

Dear Productivity Commission,

Your department, the Australian Government Productivity Commission, stated just three weeks ago, that:

**“There are particular concerns about the use of advisory groups in fisheries, including lack of clarity in their roles, sufficiency of expertise, the adequacy of representation of views and transparency in processes.**

Well surprise, surprise!!! Here in NSW, multiple state and Federal reviews have now told Australian taxpayers EXACTLY the same thing THREE TIMES IN FIVE YEARS and guess what! The problem isn't going away no matter how much evidence is presented or how many formal complaints are being lodged. If ordinary citizens aren't being fobbed off or unreasonably branded as 'vexatious complainants' by Fisheries Planners and/or Ministers, recreational fishers might end up with a review, an inquiry and even more reviews. Determinations about broken fishing related Advisory Committees have happened three times in five years. Meanwhile, my local fisheries advisory committee remains as stacked as it's been since 2009. A timeframe that's included a complete disbanding of a NSW Government Authority and the creation of a brand new Government Authority to replace it. And while all this mega-expensive, taxpayer funded disbanding and replacing was going on, a brand new and heavily stacked, Advisory Committee not only emerged, but was facilitated.

I'm making this particular submission because here in Byron Bay we have a counterproductive community engagement model that's legislated as the Cape Byron Marine Park Advisory Committee (CBMPAC). A truly bizarre assembly of actively idle individuals that were departmentally appointed to idle our time. A Ministerially assembled blight that's been so unashamedly stacked against local fishing families that fisho's have been driven to community voicelessness for seven straight years. First with the stacked 2009-2013 committee and now with the perverted construct of 2014-2018.

Your Draft discusses Advisory Committees, well here's what I'm talking about... You see our CBMPAC was stacked on a leaning Pisa of wobbly wickets. The recreational fishing advisor was personally given the job (and then re-given the job four years later) without a verifiable shred of local endorsement from any of Byron's key recreational fishing advocates. An Advisor that NEVER met with, or spoke to ANY fishing leaders or fishing clubs at Byron, Brunswick Heads or Lennox Head in the years 2009-April 2016. An 'advisor' that NEVER ENGAGED local fishing groups but was awarded a back to back, eight year tenure to shuffle fishing related information about a 22,000 hectare marine park between unicorns and Government. A deliberately stacked Advisory placement that top level signatories of Cape Byron Marine Park mendaciously rewarded with a back to back term.

Meanwhile, the spear-fishing representative was given the job as an Advisory Committee member based on his surfing abilities. A surfing advocate that has NEVER been known by anyone in the local spearfishing community as a spearfisher but was preferentially spearheaded to provide marine park related, spearfishing representations even though he's never been locally known as a spear holder.

And then there's the local Byron Shire Councillor, a bloke who holds a definitive board member position at the Arakwal Depot, the day to day occupational workplace of the management and staff of the Cape Byron Marine Park. A comedy of potentially unparalleled conflicts.

Let's not forget the drop forged 'community voices' of SCUBA, Marine Science and Conservation. Three more 'advisors' plucked out of the dysfunctional 2009-2013 committee and re-invited to sit through the 2014-2018 panel even though they presided in positions granted by EX-MINISTERS of the EX-NSW Marine Parks Authority (MPA).

A nationally publicised dud. The MPA, a NSW Government Department that was unceremoniously disbanded because of its "significant deficiencies in Management, Administration, Zoning and Compliance". A flea ridden dog of a taxpayer funded Authority that was ripped to shreds by Independent Auditors and successive Ministers because a bunch of NSW public servants refused to do their jobs ethically. And then came MEMA, an Authority that promised the people of NSW, "a balanced approach" and then deliberately stood by in 2014 as the fishing citizens of Byron Bay were shafted with the most STACKED Marine Park Advisory Committee in the history of NSW.

So, with respect to all the broad scale positive initiatives this PC Draft Report seeks to impart about conflicts of interests, Advisor expertise, performance assessments, et al, I can only comment on a revolving door construct that shines as bright as the Byron Sun. For any Advisory Committee that has reportedly been setup to procure transparent outputs that are supposed to be representative of the social, financial and environmental values of 'community', as part of the change and engagement process, it's only fair to ask:

Are the Ministers and Planners of these Advisory Committees willing to be held personally accountable for their role in best practice stakeholder engagement, the adoption of ethical standards and transparency of processes or should NSW stakeholders continually expect to be deliberately and repeatedly failed by a bunch of skunks that weaselled their way into the woodpile?

Seriously, if this PC want to fix these stacked committees one disingenuous scam at a time, I suggest you shine a very bright spotlight on the Cape Byron Marine Park Advisory Committee. A noteworthy investigation idea that can be traced to 2009 under the stewardship of a department that was disbanded for its significant deficiencies and then rehashed under MEMA's watch thanks to a chain of command that seems more competent building sheltered workshops than creating planning systems that seek to reasonably impart adequacy in the provision of balanced community engagement.

In 2016 it is truly ridiculous that Byron Bay's Recreational Fishers are not getting (a) adequate stakeholder representation and (b) the experience and level of stakeholder engagement that we have been legislated to be provided.

So, let's imagine that this PC really does want to lead the way by positive example, I also submit that Australian fishing citizens would benefit from:

- (a) Sufficient checks, measures and methods that scrutinise and accurately validate advisory committee selection processes
- (b) A vetting system to eliminate vested interests by Government employees involved in the deliberate stacking of these committees;
- (c) Knowledge of the Government motivations used to justify individual Advisor selections
- (d) Elimination of vested interests of those that facilitate and moderate advisory committee meetings
- (e) Scrutiny of the qualifications and suitability of advisory committee members to the role
- (f) The public tabling of advisory committee meeting minutes and outputs in a timeframe that coincides with those meetings
- (g) Accountability of Advisory Committee members to supply community engagement proof points to Government. e.g. A diary that shows the date and time of any meetings conducted between an appointed advisor and a local recreational fishing Club or other community leader. A measure that proves the Advisory Committee members personal ability and willingness to engage with those they're appointed to represent
- (h) Terms of Reference and a Code of Conduct that allows for the immediate removal of committee planners, meeting facilitators, moderators and advisors that are seen to be either non-performing or abusing their role at a consultative, community level.
- (i) Publicly available schedules of Advisory Committee meetings
- (j) Improved regularity of Advisory Committee meetings

One final notation... PEOPLE DON'T LIKE BEING SOLD DOWN THE RIVER. Wasn't it only three months ago when some joker in the Northern Territory effectively said to 29 million Aussies, "It's not your sport, it's the Darwin Port?". Here's what I'm wondering: Where was that Advisory Committee at the decision making stage? Were they asleep? Were they stacked? Or are these 'community representatives' simply standing in the doorway of the Chinese Embassy waiting for a Diplomatic Visa?

In Australia, many citizens value the importance of Advisory Committees. If public servants abuse the Advisory system for the simple reason that it makes their jobs easier, then they're selling each and every one of us down the river.