



Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia
Committee Secretariat
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

Submission to the Joint Select Committee inquiry into opportunities for expanding the aquaculture industry in Northern Australia.

GFB Fisheries Pty Ltd is pleased to offer this submission on the opportunities for aquaculture expansion in northern Australia. GFB Fisheries owns two major Aquaculture farms in northern Queensland. GFB located in Townsville is a land based freshwater facility producing Barramundi and Coral Coast Barramundi located in Bowen is saltwater land based aquaculture system producing Barramundi and researching other possible marine aquaculture species. The facilities have been in production for a combined 36 years and together produce around 1,000,000 kg of whole fish per annum.

Barramundi aquaculture

Barramundi is the aboriginal name of an iconic Australian fish much loved anglers, chef's and consumers. However current Australian law actually requires that imported Asian Sea Bass, which is a variety of the same species *Lates calcarifer*, to be labelled as Barramundi when sold in Australia and it is exempted from the requirement to be labelled as imported on menus etc at restaurants, fish and chip shops or other food service providers. Naturally Australians assume that all "Barramundi" is Australian (confirmed by a number of studies by the Seafood CRC) when in fact around 70% of Barramundi consumed in Australia is imported from Asia. This statutory blockage to differentiating the quality sustainably produced Australia product from the questionable imported product is a major impediment to aquaculture development in Northern Australia.

Recommendations:

- 1. The name "Barramundi" should be recognized for its strong provenance and reserved for fish caught or wholly grown in Australian*
- 2. The current exemption for the food service industry from Country of Origin Labelling (CoOL) of seafood should be removed.*

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To compete with the low wage cost, largely unregulated and environmentally unsustainable producers to our north, Australian producers clearly need to stay ahead of the innovation curve. And yet the Australian Government has spent more money funding research and innovation to assist Barramundi farmers in Vietnam over recent years than it has in Australia.

Indeed the only significant investment by the Federal Government into Australian Barramundi production over recent years was actually to help establish a hatchery operation in the then Prime Minister's electorate in Melbourne to produce fingerlings for export to Indonesia for grow out and re-importation back into Australia to compete directly with Australian producers.

There is huge potential to increase production and improve cost efficiency and sustainability of Barramundi production in Australia with a scientific selective breeding programme to achieve genetic improvement for growth, food conversion rate and fish health. Such programmes have achieved amazing results in salmon as well as species such as chicken and cattle. The Australian Government has assisted with funding for similar programmes for prawns, yellow tail king fish and salmon and barramundi is clearly in need of similar support.

Recommendation:

3. *Establishment of a large scale genetic improvement programme for Australian barramundi should be supported with Federal Government assistance.*

Further development salt water aquaculture

Aquaculture is the only land based farming that is specifically controlled by federal legislation in addition to highly restrictive state regulation even though it has demonstrably less downstream impact than other forms of intensive tropical agriculture. As a direct consequence of these multiple layers of complex and restrictive legislative controls there has not been a new coastal (salt water) aquaculture development to achieve full development approval in Queensland for more than a decade since the introduction of the Federal controls.

Recommendation:

4. *Simplification of the multi-jurisdictional approval process for new aquaculture development is required for the industry to expand in northern Queensland at least.*

Off shore marine aquaculture is theoretically possible in coastal waters of northern Queensland but only if it does not involve feeding of the farmed livestock. In other words sea cage type finfish aquaculture is current prohibited by Federal regulation.

Cobia *Rachycentron canadum*, was first cultured in Australia at GFB fisheries and shows great commercial promise as a tropical northern Australian aquaculture species. The culture of this and many other suitable tropical finfish species including high value grouper species is however commercially reliant on sea cage culture systems.

The Tasmanian Salmon industry that has rapidly expanded to become a world leader in sustainable aquaculture and this highlights the possibilities of sea cage aquaculture for Northern Australia. The northern Queensland coast has access to major international airports, roads, support services and infrastructure needed to support large scale aquaculture and transport the produce to market cost-effectively is an ideal site for land based and sea cage aquaculture expansion.

For the commercialization of tropical sea cage aquaculture in Northern Australia to develop, a reformed environmental assessment strategy assessing the actual risks to the environment from current and future

aquaculture facilities would allow environmental approvals and the development of sea cage aquaculture in northern Queensland and Australia.

Recommendation:

5. *Removal of the current blanket current prohibition of sea cage finfish aquaculture along the Northern Queensland coast and replacement with rationalized risk based assessment and approval process.*

Kind Regards,

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