SUBMISSION NO. 7
Inquiry into the Role of Science for Fisheries and Aquaculture

From: David Cook
Sent: Wednesday, 2 May 2012 10:17 PM
To: Committee, ARFF (REPS)
Cc:

Subject: Submission on the role of science in fisheries management Part 1
Attachments: 3 A REVIEW OF CONCERNS RE THE OFFSHORE GILLNET FISHERY in GBRMP Edition One AUGUST 2010 ed1a.pdf; 1 The urgent need to reverse the decline of fish stocks and other iconic marine life in inshore waters of the GBRMP 2011 04 06 lowr1 es.pdf; 2 The depleted inshore fisheries of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park need urgent management change FINAL submission to UNESCO.pdf

2 May 2012

Dear Honourable Members, Ladies & Gentlemen,

Submission on Role of Science in Fisheries Management Part 1 (Part 2 contains just one attachment, our submission to DSEWPAC) in relation to your request for comments on: http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=arff/fisheries/index.htm; closing date 3 May, 2012.

NSF is an informal and unfunded network of a few hundred concerned people working on a voluntary basis, from a variety of sectors, mostly in North Queensland, who share similar concerns about depleted inshore fish stocks in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park World Heritage Area and the poor level of management displayed in the Queensland East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery (ECIFF).

As an unfunded activity, we do not have the time to discuss at length the TOR of this enquiry. We do however have a considerable volume of reports of our findings and concerns available on line at www.ffc.org.au; some of which are attached. ***We wish to request that the TOR for this enquiry requires at least the three attachments to this mailing and the fourth sent by my subsequent mailing be assigned as required reading for those persons undertaking the enquiry.***

We are concerned that the ECIFF is one of, if not the worst managed fishery in Australia. We find it particularly ironic that this has been perpetuated along the shoreline separating two World Heritage Areas – the only place in the world where two WHAs meet.

Dugong, turtle and endemic rare, inshore dolphin are killed in gillnets in unknown numbers. Offshore gillnetting occurs in inshore waters as shallow as just over two metres depth at low tide. Up to 1.2 km of large mesh gillnets are set along the routes of migrating humpback whales. Local papers have recorded the white humpback, Migaloo, passing Snapper Island during the offshore netting season targeting breeding aggregations of depleted grey mackerel (June to September in FNQ). Grey mackerel is a inshore species that, at least in FNQ, should be fished by line only during the lead up and during their spawning season. At least one humpback has been caught in such nets so far.

A rapid overview of our concerns is presented in the twenty-slide PowerPoint presentation, Attachment 1, which is an easy, illustrated introduction to NSF findings.

Frustration with Fisheries Queensland's inability to recognize the need to get to grips with the science of fisheries management and address the need to manage fishing effort at any level,

record adequate fish landing data, and ensure local populations of philopatric protandrous species are not fished to local extinction by over-netting of spawning aggregations, etc. resulted in our submission to UNESCO, attachment 2 (March 2012).

Attachment 2 updates our flagship report, 'Review of Concerns .....' (2010) which discusses in layman's language, some of the science behind some aspects of fisheries management in North Queensland and identifies why the ECIFF is not eligible to be assigned the status of a legitimate WTO. The report identifies how the ECIFF fails to meet any of the 17 requirements of the Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management if Fisheries under the EPBC Act.

As someone who does have post-graduate qualifications in Fisheries Management and with over 25 years service in tropical Ind-Pacific fisheries, it is clear to me that the ECIFF is managed with more regard to politics and power play than fisheries science at the expense of our inshore fish stocks. I should be interested to learn whether anyone in Fisheries Queensland, DPI Brisbane, is adequately qualified in fisheries management and why the past State Labour Government was so insistent on retaining the status quo with regards inshore gillnetting, despite continuous state-wide protests from concerned people who can see what is happening to the inshore resources of their shore line and local estuary.

Does science have a role in fisheries management? Would you require your dentist to have more qualifications and training than a simple biology degree? The answers are similar for both questions. Subdividing an area into series of MPAs and no-take zones without proper regard to the actual threats to such areas is no substitution for adequate fisheries management and, while giving the administration and some sectors of the public that warm fuzzy feeling, may well inappropriately disadvantage certain sectors and communities with no clear environmental gain. The RAP process in the GBRMP has certainly failed to ensure the sustainability of both migratory species such as grey mackerel and sedentary, locally philopatric species like the king and blue threadfins, and indeed any of the larger inshore species of fish.

In summary, there has been a significant failure to date to apply any adequate level of fisheries science to the ECIFF. Population pressures, including gillnetting and environmental degradation have reached such levels that inshore fish stocks of the ECIFF are heavily depleted. Anyone who has fished their inshore waters for over 10 years is well aware of this and are disillusioned by governments failure to listen to their pleas to reduce netting. This will certainly have contributed to the huge level of dissatisfaction expressed in the last QLD State election.

Our submission to DSEWPAC for their recent assessment of the ECIFF follows in the our second mailing. ***With full respects, please ensure that the TOR require the review all four attachments*** as evidence of the results of lack of application of science to the management of the ECIFF.

Thank you.

Kind regards,

David Cook, *BSc (Hons1), Post Grad. Dp Fisheries Mgt., Dp Conservation & Land Mgt.*

Co-ordinator, Network for Sustainable Fishing in the Douglas Region of far North Queensland

"taking a community approach"

For more about our need for better fisheries management to reverse the decline of our inshore fish stocks, see: http://www.ffc.org.au.