

Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair - Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
PERTH WA 6000

20 December 2011

Dear Hon Ellis

PETITION NO 147 – OPPOSING A BAN ON COMMERCIAL DEMERSAL GILLNET FISHING

As Chairman of the WA Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC), I appreciate the opportunity to provide a written submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs following WAFIC's petition to you, opposing a ban on commercial demersal gillnet fishing. Our complaint has not been taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administrative Investigations.

This petition was developed in response to the petition lodged by the Save Our Fish Stocks (SOFS) group who are seeking a total ban on demersal gillnet fishing between Bunbury and Albany.

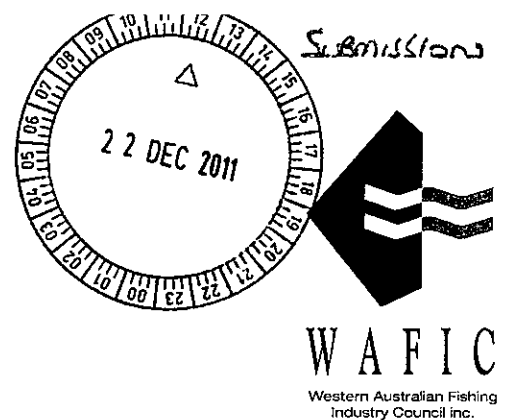
BACKGROUND

In response to the SOFS group's concerns about demersal gillnetting in the Windy Harbour to Walpole area a number of meetings were held between the SOFS group, Recfishwest, WAFIC and commercial gillnet fishers to discuss the issues in this immediate area. From these meetings, WAFIC understood that the main concerns of the SOFS group were that recreational catches of key species (Dhufish, Snapper, Blue Groper) were declining as a result of demersal gillnet fishing between Windy Harbour and Walpole. A further meeting was held between these parties, including representatives from the Minister of Fisheries' office and the Department of Fisheries, on 19 August 2011.

Following this meeting, the Minister's office advised that they would introduce management measures to reduce both recreational and commercial fishing effort in the Walpole to Windy Harbour area, given the claims by the SOFS group that fish stocks in the area were declining. We understood that this would be a preventative measure until Department of Fisheries' research is available to determine the status of fish stocks and the catch by the recreational sector in this area. Funding has since been sought for a three-year research project to provide this information. Commercial catch data is already available.

WHY THE BAN ON COMMERCIAL DEMERSAL GILLNET FISHING SHOULDN'T OCCUR

There have been a number of meetings between stakeholders to date. The SOFS group have clearly refused to accept the research and management advice provided by both the Department of Fisheries and industry on the sustainability credentials of the commercial fishery. We consider that the information presented in the SOFS group's petition, that the demersal gillnet fishery is causing 'severe depletion of fish stocks' is dishonest and contradicts the Department of Fisheries' advice that the fishery is sustainable. We consider it critical that the following points are taken into consideration by the Standing Committee:



- The fishery is one of the most strictly managed fisheries in WA and has approval under the Federal Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act)*.
- The fishery primarily targets sharks (for their fillets), with scalefish contributing less than 20% of the total catch. The SOFS claim this fishery is causing "severe depletion of fish stocks" yet the gillnet fishery catches less scalefish than the commercial 'wetline' fisheries operating in the same region. Despite this, the SOFS group have indicated to WAFIC they don't want any closures to apply to the 'wetline' sector regardless of the fact they catch more scalefish.
- The proposed ban would dramatically reduce the availability of local fish for those who rely on commercial fishermen to supply their seafood, and who don't or can't catch their own. The Southern Demersal Gillnet Fishery is a major supplier to the south-west region including restaurants and wineries, and the Perth market. Advice from major retailers, including Theo Kailis (Kailis Bros-Leederville) is that unlike many WA fisheries, this fishery has continuity of supply, high quality of product and has close proximity to market.
- In response to the SOFS group's claims that fish 'drop out' of gillnets, a research project commenced in October 2011 using underwater cameras on nets. While the project is in its early stages, preliminary data indicates there is no 'drop out'.
- There is no recreational catch data available for the area between Augusta and Albany so the recreational sector's impact on demersal scalefish is unknown. We consider it unreasonable to impose further restrictions on an already strictly managed commercial fishery while the recreational sector's impact on these fish stocks is undetermined.
- The Commonwealth Government is currently introducing a marine reserve system across WA's south-west region. The draft plan proposes extensive closures to all commercial and recreational fisheries between Albany and Bunbury and is due to be finalised by mid 2012.

SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD

WAFIC supports the commencement of research to determine stock status on the south coast as a matter of urgency. WAFIC has recommended to the Minister for Fisheries a suggested way forward. This includes the deferral of management action until the outcomes of the Commonwealth's marine planning process are finalised and the results of the research project are available. As WAFIC believes this is a resource reallocation issue, consideration should then be given to initiating the Government's Integrated Fisheries Management (IFM) process to set catch shares between recreational and commercial sectors on the south coast. If the recreational sector continues to seek the removal of demersal gillnetting in the area, consideration may need to be given to forming a Voluntary Fisheries Adjustment Scheme to purchase fishing units at a fair market value.

WAFIC believes there is no justification for a ban on demersal gillnetting from Bunbury to Albany. Such action would only cater to this vocal misinformed group of recreational fishers at the expense of the WA seafood buying public. We request that the SOFS group's petition be disregarded and the matter be referred to the Minister of Fisheries for decision.

Yours sincerely



Brad Adams
Chairman

PUBLIC