



## AMATEUR FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION OF THE NT INC.

Secretary

Productivity Commission

Australian Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture

GPO Box 1428

Canberra ACT 2601

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Dear Secretary,

The Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT Inc (AFANT) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Productivity Commission Issues Paper for Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture.

AFANT was formed in 1980 by a group of keen anglers who wanted a body to represent and advocate their interests to the government of the day. Incorporated in 1980 the organisation is recognised by both the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments as the peak body representing recreational fishing interests in the Northern Territory.

Recreational fishing is an important social and cultural component of the Northern Territory lifestyle as well as being a major tourism drawcard and a significant contributor to the economy. Recreational fishing surveys and fishing tour operator data indicates that more than 35,000 Territory residents and 54,000 visitors participated in recreational fishing in the Territory in 2010. And it is estimated that the current figures for 2015 far exceed these with 43,000 tourists from 62 different countries registering for the recent NT Tourism 'Million Dollar Barra' promotion. Recreational fishing was estimated to contribute at least \$100 million directly to the Northern Territory economy during 2014.

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***Representing recreational fishing in the NT and ensuring the quality of our sport***

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### **Are controls such as licences, bag limits and size limits effective?**

General possession, bag and size limits have been shown to be effective in controlling the effort of recreational fishermen and are commonly set using a mixture of social and scientific information such as the cultural practices of recreational fishermen and sexual maturity of target species. A slot limit is effective in this regard, in which a maximum and minimum size limit is used. This has been successful in Fish Management Zones within the Northern Territory to ensure large breeding female Barramundi and Threadfin Salmon are released while allowing the smaller, less reproductively fecund males to be retained. This slot limit is further reinforced by a culture of 'catch and release' amongst recreational fishermen fishing for sport and not sustenance.

Recreational fishing licences have not been implemented in the Northern Territory by the NT Government due to both the pristine nature of the resource and limited pressure from recreational fishermen. AFANT believes that licences cannot be classified as a control effort as they are freely available for a minimal financial outlay and are not a limiting factor on recreational fishing effort.

### **Is there scope to reduce the burden (time or monetary costs) of fishing rules on recreational fishers while achieving the same regulatory objectives?**

Increased regulations are often associated with high value or highly pressured fisheries. Recreational fishing is highly regulated with strict controls on the extraction of fisheries resources despite the limited effectiveness of the permitted gear in comparison to the commercial fishing industry. These regulations are often difficult to enforce in the Northern Territory due to limited compliance personnel, the remoteness of many fishing locations and challenging environmental conditions. As such education is a much more effective investment in ensuring recreational anglers abide by fishing rules and coupled with social pressure results in much higher voluntary compliance rates amongst anglers.

In recognising this, the Northern Territory government has successfully introduced a smart phone app 'NT Fishing Mate' to collect data on catch and effort through fish

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tagging programs, to monitor the effectiveness of reef fish protection areas and educate anglers on size and possession limits for popular species.

### **How well is recreational fishing recognised in current fisheries management and regulatory arrangements (including in relation to access rights)?**

AFANT believes that serious consideration must be given to the legislation in which Commonwealth fisheries currently operate. These fisheries are managed by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) on a narrow perception that the commercial harvest of the resource is the single best economic value of these fisheries and this commercial harvest delivers the maximum economic return to the Australian community. The lack of explicit recognition of the significant financial contribution made by recreational fishing to the national economy prevents AFMA from managing these fisheries to provide the most effective economic return and ignores the potential for negative impacts on recreational fishing and its resulting economic contributions as a result of management decisions by AFMA. AFANT believes recreational fishing needs to be formally recognised as major stakeholder in Commonwealth fisheries and the fisheries legislation and management procedures amended accordingly.

### **How does the regulation of commercial fisheries affect recreational fishers?**

AFANT believes that the regulation of commercial fisheries need to take into account the impacts of these fisheries on recreational fishing, fishing tourism and the communities that recreational fishing helps to support. These impacts are not limited to the economy but include the social and cultural impacts as well. Recreational fishing is estimated to contribute \$100 million to the economy of the Northern Territory and as identified in the NT Governments Recreational Fishing Development Plan (2012-2022), seventy per cent of recreational fishing in the Territory occurs in its regional areas, where it is often the primary economic and development driver. King Ash Bay on the McArthur River, the Daly River, the Roper River and Dundee Beach are examples of communities where recreational fishing underpins development. Fishing tourism also provides impetus for regional development on Aboriginal land, such as the Tiwi Islands, Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt.

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## **What are the main sources of tension between recreational fishers and other fishery users?**

Conflict over target species and productive fishing locations are the primary sources of tension between recreational fishers and other fishery users. Recreational fishers are limited to highly regulated and inefficient gear in comparison to the commercial sector. The commercial sector extracts large quantities of fisheries resources in comparison to recreational anglers and this leads to conflict over target species especially when it is in conjunction with overcrowding of prime recreational fishing locations. The management of commercial fisheries should be undertaken to minimise conflict and interaction on iconic recreational fishing locations.

Tensions also exist between recreational fishermen and indigenous land owners. Specifically in regards to the Blue Mud Bay ruling in 2008 when the High Court of Australia ruled that indigenous land extended beyond the low tide mark and encompassed all the intertidal zone [Northern Territory of Australia v Arnhem Land Aboriginal Land Trust [2008] HCA 29 (30 July 2008)]. This recognition of the intertidal zone as indigenous land meant that legally the large population of recreational fishermen in the Northern Territory would need permission to fish in these waters similarly to gaining permission to access any other privately owned land in Australia. This has required the government to negotiate permit agreements with all indigenous traditional owners of intertidal waters. This has been a slow and fractious process with many traditional owners still without general public permit systems due to distrust of government and strong cultural barriers.

## **What, if any, tensions exist between the controls on recreational fishing across jurisdictions and fisheries?**

Tensions between the controls on recreational fishing across jurisdictions and fisheries are generally very minor in the Northern Territory and are limited to specific Fish Management Zones in the Mary and Daly rivers and in Kakadu National Park. Regulations also differ significantly on state borders and these tensions can be remediated with sufficient education.

## **Given the services provided by state and territory governments to support recreational fishing, do recreational fishers get good value from licence fees?**

The Northern Territory currently does not have a recreational fishing licence and as such there is no specific funding source for fisheries infrastructure and enhancement projects. Despite recreational fishing contributing significantly to the economy and being an important part of the cultural and social fabric of the Northern Territory lifestyle funding for recreational fishing is allocated on an 'ad hoc' basis and is very much dependent on the whim of government.

## **Commonwealth Marine Parks**

Recreational fishing is highly regulated in terms of permitted gear and the extraction of fisheries resources through bag and size limits. In addition recreational fishing has very minor interactions with threatened and protected species and has limited impact on the seabed through fishing activities.

AFANT is supportive of Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation (ARFF) position on recreational fishing in Commonwealth Marine Parks. Any restrictions on recreational fishing must be implemented through the use of evidence based scientific assessment that shows that the impacts of recreational fishing significantly exceed those of other permitted activities such as scuba diving, whale watching, eco-tourism activities, defence and military exercises and oil and gas exploration and extraction.

## **Are arrangements for funding ongoing research in the fisheries area satisfactory?**

There is a pressing need for the Commonwealth Government to conduct a national recreational fishing survey. This would enable the collection of accurate data across all States and Territories of both the economic contribution of recreational fishing to the national economy and the amount of fisheries resource retained by recreational fishermen. The last national recreational fishing survey was conducted in 2001 and unfortunately no data from this survey was used to implement management decisions or identify research and development priorities.

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In the last fifteen years the economic contribution and also the social and cultural factors influencing recreational fishing has changed significantly. AFANT believes that as a matter of priority funding needs to be allocated towards an accurate national recreational fishing survey that can be replicated for each State and Territory and in which recommendations from this survey are implemented.

Research and development should be a core component of best practice fisheries management and policy. There is significant public interest in ensuring fisheries resources are well managed and there are increased opportunities for improving habitat for recreational fishing, enhancement projects and infrastructure. AFANT believes that sufficient funding for recreational fishing research and development must be prioritised.

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) currently conduct the majority of the research for the recreational fishing sector in the States and Territories. However this research does not satisfactorily address research and development priorities for recreational fishing as the funding model is heavily biased towards the commercial sector and the aquaculture industry.

There has also been an increasingly common trend of reducing the budget of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries by successive Northern Territory Governments leading to insufficient resources and staff to conduct research and development for recreational fishing.

Ongoing investment in research for recreational fisheries will deliver broad and considerable benefits to both the economy and general public. AFANT believes that recreational fishing research must be funded at a level commensurate to its economic, social and cultural contribution. The commercial fishing sector is able to leverage levies paid to the FRDC up to 0.25% of GVP for the sector. AFANT believes that a similar approach should also be applied to Australia's recreational fishing sector.

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A project undertaken by Ridge Partners (Colquhoun 2015) determined the most appropriate method for valuing the recreational fishing sector for this purpose, developed in partnership with forty-five sector leaders and agency representatives as part of a national workshop process. This project identified that an expenditure based valuation was the most appropriate method to estimate the value of recreational fishing to the Australian economy. As such, this method was used to estimate that recreational fishing contributed \$2.56 billion in 2013. This valuation approach was based on recreational fishers' estimated direct attributable annual expenditure as a proxy, and recognises the sector's recreational service values beyond catch.

This expenditure based valuation approach was endorsed by the Federal Government in the 2005 Campbell Report, and was later confirmed by fisheries economics experts and ABARES at a Forum held on 13th February 2015.

If desirable, a cap could be imposed to constrain leveraging capacity to within acceptable levels. A suitable model would be to implement a cap on matched investment in year 1 of 50% of the amount contributed by the sector, and then increase the matchable component by 10% each year over five years until reaching the full 0.25% in the fifth year.

Implementation of this model will increase investment in R&D associated with recreational fishing, in doing so, increasing the social and economic contribution of this activity to the Australian public and economy.

In conclusion, AFANT has a strong commitment to ensuring the protection and enhancement of recreational fishing in the Northern Territory. Recreational fishing is a major contributor to the economy and lifestyle of the Northern Territory and must be nurtured and enhanced by the Government for current and future generations.

We would welcome the opportunity for greater engagement and consideration of AFANT's views as the review progresses.

Yours sincerely



Tristan Sloan

Executive Officer  
Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT Inc.

31<sup>th</sup> March 2016