

13 April 2017

Dr Jane Thomson
Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Thomson

Re: Inquiry into the biosecurity risks associated with the importation of seafood and seafood products (including uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat) into Australia

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this very important issue. The NT Seafood Council will be providing more detailed input via the National Seafood Industry Alliance submission, due on 12 May 2017.

NT Seafood Council notes the extremely short time frame given for this submission on an extremely important issue for our industry, especially given so many of our members are at sea and not able to be contacted as they work to supply local seafood in the lead up to Easter. We therefore request the option to provide a supplementary submission by 12 May 2017.

The biggest fear for our industry is the potential ecological impacts that pests and diseases could have on the ecosystem – once the ecosystem is damaged and pests and diseases become established there is no going back and everyone in Australia is impacted. Our industry operates under the precautionary principle in all our operations, but imports do not appear to be subject to the same principle.

From a Northern Territory perspective, the following issues have been raised by our members:

- As most product (fish and crustaceans) from the NT is live, fresh or frozen (i.e. not cooked), the risk to industry from a biosecurity breach is huge.
- The NT mud crab industry is extremely concerned at biosecurity risks, given the industry relies on high value live product.
- Mud crab are susceptible to the white spot virus and a range of other diseases found in prawns, so it is critical to ensure the virus does not enter the country – and the best way to do that is to not allow the importation of uncooked prawns.
- The NT mud crab industry relies on being able to supply high value live product to all major cities in Australia.
- The use of imported bait by recreational and professional fishers poses a high risk to biosecurity at the same time as the fishing industry faces restrictions on collecting their own bait. Both sectors should be encouraged and supported in using local bait.
- One member has been trying to establish a viable fishery based on catching bait fish in Northern Territory waters, but struggles with a highly regulated industry competing against cheap, high risk imports from unregulated fisheries. Their product supplies a small Australian market whose operators choose to pay more for local bait in order to protect local waters.

- With the NT being home to one of the largest producers of saltwater barramundi in Australia, our aquaculture industry is extremely concerned at the risks posed by whole, fresh barramundi being imported into Australia from high risk areas. Processing wastes from whole product can be a major vector of diseases into the environment.
- With Australia's largest prawn farm nearing the final stages of approval before construction near the WA/NT border (Project Sea Dragon), with the risks posed by the importation of seafood and seafood products and the current biosecurity crisis enveloping Queensland prawn farms, this project could face significant hurdles to further investment. Given the national emphasis on developing the north, and the current stagnation in the economic development in the Northern Territory, these type of projects are of increasing importance to the Territory and national economy.
- The import of live fish and crustaceans (through the aquarium trade) is of great concern due to the high biosecurity risk, and testing of this product must be at the highest level.

Yours faithfully

Daniel Kimberley
Chairman