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Secretary
ECITA Reference Committee
Parliament House
Via email

Dear Secretary

Thank you for asking Recfish Australia to lodge a submission to the Senate's Environment, Communications, Information Technology and Arts (ECITA) Reference Committee inquiry into Australia's national parks, conservations reserves and marine protected areas.

The government is forging ahead with declarations of a range of 'lockouts' through parks, reserves and protected areas without due recognition of the potential impact these have on the 3.5 million recreational fishers in Australia. With recreational fishing a lifestyle for our constituents their passion and enjoyment from pursuing fishing is curtailed through the introduction of lockouts – sometimes extensively.

Our policy statement on marine protected areas (MPA) is attached at appendix 1 and is referred to the Committee for their information. Our views and position for reserves and national parks is the same as for MPAs.

Parks are for people! The enjoyment and benefits delivered through ecologically sustainable use of resources within a park is justifiable. Recreational fishing can and does provide positive benefit (socially and economically). There are ways that recreational fishing can be continued in parks, reserves, etc., without the need to lock them up. The management tool of catch and release is but one way to allow fishing which in turn generates visitations providing social and economic return to the local economies.

The declaration of Kakadu National Park is a classic example of lack of foresight and planning. Ambit claims by conservation groups, leading up to the declaration, that the West Alligator River should be closed to recreational fishing for the purposes of 'benchmarking' is a clear indication of an inappropriate lockout and to date total lack of management will. This river has been closed to recreational fishing since about 1991 and so far there have been no studies completed at all on the river regarding comparative analysis of recreational fishing between the West Alligator and the two rivers that remained open South and East Alligator Rivers as was the guise.

Our mission – to represent and advocate the interests of recreational and sport fishers at a national level to ensure high-quality, enjoyable and ecologically sustainable fishing.

Amazingly the draft plan of management which is open for public comment until 19 April 2006, still does not commit the park management to actually start the assessment of the closed West Alligator River. The draft plan states, in part:

For environmental reasons, a number of waterways within the Park have been closed to recreational boating and fishing under the Regulations. These are:

- *The West Alligator River catchment which provides an important long-term reference area that has not been subject to recreational fishing activity*

How is it possible to make this statement when no study has been completed to actually assess the impact/benefit of the closure? The concern that we have is that the closure will go on indefinitely and no-one will actually be charged with the responsibility of doing the benchmarking studies. Meanwhile aggregating the recreational fishing effort into smaller areas can lead to other problems.

A number of options have been proffered to the Kakadu management to do the 'benchmarking' by the recreational fishing industry sector through tagging, log books and a specifically designed monitoring regime and at no cost to the Park management – all to no avail.

Recommendation: - government processes for the establishment of reserves, parks, MPAs etc should provide for assessment and monitoring programs that involve recreational fishing interests. These programs will collect, manage and analyses data on catch and effort. Sufficient resources be made available to fund these programs.

Another example of poor process lies with the recent Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP) green zone declarations. Thousands of anglers along the Queensland coast line were, and still are, disgruntled with the extremely poor consultation and engagement that was conducted. There has been significant impact to many anglers and subsequent loss to businesses associated with the recreational fishing industry.

However despite the overwhelmingly poor community engagement there is one example of how it can and should work. The Capricorn Community actually took ownership of the process and through a series of transparent and genuine consultation meetings the outcomes that were achieved with the GBRMP and the community delivered solutions that all parties were comfortable with. At appendix 2 is part of a report to the GBRMP Authority which discusses the Capricorn Community as a case study. And at appendix 3 is the Recfish Australia model for community engagement in the MPA processes. This model has been adopted and modified from the Capricorn Community model.

Again another example of very poor process is highlighted with the declaration, by NSW, of the Lord Howe Island Marine Park. Despite overwhelming support to allow the continuation of spearfishing in certain areas within the park and without any environmental or fisheries science to support total exclusion of spearfishing it was decided to exclude it at the whim of minority groups. This process involved no consultation with either the Australian Underwater Federation or Recfish Australia. In addition many marine protected areas, including state jurisdictional declarations, have not involved the fisheries managers or scientists in the consultation process – resulting in possible negative effects on fish stocks through inappropriate located sanctuary zones.

Scepticism is at the forefront of the minds of recreational anglers at the very mention of new or increased MPAs, reserves etc. It is essential that robust and inclusive consultative mechanisms are introduced for future introduction or expansions of reserves.

Recommendation: - a transparent, open and accountable community engagement process model is developed in association with recreational fishing peak bodies.

Paper parks are not the answer. There is no point in introducing a park, reserve etc just for the sake of it. There must be sound biological reasons for doing this. To simply declare these without the scientific background and most likely simply to appease some minority conservationist group is poor policy. Likewise, to have a 'paper' park without resources to manage and monitor is also poor practice. It is too easy for people to draw lines on maps and declare the reserve or park and then sit back and do nothing.

Recommendation: - all declarations must be preceded by appropriate scientifically based support for the objectives and the need for a declaration is to be justified. Secondly, any declaration is to be accompanied with the allocation of sufficient resources to achieve the objectives.

Under the National Oceans Office process of marine planning the northern area is under consideration at present following on from the South-East plan. With the extremely high level of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in the north of Australia there needs to be some practicalities realised. It would be short-sighted for the Australian Government to declare a suite of representative marine protected areas in the planning area at this point in time.

Consider the issue as it currently stands. The Australian commercial, recreational and indigenous fishers locked out of certain zones in the planning area but the illegal Indonesian fishermen continue to cross into Australian territorial waters and catch fish. Not only just inside our Exclusive Economic Zone but in many cases near inshore and inside estuaries and river systems. It is reasonable to assume that the IUU effort will not take heed of the MPAs that are declared. Providing protected areas for the illegal effort in our northern waters at this point in time would be farcical.

Recommendation: - that no declarations of MPAs occur in the north of Australia until such stage as the IUU effort is eliminated or drastically curtailed.

Should the Committee require additional information or clarification please contact me.

Yours sincerely

John Harrison

John Harrison
Chief Executive Officer
5 March 2006



RECFISH AUSTRALIA

Policy Statement - Marine Protected Areas.

Effective Date 31 July 2005

Networks of marine protected areas around Australia are not the only way of preserving our aquatic ecosystems. It is not the panacea for Fisheries ESD processes, thus ensuring future generations enjoy what past generations have.

Without sound biological or scientific evidence proving the only way to save something is to lock it up there is no rationale for wholesale MPAs. Management solutions must be broader.

Declines in aquatic life may have nothing to do with activities in the area earmarked for protection. Often the problem lies outside the box drawn on the map. Off-stream pollution, habitat destruction and drainage of wetlands damage ecosystems, inshore & offshore.

The 1995 National Policy on Recreational Fishing called for: greater research; habitat work; and legislation to protect spawning/nurseries areas. NRSMPA is the legislation - all three are needed to achieve ESD in fisheries. We must address the cause not just treat the symptom.

The Jury is undecided on MPA successes due to negative side effects e.g. aggregation of effort exerts pressure in other areas. And “paper parks” are not the answer – we need resources assigned for management, community monitoring, enforcement, etc.

If an MPA is agreed it should not mean all fishing activity is excluded automatically. Recreational fishing behaviour can be modified to achieve outcomes; total exclusion is an absolute last resort.

The biggest mistake is not to consult at the start and throughout. This causes angst and doesn't generate ownership. More effective programs will be achieved with the support of recreational fishers. Support cannot be expected in exchange for total exclusion.

Futureye

Case Study 5.1 Capricorn Community

Members and representative organizations in the Capricorn region coordinated their activities to conduct a highly successful parallel consultation during the RAP process which resulted in the recreational and commercial sectors in Capricorn getting more than what they asked for. Capricorn Sunfish Inc. and the Local Marine Advisory Committee amongst others facilitated two community meetings with more 200 people during RAP.

A key message of the first meeting was that the rezoning was going to happen, they needed to "accept the rules of the game" and create consensus in order to win. The purpose of the community meetings was to provide information, encourage and facilitate discussion and gain a consensus position to be presented to GBRMPA. These meetings allowed fishermen who were concerned to vent their feelings and then moved onto identifying their concerns so they could build a consensus input about what zoning would be preferred. Consensus was needed because, as perceived by Kim Martin, President of Capricorn Sunfish, "as an individual fisherman, the chances of having input into the final outcome of RAP is next to nothing."

The final submission did not reflect anyone's personal view. Nor did it reflect Capricorn Local Marine Advisory Committee nor Capricorn Sunfish Inc nor Sunfish Queensland's view. It was the view of the community. The submission blended together an entire range of views and almost 100 per cent of what they asked for was delivered.

What makes the Capricorn Coast example unique to many other regions in Northern Queensland is that the community took ownership of the process and was extremely happy with the outcome. They understood that RAP wasn't something that could be prevented therefore worked to reach an acceptable outcome. Local figures such as the local elected representatives including the Livingstone Shire Mayor, Bill Ludwig, Capricorn Sunfish President, Kim Martin and LMAC Chair, Graham Scott were involved and lent their support to the process.

Martin believes the Capricorn Coast consultation worked because there was an external model for integrating silo-driven interest groups and because people took ownership of the process and ultimately became champions. GBRMPA was prepared to take on the elements of the public forums. These were considered to be an essential tool for getting people involved and doubts people would have participated otherwise.



Recfish Australia

Effective Date 2 August 2005

Process for Conducting Community Engagement Meetings regarding the Creation of New Marine Protected Areas (MPA's)

Background:

Various agencies have attempted to involve the recreational fishing community in "consultation" on fisheries management issues and planning for some time. Many of these exercises have been met with cynicism and criticism from the recreational fishing community, often because of the manner in which they are conducted and also as a consequence of the perceived lack of "listening" and action that results from these engagements.

A point has been reached where many recreational fishers are now refusing to participate in these consultations organized by government and/or management agencies. An alternative approach is required to re-engage the disenfranchised stakeholders.

One such alternative is for State/Territory recreational fishing peak bodies (Sunfish, AFANT, Recfishwest etc) and/or National Parent Organisations (Game Fishing Association of Australia, Australian National Sportfishing Association etc) to arrange and facilitate community engagement sessions. These sessions would aim to develop consolidated input by way of a group submission through Recfish Australia to the agencies for advice and consideration.

OBJECTIVES OF FACILITATING RECREATIONAL FISHING COMMUNITY MEETINGS

1. Gather opinion and input from interested members of the local recreational fishing community regarding Marine Protected Areas.
2. Compilation of a group submission that reflects community views and is supported by a large number of people
3. Coordination of the input and subsequent submission through the channels of Recfish Australia.

ORGANISATIONAL & SUPPORTING REQUIREMENTS associated with running public meetings relating to the creation of Marine Protected Areas

Pre-meeting advertising and promotion:

1. Produce an A4 size flyer advising of the meeting, date, location, time and brief statement of purpose and distribute widely among tackle stores and related retail outlets. (at least 3 weeks in advance of the meeting)
2. Email advice of meeting through organisational email network

3. Arrange local media coverage – TV news, ABC radio interview and news, newspaper, newspaper fishing columns (if there is such a thing in the area) and commercial radio talkback programs.

Meeting room set-up and equipment:

1. Room set up with theatre style seating (if available), presenters at the front, table at the rear for promotional and other material
2. Need large whiteboard (ideally electronic so copies can be produced), pens and eraser
3. Overhead projector is an advantage for displaying objectives of the meeting and facts and figures. (alternatively laptop and data projector if available)
4. Table and chairs on stage for recorder and presenters
5. Microphone for presenter if audience larger than about 50 people

Staffing of meeting

1. Recommend that a senior member of the facilitating recreational fishing organisation introduces the meeting and goes through preliminary explanation and scene setting prior to detailed discussion of issues.
2. Detailed exploration and discussion of issues needs to be competently facilitated and controlled. A two-person facilitation team could work. This need not be the same person who introduced the meeting – you need to get the best person for the role.
3. Recorders - someone needs to initially record input from the floor on the whiteboard – can either be facilitator, or assistant.
4. Another independent person needs to record on paper (or laptop) details of proceedings and any consensus positions reached throughout the meeting. This information will be critical in developing a group submission subsequent to the meeting. This independent person will also offer their comments and observations at the meeting through Recfish Australia to the agencies.

Media coverage of meeting:

1. Try to get a reporter and photographer from local newspaper to attend the meeting
2. Draft a media release the following day and provide to local TV for follow-up story, newspaper (even if they were there) and radio. Media release should include number of attendees, atmosphere of the meeting, summary of major issues discussed and any significant consensus positions agreed and what you do from here.

Invitations to attend meeting to local Federal/ State MP's & Councillors are recommended.

MEETING PROCESS:

1. Thank attendees for their interest and introduce presenters

2. Explain that the purpose of the meeting is –
 - to provide attendees with information relevant to the proposal for the creation of new Marine Protected Areas
 - to explore and discuss a range of options for the selection of appropriate and acceptable areas
 - to try to reach a consolidated group position with respect to preferred areas for MPA's
 - obtain consensus positions so that a group submission can be developed for input into the planning process

3. Clarify that the meeting has been organised by (insert name of your representative group) and will present and advocate for recreational fishing interests. Acknowledge that there may be commercial fishers present; however extended debate between commercial fishers, presenters and other attendees will not be permitted. Any criticism of commercial fishing practices is not aimed at individual fishers, but at the management arrangements that currently allow some unacceptable practices to occur. No personal attacks will be allowed. Unruly or disruptive attendees will be asked to leave.

4. Advise that presenters will be happy to explain official organisational policy and positions on specific issues if asked and may present personal opinions during the course of the meeting (make sure you as presenter indicate when you are presenting a personal opinion).

5. Provide a glossary of terms and acronyms relevant to the topic– eg MPA, AFMA, MAC, Regulations, GBRMPA and any others you can think of.

6. Summarise agency process associated with MPA planning and how input from this meeting will be provided into this process.

7. **FACTS & FIGURES**
Provide attendees with some facts and figures relating to the issue/s being discussed.

Ensure all figures quoted are correct and state source of data and information being presented.

For example, facts and figures may include things like comparative sectorial value of the fishery, sectorial participation rates, expenditure estimates and catch rates.

Maps of the areas in question should be displayed, either on OHT's or data projector. OHT's have the advantage of being able to draw lines on the maps in real time as discussion occurs

8. Seek options and rationale from members of the meeting and facilitate discussion on each proposal.

Use the following generic template (as applicable) to guide discussion on issues:

- Explanation of the background of each area within the proposal
- Review level of use of various areas and locations
- facilitate discussion on pros and cons of various options

- record all proposals from the floor on a whiteboard
- try to arrive at a preferred position for as many issues as possible
- final check back with attendees that they are happy with preferred positions

9. Explain process from here –

The representative organisation will develop a group submission based on info from the meeting and distribute (ensure you gather contact data from attendees – email preferred contact mechanism). Final group submission with signatures will be input into official process via relevant agency.

10. Have a prepared sheet where those in agreement with broad direction of the meeting can sign on as a member of the final group submission before leaving the meeting.

11. Thank attendees for their interest and input and advise that no guarantee can be given that any resolutions arrived at by attendees will be adopted by the agency, but that a group position arrived at via this process has far more credibility and influence than individual submissions and is likely to be given serious consideration.

Post meeting process:

1. Independent person to develop draft submission in line with agreed consensus positions from meeting and distribute to State/National peak bodies and participants who provided contact details for comment.
2. If time permits, promote the draft submission and encourage any other interested people to view and sign on to the group submission. Websites can be useful to display material and tackle and boating outlets often act as points of reference for the recreational fishing community to view the draft submission.
3. Independent person to finalise submission, collect any necessary signatures and dispatch to Recfish Australia for final comment.
4. Recfish Australia to meet with relevant agency and provide a briefing on the results and suggest ways to improve the process and provide recommendations for the smooth rollout of any MPA program.