



27 February 2017

Hon Bill Byrne MP  
Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries  
GPO Box 46  
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Minister

### **Re: White Spot Disease and Recreational Fishing**

The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) remains concerned that the current movement control orders in the Logan River do not fully take into account the risks of transferring white spot disease (WSD). Under current biosecurity arrangements there is one set of rules for recreational fishers and another for commercial fishers.

#### **1) Movement Control Orders and the Logan River**

QSIA understands that under the current movement control orders:

- Recreational and commercial fishers must cook prawns and/or crabs within the containment area before they are allowed to take them out of the containment area.
- Both Biosecurity Queensland (BQ) and the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) have previously advised impacted commercial fishers that they can cook green product on vessel so it can be moved outside the containment area.

This situation increases the risk of transferring WSD outside the containment area into the Moreton Bay Marine Park and potentially further north and south of the Logan River.

#### **2) Biosecurity Arrangements**

QSIA has been advised that a member of the public was offering a service to recreational fishers to cook crabs and prawns. If the service is free it appears no laws are being broken. However, if the service is being offered for sale to recreational fishers does this individual need to be accredited by Safe Food Production Queensland (SFPQ)? If not, does he or she need to be accredited by the Logan or Brisbane City Councils?

QSIA is aware that action has been taken to rectify the situation but the fact that this has occurred is worrying. The biosecurity legislation should be applied in such a way so to minimise risks; the manipulation of the law by the individual noted above highlights the inadequacy of the existing biosecurity framework. More importantly, it is simply impractical for commercial beam trawl and crab fishers to cook their product for the following reasons:

- Both the beam trawl and crab vessels that were working in the containment area are too small to incorporate cooking facilities; and
- Beam trawl vessels predominantly catch bait prawn which do not need to be cooked.

It would be costly to establish cooking facilities for mud crab fishers that, under normal circumstances, would either cook in a facility outside the Logan River area or sell product uncooked to local and interstate retail and wholesale businesses or directly to a restaurant.

The WSD issue was not of industry's making and from the outset commercial fishers in the Logan River offered to do everything they could to ensure no prawns or crabs were taken for commercial purposes. Why should industry have to invest in cooking facilities in the movement control area and the cost of accreditation under SFPQ?

This raises the following questions:

- The focus of the biosecurity response from a wild harvest perspective is heavily prescriptive and it is understood by industry that this is needed to ensure that the spread of WSD is contained. There are hundreds of recreational fishers accessing the Logan River region fishing for crabs and prawn each week since the introduction of the movement control order. What is the rationale that allows recreational fishing to continue when WSD remains a risk to crustacean stocks? Does DAF and/or BQ have the boating and fisheries staff to monitor recreational fishers in the movement control area?
- What is the government's long-term priority – continued recreational fishing or ensuring that WSD has been eliminated from the Logan River which is to the benefit of all users of the marine environment?

### **3) Displaced Effort and Recreational Fishing Effort**

The biosecurity response has also created displaced fishing effort at multiple levels:

- Commercial crab fishers must work in other areas outside the Logan River area which means added cost in terms of fuel;
- Commercial fishing infrastructure varies considerably between the Logan and Brisbane Rivers. Simple access to mooring facilities are limited in the Brisbane River which has made transitioning beam trawl operators difficult.
- Without commercial effort in the Logan River it continues to attract recreational fishing activity increasing the risk that uncooked product is taken out of the movement control area.

### **4) Commercial Fisher Morale**

QSIA is in continual contact with commercial fishers impacted by the movement control order as they live local and interact with recreational fishers on a daily basis. Commercial beam trawl and mud crab fishers live local, work locally and have the stress of running businesses that have now been put on hold while their debts continue to accumulate. These commercial fishers are predominantly operating three types of businesses in the region:

- Non-employing businesses or sole proprietorships and partnerships without employees;
- Micro businesses or businesses employing less than 5 people, including non-employing businesses; and
- Small businesses or businesses employing 5 or more people, but less than 20 people.

Small businesses are critical to the local economy and since early December 2016, local, family owned and operated commercial fishing businesses have been locked out of the Logan River. These businesses generated economic activity amongst their local

community and have made no income from commercial fishing and they still face an uncertain future.

The almost uncontrolled take by recreational fishers in the Logan River is real concern for industry. Local commercial fishers have advised QSIA that there is significant crab and prawn fishing taking place during the day and at night. Does the State government have the capacity to police recreational take of crab and prawn in the movement control area?

Finally, industry has approached the State government to establish a no take zone for both commercial and recreational fishers in the Logan River which was refused. Industry justifiably feel like second class business operators again, as the result of an event that was not of their making.

### **5) Seeking Government Leadership**

Commercial fishers are seeking leadership on the WSD issue and industry is still committed to doing the right thing by the environment and industry at a local, State and national level. QSIA will continue to work with the State and Commonwealth governments which is the responsible course of action.

The biosecurity response cannot be considered an all-encompassing one until all users of the marine resource endure restricted catch while WSD is being eliminated from the region. I ask that restrictions on recreational fishing be addressed as a matter of priority; the time for worrying about a potential recreational fisher backlash should be a secondary concern to the eradication of WSD from the Logan River region.

If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please Eric Perez, QSIA CEO

Regards

Keith Harris  
President  
Queensland Seafood Industry Association

Cc:

1. Hon Barnaby Joyce MP, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources.
2. Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources.
3. Dr Jim Thompson, Chief Biosecurity Officer, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.
4. Dr Alison Cook, Chief Veterinary Officer, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.
5. Scott Spencer, Deputy Director General, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries.