



SUNFISH FRASER COAST

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“Another warm and fuzzy press release is how is Ray Ozich, chairman of Sunfish Fraser Coast has described Minister Mulherin’s recent media statement on a research project to be done in North Qld.

“We are pleased that the Minister has initiated the start of phase 2 of the Inshore Finfish Management Plan, especially the issue of allocation of fish stocks, even though this should have been done over 10 years ago or at least as part of the Inshore Finfish Plan that was introduced last year. However, we have serious concerns that there is an undercurrent to maintain the status quo.”

Instead of looking at how to allocate fisheries resources on a state wide “global scale” they are looking at microscopic areas, one river at a time, where the result has already been orchestrated to maintain the status quo or there is no hope of serious regional allocation of fish resources.

There are not enough fish in the ocean. When total oceanic resources are assessed the commercial sector already takes the bulk of it. The aquaculture industry is now also a large part of the commercial fisheries sector and, according to the experts, is supposed to take pressure off the wild caught species but when asked “How?” they suddenly become non-experts and change the subject. Aquaculture was sold to the public on the promise that commercial netting of the inshore areas would not be as necessary. Another broken promise.

Sunfish has long held concerns that successive ministers and the government as a whole merely pay lip service to the value of recreational fishing, which actually contributes up to a billion dollars annually to the Qld economy.

“It is obvious that the Minister believes that there are a minority of recreational fishers who have any concerns and that depletion of catches, and that angling tourists going anywhere other than Qld is of no concern. This is reinforced by the Minister’s statement: - *‘however some recreational fishers are concerned net fishing reduces their available catch.’* A little word of advice Minister. According to the most recent survey, 97% of residents, yes that is right residents - not recreational fishers, have serious concerns over depletion of fish stocks in waters of the Fraser Coast. We are sure these concerns would be reflected up and down the coast.”

Sunfish also has serious concerns over the process to develop this project, the terms of reference and what are the desired outcomes.

“As far as we know, no recreational fishing body was asked for any input into this development of this project. Jim Groves, the head of the fisheries department

was in town some weeks ago speaking with Sunfish and other concerned anglers, and suggested that the Fraser Coast would be a good spot to trial regional management but never mentioned anything about this project. You have to wonder was he intentionally trying to keep everyone in the dark while just pretending to listen? This area is recognised as being the second most important recreational fishery in Qld. Why did they not start here?"

However the biggest concern for recreational fishers is over the independence of the person in charge of the project. Dr Daryl McPhee has been appointed to the position of leader of the team. While Dr McPhee's professional qualifications are not in question, there is a strong perception that Dr McPhee is too close to the coalface. Dr McPhee has been a long time professional adviser and advocate for the commercial fishing industry and doubts that Dr McPhee has the support of the majority of the recreational fishing industry in this case. In general, Sunfish has serious concerns as to public perception of anyone with links to a major stakeholder being in charge of projects like this.

"We would like the Minister to advise what selection process was followed, whether there was an open tender process and would the Minister consider replacing Dr McPhee with someone who has no significant links to the commercial fishing sector? With all the publicity lately about jobs for mates and big business influencing government decisions, the Minister should be making every effort to ensure transparency and independence at every step. It would also be good to know who is advising the Minister on these things as it is unlikely he is making any of these decisions on his own."

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