



Office of the Hon Tony Perrett MP Minister for Primary Industries

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26 March 2025

Mr Michael Gater
President
Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisher Association
admin@goccca.com.au

Dear Mr Gater

Thank you for your letter of 28 February 2025 to the Honourable Tony Perrett MP, Minister for Primary Industries regarding the Gulf of Carpentaria. The Minister has asked that I respond on his behalf.

I have noted your update and commend the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisher Association (GOCCFA) on their industry-led initiatives to improve compliance and transparency and support industry viability.

Future of the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery

In the lead up to the State election, the Crisafulli Government committed to support Queensland's commercial and recreational fishing sectors by only legislating scientifically backed changes to regulation, with compulsory regulatory impact statements, and fairly compensating all fishers for any changes required. We are committed to a sustainable wild-caught seafood industry that supports jobs in the regions and provides quality products that consumers appreciate. I note the comments by the previous Minister responsible for fisheries and can confirm there is no intention to phase out gillnet fishing in the Gulf by 2027. This advice has also been conveyed to the fishery working group members and industry by Fisheries Queensland (FQ).

We believe it is time that commercial fishers receive certainty and stability under the Crisafulli Government. Please look out for further information regarding a new Department of Primary Industries' (DPI) blueprint. We are working with industry and other stakeholders to co-design and co-deliver a 25-year blueprint that will shape the future of Queensland's primary industries. The blueprint will be supported by a series of five-year plans developed with industry and other stakeholders to ensure they reflect local priorities.

Harvest Strategy Development

FQ are currently drafting a harvest strategy in conjunction with the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery (GOCIF) Working Group in a process that began in 2020. I commend GOCCFA's support in the development of a harvest strategy for the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery as the implementation of a harvest strategy will give industry certainty in the

future of the fishery and allow access to more markets resulting in greater commercial viability for fishers.

Net (N3 and N12) Fishery

The Minister is aware of the concerns that have been raised by industry regarding the implementation of gillnet-free areas in the Gulf of Carpentaria. As outlined above, the Crisafulli Government's approach to fisheries management in Queensland is only enforcing scientifically backed changes to fishing regulations, with full consultation and transparency with industry as part of the process. FQ will continue to monitor changes in fishing catch and effort throughout the year and engage with industry going forward. I am advised by FQ that further discussions with industry are expected to take place regarding a potential black jewfish tagging program. I look forward to further updates on this issue in due course.

Line (L4) Fishery

We note your interest in a stock assessment for Spanish mackerel in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The most recent stock assessment was completed in 2020 and suggested the stock was between 30 and 40 per cent of unfished spawning biomass. I am advised by FQ that the 2025 east coast Spanish mackerel fishery stock assessment is a high priority, which is a view shared by Minister Perrett. Further consideration will be given to other fisheries as part of the FQ annual business planning process.

Mud Crab Fishery

FQ undertook public consultation on a range of crab fishery management reforms in response to concerns raised by parts of the commercial fishing sector between 14 March to 9 May 2024. In total, 207 submissions were received, of which 201 were responses to the online survey and six were written submissions. Survey respondents included Traditional Owners, commercial fishers, recreational stakeholders, charter fishers, environmental groups, and other interested community members. There have been no decisions made at this time. Further engagement with working groups and the Fisheries Expert Panel on proposed changes to management arrangements will be required. To facilitate consultation, a series of industry workshops along the East Coast and in the Gulf of Carpentaria are proposed in 2025.

I understand the Federal Government revoked the Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) approval for the export of mud crabs from the Gulf of Carpentaria in December 2021, despite the representations by FQ. FQ are currently drafting an application for a new Mud Crab Fishery WTO export approval under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Once an application is received, the Federal Government's Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is required to release it for public comment as part of their assessment process. Based on the previous WTO, which was revoked in late 2021, it is anticipated that conditions will be attached to a future WTO approval in the mud crab fishery. FQ is committed to working with industry as these conditions are being drafted to ensure they are achievable, pragmatic, and warranted.

FQ have listened to crab fishers and processing businesses in Far North Queensland who have conveyed a desire to export crabs to overseas markets such as Singapore if a new WTO approval can be realised. Facilitating access to new exports markets for our commercial fishers will help contribute to the Crisafulli Government's goal to grow the value of primary industries in Queensland to \$30 billion by 2030.

Independent Onboard Monitoring Field Trial

I am advised camera footage received from the voluntary field trial would be considered a public record and is therefore subject to requests for access under the *Right to Information Act 2009*.

To address concerns industry have with potential release of camera footage captured during the field trial, I'm advised that officers of the Independent Onboard Monitoring team have engaged directly with members of the GOCCFA, and several measures have been proposed to address the associations concerns, including the provisions of video footage ownership to field trial participants and the reduction in footage retention timeframes as much as operationally possible (one business day following the review of footage). As I understand, FQ are awaiting a response from the association in relation to the recently proposed amendments to the field trial arrangement and are ready to progress with further discussions to support commencement of the voluntary field trial.

Threatened Species

On 1 September 2024, scalloped hammerhead (*Sphyrna lewini*) was classified as endangered wildlife under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and subordinate legislation following a recommendation from the Species Technical Committee to the former Labor Environment Minister. In classifying this species as endangered wildlife, it has resulted in a protected animal listing under the *Fisheries Act 1994* which identifies the Scalloped hammerhead as a Threatened, Endangered or Protected (TEP) species. I am advised that any changes to the listing of scalloped hammerhead under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*, is undertaken by the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation.

At this stage there is no current plan to review the Level 2 Ecological Risk Assessment for the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery.

I would like to commend GOCCFA on their commitment to and interest in the protection of TEPs. FQ will support industry wherever possible in improving the identification, responsible handling, and reporting of TEP animals. Additionally, FQ has continued to work with stakeholders to develop TEP workshops in a range of fisheries, with sea snakes, sawfish, and small ray and sharks being the focus. FQ is currently working with OceanWatch to develop and provide an industry-recognised accreditation in the form of a master fishers training program focusing on improving the knowledge for fishers in several fisheries such as the east coast NX, trawl and Gulf of Carpentaria mud crab fisheries.

Charter, Recreational and First Nations Sector Suggestions

I note GOCCFA's interest in issues regarding other sectors of the fishery. FQ will consider relevant suggestions in consultation with the GOCIF working group. I can confirm the Crisafulli Government does not support the need for a recreational fishing licence in the Gulf or elsewhere in Queensland waters. Thank you again for writing to me on these matters.

If you require further information, please contact Madeleine Glacken, Fisheries Manager, Fisheries Management, Fisheries Queensland in the Department of Primary Industries on 0436 661 216 or by email at madeleine.glacken@daf.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matt Jensen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MATT JENSEN
Chief of Staff