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File Ref: 2015/0316

Dear Ms Woo

**Re: Northern Territory Government Submission to the Inquiry into Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture**

I note the call by the Productivity Commission for submissions to its Inquiry into Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture and the deadline for initial submissions of March 31.

On behalf of the Fisheries Division of the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries I would like to offer the following observations and comments to the Commission about areas which we feel the Commission could best focus its inquiries and also provide an overview of relevant activities already being undertaken by the Northern Territory.

As they stand the terms of reference for the Inquiry are extremely broad with a strong focus on red tape reduction. As noted during the meeting with you, the Deputy Chief Executive of this Department and myself, improvements in fisheries management could broadly be broken down into three areas; sustainability, resource sharing and economic efficiency/profitability. Ensuring sustainability of fish stocks and providing certainty and security around access to fish resources, including catch allocations, are fundamental. On this basis significant resources have been dedicated both nationally and jurisdictionally in these areas over the past 10-20 years.

As an example, I have attached to this letter copies of the Northern Territory's recently released Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines, and the Fisheries Resource Sharing Framework. These documents are intended to give the necessary guidance to Fisheries managers over the coming years and to provide all stakeholders with clarity around decision making and industry with the certainty it needs to continue to invest.

With best practice management frameworks in place to deal with these issues, the priority area for attention in more recent times is profitability and viability of fisheries and the NT, like many other jurisdictions, has clear policy agendas around red-tape reduction to improve the regulatory environment and the cost efficiency of management frameworks for both fishers and service providers.

As discussed at our meeting we believe there are a number of issues the Inquiry could concentrate on which could have a positive impact on Australian fisheries. In particular this includes a review of the various Offshore Constitutional Settlement and Joint Authority arrangements currently in place across Australia. It is our view that these could be rationalised and modified to encourage more efficient management of the resources shared between the Commonwealth and the jurisdictions and they could also be used to encourage a more efficient cross-jurisdictional management framework. To this end it should be noted that this issue has already been identified at the national level as a priority for action via the Australian Fisheries Management Forum. The Northern Territory is already in consultation with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), and fisheries agencies in

Queensland and Western Australia exploring a new management framework for Gulf of Carpentaria snapper stocks and north western shark stocks respectively.

The Territory is currently in the process of amending parts of its Fisheries legislation to, amongst other things, streamline licensing requirements, strengthen its biosecurity powers and introduce fisheries compliance powers for Indigenous marine rangers (commensurate with their skills and training). On the red tape reduction front the new act will make it simpler for commercial fishing licensees to appoint someone to operate their licence with an associated reduction in paperwork burden for both the licensee and the department.

Another area we believe the Inquiry could focus its attention on is opportunities for the mutual recognition of the sustainability status of fisheries. Jurisdictions responsible for managing these fisheries undertake assessments on the health of fish stocks and these assessment also need to be reviewed for export fisheries and accredited under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act. The more recent emergence of third party environmental accreditation, such as that offered by the Marine Stewardship Council provides another tier of assessment and accreditation that all incur costs by either fishers and/or management agencies. Opportunities for various assessments/accreditations to be mutually recognised may simplify processes and remove duplication of process and costs to industry.

The efficient delivery of management, research and compliance services is also of key interest to the Territory. To this end the NT has already entered into an arrangement with the AFMA for it to undertake compliance activities in our offshore snapper fisheries and electronic monitoring for our barramundi fishery. Sharing of compliance resources is something we expect to do more of in the future. The same can be said with research and development. Following the work undertaken by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation in analysing research and development capacity around the country the Territory actively seeks strategic partnerships and collaborations with those agencies, organisations and individuals that possess skills and experience that can add value to our research projects and programs. This approach is considered more efficient, and can deliver better outcomes, than having to employ all forms of expertise 'in house'.

As the Inquiry also covers aquaculture regulation it is important to note that the regulatory framework surrounding aquaculture development in the Territory is seen as less burdensome than some other jurisdictions. Aquaculture legislation is contained within the Fisheries Act and its Regulations and provides for a straightforward licensing and reporting process. An aquaculture licence application has traditionally been case-managed from within Fisheries to assist a proponent negotiate all necessary government approvals. The notice of intent for aquaculture required by Fisheries is also aligned with that required by the Environmental Protection Authority meaning only one application process is needed. Whilst not technically a 'one-stop-shop' the outcome is effectively the same with proponents being shepherded through the assessment process by Fisheries staff. The exception to this is the current process for "Project Sea Dragon" which has been awarded major project status by the Territory government and is being project managed by the Department of the Chief Minister.

I would be happy to provide more information on the matters raised in this letter if required.

Yours sincerely

GLENN SCHIPP  
Director of Fisheries and Aquaculture

March 31 2016