference. For example: tissue samples supplied by CM were used in a recent genetics study involving researchers from Western Australia and QLD. In this study it is reported that *P. microdon* contains 'healthy' genetic diversity over its known range and the genetic health and long term survival of this species is good, provided measures are in place to prevent further declines.

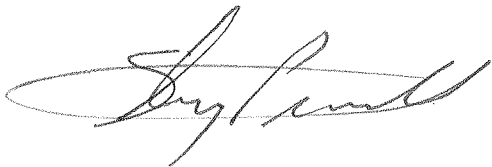
Cairns Marine has also contributed to the sawfish tag and release program both in joint field operations and on independent surveys. Furthermore, Mr Squire (Director CM) has in conjunction with my project participated in community education and conservation awareness raising seminars with school groups, commercial and recreational fishers, spotlighting the conservation need for Australian sawfish and their habitats. Mr Squire also embraced the opportunity to provide a range of extension material to the Marine Education Society Australasia's (MESA) Seaweeek campaign entitled 'Extinction – a Saw point.' This free "on line" web based education service to schools across Australia has been pivotal in delivering the conservation message regarding sawfish (www.mesa.edu.au).

Cairns Marine has always demonstrated a keen conservation interest in sawfish above and beyond what has traditionally been expected from Industry. Mr Squire has despite his Industry based background, presented at world class forums on sawfish and has been quoted in a range of scientific based literature on the subject. He has managed to become an authority on the subject and is passionate about sawfish conservation.

If Cairns Marine is unable to achieve cost recovery via export of a limited number of *Pristis microdon* (10 per year), they will not be able to sustain the valuable service they provide to research. As demonstrated the limited collections of sawfish by CM provide significant conservation benefit as the information is channeled through collaborative research studies with the Department and other research institutions.

Cairns Marine is viewed upon as an important Industry partner to the future of Sawfish research in Queensland. They are also an important driver behind the planned implementation of a not-for profit sawfish trust. The trust is dedicated to Sawfish research an outcome from many years of collaborative work where research funds have been limited and there is the obvious need for more detailed studies on these protected species.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stirling Peverell', written in a cursive style.

Stirling Peverell

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