

Introduction

The inquiry

- 1.1 During the summer of 2011 and 2012, the Committee developed options for an inquiry into fisheries, aquaculture and science. Having considered the Committee's proposal, on 21 March 2012 the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig, asked the Committee to inquire into and report on the role of science for fisheries and aquaculture.
- 1.2 The Committee called for submissions through a newspaper advertisement on 4 April 2012 and by directly contacting stakeholders. The Committee also wrote to relevant State, Territory and Federal Ministers, notifying them of the inquiry and inviting submissions.
- 1.3 The Committee received 50 submissions (and 8 supplementary submissions) over the course of the inquiry, which are available on the Committee's website.¹ A full list of submissions is contained in Appendix A of this report. The Committee also received 8 exhibits to the inquiry, which are listed in Appendix B of this report.
- 1.4 The Committee held 11 public hearings, in Canberra, Perth, Hobart and Townsville. Details of the hearings and witnesses who gave evidence to the Committee are available in Appendix C of this report.
- 1.5 The Committee would like to sincerely thank all individuals and organisations that participated in the inquiry. The Committee has been

¹ www.aph.gov.au/arff

privileged to receive evidence from scientists around Australia who are passionate, dedicated experts in their fields and who are keen to share their knowledge and understanding with the Parliament and the broader community. The Committee has also had the opportunity to visit scientists in their laboratories to view first-hand the efforts and results of their research.

Rationale for the inquiry

- 1.6 The world is expected to have a population of nine billion people by 2050; there is growing and urgent need for fish protein, the most traded protein in the world, and the highest deliverer of omega 3 oils.
- 1.7 There is a growing middle class in many Asia-Pacific countries and we are recognising the Asian century. Where does Australia fit in this picture?
- 1.8 Australia has a reputation of good science, especially for the top end of aquaculture market, which has helped to close the cycle of advances in fish production on land and the plate.
- 1.9 Wild fisheries in Australia is only small in catch and value and does not make a great impact on the huge area of oceans under Australia's exclusive economic zone.
- 1.10 Although there may be some growth from new species that could become commercially fishable and increases because of fish stock recoveries or increase in their numbers, overall there may not be growth from the wild fisheries.
- 1.11 Significant growth must come from aquaculture. The need to focus on aquaculture using world class science is critical for the growth of this industry and to find its way to take advantage of the new Asian opportunities.
- 1.12 Capital drives both fisheries and aquaculture. For wild fisheries, this means having a boat, a quota and the effort to fish. For aquaculture, this means research science and responding to a burgeoning market.
- 1.13 Underlying aquaculture is a need to find or develop new sources of feed stock, by replacing wild caught fish feed with either cereals or growing other fish to feed a higher species of more marketable fish.
- 1.14 This is where the health aspects of fish products and omega oils is an important aspect of our fisheries development, including the introduction

of fish oils into fish feed to ensure the omega oils are retained in the farmed fish.

- 1.15 The Committee began with the question of why Australia wasn't doing more to develop the fishery, to improve the position in the world. We are recognised for advances in aquaculture science and fisheries management, but there seems to be a number of barriers, including conflicting legislation, differences of emphasis between state and federal legislation, and a confused understanding of the sciences.
- 1.16 Added to this, the Federal Minister sought to look at the role of science for fisheries and aquaculture. Towards the end of the receipt of submissions, the case of the *MV Magiris* (or *Abel Tasman*) arose, which led to further questioning of the science. Further, although many fish are taken by recreational fishers, there is no real record of the recreational fishing take.
- 1.17 The aim of the report is to assess the current state of fisheries science and its application while also addressing the future of fishing in Australia. A desirable outcome would be to arrive at a new national regional policy statement that will allow the development of regional fisheries agreements that can be negotiated with the stakeholders, the states and environmental groups.



