

SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

BRIGHT STAR FISHERIES

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I am a commercial fisher and am appalled by the way we are managed. Some time ago in the distant past PIRSA-Fisheries held the mantle of being one of the best managed fisheries in the world, the reality today is that PIRSA-Fisheries is a toxic reactive dinosaur that needs burying. There is a need to scrap the old and start afresh with policy and management that is not controlled by political minders and politicians with self-interests.

We have been restructuring the fishery for over 30 years and it is steadily declining with the introduction of Marine Parks slow or non-decision making on species under threat and increasing costs through cost recovery. We pay 17% and have the honour of being co-managers that have no say, we are considered as cash only. The elephant in the room is the recreational fishers that do not contribute to compliance or research leaving the commercial fishery to do the heavy lifting, there is no ceiling in place as to the maximum level that cost recovery can reach! In a democracy this is unsatisfactory and must be addressed at the first opportunity.

The introduction of a recreational permit has more benefits for them and managers provided the funds are protected from the possibility of being spent in other areas. There must be transparency shown in how where when and why these funds are distributed and users of the funds must have a performance output rating on the value of the funds used. PIRSA Fisheries management must be held accountable for the expenditure by industry and recreational sector so maximum benefits are achieved. The development of new fisheries in dams, creeks and rivers would reduce effort at sea and with restocking programs give users some certainty of actually catching a fish. A prime example of a developing fishery is the Bass fishery interstate and in America where millions of dollars are generated through competitions and sales of equipment.

Having a data base of how many users there are where when and what they are catching would be a dream come true for management and is possible with current tech-knowledge. I have used both of the permits in Victoria and New South Wales, they are relatively inexpensive but do not capture all of the users. Both states do not charge pensioners or holders of welfare cards and children under the age of 18. There should be an associate licence for children and a token fee for pensioners and card holders to include them in the statistics. If permit holders would indicate where and when they would be fishing there would be revenue made available for improvements like fish stocking or parking and camping facilities. Once you have the details of the permit holder there can be correspondence sent to them to maintain a continuous flow of information.

Bag and boat limits in South Australia are far too generous when the recreational fisher is fishing for immediate need. It is about time that there are realistic numbers of how much a person or family can consume at a sitting. For an average family of four people six whiting should be considered adequate and allow the permit holder three times that amount as a possession limit. This process can be continued for all species targeted providing compliance with better tools to catch poachers and black market operators. An example of this is a recreational bag –boat limit for mixed shark is six fish, School Shark and Gummy Shark the former being a quota managed species where commercial operators are only allowed five per day in state waters unless they have quota. The recreational sector is growing new boats and vehicles can cover greater distances satellite navigation high quality sounders and fishing reports in real time on Facebook and Instagram do not give fish as much hope as they had 20 years ago.

COMMERCIAL FISHING

I have been fishing for 45 years the last 28 as a commercial fisher, there are many good operators mixed with quite a few rotten eggs since licences were amalgamated 22 years ago. Many of the amalgamated licences are operating outside of the owner operator policy that was introduced to protect our fish stocks by leasing through a third party. This is not a lawful practice under PIRSA Fisheries regulation but nothing is done about it, brokers are advertising licences for sale and lease. The licences that are leased are driven by making money with little or no regard for other users or regulations, many catch fish beyond their capacity to maintain them, they kill off patches of fish that could be farmed instead they kill the market price with poor quality product. I have watched a Garfish fishery come close to total collapse much of this was contributed to by management that allowed 28 experimental deep water sein nets that never saw observers on the boats and area closures that forced all of the net operators into a confined space. Those changes can be directly attributed to the demise of the Garfish stocks. Snapper are another species that are being over exploited to a point where trip limits were introduced from 1,000 kg down to 500 kg many fishers think that the limit should go down to 250 kg and adjust it up when stocks improve. Only time will tell if the intervention was prompt enough. King George Whiting is another species that are not doing too well and a size increase is the main recommendation to help them and a spatial closure for two months. A point raised was the drop in commercial effort!? I have targeted the Whiting in the areas proposed to be closed and the reasons why there was a reduction had nothing to do with stock numbers. There were two fishers that passed away five fishers retired from the fishery and I could not justify the expense of running a larger vessel for two months when the fish are active in that area.

I have attended many working groups and port meetings over my time and some 20 odd years ago there was a white paper introduced that recommended the size of Garfish go to 26 cm, the size of Whiting go to 31 cm and 32 cm not long after these are the changes being looked at or being implemented today . WHY DID IT TAKE SO LONG???

PIRSA Fisheries management has been lacking for a considerable time and my personal view is that there are two past Directors still employed within the department. I do not know of any businesses that retain their CEO'S when a change is made, the current Director is in an awkward position if he

wanted to make significant changes as he was employed and working under them. My feeling is that there will be a steady as she goes mentality because no one wants to rock the boat.

My personal view on transitioning to an ITQS management scheme is no, as it is very costly and we fish multi-species that overlap one another. My preference is to go with Transferable Effort – Boat Days. The system should be based on a licences history; this gives fishers equity in the industry and goes a long way to capping effort. As a business grows or reduces days can be transferred to suite, working out a value of a day and the cost of management is something I have not done but it should be cheaper especially if there is a recreational permit in place to assist in funding for compliance and research. Our cost of management must come down especially when one third of existing licences will have little or no history. These licences are the latent effort component or sleepers as they are referred to here. The loss of revenue from the cost recovery would see licence fees escalate to a point where it is unaffordable, there must be a contribution from the recreational fishers permits to management. There was also the proposal for a once of grant to acquire the sleeper licences at a nominal rate as well as purchasing active licences at market value so fishers could leave with dignity. As a long term fisher I would support this as it is not our fault that the changes in the fishery were not made when they should have. Most of us feel that we are prisoners in the industry because licences are less likely to be sold because of Marine Parks and too many operators in reduced areas.

Monitoring

Call 1800 number to confirm the day to be fished, the system could also include number of people on boat, where fishing will take place, estimated time of return, volume of fish caught and the method used on the day. This could replace the fish return log reducing a cost and giving real time data.

That allows the operator to choose a target species where and when they fish it and the method to catch. Proper funding for research so stock assessments can be done on a by-annually basis can be integrated into the system to prevent over fishing; it is easier to improve stocks before they collapse. In future years I can envisage that researchers will be able to monitor stock by the day and if a species is at total capacity stopping any access can be done at the 1800 stage.

There must be severe penalties imposed for noncompliance from the call in stage starting with fines suspension of licence and recidivists a total loss of licence.

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