



NPF Industry Pty Ltd Response on the Recommendations of the Queensland Competition Authority's 'Draft Report on Aquaculture Regulation in Queensland'

This submission is made on behalf of the NPF Industry Pty Ltd (NPF) in response to Queensland Competition Authority's review of Queensland's aquaculture regulation.

The NPF Industry Pty Ltd represents Commonwealth Statutory Fishing Rights holders in the Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF), which includes the waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Our industry is comprised of a combination of individuals, small businesses and corporate fishing companies, many of whom are from intergenerational fishing families who have been involved in the NPF since the 1970's.

Our industry is committed to working with government and key stakeholders to support sustainable development and conservation efforts across Northern Australia which maintain and strengthen the social, economic, cultural and environmental values of the North. NPF believe that future development, including aquaculture expansion, should be underpinned by a shared vision and supported by long term planning and collaborative decision making.

The health and productivity of the fisheries resources in the North (including the NPF) rely heavily on water flow from northern rivers and catchments and healthy. The productivity of NPF banana prawns in particular is highly correlated to rainfall and river flow and healthy marine eco-systems. Any reductions in water flow and/or quality will have a negative impact on banana prawn production and will jeopardise the fishery's Maximum Economic Yield management target.

NPFI asserts that decisions around future aquaculture development must therefore ensure that there are regulations and safeguards in place to maintain healthy freshwater and marine eco-systems and maximum wild-capture fisheries production .

NPFI Response to Recommendations of Draft Report:

Recommendation 1) Terrestrial aquaculture development areas

To assist investors with identifying prospective aquaculture sites, the QCA recommends that the government create terrestrial aquaculture development areas.

- – The QCA notes that some development work has already been undertaken by DAFF.
- – Identification of these development areas could be led by DAFF. Broad community and industry consultation will be essential, as will

support from relevant local, Queensland, and Commonwealth government agencies.

- – An audit of approved but unused sites may assist in the early identification of development areas.
- – The aquaculture development area should address issues of groundwater quality, to avoid future litigation risk from neighbouring landholders concerned about the impact of saltwater aquaculture ponds.

The QCA recommends that the government set a target for establishing aquaculture development areas.

The target could be the identification of development areas enabling 450 hectares of aquaculture operations within two years of the Government's response to the QCA's recommendations. Public reporting of progress against this target could be provided at six-monthly intervals.

NPFI supports the recommendation that government create specific terrestrial aquaculture development areas if expansion in aquaculture is pursued

NPFI recommends that a 'risk-based' approach should be taken to identify appropriate areas, including through Environmental Impact and Risk Assessment processes

NPFI recommends that a 'risk-based' approach should be taken, including through Environmental Impact and Risk Assessment processes EIS, to determine whether the proposed 450 hectares target for aquaculture development is sustainable

Recommendation 2) Codes as a clearer process for regulatory approvals

The QCA recommends that development applications in terrestrial aquaculture development areas be assessed against public criteria set out in a code applicable to each area. The code would address key issues such as:

- – The species that can be farmed in the development area.
- – The maximum load and concentration of nutrients and suspended solids that can be discharged each year from the development area.
- – The amount of environmental offsets required to offset the permitted discharge of nutrients and suspended solids.
- – Approved locations for water intake and discharge structures.
- – Construction conditions related to matters such as acid sulphate soils, impact on threatened species, clearance of native vegetation and impact on marine plants.
- – Operational restrictions such as disease management precautions, noise restrictions, setback from residential housing, traffic restrictions, and permitted hours of operation.

NPFI supports the recommendation for Codes to be developed for each area as proposed

Recommendation 3) Environmental Offsets

The QCA is aware of discussions between the Queensland and Commonwealth governments to establish a consistent environmental offsets framework. The QCA recommends that the Queensland government provide potential proponents with the maximum possible certainty about the future price and availability of offsets.

– Mechanisms for providing certainty might include the provisions for financial offsets likely to be included in the Reef Trust.

NPFI supports the mandatory requirement for environmental offsets for all existing and future aquaculture development

Recommendation 4) Structure to Implement the Reforms

The QCA recommends that the government consider the best structure to ensure the implementation of this review's recommendations.

- – Options include a task force consisting of representatives of relevant agencies, or a dedicated administrative unit.
- – DAFF is a likely candidate for lead agency of a task force, or location for a dedicated administrative unit.

NPFI notes this recommendation

5) A single Act for aquaculture

• The QCA recommends that the government defer consideration of the merits of a single legislative instrument for regulating aquaculture.

– The QCA recommends that the government consider a single legislative instrument for regulating aquaculture after the regulatory reforms recommended in this report have been well established.

NPFI notes recommendation

Recommendation 6) Marine aquaculture

The QCA recommends that the government investigate the potential for marine aquaculture development areas.

- The most prospective areas are likely to be in the Torres Strait, Gulf of Carpentaria and other less populated areas with a low possibility of conflict with other users of marine resources.
- The investigation may be led by DAFF, with input from local governments, Queensland government agencies, and Commonwealth government agencies.

NPFI notes with concern the statement that the most prospective areas for

aquaculture include the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Torres Straits¹.

Whilst promoting aquaculture development in the remote regions may be an important part of the Northern Australia Development Strategy, marine aquaculture can conflict with other uses of the marine environment including commercial, recreational and indigenous fishing/boating, and iconic environmental values.

There is considerable potential for fisheries resources² and their productivity systems to be negatively impacted by future aquaculture development in the Gulf of Carpentaria, particularly in relation to water diversion, salinity changes, pollution, sediment run-off and the introduction of exotic pests/diseases.

The Gulf of Carpentaria is a significant contributor to the total prawn production and the economic value of the Northern Prawn Fishery. Given the potential risks associated with aquaculture development, any impacts on the NPF must be clearly identified and taken into account in future decision making.

NPFI recommends that a ‘risk-based’ approach, (including consideration of potential impacts on existing businesses, stakeholders and the marine environment) be adopted when considering the potential for aquaculture development in the Gulf of Carpentaria

NPFI recommends that robust Environmental Impact and Risk Assessment processes and comprehensive stakeholder engagement are undertaken as part of this investigation

Recommendation 7) Bonds and guarantees

No recommendation

NPFI recommends that financial offsets in the form of bonds and guarantees are mandatory to fund ‘clean up’ operations and compensation payable for any diminution in the future value and/or productivity of fishing rights resulting from aquaculture development

Recommendation 8) Research and marketing levies

No recommendation

NPFI recommends that any research needs to identify impacts of aquaculture development on other industries/stakeholders are paid for by the proponents of the development

¹ And the GBR

² Including prawns

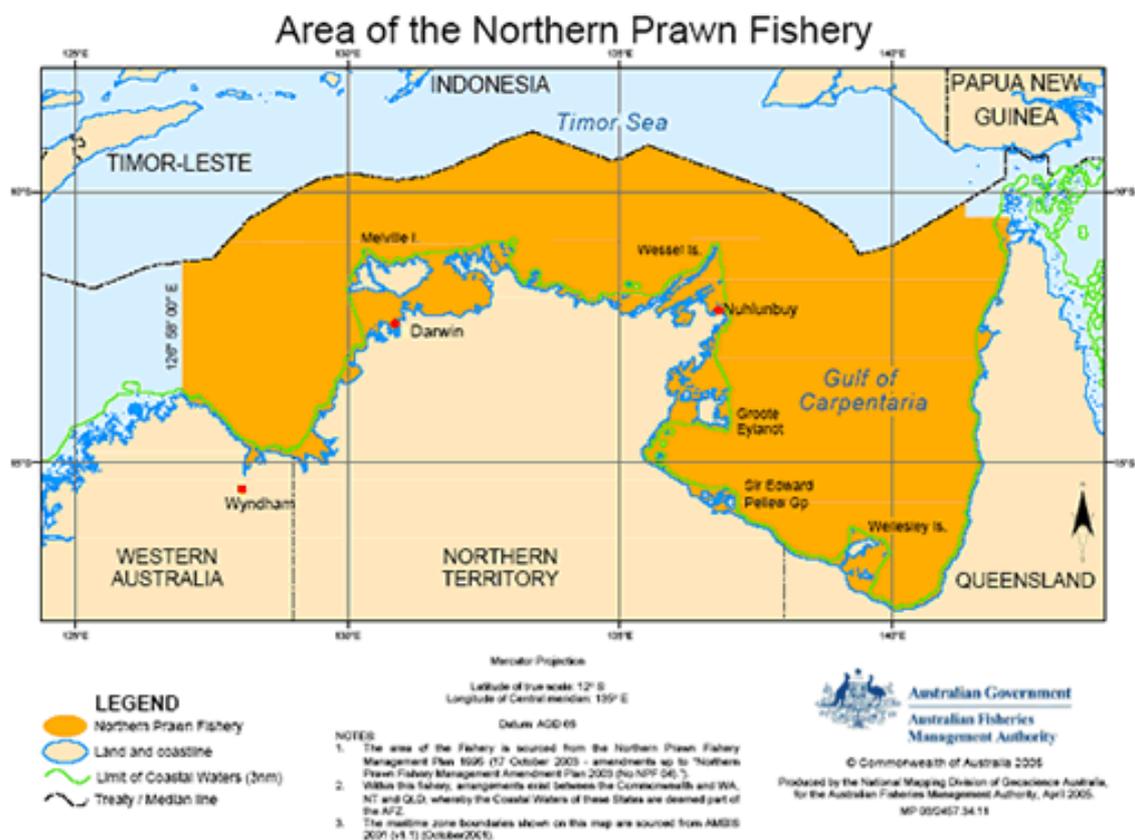
Appendix: About the Northern Prawn Fishery

The Northern Prawn Fishery is the Commonwealth's most valuable fishery, and Australia's largest and most valuable prawn fishery, occupying an area of 771,000 square kilometres off Australia's northern coast.

The Fishery extends from the low water mark to the outer edge of the Australian fishing zone along approximately 6,000 kilometres of coastline between Cape York in Queensland and Cape Londonderry in Western Australia.

The gross value production (GVP) of the NPF is currently estimated at approximately \$94 million (ABAREs 2012). The first hand value of Australia's wild-capture fisheries production was estimated at \$1.3 billion in 2010/11.

The GVP of the NPF represents a significant component of the



total economic contribution of Australian fisheries to Australia's domestic and export economies, and to Northern regional economies.

The Northern Prawn Fishery has a unique, highly valuable, and important role as the provider of fresh, high quality wild catch prawns and other marine products to Australians and international consumers. An ecosystem based management approach including the voluntary protection of key habitats and ecosystems on which our fishery depends has been adopted in the NPF for many years.

The NPF is managed through a stringent series of input controls, including limited

entry to the fishery, gear restrictions, bycatch restrictions and a system of seasonal, spatial and temporal closures. These management restrictions are implemented under the *Northern Prawn Fishery Management Plan 1995*.

On 52 boats operate in the fishery for 6 months of the year. The fishery is highly regarded as a global example of best practice management underpinned by rights-based management, a significant investment in research and a strong co-management philosophy.

The NPF is the only tropical prawn fishery in Australia¹ to have achieved certification as a sustainably managed fishery by the prestigious Marine Stewardship Council.

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¹ And only 2 in the world