

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
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Parliament House
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Friday, November 18, 2022

RE: Fisheries quota system inquiry

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of [Seafood Industry Australia](#) (SIA), the national peak-body representing the Australian seafood industry across the wild caught, aquaculture and post-harvest sectors, please accept our below statements on the current Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport into fisheries quota systems.

SIA is the national peak-body representing the Australian seafood industry as a whole. With members from the wild catch, aquaculture and post-harvest sector, including state, territory and sectorial associations, along with seafood businesses and producers. We are the voice of Australian seafood.

The Australian seafood industry directly supports more than 17,000 Australian jobs, and countless more downstream in transport, logistics, and processing; and contributes \$3.5 billion in gross domestic product annually to the Australian economy. SIA provides consumers, Government and other stakeholders with confident and united representation. Our mission is to Promote, Protect and Develop the Australian seafood industry on the national and international level. Our unity indicates that we love what we do, we stand by our products, and that our products are the best in the world.

Australia is a world-class performer in the area of fisheries management and sustainability outcomes, with our Commonwealth-managed fisheries reported as sustainable for the past eight years. Our exemplary record is due, in-part, to our science-based fisheries management. The system varies according to the needs of each specific fishery, and whether it is a state, territory or a commonwealth fishery.

Over the course of the inquiry, and the public hearings, the Committee has heard a number of opinions and baseless remarks, which we believe to be outside the scope of the inquiry, and assertions regarding international fisheries which are misleading and factually inaccurate. As such, we urge the Committee to recall the inquiry's Terms of Reference, and make recommendations that work hand-in-hand with a sustainable industry committed to providing Australian seafood for generations to come.

At the Commonwealth level, Individual Transferable Quotas (ITQs) have played a pivotal role in this outcome and the ongoing improvement processes; and as such have been effective in producing good community outcomes. This has been evidenced more in single species fisheries where quota prediction and science can support reliable and continuous assessments. SIA notes general improvements in the Southern Rock Lobster fishery and

Western Rock Lobster fishery due to the implementation of an ITQ system, all single species fisheries.

Whilst ITQs are best practice in suitable fisheries, implementation can be improved with a better understanding of the fishery's industry and market conditions both pre and post implementation. This will assist the industry and government when assessing the suitability of a fishery for ITQs and more transparent expectations around outcomes.

There is a danger in the assumption that ITQs, or any fisheries management tool, can produce good community outcomes alone. ITQs must form part of a broader fisheries management plan and, at all times, be tailored to address the complexities of the fishery and the fishing community and environment.

SIA runs the industry-specific national mental health program [Stay Afloat](#), which successfully piloted three national focus communities, and will be rolling out nationally in 2023 thanks to funding provided as an Albanese Government election commitment. Research has shown Australia's commercial fishers experience twice the base-rate of psychological stress of any other sector, and this is not okay. Our concern for industry is that they are an industry under constant pressure. Instability in the current ITQ system has the potential to exacerbate mental health concerns and negatively impact mental wellbeing.

The Stay Afloat program has highlighted that the stress of uncertainty of resource access impacts the mental health, and physical wellbeing of our fishers through heightened stress, feelings of depression, and increased anxiety. The mental health of all fishers is supported through financial security, consistency in government regulations and stronger fishing rights. This provides confidence for the future of Australian fishing families.

An instability in legislation and access rights negates a willingness from the industry to invest in operations, while simultaneously stopping new investors and the next generation of workers from considering commercial seafood fishing and production as a career pathway. At a time when food producers nationally are struggling to attract and retain local workers we need to encourage industry participation and connection to community at every level.

SIA supports all commercial fishing operations, from SMEs to corporate, for a richer industry landscape. Industry consolidation is a global economic reality across all sectors, we know this to be true for commercial fishing, however what is being overlooked in this discussion is that it can have positive outcomes for all fishers.

Overall, the use of ITQs have had a positive impact on suitable fisheries in Australia, especially when supported by broader fisheries management strategy.

Strong ITQ systems and improved security of access for all fishers will improve environmental and ecological outcomes through increased access to capital, increased investment, driver for innovation, and catalyst for industry recruitment.

I direct you to our primary SIA submission for further discussion on the above topics. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this submission with you further and can provide more detail if needed. I would like to thank you in advance for your support of the Australian seafood industry and our future.

Sincerely,

Veronica Papacosta
CEO, Seafood Industry Australia