

Submission, Draft Rockhampton Regional Council Planning Scheme.

This submission is in regards to the treatment of small scale terrestrial aquaculture within the review.

This submission is made on 25 August 2014 by

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Background:

One of the most sustainable and economically efficient methods for freshwater aquaculture and the use of water, is the integration of small scale aquaculture with other farming practices. For example a small aquaculture operation integrated with a horticulture operation.

This is increasingly found in small scale "family" operations where the water is first used for the growth of fish, then used for the irrigation of crops with the benefit of added nutrients from the fish removing or reducing the need for fertilisers on the crops.

These operations, although small can greatly increase the cash flow and income for small farming operations making them more efficient and viable, and improving small rural and regional community economies. The growing movement to source local products over imported products is just beginning to make these small operations viable income producing activities.

The QCA review does not cover small scale freshwater aquaculture operations. This is a failure of the review, as the discussion below shows it is an issue that needs to be addressed. Not examining this issue is leaving a potentially widespread form of aquaculture handicapped by excessive bureaucracy.

Regulatory problems for small scale aquaculture - the local government planning scheme:

Small aquaculture operations that have little or negligible environmental or social impact are currently recognised by the DAFF AQUA01 code. Which allows activities that meet the requirements of the code to be undertaken with self assessment in regards to DAFF requirements under the Sustainable Planning Act. This is a great initiative.

Unfortunately the small scale aquaculture operation then has to face the requirements of the local governments planning scheme. As there is no standardisation of the treatment of aquaculture in local government planning schemes through out Queensland, the costs, the outcomes, and the red tape faced by the small scale aquaculture operation to meet planning scheme requirements vary significantly from local government area to local

government area.

As local governments are not resourced enough to have aquaculture subject matter experts on their staff, planning schemes are often collated by officers with no understanding of the aquaculture industry. And as such they often over regulate to compensate for areas where there is a knowledge gap, or cut and paste items from other planning schemes with no understanding or ability to justify the inclusion of the items.

In current planning schemes in Queensland, the requirements for small scale aquaculture that meets the AQUA01 code, range from being an exempt activity in areas such as rural zones, to requiring full impact assessment for the same activity in a rural zone.

Additionally many planning schemes make no differentiation between small scale aquaculture, such as that meeting the AQUA01 code, and large scale aquaculture. Requiring both to undergo the same level of assessment. This is very harsh on the small family aquaculture operation as they will have to pay the same fees and provide the same level of detail with high costs for consultants as a large multimillion dollar operation.

Just the act of having to go through a planning application will deter almost all small family operations from integrating a small number of tanks with their farming enterprise. This reduces the potential for income in these family businesses with flow on lost opportunity effects for the community.

What needs to be done:

To ensure the intelligent, authoritative, and consistent treatment in relation to regulation of small scale aquaculture through out Queensland, something akin to a section in a State Planning Policy should be developed. This section would essentially be required to ensure that small scale aquaculture meeting the requirements of the AQUA01 code, in rural or similar zones, is a self assessable activity.