

# Isaac Regional Council - Submission to Queensland Competition Authority – Aquaculture Regulation in Queensland – Draft Report.

Isaac Regional Council (IRC) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Queensland Competition Authority's draft report 'Aquaculture Regulation in Queensland'. Aquaculture development presents a key economic diversification opportunity for the Isaac LGA, and Council recognises its benefits to the regional economy.

## Background

The Isaac Local Government Area (LGA) spans an area of approximately 58,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Central Queensland from the coalfields of the Bowen basin to the Coral Sea. The coastal area of the Isaac region is well connected. It is serviced by the Bruce Highway, Queensland's main north-south arterial highway, has access to world class sea ports and is well connected to southern fish markets via air-freight.

The region's estimated resident population is 24,215, although with an additional 14,950 resource sector workers housed in temporary accommodation at any one time the full-time equivalent population can fluctuate to an estimated 39,165.<sup>i</sup>

Agriculture is another key industry for the region. The gross value of Isaac Agriculture Commodities produced is \$168.7 million<sup>ii</sup>. The coast also hosts commercial fishing and aquaculture operations.

Tourism also features on the economic landscape with the Isaac coast identified as an emerging tourism precinct for development in the Mackay Destination Tourism Plan 2014. Isaac's established inland corridors include 'the mining trail', extending from Mackay to Clermont, and 'The Great Inland Way', connecting Clermont to Charters Towers. Both trails present visitors with an opportunity to experience the rich culture of early European settlers in the area, against a backdrop of modern industry. The 'Copper Trail' connects Clermont in the west to Isaac's coastal community of St Lawrence, and closely follows the historical route used to transport copper and other commodities from the hinterland to the then Port of St Lawrence.

## General comments

Aquaculture development presents a key economic diversification opportunity for the Isaac LGA. Council recognises the economic benefits to the regional economy and reduction in pressure on wild fish stocks, and broadly supports the creation of land based aquaculture development areas to facilitate investment in the Isaac region. The coastal strip of the Isaac LGA hosts one aquaculture operation (prawn farm) at present, with opportunity for further development along the remainder of the regions 100 kilometres of sparsely populated coastline. The coastal strip of the Isaac LGA has access to supply of both salt and fresh water and existing rural blocks of a size suitable to aquaculture operations.

While IRC agrees with the reports finding that the regulatory burden faced by potential developers serves as a deterrent to investment, it is critical to ensure efforts to streamline or simplify the process do not result in compromised environmental outcomes.

Isaac Regional Council is also cognisant of the pressure placed on wild fish stocks which are used as feed in aquaculture operations. As such is recommended a Best Practice guide for aquaculture operations in declared Aquaculture Development Zones. Beyond existing farming standards and guidelines IRC recommends the consideration of a stipulation regarding the use of feeds derived from low-value plant waste such as that recently developed and trialled by CSIRO:

‘CSIRO has continued work with the new bioactive aquafeed ingredient Novacq™, derived from low-value plant waste. Novacq™ has demonstrated a 30 per cent increase in the growth rate of farmed prawns compared with conventional fishmeal-based aquaculture feed products. This has been substantiated by on-farm trials with...licensees in Australia and Asia.’<sup>iii</sup>

It is also imperative to ensure local government is genuinely empowered to ensure any defined parameters relating to approvals processes are sustainable and appropriate for their communities.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.qgso.qld.gov.au/products/publications/bowen-basin-pop-report/bowen-basin-pop-report-2013.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> ABS 7503.0 Value of Agricultural commodities produced - release date 9 November 2012

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.csiro.au/Portals/About-CSIRO/What-we-do/Impact-case-studies/Aquaculture.aspx>