



7 July 2015

Hon Warren Entsch MP  
Chair  
Joint Select Committee on Northern Australia  
C/- Secretariat - jscna@aph.gov.au

Dear Chair

**RE: Northern Territory Seafood Council submission on the Inquiry into Opportunities for Expanding the Aquaculture Industry in Northern Australia**

As the peak representative body for the wild catch, aquaculture and trader/processor seafood sectors in the Northern Territory, the Northern Territory Seafood Council (NTSC) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the review of the Inquiry into Opportunities for Expanding the Aquaculture Industry in Northern Australia.

The Northern Territory Seafood Council (NTSC) is the peak representative body for the wild catch, aquaculture and trader/processor seafood sectors in the Northern Territory, with the exception of the Northern Prawn Fishery.

NTSC membership represents some \$60 million gross value product a year and over 220 seafood businesses. NTSC's vision is for a profitable, sustainable seafood industry supporting the economic growth of the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory seafood industry provides:

- Regional employment;
- Export income;
- Cost effective monitoring of the marine environment;
- Economic diversification and resilience for regional communities;
- Healthy, high quality and sustainably sourced food;
- Consumers with the pleasure of freshly harvested, premium quality and tasty seafood;
- Contributions to the NT tourism industry through the provision of iconic species such as grey mackerel and tropical snappers; and
- Contributions to Australia's future food security.

Notwithstanding Australia's world recognised, scientifically proven advances in fisheries resource and environmental management, regulatory burden and costs constrain the operations of wild harvest and development of aquaculture, placing Australian seafood producers at a distinct disadvantage globally. Contrary to what is spoken by Governments a culture of regulation and compliance dominates Government at all levels rather than development and growth with regards to the seafood industry.

New and emerging opportunities for aquaculture need to be co-ordinated amongst all stakeholders, including Government, existing operators, new entrants. Government initiatives and programs for indigenous development must be communicated and co-ordinated with existing aquaculture activities to ensure overarching co-ordination of the industry and to maximise the return for investment in any new ventures.

Current issues and challenges facing the seafood industry that must be addressed include under-development of both wild harvest resources and aquaculture, leading in turn to serious future food security challenges for Australia. Already, more than 70% of total seafood consumed by Australians is imported.

Participants in the Australian seafood industry are facing the same challenges as other small to medium-sized businesses in primary industry and manufacturing. In particular, they have been impacted by the high Australian dollar, and the prohibitively high cost of production. Increased competition on the domestic market from relatively cheaper imports is eroding market share within Australia.

The Northern Territory is the only jurisdiction in Australia that has removed the current loophole in seafood labelling by extending country of origin laws for seafood to the food service sector. The current absence of effective labelling requirements elsewhere in Australia for cooked seafood compromises consumer choice and undermines the Australian industry, including the industry in the Northern Territory.

Country of origin labelling throughout Australia will foster consumer confidence and provide impetus for the growth prospects of the seafood industry in the north.

The concept is simple. Information regarding the origin of seafood is collected and paid for by the supply chain all the way to the back door of dining outlets to allow seafood purchasers, including dining outlets, make informed decision. The right is not afforded to customers of dining sectors and no valid reason for this inequity has to date been articulated. This sees consumers over charged for imported product and the Seafood Industry left unable to compete with cheap imports in the dining sector market.

The recent debate in the Senate highlighted unanimous support for the intent of the Food Standards Amendment (Fish Labelling) Bill 2015 to remove the current exemption that leaves consumers in the dark regarding the Country of Origin of their seafood when dining out.

The Commonwealth Government's Senate, Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee Report made the recommendation to remove the exemption regarding country of origin labelling under Standard 1.2.11 of the Australian New Zealand Food Standards Code for cooked or pre-prepared seafood sold by the food services sector, subject to a transition period of no more than 12 months.

To not action this finding due to the lack of support from the Seafood Importers and Food Service Sector, the two sectors who have the most to gain from keeping the exemption, is unjust. That hidden gain which is demonstrably over a billion of dollars annually comes as a direct cost to consumers and Australian producers.

Success and growth of both our wild harvest and aquaculture producers is limited by the labelling current exemption. Without intervention, the Australian Seafood industry can only fairly compete in the fresh fish (retail) market with confidence, impacting significantly on the growth of the sector.

This issue, above all other barriers is the critical issue that requires addressing to ensure aquaculture can fairly compete throughout the supply chain within Australia to maximise its opportunities for expansion and viability.

Yours faithfully

Rob Fish  
Chairman