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Inquiry into the Role of Science
for Fisheries and Aquaculture

Submission to
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources,
Fisheries and Forestry

Inquiry into Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

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This submission relates to the Terms of Reference (e) and (f) for this Inquiry and addresses wild harvest fisheries (i.e excluding aquaculture).

- **Governance arrangements relating to fisheries and aquaculture, including the implications for sustainability and industry development; and**
- **Current initiatives and responses to the above matters by state, territory and Australian governments;**

The governance of Fisheries and Aquaculture science, and how it inputs into fisheries management and compliance activities in Australia is very complex. Responsibility for fisheries administration falls to many jurisdictions, with their own legislations, cultures, politics, time-lines, funding models and cycles, etc. There are 7 state and territory agencies and several Commonwealth government agencies that have responsibilities for delivering science-based management for Australia's fisheries. These multi-jurisdictional arrangements are less than ideal and cause significant inefficiencies and problems in managing individual species, fish stocks, fisheries and fishermen.

The fact that the same fish could be managed by 3-4 different sets of regulations, studied by 3-4 different groups of scientists and policed by 3-4 different groups of compliance officers, is a source of conflict between fishermen and government fisheries managers.

This disjointed structure has led to inefficiencies in the delivery of science and a paucity of properly-directed, high priority research. In cases where there is a vacuum of rigorous scientific data, particular interest groups provide their own science to argue particular points of view. An example is in the Marine

Parks debate where conservation groups argue their case using science based on scientifically valid observations and analysis, whilst commercial and recreational fishers often base their arguments on subjective anecdotal information.

A substantial amount of funding is spent on fisheries science in Australia by the many jurisdictions involved. But a lack of coordination among fisheries jurisdictions, different legislative frameworks, different localised priorities, different regulations and different stages in political cycles all contribute to marked inefficiencies in the execution of fisheries management, science and compliance in Australia.

There have been various attempts to coordinate this multi-jurisdictional matrix, but such attempts usually lead to increased bureaucracy, additional layers in the matrix, very substantial transaction costs, but with no actual powers to influence jurisdictional practices. This all adds greatly to the expense of fisheries science and management in Australia and therefore decreases the money available to collect the information critical to providing scientifically valid advice for management.

Australia was at the forefront of establishing fisheries industry based on well planned scientific observation, but development has not kept pace with the rest of the world over the past five decades or so. There have been a very small number of projects which have been of great significance nationally, but these have been of a one-off nature. To take a single example, the recreational fishery in Australia involves more than 3 million fishers annually, but the only scientifically based national survey was completed in 2003. While individual state agencies have funded studies of recreational fisheries for their own jurisdictions, no nationally based program has been in place for a decade. In other comparable countries, regular scientifically-based monitoring (on annual or 3 year timeframes) has been done for decades. Australia should adopt a fisheries management, science and compliance regime comparable to the models of New Zealand, Norway, the US and Canada. That is, Australia should have one National Fisheries Service that is responsible for all facets of fisheries. This would mean rationalisation of the significant bureaucracies that exist, and more efficient use of the science, management and compliance resources available. Such a structure, will of course, eventually evolve into regionalised sub-structures based on the fish stocks and the fisheries that exploit them – not jurisdictional borders.