



AMATEUR FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF THE NT Inc

Submission for the Inquiry into Opportunities for Expanding the Aquaculture Industry in Northern Australia

Representing recreational fishing in the NT and ensuring the quality of our sport

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Inquiry into Opportunities for Expanding the Aquaculture Industry in Northern Australia
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AFANT was formed and incorporated in 1980 and represents the recreational anglers of the Northern Territory on several management advisory committees dealing with key recreational fish and crustacean species as well as a diverse group of natural resource management advisory groups, recreational fishing steering committees and the water safety advisory council in the Northern Territory. All of these provide the opportunity for the recreational fishing industry to have a say on the day to day management of fisheries, input to policy development and the forward planning of sustainable development.

AFANT welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the Inquiry into Opportunities for Expanding the Aquaculture Industry in Northern Australia. We understand that the potential of aquaculture was first raised in the Governments pre-policy planning document the *Green Paper on Developing Northern Australia*. It was noted in the Green Paper itself that past efforts to unlock the north have often been criticised for not considering the views and aspirations of those already living and working in northern Australia. AFANT has raised a number of issues in regards to aquaculture which we sincerely hope will be properly considered, as one of the great attractions for Australians living and working in Northern Australia is the lifestyle and a large part of this is the spectacular recreational fishing and environment.

AFANT believes that aquaculture can play an important role in food production and economic development in the Northern Territory. While several major aquaculture projects in the past have been rejected because of their potential impact on wild fisheries and the environment there are also current operations, like the closed salt water barramundi farming systems on the Adelaide River floodplain, which are examples of productive, efficient aquaculture systems conducted with minimal environmental impact or risk.

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AFANT has serious concerns that the government's desire to reduce red-green tape in order to promote and foster aquaculture development may result in hastily approved aquaculture facilities. This approach of reducing regulatory settings to create incentives for business to invest, innovate and employ is fraught with risk.

There have been numerous examples in the mining industry where approvals have been hastily granted and where the existing regulation penalties and enforcement is woefully inadequate to ensure that companies operate without major impacts on the environment. The history of mining development in the NT demonstrates that a number of operators show scant regard to environmental legislation and requirements and have left significant polluting legacies for government or new operators to clean up. AFANT does not want to see a similar story of environmental damage repeated with aquaculture due to watered down legislation, rushed environmental approvals and lack of enforcement.

Significant risk factors in aquaculture include:

1. Conflict with other users of water bodies such as recreational fishermen, commercial fishermen, tourism operators and traditional owners
2. Excess pressure on wild baitfish stocks that are used to create high protein feed pellets
3. The transfer of disease and parasites to wild fish populations
4. Pollution of waterways with excess nutrients (fish feed & wastes), chemicals and antibiotics
5. Reduction of native gene pools if farmed fish (escapees) and native species interbreed
7. Aquaculture can be an unpredictable enterprise for small local communities due to its susceptibility to severe weather, predators, disease, and global competition
8. Facilities can compromise the aesthetic beauty of the coastline

If the government is genuine with its desire to promote and foster sustainable development in Northern Australia it has an obligation to do the required work to ensure that this can occur without impacting the environment and lifestyle of the Top End. As most of the Northern Territory has minimal development and disturbance, it also has significant gaps in the scientific knowledge surround the effects of aquaculture in the northern Australian

environment. These significant gaps in knowledge must be addressed before any development takes place that may have unintended and serious environmental consequences.

AFANT believes that continuous engagement with recreational fishermen is vital as they represent the most significant user group of coastal and inland waters where aquaculture facilities are likely to be found. AFANT is strongly of the view that the lifestyle, landscapes and environment of Northern Australia needs greater recognition, protection and consideration in the drive to develop the region.

I hope you have found this submission helpful and should you require any further information in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

Tristan Sloan
Executive Officer
Amateur Fishermen's Association NT

30 March 2015