

ATTN: Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Discussion Paper

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Copy to:

Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group
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The Hon Mark Furner MP (Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries) – agriculture@ministerial.qld.gov.au
Public Release

10 December 2023

To whom it may concern,

Please find attached the submission from the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association Incorporated (GOCCFA) in relation to the Queensland Government's *Discussion Paper – Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms*.

This submission is being publicly released by GOCCFA. It is accompanied by letters of support from several key stakeholders and has the support of many affected and concerned businesses throughout GoC communities and the supply chain.

In relation to the GoC set net fishery, GOCCFA and the commercial fishing industry do not support:

- the Commonwealth Government's commitments to UNESCO;
- the GoC Inshore Fishery policy changes being proposed by the Queensland Government; or
- the way in which the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments are prosecuting these changes.

The proposed measures are not necessary, appropriate, or proportional to achieve their stated purpose.

The proposed measures will have serious and irreversible impacts. A full and honest assessment of the total impact has not been provided by government. If it had, it would have demonstrated that the relative risks of net fishing to the environment are low, and therefore that the economic decimation of an industry and those who rely on and benefit from it is not a proportional regulatory intervention to contribute to long term sustainability.

There are several major issues with the way in which the reforms have been pursued. Our submission comprehensively addresses these concerns and the expected impacts of the proposed reforms.

GOCCFA and industry note in the strongest possible terms the seriousness of the current situation and the nature and extent of our concerns. These are shared among families, businesses, industry, and the general community. GOCCFA and our members also note our concern and dissatisfaction with the process being pursued by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments in the strongest possible terms.

GOCCFA is ready to engage constructively and has proposed a comprehensive way forward in this submission.

Yours sincerely

David Wren

President – GOCCFA, for and on behalf of GOCCFA and its members

DECEMBER 2023

Impacts of the Queensland Government's proposed changes to commercial fishing operations in the GoC Inshore Fisheries



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Submission — Impacts of the Queensland Government’s proposed changes to commercial fishing operations in the GoC Inshore Fisheries

10 December 2023

This submission is made by the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association Incorporated (GOCCFA). It has the support of many affected and concerned businesses throughout GoC regional communities and the Queensland seafood industry supply chain.

Letters related to this submission have also been provided by:

- Carpentaria Shire Council
- Cairns Regional Council.

About the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association Incorporated

The Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association (GOCCFA) was founded in 2000 to replace the QCFO—Branch 1 and to provide a representative body for the Gulf Fishers of Queensland, including set net, crab, and line. The GOCCFA represents commercial fishers across the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) commercial fishery, including the 84 N3, 3 N12, and 1 N13 net symbol holders.

GoC fishers have been a pioneering force, having been at the forefront of research and development in the GoC inshore fisheries since the early 1950s. A multi-product, multi-species fishery with national and international markets, it is an economic cornerstone of communities across the GoC. GOCCFA and its members care deeply for the resource on which it depends and take a proactive, progressive, long-term outlook on this resource and the industry's viability.

Considered a good steward of the GoC, the GOCCFA has an acknowledged track record of engagement and collaboration across industry, government, and science to support an economically strong and environmentally sustainable industry. This includes broad-ranging initiatives related to industry conduct, protocols, and practices to minimise risks associated with protected species, voluntary implementation of ground closures and buy-backs, improvements in technology and fishing practices, stocking and assessment programs, and research and scientific partnerships.

Submission Development Principles and Process

To ensure GOCCFA's submission reflects the diverse views of our members, we have undertaken a clear, transparent and collaborative process of consultation, information sharing and recommendation development with our members. Our principles in developing this submission were to:

- undertake an evidence-based process to ensure a balanced and comprehensive submission;
- reflect that Australian consumers' right to access wild-caught Australian seafood protein, together with fishers' responsibility for environmental sustainability, underpins the industry's social license to operate;
- conduct a transparent, inclusive, and fair process for all our members;
- take a long term, realistic view of the future operational context and the requirements of maintaining a sustainable fishery in the GoC;
- reflect that industry's viability is intrinsically linked to the economic and social fabric of regional and remote communities across the GoC, and the seafood industry supply chain in Queensland and Australia;
- recognise this as a critical and defining point in the future of the GOC inshore fishery and all Australian fisheries; and
- take a proactive approach, focussed on solutions and collaboration with government and all stakeholders.

Notwithstanding the afforded consultation time being insufficient for such a significant reform, GOCCFA has:

- undertaken extensive research and analysis to form an evidence-based response to government;
- sought clarification of nearly 100 questions from the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments (which have not been adequately responded to);
- communicated via email and phone calls to ensure all correspondence transparency of all information, correspondence, relevant media and briefings with GOCCFA members;
- conducted detailed engagement and a survey, open to all GOCCFA members (in person, online, and via telephone) to ensure the views and suggestions of members are reflected in the submission; and
- attended various meetings with relevant bureaucrats and Commonwealth and State Ministers, and the Queensland Community Cabinet meeting on 29 October.





Glossary of terms

Acronym	Definition
AFMA	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
ATSEA	Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Programme
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DAF	Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
ERA	Environmental Risk Assessment
GoC	Gulf of Carpentaria
GOCFA	Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association Incorporated
ITQ	Individual transferable quota
IUU	International, unreported, and unregulated fishing
NGO	Non-government organisation
PSA	Productivity and susceptibility analysis
QSIA	Queensland Seafood Industry Association
SAFE	Sustainability analysis for fishing effect
SOCC	Species of conservation concern
TDA	Trans-boundary diagnostic analysis
TOR	Terms of reference
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive summary

The pristine waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) are critically important to current and future generations of Australians, and our economy. The **GoC commercial fishing industry sustainably produces high-quality prized wild-caught fish** for dinner tables and restaurants in Queensland and Australia, beloved by locals, tourists and visitors alike.



GoC collectively produced
**1,639 tonnes of
wild-caught fish**
in 2020.



GoC wild-caught
**end-market value
of over \$90 million**
in 2020.



The current and future economic
value of the GoC supply chain is
estimated to be
\$600-800 million.

Our **social licence to sustainably fish this resource** has always been underpinned by the public's demand for, and right and expectation of access to, high-quality Australian wild-caught fish and industry's vital role in economic development, gainful employment in regional and remote communities, and contribution to Australia's food supply chain and security.



**50
multi-generational
fishing families
and communities**
across the GoC rely
on the fishery.



A
**highly specialised
supply chain**
delivering wild-caught fish from
remote catch areas to dinner tables
around Australia.



The GoC fishery
**contributes to
Australia's food and
nutritional security.**

The reforms, as proposed, will decimate this industry, a specialised supply chain, and the people and communities who rely on it. None of these outcomes align with any of the Queensland Government's stated objectives. **What is at stake?**



Reduced access to
**iconic
wild-caught
fish**
include Barramundi,
King Salmon and Mackerel.



Devastation of regional
communities and
**decimation of
economic value and
people's livelihoods.**



**Over \$1m of
investment for the
2024 season**
in jeopardy.

As an industry, we have done, and continue to do, significant work to discharge our responsibility as a steward of these waters. We have an extensive track record in contributing to the development of knowledge, science, and other practice and research-based initiatives, to drive the development of a sustainable fishery. Indeed, the Queensland Government's Future Fishing Taskforce acknowledged industry as good environmental stewards in its publicly available communiques.

The GoC — and Australia's — fisheries are already among the most heavily regulated in the world. In stark contrast, many of our immediate neighbouring fisheries in the Asia-Pacific region are over-fished and under-regulated by global and UNESCO standards. **These proposed changes will permanently decimate Australia's capacity and supply chain for wild-caught Australian seafood protein.** The narrow focus of government on species-level risks to justify the proposed changes excludes the strong evidence of other, more significant, direct risks to environmental sustainability and broader, indirect risks to global fish stocks.



Marine debris, climate change, foreign illegal fishing, and other factors pose greater ecological risks than net fishing.



Wild-caught fish substituted with imported and aquaculture product, increasing demand on international overfished fisheries.



Government has not undertaken evidence-based analysis of the total impact of its proposal.

There does not have to be a choice between ecological sustainability and industry viability. Both are achievable.

The relative risk of net fishing to the environment is low in the context of the many other more significant environmental risks facing the GoC. These are well-documented in the literature and over the last decade by UNESCO, however, have not been acknowledged in government's justification of these changes. That is not to say net fishing does not pose risks. However, these should be addressed through proportional and appropriate management approaches that balance the full economic, social, and environmental impacts.

In relation to the GoC set net fishery, GOCCFA and the commercial fishing industry do not support:

- the Commonwealth Government's commitments to UNESCO;
- the GoC Inshore Fishery policy changes being proposed by the Queensland Government; or
- the way in which the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments are prosecuting these changes.

The proposed measures are not necessary, appropriate, or proportional to achieve their stated purpose.

There are several major issues with the way in which the reforms have been pursued by government.

- The timelines being pursued on the current proposal are too aggressive for such a significant change.
- There has not been open or transparent consultation process with commercial industry.
- Government has neither meaningfully answered nearly 100 questions asked by GOCCFA, nor provided a robust estimate of the estimated fishery impact of the current proposal.
- Government has not completed or published an economic or social impact statement.
- Government has not been transparent on the many more significant threats to sustainability than commercial fishing or addressed the many limitations of the Environmental Risk Assessment model.
- We understand Government has drafted legislation for GoC compensation triggers in prosecuting the East Coast reforms, despite these reforms being separate and several public statements that no decisions have been made.

The proposed measures will have serious and irreversible impacts. A full and honest assessment of the total impact has not been provided by government. If it had, it would have demonstrated that the relative risks of net fishing to the environment are low, and therefore that the economic decimation of an industry and those who rely on and benefit from it is not a proportional regulatory intervention to contribute to long term sustainability. GOCCFA and industry note in the strongest possible terms the seriousness of the current situation and the nature and extent of our concerns. These are shared among families, businesses, industry, and the general community.

This comprehensive submission addresses these concerns and proposes a comprehensive way forward.

GOCCFA and our members are ready to engage constructively to this end.

Recommendations to government

1. Decouple all aspects of the development and implementation of the proposed GoC reforms from the East Coast reforms, because the GoC fishery is completely separate to the East Coast fishery and not part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and full and separate consideration of any proposed reform to the GoC commercial fishery is required on its own merits.
2. Assure industry that none of the proposed net free zones or other reform changes will be implemented or have any effect on the 2024 commercial fishing season in order to provide confidence and certainty for industry to invest in refit and associated costs to prepare for the 2024 season, and to help mitigate the real human impact being caused through people's lack of certainty of their livelihoods.
3. Commit to the implementation of the planned Harvest Strategy for the GoC fishery as a pre-cursor to any further policy change.
4. Assure all stakeholders that there will be no decisions or implementation of any potential GoC reforms until:
 - a) An independent and neutral chair is appointed to the GoC Inshore Working Group and priority placed on finalising and implementing the draft Harvest Strategy for the fishery with all stakeholders, including the GoC commercial industry; and
 - b) All stakeholders, including the GoC commercial fishery, can participate in a genuine reform co-design process; and
 - c) A balanced and transparent assessment of the economic, environmental, and community impacts of all potential short, medium, and long term reform options is completed.
5. Provide assurance to industry that any reduction in licenses as part of any future reforms is implemented in the first instance via a voluntary structural buy-out of license-holders, comprising appropriate compensation for forgone current and future earnings, buyout of residual assets and equipment, and retraining costs.
6. Establish an independent evaluation of the onboard observer program to inform future monitoring alongside camera technology.
7. Provide an assurance that fishers' data will be secured by a data management agreement to be signed between industry and government, including data derived from the trial phase of an onboard camera program and third party validation.
8. Compel the Commonwealth Government to redouble diplomatic and trade efforts to address overfishing and association fisheries management issues in international fisheries neighbouring the GoC.

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Background

1. Background

This section provides important context to GOCCFA's response to the Queensland Government's Discussion Paper.

1.1 Social licence to operate

The waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) are pristine and critically important to current and future generations of Australians, and the Australian economy.

Many stakeholders expect and derive benefits from the GoC waters, including (but not limited to) regional and remote communities, First Nations traditional owners, recreational and charter fishers, and commercial fishers.

All stakeholders who use and derive benefits from these waters share responsibility, alongside appropriate legislation and regulation, to preserve its condition and ensure its benefits are sustained for current and future generations.

The GoC commercial fisheries, together with fisheries across Australia, are among the most highly regulated in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. The GoC net fishery was pioneered by Lloyd Clarke on the Larry Cork in 1950. Clarke was followed by Reg Ward in 1956. They invested in infrastructure and operations, pioneered survey and stocking projects, and fished. Their efforts contributed to the development of an integrated supply chain with the specialisation to deliver high-quality pristine Australian wild-caught seafood protein from the rural and remote areas in which it is caught to consumers across Queensland and Australia.

Today, around 50 multi-generational fishing families and communities across the GoC rely on this fishery. It is part of the social and economic fabric and lifeblood of regional and remote communities across the GoC and North Queensland, including Karumba, Pormpuraaw, Weipa, Normanton, Mapoon, Napranum, Cairns, Burketown, and Bamaga. Countless businesses across the supply chain benefit from the fishery, from chandlery, maintenance, and equipment companies to logistics and cold storage, distributors, retail stores, and restaurants. Its current and future economic value is estimated between \$600-800 million in today's dollars.¹

Our social licence to sustainably fish this resource has always been underpinned by the public's demand for, and right and expectation of access to, high-quality Australian wild-caught fish. It is also underpinned by the role of the fishery in economic development, the provision of gainful employment opportunities in regional and remote communities across the GoC, and its role in Australia's food supply chain and nutritional security.

Without a sustainable, pristine resource, not only is the environment at risk, but so too are the economic livelihoods of those who rely on it. Industry therefore has a common interest in preserving the sustainability of the fishery.

A sustainable fishery and effective custodianship of the water are necessary pre-conditions for a viable commercial fishing industry today and in the future, and industry's continued social license to operate.

It is in industry's interest for commercial fishers to observe sustainable practice and a culture based on partnership, learning, knowledge-sharing, reflection, and improvement.

¹ Based on current and future estimated value-added across the supply chain for product originating from the GoC commercial fishery, estimated using reported catch volumes from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, information sourced from industry operators, and economic parameters and evidence on supply chain inter-relationships in recent analysis undertaken by BDO EconSearch and funded by the Fisheries Research Development Corporation in *Valuing WA smaller commercial fisheries across the supply chain (FRDC Project: 2022-038): Final Report*, available here: <https://www.frdc.com.au/sites/default/files/products/2022-038-DLD.pdf>.

1.2 The commercial fishery's track record of stewardship

In the 73 years since the pioneering of the industry, there has been many developments in legislation, regulation, fisheries management policy, industry practice, and community expectations. Throughout, fishing families and the industry have taken a long-term approach to sustainable practice and industry development.

"...the majority of commercial fishers working in the Gulf worked with researchers and were generally good stewards of their environment."

Future Fishing Taskforce, Queensland Government

For decades, industry has demonstrated good stewardship of GoC waters and high levels of compliance with relevant legislation and regulations.

However, the industry has not stopped at the minimum expectations of the legislation. Industry has, and continues to:

- actively participate in initiatives with government and the scientific community to improve understanding and evidence associated with the fishery and water;
- facilitate, via the use of its fishing vessels, access for researchers to very remote areas to assist with undertaking research; and
- coordinate and share knowledge in relation to the fishery.

In several cases, the commercial industry has voluntarily implemented ground closures, adjusted its fishing patterns, shared knowledge, shared research priorities, and advocated to further support environmental sustainability beyond minimum standards while ensuring the continued operation of the fishery.

GoC fishers have deep knowledge and extensive historical understanding of fishing grounds, including sensitivity of grounds, seasonal and migratory patterns for fish, and migratory patterns for protected species. For many decades, when fisheries have been identified by local fishers as disrupted or having changed, they are actively avoided.

1.3 Historical initiatives supported

Some of the historical initiatives driven by industry include (but are not limited to):

- by-catch reduction forums;
- voluntary closure of sea grass beds for dugong protection;
- programs for turtle tagging, release, and resuscitation;
- publication of turtle release brochures and shark and endangered species booklets;
- facilitation of endangered species workshops (e.g., shark identification, best practice sawfish release);
- voluntary buy-back programs funded by fishermen;
- participation in stocking programs;
- participation in sampling programs for research;
- implementation of net size reductions in line with scientific suggestion;
- implementation of river closures proposed by fishermen;
- articulation in observer programs (incl. trap);
- implementation of initial Gulf entitlement program to support consolidation of fishing effort;
- establishment of the Wellesley Island Wildlife Area for dugong protection;
- implementation of vessel monitoring systems 12-months prior to government requirements; and
- establishment of environmental management systems, and implementation of industry codes of conduct.

1.4 Current and future committed initiatives

GOCFA and our members are currently partnering across several initiatives, co-funded by industry and scientific partners, in relation to environmental sustainability and industry improvement. These include (but not limited to):

- GOCFA & National Environmental Science Program (CSIRO) (2022 – ongoing): Sawfish close kin mark recapture research participation by commercial set net fishers;
- GOCFA & CSIRO (2021 – ongoing): Commercial set net and crab fisher participation on spear tooth shark research in Wenlock River, Tentpole Creek, and Mapoon;
- GOCFA & DAF (2022 - ongoing): Commitment of two (2) commercial representatives to the Gulf King Threadfin Stock assessment to inform the stock synthesis modelling improvements;
- GOCFA & DAF (2023-2024): Investigating toothed whale and dugong proximity to fishing gear, including validation;
- GOCFA (2023): Led the redrafting of the set net Code of Conduct for the 2024 implementation season; and
- Wren Fishing (2022 – ongoing): Commitment to implementation of fish improvement program (FIP) for set net fishing operation in N12.

In addition, future research development priorities for 2024 include:

- GOCFA & NPFI (2024): Climate and agricultural runoff data collection in the GoC inshore and offshore fishing areas; and
- GOCFA, DAF & Curtin University (2024): Trace element study on King Salmon sampling to overlay with existing otoliths data to determine range and origins of stock.

Industry has an extensive record in contributing to the development of knowledge, science, and other practice and research-based initiatives to drive the development of a sustainable fishery. This continues today, with industry actively partnering to help deliver and facilitate research programs and initiatives in relation to protected species, fish improvement programs, stock assessments, climate and agricultural runoff, stock origins, and more.

In addition to building and contributing their deep knowledge of waters, fishers also facilitate access to some of the most remote areas of Australia to help enable scientific and research-based programs to take place.

Despite this demonstrated, long term commitment to researching and implementing sustainable fishing practices, industry was not given a meaningful seat at the table as part of the development of the proposed changes – the most significant in a generation.

1.5 International, Federal, and State policy context

The GoC is one of the most highly regulated in the Asia-Pacific region.² Commercial catch in the GoC fishery is primarily regulated through input controls (e.g., gear length, spatial and temporal closures), Commonwealth Government marine park closures, and monitoring and compliance programs (e.g., onboard observer programs).

A key challenge in effective fisheries management in Australia and the GoC is the complex tiers of management across multiple jurisdictions, landowners, and stakeholder groups.³ This includes increasing industrial interest in the area (e.g., from mining) and its broad reaching environmental and access impacts.

1.6 International policy and strategic context

Several multilateral and intergovernmental agreements are in place to help manage global waters, including international treaties such as the 1982 United Nations (UN) Convention on the Law of the Sea and the 1995 UN Fish Stocks Agreement. These are intended to underpin and inform international fisheries obligations and cooperation across Australia and all UN Member States.⁴

The Australian GoC waters are bounded by the neighbouring countries and UN Member States of Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste.

In addition to bilateral treaties between each country and Australia, these countries, including Australia, also collaborated to implement the Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Programme (ATSEA), under the auspices of the UN Development Program. The current ATSEA-2 Programme, which commenced in 2019, seeks to manage the marine and fisheries resources in the Arafura and Timor Seas (for which the GoC is a recognised part).⁵

Despite the international and bilateral treaties, and collaboration in relation to the aims of the ATSEA-2 Programme, the Arafura and Timor Seas, particularly the Arafura Sea is recognised as a global hotspot for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which continues to pose a major trans-boundary threat to fisheries, food security, and globally significant biodiversity.⁶

There is well-documented evidence that over-fishing and IUU has had devastating impacts on fish stocks and marine habitats since the early 1950s.⁷ As these fisheries neighbour the GoC fishery, they also pose a significant threat to the environmental sustainability in the GoC. This issue is explored further in Section 2.

² Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

³ Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

⁴ Australian Government, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, website, <https://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/international-fisheries-management/international-engagement>, viewed 12 November 2023

⁵ United Nations Development Program, Indonesia, Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Phase II (ATSEA-2), <https://www.undp.org/indonesia/projects/arafura-and-timor-seas-ecosystem-action-phase-ii-atsea-2>, viewed 12 November 2023

⁶ Edyvane, K, 2018, *Trends in IUU fishing in the Shared Arafura and Timor Seas*, Australian National University, 2020

⁷ Wilcox, Chris; Mann, Vanessa; Cannard, Toni; Ford, Jessica; Pascoe, Sean; Hoshino, Eriko. A review of IUU fishing related issues and progress in the APFIC region. Hobart, Tasmania, Australia: CSIRO Hobart; 2021. csiro:EP202288. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2640en>

1.7 Federal policy context

In 2017 the Commonwealth Government published the *Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture Productivity Commission Inquiry Report*, which highlighted that:

- policy settings were not maximising the value of fisheries to the community;
- fisheries management is primarily through method controls, inhibiting fishers from introducing more innovative and cost effective practices;
- cross-jurisdictional fisheries subject fishers to higher operating costs and present risks to the management of sustainable fish stocks; and
- allocation of access to fisheries should address social and cultural benefits, as well as economic benefits.⁸

Very little has changed since this time, despite the release of the Commonwealth Government's *National Fisheries Plan 2020 – 2030*, which set out a shared vision for the future of fishing, aquaculture, and seafood in Australia.⁹ The plan contains an aim to align the strategic planning, prioritisation, and investment of Commonwealth, state and territory governments with a vision to support “*Sustainable growth and development of Australia’s fishing, aquaculture and seafood community for the benefit of all Australians and our aquatic ecosystems now and into the future.*”

Further, it sought to empower key stakeholders, including commercial fishers, and set out nine priority areas including governance, sustainability, resource sharing and access security, indigenous opportunity, recreational recognition, adaptation, employment, participation and health, community connection and international engagement.

Separate to this plan, the Commonwealth's Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) has a *National Plan to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate IUU Fishing*¹⁰ and its *International Compliance and Engagement Program 2022-24*.¹¹ Whilst these plans have been successful in reducing IUU in Australian waters, Australia's collaboration and diplomatic efforts to ensure IUU is managed by neighbouring countries has not been effective, with these waters continuing to be overfished.

⁸ Australian Government, Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture Productivity Commission Inquiry Report, No 81, 19 December 2017

⁹ Australian Government, *National Fisheries Plan 2020 – 2030*, 2022

¹⁰ Australian Government, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, website, <https://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/international-fisheries-management/iuu-fishing>, viewed 12 November 2023

¹¹ Australian Government, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, website, <https://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-management/international-fisheries-management/iuu-fishing>, viewed 12 November 2023

1.8 State and local (GoC) policy context

Over the last five decades there has been a sporadic, unfocused, and reactive management and regulatory approach to GoC inshore fisheries management.

Reactive regulations were implemented in the early 1980s, including changes to licensing and seasonal bans. The mid-1990s saw changes to licence fishing areas (subsequently reversed), permits, and gear. In 2010-11, the Queensland Government introduced new licensing, and in 2018 several fishing areas were lost to Commonwealth Marine Parks.

Further closures implemented in the GoC were to support the mining industry, namely the Aurukun Bauxite Project (2020) and the Q23/P Petroleum exploration permit closing more waters (2022).

Not only did these closures have an economic impact on the commercial operators, but additional mining creates additional environmental risks that far outweigh those posed by commercial fishing.

After years of reactive regulatory changes and inaction on policy development, characterised by blunt closures and bans, the Queensland Government is now proposing the most consequential changes to GoC inshore fisheries in a generation.

The Queensland Government's *Sustainable Fishing Strategy 2017-2027* sets out a vision for a "A modern, responsive and consultative approach to fisheries management ensuring fishing is a low risk to Queensland's aquatic resources, and these are used in a way that optimises benefits to the community."¹²

Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027 **10 Major Reform Areas:**

- Improved monitoring and research
- Setting sustainable catch limits
- Improved stakeholder engagement
- Environmental risk assessments
- Resource allocation
- Harvest strategies
- Fishing rules and access
- Responsive decision-making
- Compliance
- Resourcing

This vision is to be realised through the delivery of 33 actions across 10 reform areas. The Queensland Government claims that the strategy will ensure healthy fish stocks and support thousands of Queensland jobs.¹³

Substantive progress by government in successfully delivering the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy reforms in the GOC inshore fishery is not evident. There is no substantive scientific evidence, no improvement in stakeholder engagement, the environmental risk assessment is based on flawed methodology, there is no harvest strategy in place and decision making is not informed, evidence based or responsive to the actual threats to the ecological health and sustainability of the fishery.

In addition, and despite the release the Commonwealth Government's *National Fisheries Plan 2020 – 2030*¹⁴, the recent announcements, commitments, and proposed changes to GoC inshore fishery do not sustainable development, thousands of jobs or protect these valuable resources for Australian industries and communities.

The proposed change will do the opposite.

The proposed reforms and the way in which they have been prosecuted by government demonstrate a complete disregard for

several of the established 2027 targets, including (but not limited to) increased certainty for commercial operators and reducing the volume of fisheries regulation.

¹² Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries, *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, 2017

¹³ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries website, <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/sustainable-fisheries-strategy-overview#:~:text=The%20strategy%20outlines%2033%20actions,on%20all%20commercial%20fishing%20boats>, viewed 12 November 2023

¹⁴ Australian Government, *National Fisheries Plan 2020 – 2030*, 2022

1.9 Proposed management changes to the GoC inshore fishery

The focus of this submission is, necessarily, on the proposed short-term reform, being the proposed implementation of net free zones in the GOC inshore fishery. However, the submission also presents a consolidated response to the package of medium- and longer-term future management options proposed in the Queensland Government's Discussion Paper.¹⁵

While the Discussion Paper notes stakeholders will have further opportunities to provide comments on future management options, including the Harvest Strategy, GOCCFA believes it is critical to consider management options and changes more holistically, including the most logical sequence of reform implementation.

The table below outlines the GOCCFA's position regarding all the reforms outlined in the Discussion Paper.

Table 1: DAF proposed GoC inshore fisheries short-, medium- and longer-term management actions

Management Approach	Timeframe	GOCCFA Position	GOCCFA Comments
New gill-net free zones	Short	Not supported as currently proposed	GOCCFA does not support the net free zones as currently proposed, including the location, consultation timeframe afforded, implementation timeframe, and in the absence of fair and balanced evidence-based analysis of economic, ecological, and social/community impacts of such a significant change. Temporal and spatial closures (incl. net free zones) can be an important fisheries management practice. However, they must be accompanied and sequenced appropriately with a wide range of other regulatory tools and transition and mitigation strategies to ensure a balanced set of impacts are achieved.
King threadfin rebuilding actions	Short - medium	Supported	GOCCFA, in collaboration with DAF, needs to close knowledge gaps on King Threadfin to better inform the stock assessment process. These research priorities must be aligned with current Fisheries Research Development Corporation (FRDC) EOI priorities. GOCCFA is ready and willing to participate in this research. GOCCFA will continue to offer commercial representation to the stock assessment project team. Industry is prepared to support adjustments to fishing practises that support the stock recovery of King Threadfin. These adjustments need to be balanced to underpin the socio-economic needs of the fishery and regional community, as well as stock recovery of King Threadfin.

¹⁵ Queensland Government, *Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery, Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms, Discussion Paper*, 2023

Harvest strategy (including management reforms)	Medium	Supported	GOCCFA supports as an immediate priority the finalisation and implementation of the Harvest Strategy. GOCCFA notes DAF's commitment to further consultation.
Management Framework Options			
Option 1: Prescribed commercial catch limits	Medium	Not supported	Needs clarification and explanation of how this differs to a total allowable commercial catch.
Option 2: Individual transferable quota	Medium	Not supported	GOCCFA does not support the implementation of individual transferable quota (ITQ), including the notion of ITQ zones in the GoC fisheries, owing to the significant challenges observed in the East Coast net and line caught fisheries, notably: • quota limits set too high owing to fishers over-reporting catches prior to ITQ implementations; • increased likelihood of institutional investment creating uneconomic conditions for fishers to operate; and • lack of confidence observed by the current reforms in the East Coast Mesh net fisheries where ITQ rights have been extinguished two years after the implementation of such reforms. If any future proposed ITQ allocations are considered within the context of the current draft harvest strategy, they must be informed by updated stock assessments for individual species and peer reviewed by persons agreed by DAF and fishery stakeholders.
Option 3: Effort units (N3 symbols)	Medium	Supported	GOCCFA supports net unitisation as a means of reducing net effort in the GoC, as well as maintaining both legacy and new entrant operators in the fishery.
Other general fishery reforms			
Marking nets with lights at both ends	Medium	Not supported	GOCCFA continues to support light markers for nets over 50 metres. The industry objects to implementing lights at both end of nets measuring under 50 metres due to increased navigational safety risks they would present. GOCCFA also seeks assurance for industry, that a fault or failure of one or both lights (e.g., a blown light globe) does not warrant a return to port order.

Net closure for N12 symbol – 7 Oct to 31 Jan	Medium	Supported	GOCCFA members support the removal of the closure noting that this closure is prescriptive to the N3 fishery and as such the N12 fishery offers no risks to the sustainability of the inshore target species.
Species that can be retained by L4 symbol	Medium	Not supported	GOCCFA members, including its L4 members, do not support retention of target species prescribed to the N3 fishery, noting that there is no economic justification for this regulatory change now or into the future.
Fishery area of N13	Medium	Not Supported	GOCCFA does support redefining the fishing boundaries for the N13 and GOCCFA calls for removal of the N13 symbol through appropriate compensation processes.
Protected species management strategy implementation	Medium	Supported	GOCCFA calls for an independent peer review of the current ERA level 2 for protected species in the GoC. GOCCFA is prepared to offer expert fishers to inform this review process.
Future reporting arrangements	Medium	Supported	GOCCFA calls for the development of a transshipment strategy to support the transfer of fishery products to third party operators or licensed fishing operators for return to designated unloading ports. GOCCFA calls for a tagging arrangement to support the retention of Black Jewfish. GOCCFA calls for the ongoing need for commercial operators based on the historical nature of this fishery to be permitted to continue to fillet and freeze at sea.
Independent onboard monitoring	Longer	Supported	GOCCFA is supportive for the need of independent on-board monitoring and has proposed several actions as means to achieve this outcome. GOCCFA is supportive of the implementation of trial Electronic Monitoring in 2024, supporting with a data management agreement.

GOCCFA and its members stand ready to work productively and collaboratively with the Queensland Government on the development and implementation of management approaches. This requires a legitimate and meaningful seat at the table, the establishment of an evidence base, proactive and collaborative consultation with industry, and a full assessment of the environmental, social and economic impacts of each management approach.

The GOCCFA also understands it has an important role to play in forming, funding and implementing management reforms and our members recognise that more needs to be done. As outlined in Section 4, we are ready to work productively with government to develop and implement appropriate management approaches to support a sustainable GoC inshore fishery.

1.10 Approach to developing this submission

Industry and the community have several causes for serious concern at the nature of the proposed changes and the way in which they are being pursued by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments.

This submission details extensive analysis and research undertaken by GOCCFA in the limited timeframe provided, to be clear on the problems with the reform, the likely impacts, and the reasons for industry's position based on this information.

A key focus has necessarily been on the impacts of the additional net free zones, given the scale of their impact on the viability and economic output of the fishery. However, the submission also addresses a broader suite of issues that demonstrate the need for a much more rigorous, evidence-based package of reforms to more effectively balance all of the objectives and desired benefits of the fishery.

Despite the serious concerns of industry, GOCCFA and its members want to work productively and collaboratively with the Queensland Government and stakeholders on the development and implementation of management options that promote a modern, sustainable fishery in the GoC.

To this end, this submission proposes a balanced and comprehensive suite of actions to deliver improvements in environmental sustainability while also preserving and maximising the future economic value of the fishery for the benefit of all Queenslanders, including our regional and remote communities.

Industry needs and insists on a meaningful seat at the table in this process.

In the above context, the remainder of this submission is structured as follows:

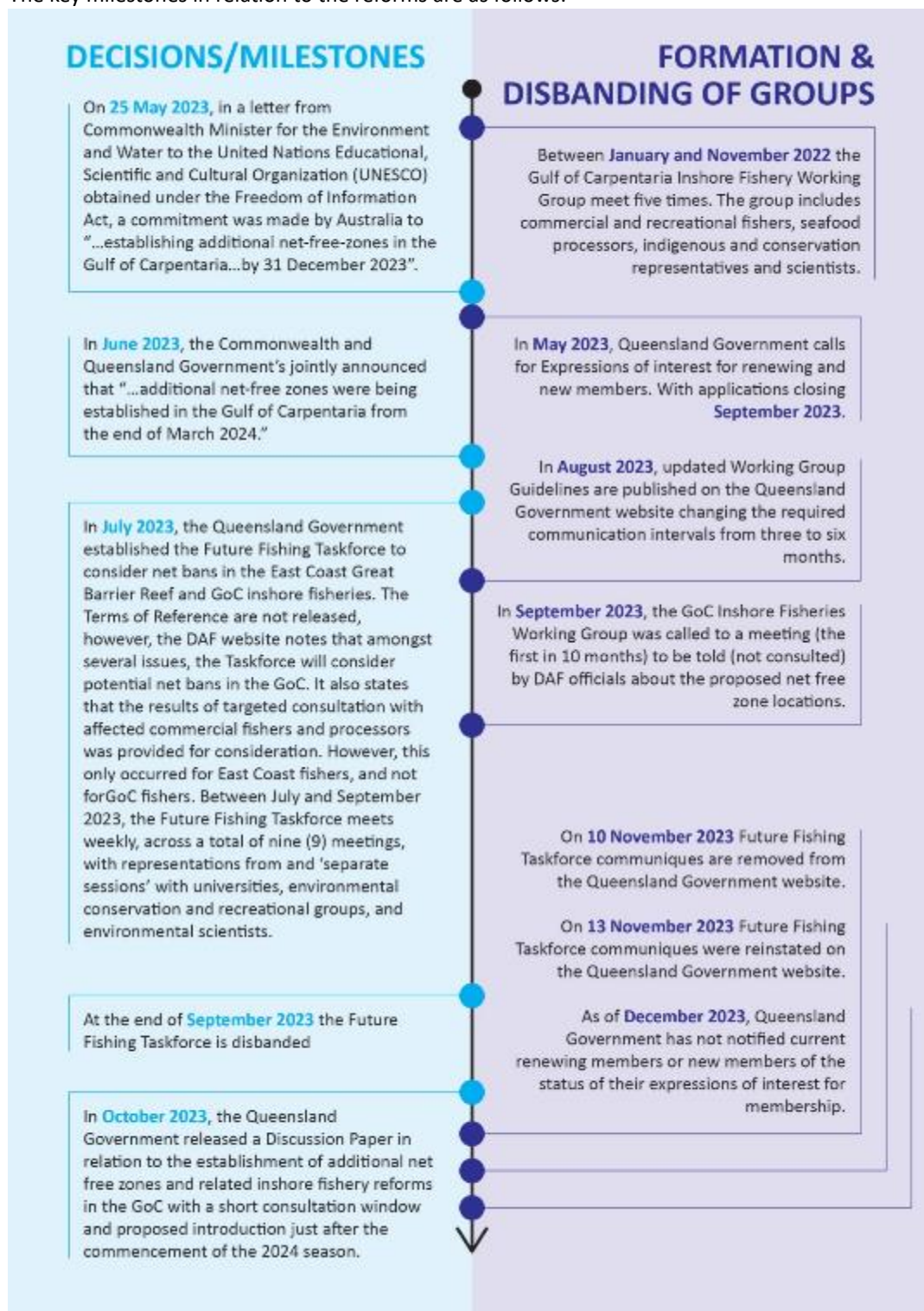
- **Section 2** addresses the serious concerns of industry in relation to the process, integrity, and quality of impact and risk analysis undertaken by government in developing the reforms as proposed;
- **Section 3** discusses the economic and environmental impacts of the reforms as proposed; and
- **Section 4** presents a collaborative proposal to the Queensland Government consisting of detailed actions and recommendations to move forward productively.

02

Problems with the approach, integrity, and justification of the policy by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments

2. Problems with the approach, integrity, and justification of the policy by government

The key milestones in relation to the reforms are as follows:



The way these reforms have been devised, announced, and justified by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments is of serious concern to industry and affected stakeholders. The sections below cover these issues in detail.

2.1 Lack of consultation with industry prior to the reform announcement

There was no prior indication of proposed reforms to net zones in the GoC fishery or indication that the Commonwealth Government and Queensland Governments had coordinated to commit to these reforms.

The Commonwealth Government's commitment to UNESCO and the subsequent joint Commonwealth and Queensland Government announcement committing to net free zones in the GoC were made prior to any consultation with GOCCFA or our affected industry stakeholders.

2.2 Lack of transparency in relation to the Future Fishing Taskforce

The Future Fishing Taskforce's Terms of Reference (ToR) have not been made public.

When requested, the Queensland Government withheld the release of the ToR under parliamentary privilege. The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) also made a similar request and received the same response. This means there is no transparency as to the purpose, principles, governance, or authority of the Taskforce.

The Future Fishing Taskforce meeting communiques are publicly available. However, on 10 November 2023, mid-way through this consultation period and following the submission of several detailed questions by GOCCFA in relation to the Taskforce (see Appendix A), the Future Fishing Taskforce's meeting communiques were removed from the DAF website. They were reinstated on 13 November 2023 following queries from the media.

2.3 Exclusion of industry from consultation process

The Taskforce meeting communiques note representations were made by a range of environmental groups, universities, environmental conservation focussed non-government organisations (NGOs), environmental scientists, and a survey related to East Coast reforms as part of decision making and forming recommendations. The Taskforce did not undertake adequate or timely consultation with commercial fishers in regard to the GoC despite the existence of a Queensland Government appointed GoC Inshore Fishery Working Group (Working Group) having an active membership during the Taskforce's appointment period.

Whilst the Working Group met five times in 2022, with the last meeting occurring in November 2022¹⁶ and despite the June 2023 announcement of reforms in the GoC and the period of Taskforce deliberations, DAF did not call a meeting of the Working Group again for 10 months.

A meeting was held in September 2023, only weeks before the release of the Discussion Paper, despite members being available throughout 2023. At a pre-meeting the day prior to this Working Group meeting, DAF representatives displayed a map of 10 net free zone areas that had already been presented to the Future Fishing Taskforce (as outlined in the appended communications). DAF representatives requested feedback from the commercial members during the meeting and industry declined on the basis that this was not a genuine consultation process.

2.4 Lack of structured consideration of reforms by the Future Fishing Taskforce

The Future Fishing Taskforce meeting communiques demonstrate a lack of structured framework and evidence-based analysis of issues to underpin its recommendations to the Queensland Government. Whilst the Taskforce acknowledges that commercial fishers in the GoC are good stewards of the environment and that commercial fishing was of particular economic importance to the GoC, with limited opportunities for businesses to shift into other industries or employment¹⁷, none of this appears to have been quantified, analysed or to have borne any weight in decision making.

¹⁶ Queensland Government, [Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery working group communiques | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/gulf-of-carpentaria-inshore-fishery-working-group-communiques), viewed 27 October 23

¹⁷ Queensland Government, [1 September 2023 taskforce meeting | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/1-september-2023-taskforce-meeting), viewed 26 October 23

The aggressive timeline under which these proposed changes were developed, lack of transparency, genuine and timely consultation with GoC industry has resulted in poorly considered recommendations by the Taskforce and does not align with the principles of evidence based, consultative and informed decision and policy making.

2.5 Conflation of the GoC fishery with the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area

The GoC is not a listed UNESCO World Heritage Asset. UNESCO's 2022 Mission to the Great Barrier Reef (Australia) Report¹⁸ made recommendations for net free zones in the Great Barrier Reef. These recommendations do not relate to the GoC. Over the last decade, net fishing has not been highlighted as a key threat to the Great Barrier Reef in the UNESCO State of Conservation reports¹⁹.

The Commonwealth Government made commitments to UNESCO that were not sought by UNESCO. It was only when the Commonwealth Government proposed net free zones in the GoC in their letter of 25 May 2023²⁰ that UNESCO acknowledged this action without offering any supporting assessment of the need for bans in this area. In making these commitments to UNESCO, the Queensland Government has made certain inferences in relation to the transfer of risk between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and GoC inshore fisheries. However, the Queensland Government either does not have, or does have but has not shared, compelling evidence to support this concern.

These commitments to UNESCO do not acknowledge or seek to address the major environmental degradation risks to the GoC that have been previously identified by UNESCO and other bodies, including IUU fishing, mining extraction and transportation, water extraction for agricultural irrigation, agricultural runoff, marine debris, climate change²¹, and overfishing in neighbouring waters.²² The broader context of the major environmental risks facing the GoC is explored in detail in Section 3 of this document.

Further, and despite various international treaties, the Commonwealth Government's commitments further restrict an already heavily regulated fishery s despite the three neighbouring countries (all UN Member States) having overfished fisheries with significant IUU in their own waters.

The Future Fishing Taskforce did highlight the potential risk to GoC fisheries posed by the East Coast net free zones and the transfer of commercial fishers from the East Coast to the GoC intensifying fishing in the area.

Intensified commercial fishing in the GoC is a risk created by the Queensland Government's own policy reforms in East Coast fisheries. Government appears not to have explored the many other management options at its disposal to address the unintended consequences of its own policy decisions.

¹⁸ UNESCO and IUCN, Thulstrup, H and Carter, E, *Report on the joint World Heritage Centre / IUCN Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Great Barrier Reef (Australia) from 21 to 30 March 2022*, March 2022

¹⁹ At regular intervals UNESCO World Heritage Convention publishes the Great Barrier Reef State of Conservation Report, which highlights the key threats to the property. The five reports conducted over the last decade do not highlight fishing as a key threat (reports undertaken in 2023, 2021, 2017, 2015, 2012). A summary of the key threats identified across all 17 reports undertaken since 1985 do not include fishing, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&id_site=154

²⁰ Letter from The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP to the Director-General, UNESCO outlining the Australian and Queensland government commitments for the protection of the Great Barrier Reef, May 2023, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act

²¹ Australian Government, *Species Profiles and Threats Data, Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Bioregional Plan*, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water., viewed 24 October 2023, <https://www.environment.gov.au/sprat-public/action/kef/view/82;jsessionid=C696E761A8CE5B4930D8475FFB7AF58E>

²² Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

2.6 Lack of demonstration of balanced impact analysis identified in the *Fisheries Act (1994)*

The main purpose of the Queensland Government's *Fisheries Act 1994* is to provide for the use, conservation and enhancement of the community's fisheries resources and fish habitats in a way that seeks to apply and balance the principles of ecological sustainable development and promote ecologically sustainable development.²³

"In balancing the principles [of ecologically sustainable development], each principle is to be given the relative emphasis appropriate in the circumstances, having regard to ensuring access to the fisheries resources is allocated in a way that maximises the potential economic, social and cultural benefits to the community."

Queensland Government, *Fisheries Act 1994*

To put forward significant changes that Future Fishing Taskforce note require changes to the *Fisheries Act 1994* and its subordinate legislation (*Fisheries (Commercial Fisheries) Regulation 2019*, *Fisheries Declaration 2019*, *Fisheries (General) Regulation 2019* and *Fisheries Quota Declaration 2019*), the changes should, at minimum demonstrate, an alignment with the principles of ecologically sustainable development. The principles of ecologically sustainable development are:

- enhancing individual and community wellbeing through economic development that safeguards the wellbeing of future generations;
- providing fairness within and between generations;
- protecting biological diversity, ecological processes and life-support systems;
- in making decisions, effectively integrating fairness and short and long-term economic, environmental and social considerations;
- considering the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies;
- considering the need to maintain and enhance competition, in an environmentally sound way;
- considering the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy that can enhance the capacity for environmental protection; and
- that decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues affecting them; and
- the precautionary principle.²⁴

There is no available documentation in the Future Fishing Taskforce communiques to suggest the sustainable ecological development principles in the *Fisheries Act 1994* were considered and assessed in a structured and demonstrable way.

It is a legislative requirement of the Queensland Government to undertake a balanced assessment of the nine ecological sustainable development principles in the *Fisheries Act 1994* when considering changes to the legislation (including access, use, and allocation). This is the case with the proposed reforms. It is vital that all nine principles are given equal consideration, and it is also critical to note that the 'precautionary principle', considered an overriding principle, is not applicable in this instance.

The precautionary principle as described in the context of the *Fisheries Act 1994*, reflects the intent of the precautionary principle as defined under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act, Section 391 (2)*: "The precautionary principle

²³ Queensland Government, *Fisheries Act 1994*, <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1994-037#pt.1>, viewed 24 October 2023

²⁴ Queensland Government, *Fisheries Act 1994*, <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1994-037#pt.1>, viewed 24 October 2023

is that lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing a measure to prevent degradation of the environment where there are threats of serious or irreversible environmental damage.”²⁵

The conditions under which the precautionary principle is triggered are critical. To trigger the principle, two cumulative conditions must be met.

The first condition is that there is a threat of serious or irreversible environmental damage.

In considering the first condition, the reforms should have demonstrated:

- the environmental threat is serious and irreversible;
- the threats consider many factors and were enhanced by consultation with rights holders; and
- the threat of damage is adequately substantiated by scientific evidence.²⁶

These thresholds have not been met. As outlined earlier, government has not provided any analysis or evidence of the serious and irreversible environmental damage posed by net fishing, therefore there is a high degree of uncertainty in regard to whether there is a serious or irreversible threat posed by net fishing.

The second condition is the application of appropriate and necessary measures based on analysis of many factors.

In considering the second condition, the reforms should have demonstrated:

- that if there are uncertainties about the seriousness or irreversibility of environmental damage that cannot be substantiated with scientific evidence, that an assessment of the degree of uncertainty involved an analysis of many factors; and
- measures do not go beyond what is appropriate or necessary to achieve the overall objective of the measure.²⁷

In the context of the significant degree of uncertainty and the many other more significant serious and irreversible environmental threats to the GoC, the proposed measures are neither appropriate nor necessary.

In considering the full and detailed definition of the precautionary principle and the conditions required for it to be triggered, it is important to note that the threat of seriousness or irreversible environmental damage posed by net fishing cannot be substantiated by scientific evidence and that in the context of this uncertainty, the proposed reforms are neither appropriate or necessary (given the lack of analysis and overall context). Therefore, the precautionary principle does not apply.

It is of significant concern to the GOCCFA that the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027* inaccurately invokes the precautionary principle in stating that “...moving to best practice fisheries management, we will adopt the precautionary principle required by the Fisheries Act 1994. This means that if the information is insufficient at a particular time to provide confidence in the existing fishing rules to sustainably manage our fisheries, a more conservative approach may be required through clearly defined management actions”.²⁸ This is not consistent with the definition of the precautionary principle as outlined in the legislation or recent precedents.

²⁵ Australian Government, Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act, Section 391 (2), [https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/legis/cth/consol_act/epabca1999588/s391.html#:~:text=\(2\)%20The%20precautionary%20principle%20is,serious%20or%20irreversible%20environmental%20damage](https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/legis/cth/consol_act/epabca1999588/s391.html#:~:text=(2)%20The%20precautionary%20principle%20is,serious%20or%20irreversible%20environmental%20damage), viewed 9 November 2023

²⁶ Federal Court of Australia, *Bob Brown Foundation Inc v Minister for the Environment (No 2)* [2022] FCA 873, [BarNet Jade - Find recent Australian legal decisions, judgments, case summaries for legal professionals \(Judgments And Decisions Enhanced\)](#), viewed 10 November 2023

²⁷ Federal Court of Australia, *Bob Brown Foundation Inc v Minister for the Environment (No 2)* [2022] FCA 873, [BarNet Jade - Find recent Australian legal decisions, judgments, case summaries for legal professionals \(Judgments And Decisions Enhanced\)](#), viewed 10 November 2023

²⁸ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries, *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, 2017

The Discussion Paper does not state a specific objective, however notes that the measures “...are necessary to modernise management arrangements, be responsive to changes in stock levels, optimise economic benefits, manage ecological risks and ensure a fair and equitable access by all.”²⁹

Without any scientific evidence noting the nature and scope of the ‘seriousness’ and ‘irreversibility’ of the threat, or the level of certainty, it is GOCFCA’s view that this condition has not been met in relation to the proposed GoC reforms.

The proposed measures go beyond what is appropriate and necessary to achieve government’s stated purpose. A single blunt regulatory instrument can never address complex issues, and certainly not in the absence of any evidence from which to justify or determine such actions. As such, the precautionary principle cannot be triggered, and government is required to assess – with equal weighting – the proposed changes against all nine sustainable development principles under the *Fisheries Act 1994*.

It is further noted that the Queensland Government proposes to achieve the purposes of the *Fisheries Act 1994*:

- in consultation with, and having regard to the views and interests of, all persons involved in commercial, charter, recreational or indigenous fishing and the community generally; and
- using a transparent and responsive approach to the management of access to fisheries resources.³⁰

The GoC commercial fishers and community were not afforded the opportunity to make representations to the Future Fishing Taskforce, unlike East Coast and environmental stakeholders. They were not invited to make representations at meetings and therefore, the views and interests of commercial fishers were not considered.

The Future Fishing Taskforce Terms of Reference have not been made public, having been held under parliamentary privilege, making this process neither transparent nor responsive to the management of access to GoC fisheries resources.

The GoC Inshore Fisheries Working Group, established to enable representatives from industry and community to work collaboratively with the Queensland Government, was not called to meet by DAF for 10 months (between November 2022 and September 2023). The Working Group was presented – not consulted – with proposed net free zone locations weeks before their public release.

In addition to the above legislative process considerations, balanced and transparent analysis of the economic, environmental, and social impacts of the proposed changes is a requirement under the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy*. This has not been provided by government.

²⁹ Queensland Government, *Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery, Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms, Discussion Paper*, 2023

³⁰ Queensland Government, *Fisheries Act 1994*, <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1994-037#pt.1>, viewed 24 October 2023

The *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* sets out minimum criteria that are required to be met before consideration of any reallocation of fisheries resources.³¹

The assessment is to be based on maximising the economic, social and cultural value that Queenslanders receive from the sustainable use of fisheries resources, with one of the key principles being to ensure there is a transparent, predictable and repeatable process with clear reasons for decisions and certainty for users.

Queensland Government, Fisheries Reallocation Policy

The minimum criteria to be met for reallocation to occur are:

- there is the data supporting the proposal of sufficient quality;
- the cost-benefit analysis demonstrates that it will optimise the economic, social and cultural benefits Queenslanders receive from the sustainable use of fisheries resources;
- there is a workable plan to fund compensation for loss of access;
- the required consultation been completed;
- there is significant community support from the relevant community;
- it is practical and achievable; and
- it is consistent with relevant policies, the *Fisheries Act 1994* and relevant harvest strategies.

It is noted that these are minimum criteria only and do not fully align with best practice policy and decision making. However, at minimum, assessing the proposed changes against these criteria would provide practical approach to evidence-based analysis, consultation, and policy change process for government to follow before making recommendations about reallocating – or indeed completing removing – access to fisheries.

The Discussion Paper and the Future Fishing Taskforce communiques do not present evidence of quality data to support the proposed changes, a full cost benefit analysis of the impacts, detailed compensation plans for affected stakeholders, required consultation, community support, project management and implementation plans, and its alignment with the *Fisheries Act 1994* and Harvest Strategies.

2.7 Exclusion of scientific evidence related to more significant threats than net fishing

GOCFA and all stakeholders have a shared objective of maintaining the health and sustainability of fisheries in Queensland and more broadly, across Australia, neighbouring and international waters. It is vital to the viability of the commercial fishing sector.

³¹ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries, *Fisheries Allocation Policy*, 2018

The GoC faces a number of environmental threats which have been well documented by Government^{32 33}, UNESCO³⁴ and the scientific literature³⁵. However, net fishing does not rate highly (or even at all) in reports and research over the last decade.

The Commonwealth Government's *Gulf of Carpentaria Basin's Marine Bioregional Plan profile*³⁶ noted the present and emerging pressures affecting environmental conservation values in the GoC as:

- marine debris;
- climate change (temperature increases and ocean acidification); and
- IUU.

Marine debris

According to a 2014 report, 6.4 million tonnes of fishing gear is lost in global oceans annually.³⁷

Referred to as ghost nets, is sometimes accidentally lost, abandoned or deliberately discarded poses a threat to marine wildlife as it drifts with currents and entangles them.³⁸

In 2014, northern Australia had some of the highest densities of ghost nets in the world and remains an important and ongoing transboundary threat to biodiversity in the region that requires attention from the countries surrounding the Arafura and Timor Seas.³⁹

Many commercial fishers seek to recover, destroy and dispose the nets left behind by IUU fishers, and other debris they come across, while historically, when border patrol have detained illegal fishers in the GoC, their boats have been taken to port, however their nets were not recovered. This burden was left to commercial fishers, who voluntarily recovered and destroyed these nets.

Actual documented environmental threats to the GoC:

- Climate change (temperature increases and ocean acidification)
- Marine debris
- Foreign illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (including transboundary overfishing)
- Mining extraction and transportation
- Water extraction for agricultural irrigation
- Agricultural run off

³² Queensland Government, Climate change in the Gulf region, version 1, <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/climateaction/resources/science>, viewed 14 November 2023

³³ Australian Government, *Species Profiles and Threats Data, Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Bioregional Plan*, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water., viewed 24 October 2023, <https://www.environment.gov.au/sprat-public/action/kef/view/82;jsessionid=C696E761A8CE5B4930D8475FFB7AF58E>

³⁴ At regular intervals UNESCO World Heritage Convention publishes the Great Barrier Reef State of Conservation Report, which highlights the key threats to the property. The five reports conducted over the last decade do not highlight fishing as a key threat (reports undertaken in 2023, 2021, 2017, 2015, 2012). A summary of the key threats identified across all 17 reports undertaken since 1985 do not include fishing, https://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/?action=list&id_site=154

³⁵ Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

³⁶ Australian Government, *Species Profiles and Threats Data, Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Bioregional Plan*, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water., viewed 24 October 2023, <https://www.environment.gov.au/sprat-public/action/kef/view/82;jsessionid=C696E761A8CE5B4930D8475FFB7AF58E>

³⁷ Wilcox, C. et al, 2014, *Understanding the Sources and Effects of Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear on Marine Turtles in Northern Australia*

³⁸ Wilcox, C. et al, 2014, *Understanding the Sources and Effects of Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear on Marine Turtles in Northern Australia*

³⁹ Wilcox, C. et al, 2014, *Understanding the Sources and Effects of Abandoned, Lost, and Discarded Fishing Gear on Marine Turtles in Northern Australia*

Climate change

It is estimated that more than 90 per cent of global blue food production (defined as fish, shellfish, plants and algae) faces substantial risks from environmental change.⁴⁰

The Queensland Government's Regional climate change impact summary for the Gulf Region (including the GoC), highlights a range of climate risks including:

- higher temperatures;
- hotter and more frequent hot days;
- more intense downpours;
- less frequent but more intense tropical cyclones;
- rising sea level;
- more frequent sea level extremes; and
- warmer and more acidic oceans.⁴¹

These factors, individually and collectively, pose significant threats to the coastal estuaries and the GoC inshore fishery including coastline erosion, increased water usage (domestic and agricultural), loss of ecosystems, cyclone and storm tide inundation, and sea level and storm intensity increasing inland flooding.

The vulnerability to the GoC inshore fishery to climate and environmental change should be of much higher concern than the much smaller and mitigable environmental risks posed by net fishing.

Foreign IUU in international neighbouring waters

Despite significant improvements to intercept illegal fishing boats in the GoC's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (down from a peak of 120 in 2006 to zero in 2017 and 2018)⁴², a report by Charles Darwin University highlights the transboundary risk of environmental degradation and fisheries resource depletion due to overfishing in neighbouring countries. For example, the report noted that the northern Australia commercial fisheries' catch in 2009 was only 5.8% (13,340 tonnes) of the total catch (228,165 tonnes) in the neighbouring province of Papua.⁴³

Whilst IUU has been an ongoing issue since the 1950's⁴⁴, in the last decade, this risk has only intensified, with a recent global study of fish stocks highlighting it as the most important and urgent issue for global oceans.⁴⁵ With 29 of the 142 countries included in this recent global study not even attempting to keep stock reports, not only is it impossible for governments to make informed policy decisions, but it has also created an environment where sustainable fishing practice is undermined.⁴⁶

As global demand for fish protein continues to rise to feed growing populations⁴⁷, overfished stocks have tripled over the last 50 years.⁴⁸ Live marine traffic monitoring reveals the many hundreds, if not thousands, of unidentified vessels fishing in neighbouring waters to the GoC and those surrounding Australian waters nationally. Many fleets fish illegally in

⁴⁰ Cao, L., Halpern, B.S., Troell, M. *et al.* *Vulnerability of blue foods to human-induced environmental change*. *Nat Sustain* **6**, 1186–1198 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-023-01156-y>

⁴¹ Queensland Government, Climate change in the Gulf region, version 1, <https://www.des.qld.gov.au/climateaction/resources/science>, viewed 14 November 2023

⁴² Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

⁴³ Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

⁴⁴ Wilcox, Chris; Mann, Vanessa; Cannard, Toni; Ford, Jessica; Pascoe, Sean; Hoshino, Eriko. A review of IUU fishing related issues and progress in the APFIC region. Hobart, Tasmania, Australia: CSIRO Hobart; 2021. csiro:EP202288. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2640en>

⁴⁵ Minderoo Foundation, *Global Fishing Index 2021, Assessing the sustainability of the world's marine fisheries*, 2021

⁴⁶ Minderoo Foundation, *Global Fishing Index 2021, Assessing the sustainability of the world's marine fisheries*, 2021

⁴⁷ Wilcox, Chris; Mann, Vanessa; Cannard, Toni; Ford, Jessica; Pascoe, Sean; Hoshino, Eriko. A review of IUU fishing related issues and progress in the APFIC region. Hobart, Tasmania, Australia: CSIRO Hobart; 2021. csiro:EP202288. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb2640en>

⁴⁸ Sydney Morning Herald, Bagshaw, E, *Who is eating all the fish?*, 6 November 2023

international EEZs or in international waters on the periphery of other countries' EEZs, or simply turn off their automatic identification systems to conduct illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.⁴⁹

There is significant overfishing occurring in waters neighbouring the GoC.

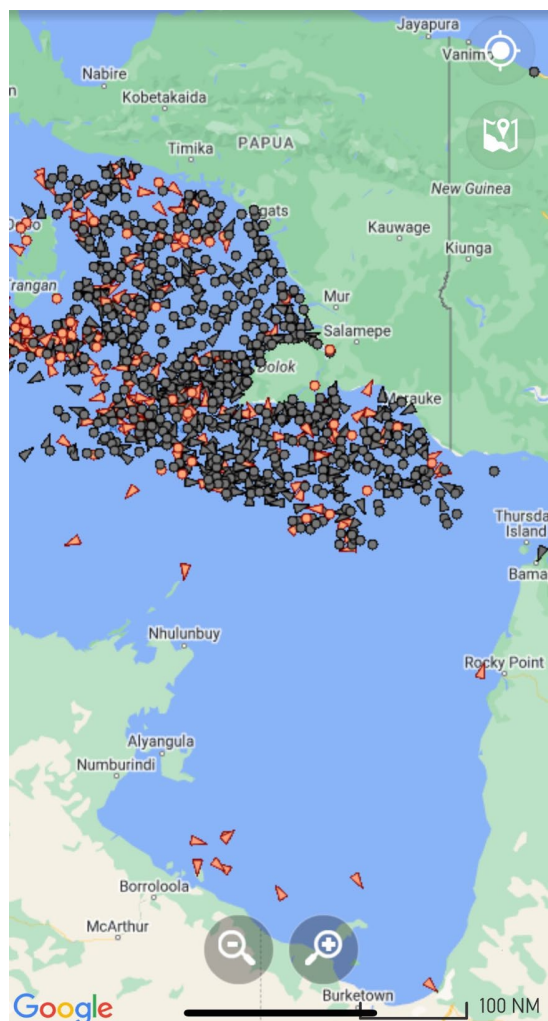


Image 1: Fishing vessels (orange) and "Undefined" (grey) vessels in 718 fishery (Laut Aru, Laut Arafuru, dan Laut Timor bangian Timur), 7 November 2023
Source: Marine Traffic App

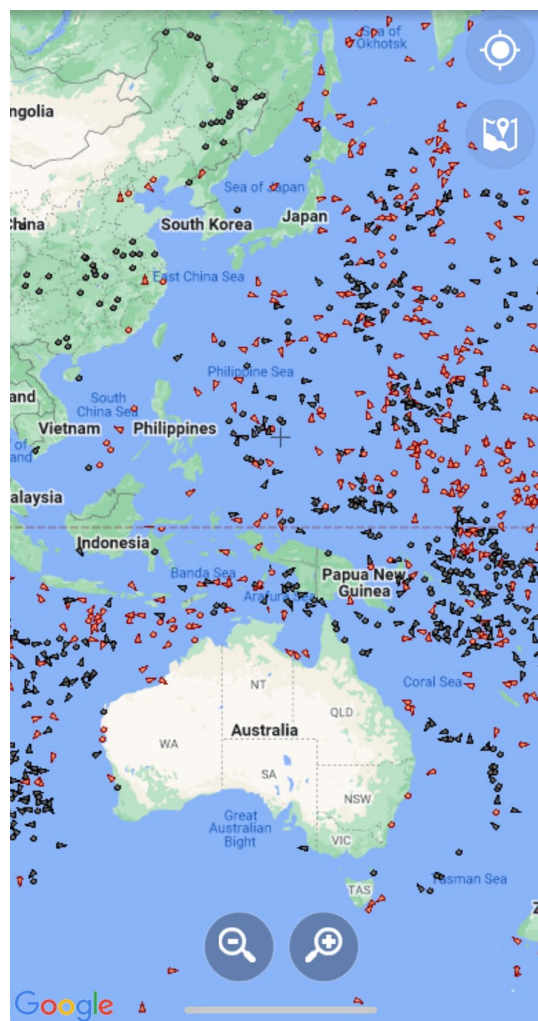


Image 2: Fishing vessels (orange) and "Undefined" (grey) vessels in South-East Asia, 7 November 2023
Source: Marine Traffic App

In 2011, ATSEA conducted a Trans-boundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA), and identified Indonesia was responsible for 98 per cent of catch in the Timor and Arafura Seas. This fish was caught by approximately 247,000 fishers, compared to Australia which only caught 1.65 per cent of the total catch and had just 625 operators (every Australian fishery in the

⁴⁹ Sydney Morning Herald, Bagshaw, E, *Who is eating all the fish?*, 6 November 2023

Timor and Arafura sea).⁵⁰ Furthermore, these figures are likely underestimated given Indonesian catch data is highly unreliable due the high degree of IUU that occurs across the country but particularly in the Timor and Arafura Seas.⁵¹

Whilst the Commonwealth Government has successfully deterred IUU fishing in Australian waters, it has failed in its diplomatic efforts to manage the practice in international waters⁵² which poses the most significant risk to global fish stocks,⁵³ the industries these resources support, food security, and equitable access and use of Australian fisheries resources.

Overfishing by Australian commercial fishers and net fishing are not identified in the literature as posing a major environmental risk to the GoC.

IUU in neighbouring UN Member States' waters is a more significant environmental threat to the GoC.

Other environmental risks to the GoC

There are several other environmental risks that need consideration, including mining extraction, mining and agricultural transportation, water extraction for agricultural irrigation, and run off. Climate change will intensify agricultural risks to the GoC inshore fishery, while mining activities (extraction, land and sea transport) continue to impact the environment.

CSIRO has undertaken a range of studies across the northern and southern GoC areas to identify opportunities for agricultural development and model the ecological impact of changed / reduced river flows to the downstream marine ecosystems of the GoC.⁵⁴ Triggered by significant interest for increased irrigated agriculture development in the area, the modelling has consistently found negative impacts on the ecological health of the GoC waters, and in turn the economic viability of the fishery.⁵⁵ This poses a significant threat to the ecology of the GoC inshore fishery, and arguably a more significant risk, relative to net fishing.

A further and an equally critical consideration, is the indirect environmental impacts associated with demand substitution for protein caused by these reforms.

With continued growth in protein demand in Australia and globally, and reduced GoC wild-caught Australian production, exacerbated by the East Coast and related closures, the current and future increased demand for Australian product is expected to shift to other seafood protein sources. To fill this gap and meet current and increasing demand, the two most likely sources of seafood protein will be imported seafood and aquaculture farmed product.

Increasing Australia's reliance on imported seafood product not only reduces food security but will likely also intensify fishing in international waters to meet this demand. At best, this will reduce currently sustainable fisheries, and at worst, will intensify IUU in already overfished fisheries.

For aquaculture product, the increased reliance will be indirect, in the form of increased demand for fish meal inputs required to produce aquaculture farmed product. Wild caught fish still accounts for 69% of fish meal inputs and 75% of fish oil production used to feed farmed fish.⁵⁶ Additional inputs are also required to produce farmed fish, including

⁵⁰ ATSEA. 2012. Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis for the Arafura and Timor Seas Region.

⁵¹ Edyvane KS, and Penny SS. 2017. Trends in derelict fishing nets and fishing activity in northern Australia: implications for trans-boundary fisheries management in the Shared Arafura and Timor Seas. *Fisheries Research* 188: 23-37.

⁵² Sydney Morning Herald, Bagshaw, E, *Who is eating all the fish?*, 6 November 2023

⁵³ Minderero Foundation, *Global Fishing Index 2021, Assessing the sustainability of the world's marine fisheries*, 2021

⁵⁴ Plagányi, Eva; Kenyon, Rob; Blamey, Laura; [Can we have healthy marine ecosystems and modify rivers in northern Australia? - CSIRO](#), 2022, viewed 8 December 2023

⁵⁵ Plagányi, Eva; Kenyon, Rob et al; *Ecological modelling of the impacts of water development in the Gulf of Carpentaria with particular reference to impacts on the Northern Prawn Fishery*. Gulf of Carpentaria MICE, 2022. [Microsoft Word - FRDC-Final-Report-Plaganyi et al 2022.docx](#)

⁵⁶ Naylor, R.L., Hardy, R.W., Buschmann, A.H. et al. A 20-year retrospective review of global aquaculture. *Nature* 591, 551–563 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03308-6>

terrestrial feed products (livestock and crops). These all have additional environmental impacts including biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient and chemical waste, and pollution.⁵⁷ This is further explored in Section 3.

The relative environmental risk of net fishing is low compared to the many other significant known factors. This is not to say net fishing does not have potential impacts. However, management approaches need to be proportional and reasonable to the impacts. The Future Fishing Taskforce communiques demonstrate a very narrow focus on risk. Many other more significant environmental risks have, at worst, been actively excluded, and at best, not actively considered by the Taskforce or the Queensland Government. There is strong evidence of many other direct and indirect environmental risks that have not been considered to develop a full and honest assessment of the total impacts of the proposed changes.

2.8 Lack of robust analysis and data to support estimated fishery impact

The Queensland Government has indicated that it expects the reforms – specifically, the new net free zones – to impact 20 per cent of the current fishery. The Queensland Government has not provided transparency of its approach or underpinning assumptions to this analysis and has not established an independent process to verify or validate this figure to provide confidence to industry and the community.

Known limitations in data and evidence suggest that this is likely to be a significant under-estimate of the impact.

Based on industry's knowledge of the fishing grounds, known data gaps and limitations, and broader research, industry notes the following significant limitations and inconsistencies in the data that the Queensland Government has likely used to derive this figure:

- in many areas it is impossible to determine if catch came from within proposed net-free zones or just adjacent to these zones;
- spatial data for several catches is not attached to reported logbook catches, while others logbooks are significantly incomplete for several years;
- fishers have reported to the association that on receiving and reviewing their individual data sets that there are significant gaps in both fishing and protected species data;
- there is no independent validation for data collected, and estimated catches may be inaccurate;
- there is no accurate differentiation in the method of fishing used (e.g., creek net or foreshore netting); and
- fishers move around, for example if they are concerned about stocks in a particular location they will not fish in that for several years, therefore catch data needs to be reviewed over a long period of time.

We also note that in the process of requesting data to support GOCFFA's consideration of the Discussion Paper and proposed changes, we have identified significant discrepancies in information as well as large gaps in the data, beyond anticipated gaps related to 2023 data (where DAF is still entering this information).

DAF estimates for the tonnage of catch caught in the proposed net-free zones are consistently less than half (but as low as 25 per cent) what logbook data from 2018-2023 suggests. Furthermore, this logbook data excludes 13 authorities. This suggests that at only two years of catch data (possibly less) has been considered in these estimations, posing a significant issue as fishing grounds may not be fished for long periods of time to ensure they are productive and sustainable. It is unknown how DAF came to these estimates.

There are several factors that impact the productivity of fishing grounds because the environment in these areas is variable and inconsistent. For instance, rainfall, salinity, temperature, time of year, tides, wind, and turbidity will impact the abundance of target species in fishing grounds with variable hydrology and topographical features. In some cases, conditions may not be suitable to fish an area for many years. Additionally, there are social considerations to address,

⁵⁷ Naylor, R.L., Hardy, R.W., Buschmann, A.H. *et al.* A 20-year retrospective review of global aquaculture. *Nature* 591, 551–563 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03308-6>

including the distance from port (which may result in less trips, compared to area close to port), fuel costs, wholesale prices of fish, and availability of crew. Given these factors, it is critical that several years of logbook data be analysed and considered alongside other quantitative and qualitative information to develop a more robust estimate of the impact of the proposed net-free zones on total harvest.

These environmental factors are even more relevant for nearshore and river netting, where considerably more physical rather than biological variables have a significantly greater variability, including salinity, temperature freshwater flows, and turbidity. It is these areas that are predominantly proposed for net-free areas.

Given the poor conditions and subsequent catches in recent years, it is reasonable to assume that the catch estimate provided by DAF does not adequately portray the importance of these areas and is therefore a significant underestimate of the likely impact of the proposed changes on the current fishery.

2.9 Significant limitations in the Environmental Risk Assessment model relied upon by government

GOCCFA have serious concerns regarding the Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) model used in the Ecological Risk Assessment to assess risk to Species of Conservation Concern (SOCC) in the GoC Inshore Fishery. These concerns, about the shortcomings of the PSA method, are supported by and shared with those expressed by its developers^{58 59}, fisheries management^{60 61} and the broader scientific community^{62 63}.

More specifically, the PSA model of risk assessment was not designed to be a measure of absolute risk. The PSA is heavily conservative, with risk overestimated to account for uncertainty, which leads to a high number of false positives – as high as it (>50%)^{64 65}.

An overview of the ERA limitations include:

- significant inaccuracies and incorrect allocations of scores for several PSA analysis attributes and species;
- an inherent bias toward biological constraints (productivity analysis) rather than fishery impact (susceptibility analysis);
- the ERA accounts for the entire GoC inshore fishery and is not appropriate at looking at risk posed by the N3 fishery, of which the nearshore and creek components operate in a vastly different way to the N12 fishery;
- it does not adequately identify currently widespread fishing practices and methods that significantly reduce the risk to SOCC/protected species;
- **it incorrectly assumes fishers are doing the bare minimum as is required by legislation**, however, there is demonstrable evidence that economic, social, and environmental drivers mean their operation generally exceeds the legislative requirements and standards;

⁵⁸ Hobday AJ, Smith ADM, Stobutzki IC, Bulman C, Daley R, Dambacher JM, Deng RA, Dowdney J, Fuller M, Furlani D, Griffiths SP, Johnson D, Kenyon R, Knuckey IA, Ling SD, Pitcher R, Sainsbury KJ, Sporcic M, Smith T, Turnbull C, Walker TI, Wayte SE, Webb H, Williams A, Wise BS, & Zhou S. 2011. Ecological risk assessment for the effects of fishing. *Fisheries Research* 108: 372- 384.

⁵⁹ Hobday AJ, Smith A, Webb H, Daley S, Wayte S, Bulman C, Dowdney J, Williams A, Sporcic M, Dambacher J, Fuller M, & Walker T. 2007. Ecological Risk Assessment for the Effects of Fishing: Methodology. Report R04/1072 for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Canberra

⁶⁰ Good S. 2019. Review of the MSC Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis for Out-of-Scope Species. Marine Stewardship Council.

⁶¹ Australian Fisheries Management Authority. 2017. Guide to AFMA's Ecological Risk Management. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁶² Fulton EA, Bulman C, Thomas L, Sporcic M, & Hartog J. 2019. Ecological risk assessment global review. CSIRO, Australia.

⁶³ Hordyk AR, & Carruthers TR. 2018. A quantitative evaluation of qualitative risk assessment framework: Examining the assumptions and predictions of the Productivity Susceptibility Analysis (PSA). *PLoS ONE* 13: e0198298.

⁶⁴ Zhou S, Hobday AJ, Dichmont CM, & Smith ADM. 2016. Ecological risk assessments for the effects of fishing: A comparison and validation of PSA and SAFE. *Fisheries Research* 183: 518- 529.

⁶⁵ Hordyk AR, & Carruthers TR. 2018. A quantitative evaluation of qualitative risk assessment framework: Examining the assumptions and predictions of the Productivity Susceptibility Analysis (PSA). *PLoS ONE* 13: e0198298.

- there is important attributes missing (e.g. population size and natural mortality), as well as adequate thresholds and criteria to determine risk for the attributes that are assessed;
- the PSA attributes used to assess risk are not appropriate to assess risk, some are redundant, and are not of equal importance;
- every attribute is treated equally, when the attributes important for identifying species-risk should be weighted;
- that are considerable knowledge gaps for all species assessed;
- the ERA over-subscribes to the precautionary principle when assessing risk;
- the residual risk analysis criteria are not consistently adhered to; and
- there is an obvious lack of industry consultation.

Critically, the attributes assessed have been deemed inadequate for assessing risk in other jurisdictions, including the United States and Europe, with only post-release mortality (and its accompanying criteria) assessed as being an appropriate attribute by the Marine Stewardship Council.⁶⁶

The flawed methodology used in the ERA means that every species is assessed as high risk for simply being present in the GoC, which is neither appropriate or accurate.

In addition, many of these failings are indicative of the authors having an ill-informed understanding of set netting operations in the GoC inshore fisheries, with commercial fishers' knowledge and input not sought or considered.

Importantly, the ERA was not and was never intended to be used as a reference for making economically significant management decisions, such as the proposed introduction of net-free zones in the GoC. Its recommendations identify knowledge gaps that need resolving.

Despite the authors' own acknowledgement of the PSA model's shortcomings, the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments ignore these significant limitations. A Sustainability Analysis for Fishing Effect (SAFE) analysis would provide a more realistic assessment of realised risk as is acknowledged by DAF risk assessment guidelines.⁶⁷

2.10 Lack of regard for the Queensland Government's own 2023 *Better Regulation Policy*

Notwithstanding the legislative requirements, without a structured and evidence-based assessment of the environmental, economic, and social impacts of proposed changes, government is not able to make informed decisions in the best interests of all stakeholders.

When ".....considering a policy proposal, it is essential government decision makers are provided with well-informed advice and a strong evidence base.

This is particularly important for policy proposals that introduce or amend regulation as these can have significant impacts on business, the community and the Queensland economy".

Queensland Government, *Better Regulation Policy*

⁶⁶ Good S. 2019. *Review of MSC Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis for Out-of-Scope Species*. Published by Marine Stewardship Council [www.msc.org]

⁶⁷ Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. 2018. *Ecological Risk Assessment Guideline*.

Regulatory impact analysis is recommended under the *Better Regulation Policy*.⁶⁸ This includes an Impact Assessment Statement, which provides a systematic approach to assessing the impacts of the proposed changes and is considered by the Queensland Government to be an integral part of good policy making.

Such an approach would support, at minimum, a full and balanced assessment of the proposed changes, within the context of the *Fisheries Act 1994*, and would provide a thorough assessment of the proposed changes including:

- a definition of the actual problem that Queensland Government is seeking to address;
- if and what management action is actually required; and
- identification and assessment of regulatory and non-regulatory options to address the clearly stated problem, and an assessment of the net impacts (costs and benefits) of each option.

There are serious failures of due process, fairness, and transparency in the proposed changes and the way in which they are being pursued.

There is no established evidence-based case for change or any evidence-based analysis of the economic, social, or environmental impacts of the proposed changes.

The nature and scale of the proposed reforms are not justified by the available evidence including the lack of an assessment of a full suite of regulatory and non-regulatory management options to address the problems these changes are seeking to address.

Through the above, DAF and the Queensland Government have failed to comply with the Queensland Government's own *Better Regulation Policy*.

Notwithstanding these requirements (which have not been met), the timeline for the proposed changes to come into effect does not seem realistic. As noted by the Future Fishing Taskforce, the proposed changes require legislative approval. Yet, the parliamentary process to give effect to legislative changes, supported by the required consultation, analysis and supporting implementation plans (including detailed compensation packages(s) and requisite process information) and the drafting and legal review of the proposed legislative changes, does not seem to have been taken into account by DAF.

With the proposed changes flagged to come into effect by March 2024, it is unclear how these processes will be undertaken in time, accounting for the new year recess of the Queensland Government. During consultation for the development of the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, one of the key identified challenges was "...unclear decision-making processes that complicate effective management actions."

Despite DAF's awareness of this challenge and the strategy's commitment to improvements, the process remains unclear, not transparent and unnecessarily complicated.

Details of any retraining and compensation package(s) that may be offered to commercial fishers and the process by which this would be delivered (to minimise the devastating local economic impacts) have not been provided. The anticipated closure of commercial fishing businesses and the range of businesses supported by and/or servicing the industry will result in an abrupt spike in unemployment across regional and rural communities. The delivery of retraining and education packages is essential, given the acknowledgment by the Future Fishing Taskforce that there are limited opportunities to shift into other industries or employment for local commercial fishers.⁶⁹

Further, the Future Fishing Taskforce webpage notes that the Taskforce was also required to consider an assessment of the impacts and the development of an impact mitigation package for industry participants directly affected by the Great

⁶⁸ Queensland Government, *Better Regulation Policy*, Queensland Treasury, September 2023, <https://s3.treasury.qld.gov.au/files/Queensland-Government-Better-Regulation-Policy.pdf>

⁶⁹ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries website, 1 September 2023 taskforce meeting, <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/commercial/future-fishing/1-september-2023-taskforce-meeting>, viewed 8 November 2023

Sandy Marine Park zoning plan changes. This package was to include financial mitigation, buy back, purchase of quota units for select species, and support for eligible post-harvest seafood businesses.⁷⁰

The Taskforce communiques and the Discussion Paper do not afford the GoC any of this consideration. There has been no information released about compensation, education and retraining, or any other impact mitigation measures for industry affected by the introduction of GoC net free zones.

GOCFA would expect, at minimum, the need for an impact mitigation package including measures such as structural buyouts and compensation for the loss of current and future earnings, asset value, retaining and education for employees, and a range of other measures for impacted stakeholders. At a minimum, impacted stakeholders should include commercial fishers, processors, and retailers.

Retraining, education and compensation package(s), process, and timeframe information has not yet been released and therefore cannot be considered by GOCFA and its members as part of this consultation. This creates significant uncertainty and greatly hinders members' ability to assess information vital to their future and decision making and offer considered feedback.

In addition, the aggressive consultation period afforded to stakeholders (notwithstanding the extension provided after repeated requests) to consider the proposed changes does not provide adequate time to fully consider the impacts. It is also at odds with the Queensland Government's commitment to improved stakeholder engagement as one of only 10 reform areas in the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017 – 2027*.⁷¹

The *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017 – 2027* noted that effective engagement with stakeholders would be fundamental to its successful implementation. Much of the consultation feedback informing its development highlighted the need for ongoing and transparent stakeholder engagement, and a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy was implemented. However, subsequent satisfaction surveys highlight that commercial fishers do not think that Fisheries Queensland is genuine about engaging.⁷²

The clandestine, unclear, and unfair nature of this process is of even further concern.

Further, the proposed changes are flagged to come into effect by March 2024 and no timeframe for the release of the final reforms has been provided. With the 2024 season due to commence in February 2024 and preparations now underway, there is no certainty for commercial fishers who need to invest now if they are to be ready to commence the season in February 2024, or to consider the costs and or benefits of not commencing the season at all if zones are to come into effect within four weeks of the commencement of the season.

In consultation with GOCFA members, commercial fishers estimated that over \$1 million would be spent on refitting, gear and other required upgrades in preparation for the 2024 season. Fishers will either not make this investment – a significant loss to the local economy – or, if they take the risk and make the investment and the proposed changes do occur, the economic impact and destruction to these businesses is even greater.

This is an impossible choice.

Government and DAF's lack of clarity and failure to provide assurances to industry about the 2024 season is creating significant human impacts and putting at risk investment in over \$1 million refit costs and new investment, as well as ongoing economic returns from the fishery.

⁷⁰ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries website, Future Fishing webpage, [Future fishing | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/improving-stakeholder-engagement#:~:text=Improving%20engagement%20with%20our%20stakeholders,have%20fish%20for%20the%20future), viewed 12 November 2023

⁷¹ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries website, <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/improving-stakeholder-engagement#:~:text=Improving%20engagement%20with%20our%20stakeholders,have%20fish%20for%20the%20future>, viewed 2 November 2023

⁷² Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries website, <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/improving-stakeholder-engagement>, viewed 9 November 2023

Without confirmed decision timeframes, compensation and retraining packages, or clarity of implementation timeframes, commercial fishers have certainty or confidence. This is in direct odds with the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027* target of increasing certainty for commercial fishers.

03

Impacts of the proposed measures

3. Impacts of the proposed measures

This section discusses the impacts of the measures related to the GoC commercial fishery committed to UNESCO by the Commonwealth Government and being pursued by the Queensland Government.

3.1 Current and future economic value of the GoC set net fishery

In its *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, the government acknowledged that Queensland fisheries resources are highly valued for their economic, social and cultural contributions to the state.⁷³ That notwithstanding, the proposed will have a catastrophic impact on current and future industry viability, employment in regional and remote communities, food security and affordability, and the economic output of commercial fishing in the GoC.

Around 50 multi-generational fishing families and communities across the GoC rely on the fishery and it is part of the social and economic fabric and lifeblood of regional communities across the GoC. Given the significance and contribution of fishing to regional communities, these changes will be felt throughout GoC and Queensland including (but not limited to) the communities of Karumba, Pormpuraaw, Weipa, Normanton, Mapoon, Napranum, Cairns, Bourketown, and Bamaga.

The GOCCEFA represents commercial fishers across the GoC, including the 84 N3, 3 N12 and 1 N13 net symbol holders who collectively produced 1,639 tonnes of wild-caught fish species across the GoC in 2020 with an end-market value of over \$90 million in 2020.

Countless businesses across the integrated supply chain benefit from the fishery, from chandlery, maintenance, and equipment companies to logistics and cold storage, distributors, retail stores, and restaurants. Based on current and future estimated value-added across the supply chain for product originating from the GoC commercial fishery (estimated using reported catch volumes from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, information sourced from industry operators), we considered the economic parameters and evidence on supply chain inter-relationships in recent analysis undertaken by BDO EconSearch.⁷⁴

The current and future economic value throughout the supply chain for product originating from the GoC set net fishery is estimated between \$600-800 million in today's dollars.

The impacts of the proposed changes will be wide ranging and include economic and social impacts, and likely, environmental degradation in the GoC and to fish stocks more broadly. The proposed net free zones cover a significant area, with DAF stating an estimated production impact of 20 per cent, however an assessment of the data indicates that this has been significantly underestimated (as outlined in Section 2). Given the size and value of the GoC fishery, the estimated decrease in production will reduce scale and therefore have significant direct and flow through impacts to the supply chain.

⁷³ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries, *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, 2017

⁷⁴ BDO EconSearch was funded by the Fisheries Research Development Corporation in *Valuing WA smaller commercial fisheries across the supply chain (FRDC Project: 2022-038): Final Report*, available here: <https://www.frdc.com.au/sites/default/files/products/2022-038-DLD.pdf>.

3.2 Impacts of the proposed changes

The proposed changes constitute blunt regulatory interventions. The impacts will be far more severe than are necessary and includes reduced business investment, employment, and future business earnings that will increase business uncertainty, reduced access to wild caught seafood, jeopardising food and nutritional security and likely shifting demand to international, already over-fished waters. The proposed reduction in fishing area will likely concentrate fishing into smaller areas of the GoC, likely increasing the risk of environmental degradation.

The economic destruction caused by the proposed changes is not proportional to the potential for environmental improvement.

Reduced access to wild-caught Australian seafood product

The global rate of demand for seafood and fish has doubled over the last 60 years, with the average global consumption in 2019 being 20.5kg per person, compared with 9.9kgs in the 1960s.⁷⁵

Australian consumption of fish and seafood is growing even faster. In 2019, Australian consumption was 26.12kg per person⁷⁶, up from 13.5kgs per person in 2015-16.⁷⁷

The significant reduction in commercial fishing in the GoC will result in a significant decrease in production and community access to fish protein, including iconic Australian wild-caught fish such as Barramundi, King Salmon, Mackerel.

Based on historical catch data, the loss of GoC collective wild-caught fish output can be expected to be more than 1,600 tonnes per annum. This will be compounded by the loss of production resulting from the East Coast fishery and associated closures.

This loss will have a significant impact at a time when there is significant evidence that global and local Australian aggregate and per-capita demand for seafood protein is only expected to grow.^{78 79}

It will be increasingly difficult for local consumers to access wild-caught seafood. Scarcity of product will also likely drive increased prices, further diminishing access. More broadly, the reduced volume of product will also further jeopardise Australian food and nutritional security, as the capacity of the highly specialised supply chain supporting the processing, storage and distribution of product will be permanently diminished.

Increased reliance on protein from international overfished fisheries

There is also no evidence to suggest that consumers' demand for wild-caught product will reduce as a result of the Government's proposed changes.

With continued growth in protein demand in Australia and globally, and reduced GoC wild-caught Australian production, exacerbated by the East Coast and related closures, the current and future increased demand for Australian product is expected to shift to other seafood protein sources.

To fill this gap and meet current and increasing demand, the two most likely sources of seafood protein will be imported seafood and aquaculture farmed product. Both of these sources are expected to increase reliance on international fisheries, many of which are recognised as over-fished and under-regulated by UNESCO and international standards.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Sydney Morning Herald, Bagshaw, E, *Who is eating all the fish?*, 6 November 2023

⁷⁶ Sydney Morning Herald, Bagshaw, E, *Who is eating all the fish?*, 6 November 2023

⁷⁷ Australian Government, Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, 2017, *Australian fisheries and aquaculture statistics 2016*

⁷⁸ Sydney Morning Herald, Bagshaw, E, *Who is eating all the fish?*, 6 November 2023

⁷⁹ Minderoo Foundation, *Global Fishing Index 2021, Assessing the sustainability of the world's marine fisheries*, 2021

⁸⁰ Minderoo Foundation, 2021, *Global Fishing Index 2021, Assessing the sustainability of the world's marine fisheries*

Increasing Australia's reliance on imported seafood product not only reduces food security, but it is also likely that imported product will intensify fishing in international waters due to this increased demand. At best, this will reduce currently sustainable fisheries, at worst, it will intensify IUU in already overfished fisheries.

For aquaculture product, the increased reliance will be indirect, in the form of fish meal inputs required to produce aquaculture farmed product.

Developed by the Australian Marine Conservation Society, the Good Fish Australia's Sustainable Seafood Guide proposes a range of criteria to assess the sustainability of farmed fish. Shockingly, to score a green rating (the highest available) against the Use of Marine Resources category, the estimated wild fish input to farmed fish output required is less than or equal to 1.1:1.⁸¹

Or, put simply, conservationists, Government and industry accept that 1.1 kilotons of wild fish input (as fishmeal or fish oil) provides just 1 kiloton of farmed fish output.

Wild caught fish still account for 69 per cent of fish meal inputs and 75 per cent of fish oil production used to feed farmed fish⁸², and this does not include all the additional inputs required to produce farmed fish, such as terrestrial feed products (livestock, land and crops) which have additional environmental impacts including biodiversity loss, greenhouse gas emissions, nutrient and chemical waste and pollution.⁸³

With much of the fish meal input for aquaculture originating from international fisheries, and with many of these fisheries already overfished, the flow on impacts of the proposed changes is likely to be a *net-decrease* in sustainability when taking a wider purview of the total impacts.

The Future Fishing Taskforce communiques demonstrate a very narrow focus on risk. Many other more significant environmental risks have, at worst, been actively excluded, and at best, not actively considered by the Taskforce or the Queensland Government. This includes the lack of provision of a full and honest assessment of the impact to Australia's food and nutritional security.

Concentration of the fishery increasing the risk of environmental impacts

As noted in previous sections, commercial fishers currently have the space to be able to temporally vary their effort across the fishery. This allows the fisher to account for physical and other environmental factors impacting fishing grounds and support sustainable fishing practices. They may not return to fishing grounds for several years. Alternatively, they may fully avoid certain areas unless absolutely necessary.

This approach offers a range of benefits as it minimises localised depletion of stocks and affords time for stock replenishment. In addition, the current accessibility of fishing grounds offers fishers a range of options on where to fish. This has provided the key additional benefit of enabling fishers to be selective about their fishing locations taking account of increased variables such as protected species interaction risk and ecology, whilst still allowing them to catch enough fish to be economically viable.

If the current fishing area is reduced on the scale as proposed, commercial fishing activity will be naturally compressed. In the absence of other fishery reforms and effort reduction, this will have a negative impact on sustainable fishing outcomes. This will likely be compounded by effort shift from the displaced East Coast set net fishers who are asset and knowledge capable. There is a high likelihood that these fishers will buy or lease latent N3 licences that have historically not fished, thereby increasing fishing effort and further impacting sustainable fishing outcomes.

⁸¹ Australian Marine Conservation Society, 2021, *Good Fish, Australia's Sustainable Seafood Guide*, AMCS Aquaculture Assessment Criteria Version 2021A

⁸² Naylor, R.L., Hardy, R.W., Buschmann, A.H. *et al.* A 20-year retrospective review of global aquaculture. *Nature* 591, 551–563 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03308-6>

⁸³ Naylor, R.L., Hardy, R.W., Buschmann, A.H. *et al.* A 20-year retrospective review of global aquaculture. *Nature* 591, 551–563 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03308-6>

Commercial fishers currently and actively avoid areas with greater risk of protected species interactions and to allow fish stocks to recover for abiotic factors. If the proposed net free areas are implemented at the scale proposed, the compression of fishing activity will lead to higher interaction rates with protected species in remaining fishing areas. In the absence of other fishery reforms and effort reduction, this will lead to higher local depletions of protected species.

Reduced business investment

Significant investment is made by operators in preparation for each season, including for refits, maintenance and gear upgrades. GOCCFA members indicated investment requirements of over \$1 million to prepare for the 2024 season, primarily in relation to refit and maintenance. This investment is unable to proceed until surety about the season is provided.

In addition to annual investments, longer term investment in supporting business infrastructure, such as processing, cold store and transportation will also cease. One GOCCFA member has already invested \$750,000 investment in a storage facility in Mareeba. It is now 75 per cent complete and in jeopardy, along with the many staff it is intending to employ.

A 2023 report from the Business Council of Australia, highlighted Australia's precarious global investment position, hailing it an investment drought, with much of the local investment now being directed to overseas markets.⁸⁴ At a time of global economic instability, high inflation and cost of living, low rates of investment will result in lower productivity and innovation, and stifle real wages growth.⁸⁵

These impacts will be felt deeply by regional and remote communities, with flow on impacts for the broader state and national economy.

Reduced value of future business earnings

Currently, GoC fishers collectively produced 1,639 tonnes of wild-caught fish species with an end-market value of over \$90 million in 2020.

The proposed changes, in their current form, will cause operators to forego current and future profits as the closures directly impact fishing operations in the GoC inshore fishery. The reduced production output and the likely higher costs of compliance will make current operators unviable moving forward as they cannot maintain their efficiencies of scale or their capacity.

In addition to the range of external factors impacting operator viability, this reduced value is compounded by uncertainty over the future operating environment and increased costs of compliance.

Reduced employment

Commercial fishers operate regional and remote businesses that provide valuable, and sometimes the primary, employment in their areas.⁸⁶ The shutting down of the industry by the introduction of the proposed changes will cost hundreds of jobs.

With little to no opportunity for unemployed former commercial a (and supporting business employees) to shift into other industries or employment⁸⁷, the timing of the proposed implementation is particularly devastating. Proposed to be implemented in March 2024 these jobs will be lost in the coming months

⁸⁴ Business Council of Australia, *Australia's investment drought and what to do about it*, March 2023

⁸⁵ Business Council of Australia, *Australia's investment drought and what to do about it*, March 2023

⁸⁶ Queensland Government, Department of Fisheries, *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, 2017

⁸⁷ Queensland Government, [1 September 2023 taskforce meeting | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au), viewed 26/10/23

Case Study: The loss of just one business will cost up to 35 jobs

Carroll Bros., a local family owned business have invested heavily in four businesses supporting the seafood supply chain. Carroll Bros. Fishing, a commercial fishing operation with four commercial fishing vessels operating under four primary licences and 11 symbols in the GOC. The proposed changes will result in the loss of 14 employees, including local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.

Carroll Bros. Seafood, a retail seafood shop, provides both retail and a wholesale outlet for the majority of its wild caught GOC product. Also housing a processing facility to support the wholesale market, including local and interstate hospitality and grocery customers. The proposed changes will result in the loss of 13 employees (and Christmas casuals), the closure of the retail and wholesale shops and the local wild caught seafood available to the hospitality and grocery customers.

Carroll Bros. Refrigeration and Electrical provides refrigeration services and electrical work and refits on fishing vessels in Karumba and Weipa. The proposed changes could result in the loss of up to 8 staff.

The downstream impacts of these changes will also be felt by a range of businesses that provide services and products to these businesses, for example trade companies, fuel companies, local farmers, land and property owners, mechanical and diesel fitting trades and many others. With changes announced without consultation and warning, the Carroll Bros.' \$750,000 investment in a storage facility in Mareeba is now in jeopardy, along with the many staff it is intending to employ.

The loss of commercial fishing operators and the diverse businesses that support the industry, including processing, cold storage, transportation and retail will be devastating to communities across the GoC and north Queensland. The scale of job losses will profoundly impact communities with very few other employment options, while the broader contraction of related business will have an intergenerational impact.

Increased business uncertainty

The proposed changes and the process under which Government has developed them set a dangerous precedent for policy-making in Australia's fisheries. Lacking in policy and procedural integrity, transparency, and evidence-based decision making, the impact of this uncertainty will reduce business confidence and in turn, reduce business investment.

Notwithstanding the business uncertainty currently felt by commercial fishers and supporting sectors including processing, transport and cold storage (amongst others), around the 2024 season, the longer-term impacts of reduced certainty for business will have a range of impacts including reduced investment, and reduced trust in Government.

The Government's credibility with business, industry more broadly, and the communities for which the proposed changes will detrimentally impact, will be diminished, as will its legitimacy – having disregarded the frameworks and processes it has made a public committed to.

3.2 Proportionality of impacts

The introduction of net free zones will have devastating economic and social impacts to the industry, to regional and remote Queensland communities, the seafood supply chain, food security and, more broadly the reputation and experience of tourists to Australia but realise a likely very small environmental uplift (if not degrade key areas of the GoC).

As outlined in previous sections, relative to major environmental threats facing the GoC and their causal impacts on stock sustainability, net free zones are likely to result in minimal environmental improvements, however, the proposed changes will have a devastating and irreversible impact on the industry and regional communities, with no option to rescale in the future.

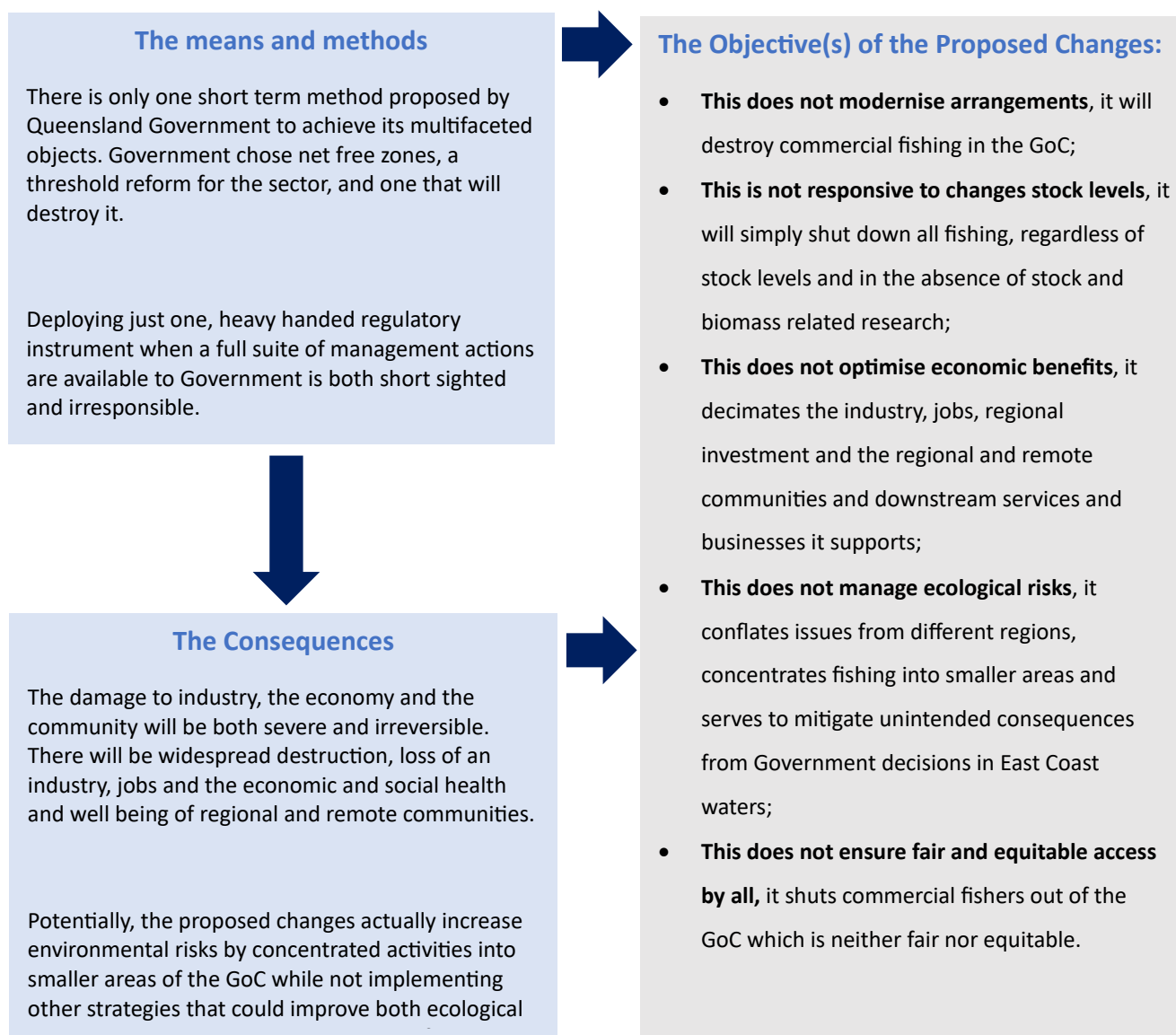
Ecological sustainability is a precondition for a viable industry and for decades, the majority of the industry has demonstrated good stewardship of these waters, with a strong track record of proactive sustainable fishing practices, voluntary initiatives and partnerships with the scientific community.

In considering the principle of proportionality in the context of the proposed changes, it is critical to understand the balance between the objective, means/methods and consequences of the proposed changes. Not only is there no

balance between these three considerations, the methods and consequences actually ensure that the objective of proposing these changes cannot be achieved. The Discussion Paper states that the proposed measures “...are necessary to modernise management arrangements, be responsive to changes in stock levels, optimise economic benefits, manage ecological risks and ensure a fair and equitable access by all”.⁸⁸

Decimating an industry, a specialised supply chain, and the communities that rely on it does not achieve any of the Queensland Government’s stated objectives.

Figure 1: An assessment of the proportionality of the proposed GoC net free zones



A proportional response requires one that balances consequences (or impacts) with the intended objective of the action. When the impacts of a proposed action do not achieve any objectives, the action needs to be urgently reconsidered.

⁸⁸ Queensland Government, *Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery, Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms, Discussion Paper*, 2023

04

**Industry's
proposal for
a better way
forward**

4. Proposed way forward

This section sets out GOCCFA's vision for a sustainable commercial fishing industry with contemporary management and technology approaches to support environmental sustainability, economic diversification and growth, and the prosperity and wellbeing of regional and remote communities.

4.1 A seat at the table

The Discussion Paper is stated as *"...to establish a framework for the future direction of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fisheries and a clear vision of the operational landscape that lies ahead, with a focus on providing guidance to all stakeholders, particularly those in the commercial industry."*⁸⁹

The Discussion Paper does not set out a vision. It simply states that the operating environment will be different. It makes no attempt to describe what that might look like, how it might get there, or how it can work with industry to ensure that environmental sustainability and industry economic viability can both be achieved.

Introducing ill-considered, blunt and reactive regulatory instruments is not a vision and it is not a framework for the future. Without consultation with industry, without seeking industry input and without putting forward a viable framework – rather than one that fails at the measure – is reprehensible at worst, irresponsible at best.

GOCCFA and its members have an important role to play in forming, funding, and implementing management reforms.

It is important to highlight the missed opportunity by the Queensland (and Commonwealth) Governments to utilise the extensive, intergenerational knowledge that the GoC commercial fishers can offer, and their willingness to do so cannot be overstated.

The majority of commercial fishing businesses are family owned and run, having been established over many decades and generations. Our fishers are considered good stewards of the GoC and hold extensive knowledge of the areas they fish, what they fish, what they avoid and the practical application of management approaches. Their collective knowledge, accumulated and passed down through generations, is both immeasurable and priceless.

GOCCFA and its members recognise that over time, the industry will need to accommodate generational change across fishing families, increased barriers to entry and investment, continued implementation of evidence-based fisheries management policies and practices, and implement technological change.

This can happen in a way that maximises economic benefits, facilitates a pathway for future generations of fishers, and preserves the supply chain while ensuring improvements in sustainability.

Though GOCCFA strongly objects to the currently proposed reforms and the process by which they have been developed and pursued, GOCCFA and its members stand ready to work collaboratively with government and stakeholders to develop, assess, and implement appropriate management approaches. As outlined in detail below, we are ready to work productively with government to develop and implement appropriate management approaches to support a sustainable GOC inshore fishery.

However, industry needs and insists on a meaningful seat at the table in this process going forward.

⁸⁹ Queensland Government, *Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery, Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms, Discussion Paper*, 2023

4.2 Recommendations to government

Notwithstanding the serious concerns documented in this submission, and GOCCFA's strongest possible objection to the way these changes have been prosecuted by the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments, GOCCFA and our members have put forward a comprehensive proposal below for government and industry to work together to:

- restore confidence in government's approach to the management of the GoC fishery;
- reset the timelines for the reform process;
- ensure a fair, balanced, and transparent reform process for all stakeholders;
- address gaps in the evidence base associated with the GoC fishery
- increase confidence in, and validate, protected species interactions in the GoC fishery; and,
- address more significant risks to sustainability than net fishing (e.g., overfishing in neighbouring international fisheries).

In line with these objectives, our recommendations to government are as follows:

1. Decouple all aspects of the development and implementation of the proposed GoC reforms from the East Coast reforms, because the GoC fishery is completely separate to the East Coast fishery and not part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and full and separate consideration of any proposed reform to the GoC commercial fishery is required on its own merits.
2. Assure industry that none of the proposed net free zones or other reform changes will be implemented or have any effect on the 2024 commercial fishing season in order to provide confidence and certainty for industry to invest in refit and associated costs to prepare for the 2024 season, and to help mitigate the real human impact being caused through people's lack of certainty of their livelihoods.
3. Commit to the completion and implementation of the draft Harvest Strategy for the GoC fishery as a pre-cursor to any further policy change.
4. Assure all stakeholders that there will be no decisions or implementation of any potential GoC reforms until:
 - a) An independent and neutral chair is appointed to the GoC Inshore Working Group and priority placed on finalising and implementing the draft Harvest Strategy for the fishery with all stakeholders, including the GoC commercial industry; and
 - b) All stakeholders, including the GoC commercial fishery, can participate in a genuine reform co-design process; and
 - c) A balanced and transparent assessment of the economic, environmental, and community impacts of all potential short, medium, and long term reform options is completed.
5. Provide assurance to industry that any reduction in licenses as part of any future reforms is implemented in the first instance via a voluntary structural buy-out of license-holders, comprising appropriate compensation for forgone current and future earnings, buyout of residual assets and equipment, and retraining costs.
6. Establish an independent evaluation of the onboard observer program to inform future monitoring alongside camera technology.
7. Provide an assurance that fishers' data will be secured by a data management agreement to be signed between industry and government, including data derived from the trial phase of an onboard camera program and third party validation.
8. Compel the Commonwealth Government to redouble diplomatic and trade efforts to address overfishing and association fisheries management issues in international fisheries neighbouring the GoC.

4.3 Action plan and alignment

The following table maps each recommendation and several additional actions for industry with various objectives identified by GOCFFA and industry as critical to moving forward.

Table 2: Proposed suite of actions in response to the Queensland Government's discussion paper and proposed reforms

	Primary responsibility (in collaboration with other stakeholders where appropriate)	Restore confidence in government's approach to the management of the GoC commercial fishery	Reset timing pathway	A fairer, more transparent and evidence-based process to develop GoC fisheries management policy	Facilitate the modernisation of the GoC commercial fishery	Address significant gaps in the evidence base associated with the fishery	Increase confidence in and validate protected species interactions in the GoC fishery	Address more significant risks to sustainability than net fishing (e.g., over-fishing in neighbouring international fisheries)
Decouple all aspects of the development and implementation of the proposed GoC reforms from the East Coast reforms	Queensland Government	✓	✓	✓				
Assure industry that none of the proposed net free zones or other reform changes will be implemented or have any effect on the 2024 commercial fishing season	Queensland Government	✓		✓				
Commit to the completion and implementation of the draft Harvest Strategy for the GoC fishery as a pre-cursor to any further policy change	Queensland Government	✓	✓	✓	✓			

	Primary responsibility (in collaboration with other stakeholders where appropriate)	Restore confidence in government's approach to the management of the GoC commercial fishery	Reset timing pathway	A fairer, more transparent and evidence-based process to develop GoC fisheries management policy	Facilitate the modernisation of the GoC commercial fishery	Address significant gaps in the evidence base associated with the fishery	Increase confidence in and validate protected species interactions in the GoC fishery	Address more significant risks to sustainability than net fishing (e.g., over-fishing in neighbouring international fisheries)
Assure all stakeholders that there will be no decisions or implementation of any potential GoC reforms until:	Queensland Government	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
- An independent and neutral chair is appointed to the GoC Inshore Working Group and priority placed on finalising and implementing the draft Harvest Strategy for the fishery with all stakeholders, including the GoC commercial industry; <u>and</u> - All stakeholders, including the GoC commercial fishery, can participate in a genuine reform co-design process; <u>and</u> - A balanced and transparent assessment of the economic, environmental, and community impacts of all potential short, medium, and long term reform options is completed.								
Provide assurance to industry that any reduction in licenses as part of any future reforms is implemented in the first instance via a voluntary structural buy-out of license-holders, comprising appropriate compensation for forgone current and future earnings, buyout of residual assets and equipment, and retraining costs	Queensland Government	✓		✓	✓			

	Primary responsibility (in collaboration with other stakeholders where appropriate)	Restore confidence in government's approach to the management of the GoC commercial fishery	Reset timing pathway	A fairer, more transparent and evidence-based process to develop GoC fisheries management policy	Facilitate the modernisation of the GoC commercial fishery	Address significant gaps in the evidence base associated with the fishery	Increase confidence in and validate protected species interactions in the GoC fishery	Address more significant risks to sustainability than net fishing (e.g., over-fishing in neighbouring international fisheries)
Establish an independent evaluation of the onboard observer program to inform future monitoring alongside camera technology	Queensland Government			✓			✓	
Provide an assurance that fishers' data will be secured by a data management agreement to be signed between industry and government, including data derived from the trial phase of an onboard camera program and third party validation	Queensland Government	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Compel the Commonwealth Government to redouble diplomatic and trade efforts to address overfishing and association fisheries management issues in international fisheries neighbouring the GoC	Queensland Government					✓	✓	✓

	Primary responsibility (in collaboration with other stakeholders where appropriate)	Restore confidence in government's approach to the management of the GoC commercial fishery	Reset timing pathway	A fairer, more transparent and evidence-based process to develop GoC fisheries management policy	Facilitate the modernisation of the GoC commercial fishery	Address significant gaps in the evidence base associated with the fishery	Increase confidence in and validate protected species interactions in the GoC fishery	Address more significant risks to sustainability than net fishing (e.g., over-fishing in neighbouring international fisheries)
Commit to the installation of onboard cameras as prescribed and funded by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water at the commencement of season 2024. It understands and commits to supporting that the data will be independently validated and the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishers Association commits to recruiting fishing operators across a representative and geographically broad base of fishing areas to participate in this trial.	Industry						✓	
Develop and implement a contemporary code of conduct for the 2024 fishing season	Industry				✓		✓	
Introduce mandatory participation by industry in externally-accredited science-based protected species training	Industry				✓		✓	
Continue and increase engagement with the Queensland Government, scientists, and other science and evidence-based research programs in relation to the GoC fishery	Industry			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Attachment 1: Letters of support



9 December 2023

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/Madam

Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery

Following the release of the Queensland Government's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries consultation on new gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria and general fishery reforms Council have engaged with our communities to work together on this very important issue.

Council has been working with industry, namely the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman Association Inc (GoCCFA) and the Karumba and Normanton communities and more broadly with the North West Regional Organisation of Councils representing 10 local authorities across the North West including the Gulf.

Council has been provided with a copy of the Submission from GoCCFA and wishes to advise that we fully support their submission. They provide a well-structured and thought-out submission and do offer support to certain areas of the management approach, the management framework and other general fishery reforms. They seek to work with the Commonwealth and Queensland Government and Council believes this will provide an opportunity for genuine engagement on this very important reform, before any other decisions are made without the proper consideration.

Council's own submission centres on the economic and social impact that the proposed closures will have on our economy and our communities. We are small communities, and an impact of this magnitude will have devastating consequences. Carpentaria relies on Tourism, Agriculture and Fishing for our existence and each one is as important as the other, to lose one would have an immediate and long reaching negative impacts on our lives and future existence.

Whether or not reforms are necessary and when reforms are required they need to be openly discussed with all stakeholders and seen to be open and transparent.

Please contact Council's Director Community Development, Tourism and Regional Prosperity, Anne Andrew's (P. (07) 4745 2200 E. anne.andrews@carpentaria.qld.gov.au) if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully

Jack Bawden
Mayor
CARPENTARIA SHIRE COUNCIL
Ph: (07) 4745 2221 | Mob: 0427 459 424
PO Box 31, NORMANTON QLD 4890
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<http://www.carpentaria.qld.gov.au>



Office of the Mayor

OUR REF: #7303844 | N Masasso

14 November 2023

To Whom it May Concern

Dear Sir/Madam

**Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery
Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms**

The Queensland Government's Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (the Department) has released a discussion paper on potential reforms to the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery. Council officers recently met with representatives of the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman Association Inc (GoCCFA) who have expressed concerns regarding the potential implications of the proposed reforms and the speed in which these reforms are being considered/progressed. We understand that submissions on the discussion paper must be made by 17 November 2023 and GoCCFA representatives have indicated they will be lodging a submission.

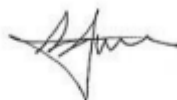
Whilst the fishery is not directly adjacent to the Cairns Local Government Area (LGA), there is a significant industry base in Cairns that supplies and services the sector. This includes the provision of services such as road and sea freight, cold storage, chandlery, and specialised marine support services such as slippage and mechanical, refrigeration and electrical repairs. These activities contribute positively to the Cairns economy.

Cairns Regional Council (Council) appreciates that issues underpinning fishery reforms are complex and multifaceted requiring a delicate balance to be struck between both environmental and economic considerations. Accordingly, whilst Council does not have a position on whether the specific reforms outlined in the discussion paper should be implemented or not, we do urge the Department to take the necessary time to ensure any changes are well considered and underpinned by thorough environmental and economic analysis. We understand this is a particular concern of industry. It is also critically important that comprehensive industry and community consultation be undertaken in parallel with this analysis.

Where future reforms result in adverse impacts to industry, it is also important that comprehensive structural adjustment packages be made available to those businesses affected including not only licensees, but also those businesses in the supply chain that service the sector more broadly.

Please contact Council's Director – Economic Development and Advocacy, Nick Masasso (P: 0438 172 982 E: n.masasso@cairns.qld.gov.au) if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully



Cr Terry James
Acting Mayor

Attachment 2: Correspondence between DAF and the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments seeking clarification across nearly 100 questions



GoCCFA
PO Box 138
Karumba, Qld 4891
www.goccfa.com

ATTN: The Hon Annastacia Palaszczuk

Queensland Premier
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au

ATTN: The Hon Leanne Linard

Queensland Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for Multicultural Affairs
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
environment@ministerial.qld.gov.au

ATTN: The Hon Mark Furner

Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
agriculture@ministerial.qld.gov.au

ATTN: Dallas D'Silva

Executive Director, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Level 5, 41 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
dallas.dsilva@daf.qld.gov.au

ATTN: Ian McKenzie

Fisheries Manager, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Level 5, 41 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
ian.mckenzie@daf.qld.gov.au

27th November 2023

Re: Urgent action required in relation to the consultation on the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms

Dear Premier Palaszczuk, Minister Linard and Minister Furner, Dr McKenzie & Mr D'Silva,

We write to again follow up on our previous correspondence, and to reiterate our concerns regarding the process being undertaken the Queensland Government, following an informal meeting held with the Deputy Director General and Fisheries Manager on 23 November 2023.

Whilst we are still yet to receive meaningful responses to the now more than 100 clarification questions related to the proposed reforms.

Here we reiterate just those that are most urgent:

- **Immediate assurance that the proposed net free zones and other reform changes will NOT be implemented or have any effect on the 2024 commercial fishing season:**
 - It is unreasonable not to provide surety to industry just months from the commencement of the season if they will have a business or be employed.
 - Government cannot reasonably or fairly assess consultation feedback and address the obvious and significant evidence gaps to make such a profound and irreversible decision in



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the 32 working days between consultation closing and the commencement of the 2024 season on 1st February

- It is absurd that Government would risk the industry's pre-season investment of up to \$1 million dollars and the livelihoods of hundreds of regional and remote worker weeks before Christmas at a time when the cost of living is already seeing these families struggle.
- **Immediately confirmation that the process that will be undertaken by Government at the conclusion of consultation on 10 December:**
 - This includes the complete decoupling of East Coast and GOC reforms – not just the consultation timeframes – as the GOC is not a UNESCO World Heritage Asset.
 - Transfer of effort from East Coast reforms should be managed alongside other mitigation measures for the East Coast.
- **Clarification, on the public record, that the statement made by Minister Furner that there would be no gill net fisheries operating in the GOC by mid-2027 was incorrect.**
 - To restore industry and rural and remote communities' presumption of good faith in the Queensland Government and DAF in relation to the management of the GOC commercial fishery.
- **Confirmation that legislative triggers related to the GOC have not already been pursued internally by Queensland Government:**
 - Given the repeated assurances that no decisions have been made and that no mitigation measures for the proposed reforms, should they proceed in some form have been released; it is completely counter to logic or procedural fairness, that anything related to the GOC has already been drafted
- **Immediate assurance that there will be no decisions or implementation of any potential Gulf of Carpentaria reforms until:**
 - An independent and neutral chair is appointed to the GOC Inshore Working Group and priority placed on finalising and implementing the draft Harvest Strategy for the fishery with all stakeholders, including the GoC commercial industry; and
 - All stakeholders, including the GoC commercial fishery, can participate in a genuine reform co-design process; and
 - A balanced and transparent assessment of the economic, environmental, and community impacts of all potential short, medium, and long term reform options is completed.

Time is of the essence, there is no clarity about the next steps in the Queensland Government's process, and concerns are mounting each day in relation to government's integrity.

Your urgent action is critical.

Regards



David Wren
President, GOCCFA
david@wrengroup.com.au



GoCCFA
PO Box 138
Karumba, Qld 4891
www.goccfa.com

ATTN: The Hon Mark Furner

Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
agriculture@ministerial.qld.gov.au

17 November 2023

Re: Queensland Government's proposed Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms

Dear Minister Furner

We write in relation to your [Media Release](#) and associated news conference yesterday (16 November 2023).

During your news conference yesterday, you stated that *"by mid 2027, no gill net fisheries will operate in the GBR, the Gulf of Carpentaria or Sandy Straight fisheries."*

The current proposed reforms around the GoC Inshore Fishery do not include a complete phasing out of all gill net fishing. In its Discussion Paper, correspondence to GOCCFA, and publicly, the Queensland Government has also repeatedly stated that no decisions have been made in relation to the proposed GoC net free zones and that none will be made until after the consultation period (now extended to 10 December 2023).

Until now, it has not been clear that complete bans were intended to relate to the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Your statement is therefore of critical concern. We insist on your immediate and urgent clarification on the public record in relation to there being no gill net fisheries operating in the Gulf of Carpentaria by mid 2027.

This event reinforces the existing concerns of GOCCFA and its members in relation to the current proposed GoC commercial fishery reforms and the way they are being pursued:

- The timelines being pursued on the current proposal are too aggressive for such a significant change.
- There has not been open or transparent consultation process with commercial industry.
- The Queensland Government has not meaningfully answered nearly 100 questions asked by GOCCFA.
- Government has not provided a robust estimate of the estimated fishery impact of the current proposal.
- Government has not completed or published an economic or social impact statement.
- Government has not been transparent on the many more significant threats to sustainability than commercial fishing.
- There are many limitations of the Environmental Risk Assessment model.
- Government has not followed the principles of its own 2023 Better Regulation Policy.
- We understand that Queensland Government has already drafted legislation for compensation triggers for the Gulf of Carpentaria in its prosecution of the East Coast reforms. This is despite the two reforms being completely separate and government stating that no decisions have yet been made.

Industry and rural and remote communities' presumption of good faith in the Queensland Government and DAF in relation to the management of the commercial fishery needs to be restored by:

- **An assurance from government to industry** that none of the proposed net free zones or other reform changes will be implemented or have any effect on the 2024 commercial fishing season in order to provide confidence and certainty for industry to invest several million dollars in refit and associated costs to prepare for the 2024 season, and to help mitigate the real human impact being caused through people's lack of certainty of their livelihoods.



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- **A full decoupling all aspects of the development and implementation of the proposed Gulf of Carpentaria reforms from the East Coast reforms**, because the Gulf of Carpentaria fishery is completely separate to the East Coast fishery and not part of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area, and full and separate consideration of any proposed reform to the Gulf of Carpentaria commercial fishery is required on its own merits.
- **An assurance from government** that there will be no decisions or implementation of any potential Gulf of Carpentaria reforms until:
 - a) An independent and neutral chair is appointed to the GOC Inshore Working Group and priority placed on finalising and implementing the draft Harvest Strategy for the fishery with all stakeholders, including the GoC commercial industry; and
 - b) All stakeholders, including the GoC commercial fishery, can participate in a genuine reform co-design process; and
 - c) A balanced and transparent assessment of the economic, environmental, and community impacts of all potential short, medium, and long term reform options is completed.

Time is of the essence, there is no clarity about the next steps in the Queensland Government's process, and concerns are mounting each day in relation to government's integrity.

Your urgent action is critical.

Regards



David Wren
President, GOCCFA
david@wrengroup.com.au



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ATTN: The Hon Mark Furner

Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
agriculture@ministerial.qld.gov.au

ATTN: Dr Chris Sarra

Director General, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Level 5, 41 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
chris.sarra@daf.qld.gov.au

ATTN: Graeme Bolton

Deputy Director General
Level 5, 41 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
graeme.bolton@daf.qld.gov.au

ATTN: Lauren Jubb

Fisheries Manager
Level 5, 41 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000
lauren.jubb@daf.qld.gov.au

10 November 2023

Re: Urgent action required in relation to the consultation on the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms

Dear Minister Furner, Dr Sarra, Mr Bolton and Ms Jubb

Further to our previous meetings and correspondence in relation to the Queensland Government's proposed reforms and associated consultation on additional Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) net free zones and associated GoC Inshore Fishery reforms, we write to follow up on previous correspondence.

Further to our correspondence and meetings with the Minister and Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) on 18 September, 13 October, 24 October and 3 November 2023 containing data and information requests, clarification questions, surety that the 2024 fishing season will not be disrupted, a decoupling of the East Coast and GOC reforms, and a request for an extension of time (attached for reference).

On Wednesday 1 November 2023, DAF provided a response to the first set of our clarification questions. As previously noted, the response was inadequate and our requested extension, which was first made on 13 October 2023, made again on 24 October 2023, and again on 3 November, the letter stated that it was still under consideration, despite submissions being due in approximately two weeks.

The submissions are now due in seven days, and despite making this request for the first time, four weeks ago, there has still been no decision by DAF.

The pursuit of unjustified and aggressive consultation timeframes creates significant barriers to the most affected stakeholders in providing a balanced and considered response.

Whilst it is clear that the Queensland Government and DAF is not going to provide adequate responses to our clarifications or any evidence of an assessment of the impacts, costs, benefits of the proposed changes, it is imperative that DAF afford GOCCFA and our members a fair and transparent consultation process, including a reasonable timeframe in which to respond and surety for the 2024 Season.



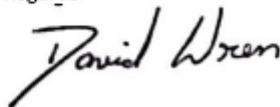
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We again request:

- We again request an extension of time for the GoCCFA to make a submission to DAF on the proposed Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms, to 31 March 2024.
- We again seek assurance that the proposed reforms will not affect the 2024 commercial fishing season to ensure confidence for industry and appropriate time for full and transparent consideration with government and stakeholders of the full suite of management options through an informed policy process. **Government and DAF's lack of clarity and failure to provide these assurances for the 2024 season is creating significant angst and putting at risk several million dollars in refit costs and new investment, as well as ongoing economic returns from the fishery.**
- A complete decoupling of the East Coast and Gulf of Carpentaria reforms, including consultation, decision making and implementation. This decoupling will ensure there is full and transparent consideration of the reforms, as well as allowing time for a full assessment of management options and evidence gathering to ensure informed decision and policy making. Decoupling the reforms will also ensure that our shared objectives, of the best possible ecological and environmental outcomes, can be met.
- A response to the additional clarification questions provided on 3 November 2023 (included in Attachment 1 of this letter), which include several pertinent issues not addressed in the Government's response to our original questions.

With just seven days until consultation submissions close, I look forward to your urgent response and action on the above matters.

Regards



David Wren
President
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david@wrengroup.com.au



Attachment 1: Additional clarification questions to the Queensland Government on the proposed changes to commercial fishing in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) Inshore Fisheries (*provided 3 November 2023*)

1. **The Future Fishing Taskforce (Taskforce) Terms of Reference is not publicly available. According to a Queensland Government [media release](#) (17 July 2023), its purpose was to be independent and provide advice to the Queensland Government on ensuring Queenslanders continue to enjoy seafood and transition to more sustainable fishing methods.**
 - a. Why are the Taskforce's Terms of Reference not publicly available?
 - b. Why has the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) advised industry that the Terms of Reference have not been made publicly available due to parliamentary privilege?
 - i. Why would parliamentarians, Government employees, or an independently appointed Chair require protection from defamation in regard to the purpose, functions, and/or authority of the Taskforce?
 - ii. Why are the Taskforce Terms of Reference subject to parliamentary privilege when in 2021–2022, the Queensland Government established the Sustainable Fisheries Export Panel and a number of Fisheries Working Groups with published Terms of Reference and Guidelines?
 - iii. Why does the Queensland Government not believe it is in the public's best interest to ensure transparency in the purpose, principles, governance, and authority of the Taskforce?
 - c. The Taskforce communicates note representations from a range of environmental groups, universities, environmental non-government organisations (NGOs), and environmental scientists. We note the Taskforce Chair's strong environmental qualifications and recent roles with international environmental NGOs and advocacy groups, including the World Wildlife Fund and The Nature Conservancy.
 - i. Please provide details of the representations from commercial fishers, the seafood industry, seafood supply chain and services industries (processing, transport and distribution), hospitality and tourism, local government and communities?
 - ii. If there was not representations made to the Taskforce by these groups, please outline why this decision was made and by whom.
 - iii. If there was not representations made to the Taskforce by these groups, please confirm whether consultation with these groups was expressly excluded from the Terms of Reference.
 - iv. If there was not representations made to the Taskforce by these groups, and irrespective of whether this was included in the Terms of Reference, please outline how the Taskforce's advice to government could be considered balanced without such input, given its objective was to "provide advice ... on ensuring Queenslanders continue to enjoy seafood and transition to more sustainable fishing methods."
 - d. Why was a survey related to East Coast reforms undertaken by the Taskforce¹, but time was not taken to undertake the same level of consultation with GoC commercial fishers and other

¹ Queensland Government, [Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Future Fishing Taskforce consultation](#) (engagementhub.com.au), viewed 27.10.23



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Interested parties, including (but not limited to) local government and those representing the hospitality and food services industries undertaken?

- e. The Taskforce did not undertake adequate or timely consultation with GoC commercial fishers despite the existence of a Queensland Government appointed Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group. Why?
 - f. Why was the East Coast Inshore Fisheries Working Group invited to make representations to the Taskforce at their meeting of 25 August 2023², but not the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group?
 - g. What was the structured framework and analysis utilised by the Taskforce to ensure evidence-based analysis of issues to underpin the recommendations it made to the Queensland Government?
 - h. The publicly available information, including the Taskforce meetings summaries and Discussion Paper provide no evidence that a full set of policy, regulatory, and management responses have been considered before deciding the proposed net free zones most effectively balance the principles and criteria outlined in the legislation. Why then, did the Queensland Government accept the Taskforce's recommendations without the detailed analysis required under its own Act and policies?
 - g. The Taskforce acknowledged that commercial fishers in the GoC are good stewards of the environment and that commercial fishing was of particular importance to the GoC, with limited opportunities for businesses to shift into other industries or employment.³
 - i. How did the Taskforce quantify and analyse the importance of commercial fishing and the impacts of these changes in regard to economic impact (noting the ascertain that there are limited opportunities for business to shift into other industries or employment)?
 - ii. What weight was given to these impacts in balance and proportion to the environmental improvements, noting the Taskforce's acknowledgement that sustainable fishing already occurs in the GoC?
 - h. The Taskforce acknowledged that displaced activities arising from East Coast bans may need to be absorbed in the GoC.⁴
 - i. To what extent is this expected?
 - ii. What were the assessed impacts?
 - iii. What, more appropriate, management options have been investigated to mitigate this risk?
2. **Fisheries Queensland and the Queensland Government have mismanaged consultation with one of the most significantly impacted parts of the commercial fishing sector through not effectively performing its role as part of the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group (Working Group).** The Working Group met five times in 2022, with the last meeting occurring in November 2022.⁵ Despite the June 2023

² Queensland Government, [25 August 2023 taskforce meeting | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](#), Viewed 27.10.23

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⁵ Queensland Government, [Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery working group communiques | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](#), viewed 27.10.23



announcement of reforms in the GoC and the period of the Future Fishing Taskforce meetings, Fisheries Queensland did not call a meeting of the Working Group again for 10 months.

- a) Why, after 10 months, was the first meeting of the Working Group for 2023 held in September 2023, only weeks before the release of the Discussion Paper, despite members being available throughout 2023.
- b) Under the Freshwater Fisheries Working Groups Guidelines, the purpose of the Working Group is to "...provide advice on fisheries management and are key stakeholder engagement mechanisms." It further notes that for the main purpose of the *Fishers Act 1994* is to be achieved, it is to be undertaken in consultation, including with "...commercial fishing and the community."⁶ Why Fisheries Queensland would not call meetings of the Working Group and or suggest representations to and between the Future Fishing Taskforce when such significant changes were being deliberated, until the very last minute?
- c) Under the guidelines, communication by Fisheries Queensland is to occur with the Working Group every three months as well as the provision of a forward program of work. Why, after the November 2022 meeting, did Fisheries Queensland did not call a follow-up meeting for 10 months or provide a forward program of work despite the reforms being on the Government's agenda?
- d) In May 2023, applications for membership were called, with decisions to be made by September 2023 (at the expiry of the two year membership period).⁷ Despite it being the end of October 2023, and with consultation on reforms that will directly impact this Working Group underway, why have new and renewed members not yet been confirmed by Fisheries Queensland?
- a) Why did Fisheries Queensland release 2023 Draft Working Group Guidelines,⁸ with communication with Working Groups only required every six months rather than every three months at a time when there are significant reforms and strategic initiatives taking place?

3. Noting the serious gaps, inconsistencies and widespread concern about the Ecological Risk Assessment for the GoC Inshore Fisheries including comprehensive acknowledgement of the PSA shortcomings from its developers, fisheries management, the broader scientific community, and the authors of the ERA and that it was not and was never intended to be used as a reference for making economically significant management decisions such as the proposed introduction of net-free zones in the GoC:

- a) Please confirm which agencies prepared the ERA?
- b) Has the ERA been peer reviewed, and if so, by whom and when?
- c) The current Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) method utilised in the ERA does not provide a measure of realised risk. The PSA is heavily conservative, with risk overestimated to account for uncertainty, which leads to a high number of false positives. It is therefore only a measure of potential risk. Given these shortcomings, the PSA model and criteria are not fit-for-purpose for determining the real risk to SOCC from net fishing operations. With this knowledge:
 - i. To what extent was the Level 2 ERA for the SOCC in the GOCIF relied upon by the Taskforce to inform the proposed changes?
 - ii. Why is the Taskforce (and subsequently the Government) using the ERA?

⁶ Queensland Government, [Freshwater fisheries working group terms of reference | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](http://Freshwater fisheries working group terms of reference | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland (daf.qld.gov.au)), viewed 27.10.23

⁷ Queensland Government, [Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Fishery Working Groups \(engagementhub.com.au\)](http://Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Fishery Working Groups (engagementhub.com.au)), viewed 27.10.23

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- d) There are significant inaccuracies and incorrect allocations of scores for several PSA analysis attributes and species, and inherent bias toward biological constraints rather than fishery impact. This means that every species is assessed as high risk for simply being present in the GoC, which is neither appropriate or accurate. In addition, many of these failings are indicative of the authors having an ill-informed understanding of set netting operations in the GOC inshore fisheries.
 - i. Given the awareness of Government about these failings, why is it continuing to rely on the ERA?
 - ii. Given the lack of knowledge demonstrated by the authors of the ERA, why did Government choose not to work collaboratively with industry, who hold extensive intergenerational knowledge of the GOCIF?
- e) Whilst there are minimum legal requirements that N3 fishers may adhere to, the ERA does not consider the profound impacts, over and above these restrictions, of commercial fishing practice and intergenerational knowledge in relation to the actual level of risk posed to SOCC by the fishery. These include:
 - o Fishers' equipment and methods are much more refined than minimum requirements, owing to target species ecology, non-target species ecology, prevailing environmental conditions, local hydrology and bathymetry, and family practices.
 - o Typically, N3 fishing operations have been passed down within families, and the same ground fished over several generations. Commercial fishers have an unmatched knowledge of their local fishing grounds, including when, where and how to catch fish, whilst avoiding interactions with SOCC due to an enviable knowledge of their local ecology.
 - i. Why is DAF, not actively avoiding engagement with commercial fishers, a willing partner and key stakeholder?
 - ii. Why is DAF not affording commercial fishers with the opportunity to share intergenerational knowledge that would inform improved management practices?
 - iii. Why is DAF not working collaboratively with commercial fishers to support sustainable fishing practice and achieve our shared objectives and those of the community?

Select questions from those previously submitted (on 24.10.23) but not addressed in the DAF response, received 1 November 2023 (*submitted again on 3 November 2023*)

Timing, consultation and process of decisions:

- a) Why did the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments announce in May and June 2023 the introduction of new net free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) prior to consultation with key stakeholders, as required under the *Fisheries Act 1994*?
- b) When did the Queensland Government indicate to the Commonwealth Government that it would implement additional net free zones in the GoC inshore fishery, as the Federal Environment Minister advised to UNESCO in her correspondence dated 25 May 2023?
- c) Does Government have any intent to consider different options to those outlined in the Discussion Paper?
- d) Please clarify the precise nature of the decisions expected to be taken by the Queensland Government following consultation and the exact timeframe.



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- e) Please clarify the process undertaken by the Taskforce and/or Government to determine the currently proposed maps of net ban areas as outlined in the Discussion Paper.

Impact assessment and evidence base supporting the proposed changes:

- a) What were the full range of regulatory, management and policy options considered as part of the proposed framework (and please provide the analysis of these options)?
- b) How does the proposed future direction of the GoC Inshore Fishery provide an operational landscape that is viable for all key stakeholders, including:
 - i. Local communities (including First Nations)
 - ii. The regional economy
 - iii. Commercial fishers
 - iv. Recreational fishers.
- c) How do the proposed changes maximise economic, social and cultural benefits in the context of the expected industry impacts and the associated down stream impacts to community and related industries?
- d) What is the Queensland Government's estimate of the short term and long term future generational economic loss (in gross value added terms and in direct and indirect jobs) associated with the proposed gillnet fisheries?
- e) Has the Queensland Government evaluated a long list of management and reform options in relation to the net fishery management?
- f) Please provide demonstration of the existence of a sound business case that provides balanced consideration of the impacts of the proposed reforms, including:
 - i. Consideration of a long list of reform options.
 - ii. Comparative analysis of management and reform options relative to the achievement of the policy objectives and balancing all of the principles outlined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*.
 - iii. Economic and financial analysis of options considered
 - iv. Balanced scorecard analysis with respect to all of the principles outlined in the relevant legislation.
- g) Given the anticipated catastrophic impacts of the proposed changes to commercial fishers currently operating in the GoC inshore fisheries, how does Government propose to ensure adequate compensation for business, retaining and unemployment services and other downstream economic impact offsets are in place by the time net free zones come into effect on any of the (contradictory) timelines released publicly?
- h) Please provide detailed information on the commercial fisheries compensation, training, buy back or other schemes to minimise the noted impact on commercial fishers and how this compensation and activities have been estimated, a budget determined and criteria for accessing support.



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Attachment 2: Letter to Minister Plibersek, Premier Palaszczuk, Minister Linard,
Minister Furner, 3 November 2023



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ATTN: The Hon Tanya Plibersek
Federal Minister Environment and Water
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Minister.Plibersek@dceew.gov.au

ATTN: The Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk
Queensland Premier
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
premier@ministerial.qld.gov.au

ATTN: The Hon Leanne Linard
Queensland Minister for the Environment and the Great Barrier Reef, Minister for Science and Minister for Multicultural Affairs
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
environment@ministerial.qld.gov.au

ATTN: The Hon Mark Furner
Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
1 William Street
Brisbane QLD 4000
agriculture@ministerial.qld.gov.au

3 November 2023

Re: Urgent action required in relation to the consultation on the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms

Dear Minister Plibersek, Premier Palaszczuk, Minister Linard and Minister Furner,

This letter relates to the Queensland Government's proposed reforms and associated consultation on additional Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) net free zones and associated GoC Inshore Fishery reforms.

The Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association Incorporated (GOCCFA) represents the most adversely-affected group of stakeholders associated with these reforms.

This letter is further to GOCCFA's prior correspondence, and formal and informal meetings with:

- Minister Furner and Minister Linard last week at the Queensland Government's Community Cabinet meeting in Townsville
- Our correspondence and meetings with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) on 18 September, 13 October and 24 October 2023 containing data and information requests, clarification questions, and a request for an extension of time.

On Wednesday 1 November 2023, DAF provided the attached response to our clarifications.



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The response was inadequate. Its tone is patronising, the information included is generic, and it does not address any of our questions or requested information. It appears to have been written to evade our questions and pacify us, rather than to inform and engage with us in good faith.

The response also raises the following additional concerns for GOCCFA and our members:

- The letter confirms that the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments made the decision to introduce additional net free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GOC) without any consultation or assessment of the ecological or economic impacts.
- Government is deferring responsibility for the assessment of economic, industry, and community impact of the proposed changes and the quantification of potential transfer impacts from commercial fishers from the East Coast to the GoC to GOCCFA. By implication, Government has not considered or sought to balance these impacts.
- Government has developed a rushed policy underpinned by opinion and baseless assertions to justify political decisions, rather than evidence-based policy co-designed with all stakeholders, including industry. Further, the response highlights increased public scrutiny of government and industry activities and implies that the commercial fishing sector has lost its social license to operate. Yet, the response provides no evidence of even minimal analysis being undertaken to support and justify the direction being taken and the way in which it is being prosecuted, namely one that excludes the commercial sector from any meaningful consultation.
- DAF is not making any meaningful attempt to represent and or support commercial fishers in this process, despite commercial fishers being the most impacted group by the proposed reforms and whose interests DAF is obligated to support and represent under the objectives of its own Act.
- Our requested extension, which was first made on 13 October 2023, and made again on 24 October 2023, is noted as still being under consideration, despite submissions being due in approximately two weeks. Government is pursuing an unjustified and aggressive timeframe to undertake these consultations and it is creating significant barriers to the most affected stakeholders in providing a balanced and considered response.

The Queensland Government, at minimum, is required to meet the objectives established within the *Fisheries Act 1994* and its subordinate legislation and policies. This includes balancing the nine principles of ecologically sustainable development, with each to be given relative emphasis and to ensure access to fisheries resources is allocated in a way that maximises the potential economic, social and cultural benefits to the community. Further, the Act itself is to be achieved "...in consultation with and having regard to the views and interests of all involved in the commercial, charter, recreational or indigenous fishing and the community in general, and using a transparent and responsive approach to the management of access to fisheries resources."

The chain of events to-date demonstrate that Government is not making any meaningful attempt to acquit these responsibilities and falls well short of community expectations.

GOCCFA does not support the changes as currently proposed. They have not been informed by proper balanced evidence-based analysis and are being irresponsibly rushed to meet a political objective rather than co-designed in genuine collaboration with all stakeholders, including the commercial fishing sector. The changes, as proposed, will cause economic destruction across GoC communities and increase risks to sustainable fishing due to the compression of the commercial fishery, which in turn which increase risks for interactions with TEPS in the compressed fishery.



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There is a more effective suite of policy responses than the single, short term, blunt regulatory instrument recommended by the Taskforce and outlined in the Discussion Paper, that can come together to:

- **Establish clarity of commercial fishers' interactions with threatened and endangered species and build greater confidence through independent validation**
- **Continue to minimise interactions with, and risks to, threatened and endangered species and ensure Queensland and Australia can meet evolving environmental and scientific expectations**
- **Ensure industry can continue to modernise and improve its sustainability while also remaining commercially-viable**
- **Ensure current and future economic benefits and the contribution of industry to regional communities across Queensland are preserved and maximised.**

There does not have to be a choice between ecological sustainability and industry viability. Both are achievable.

Industry has stood, and continues to be, ready to engage in genuine collaboration with Government.

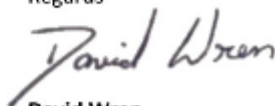
In the above context, and to ensure GOCCFA and our members are afforded a fair and transparent consultation process, including access to information and data that enables us to appropriately consider and respond to the proposed changes, we request:

- **A complete decoupling of the East Coast and Gulf of Carpentaria reforms, including consultation, decision making and implementation. This decoupling will ensure there is full and transparent consideration of the reforms, as well as allowing time for a full assessment of management options and evidence gathering to ensure informed decision and policy making. Decoupling the reforms will also ensure that our shared objectives, of the best possible ecological and environmental outcomes, can be met.**
- **We again request an extension of time for the GoCCFA to make a submission to DAF on the proposed Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms, to 31 March 2024.**
- **We again seek assurance that the proposed reforms will not affect the 2024 commercial fishing season to allow time to gather the requisite evidence gathering and ensure there is full and transparent consideration of the management options, informed decision and policy making and mitigate the devastating potential impacts of a rushed and ill-considered approach.**

We also attach additional clarification questions, which include several pertinent issues not addressed in the Government's response to our original questions.

I look forward to your urgent response and action on the above matters.

Regards



David Wren
President
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david@wrengroup.com.au



Attachment 1: Additional clarification questions to the Queensland Government on the proposed changes to commercial fishing in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) Inshore Fisheries

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 - i. Please provide details of the representations from commercial fishers, the seafood industry, seafood supply chain and services industries (processing, transport and distribution), hospitality and tourism, local government and communities?
 - ii. If there was not representations made to the Taskforce by these groups, please outline why this decision was made and by whom.
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 - d. Why was a survey related to East Coast reforms undertaken by the Taskforce¹, but time was not taken to undertake the same level of consultation with GoC commercial fishers and other

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- e. The Taskforce did not undertake adequate or timely consultation with GoC commercial fishers despite the existence of a Queensland Government appointed Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group. Why?
- f. Why was the East Coast Inshore Fisheries Working Group invited to make representations to the Taskforce at their meeting of 25 August 2023², but not the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group?
- g. What was the structured framework and analysis utilised by the Taskforce to ensure evidence-based analysis of issues to underpin the recommendations it made to the Queensland Government?
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 - i. To what extent is this expected?
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2. **Fisheries Queensland and the Queensland Government have mismanaged consultation with one of the most significantly impacted parts of the commercial fishing sector through not effectively performing its role as part of the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery Working Group (Working Group).** The Working Group met five times in 2022, with the last meeting occurring in November 2022.⁵ Despite the June 2023

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- b) Under the Freshwater Fisheries Working Groups Guidelines, the purpose of the Working Group is to "...provide advice on fisheries management and are key stakeholder engagement mechanisms." It further notes that for the main purpose of the *Fishers Act 1994* is to be achieved, it is to be undertaken in consultation, including with "...commercial fishing and the community."⁶ Why Fisheries Queensland would not call meetings of the Working Group and or suggest representations to and between the Future Fishing Taskforce when such significant changes were being deliberated, until the very last minute?
- c) Under the guidelines, communication by Fisheries Queensland is to occur with the Working Group every three months as well as the provision of a forward program of work. Why, after the November 2022 meeting, did Fisheries Queensland did not call a follow-up meeting for 10 months or provide a forward program of work despite the reforms being on the Government's agenda?
- d) In May 2023, applications for membership were called, with decisions to be made by September 2023 (at the expiry of the two year membership period).⁷ Despite it being the end of October 2023, and with consultation on reforms that will directly impact this Working Group underway, why have new and renewed members not yet been confirmed by Fisheries Queensland?
- a) Why did Fisheries Queensland release 2023 Draft Working Group Guidelines,⁸ with communication with Working Groups only required every six months rather than every three months at a time when there are significant reforms and strategic initiatives taking place?

3. **Noting the serious gaps, inconsistencies and widespread concern about the Ecological Risk Assessment for the GoC Inshore Fisheries including** comprehensive acknowledgement of the PSA shortcomings from its developers, fisheries management, the broader scientific community, and the authors of the ERA and that it was not and was never intended to be used as a reference for making economically significant management decisions such as the proposed introduction of net-free zones in the GoC:

- a) Please confirm which agencies prepared the ERA?
- b) Has the ERA been peer reviewed, and if so, by whom and when?
- c) The current Productivity and Susceptibility Analysis (PSA) method utilised in the ERA does not provide a measure of realised risk. The PSA is heavily conservative, with risk overestimated to account for uncertainty, which leads to a high number of false positives. It is therefore only a measure of potential risk. Given these shortcomings, the PSA model and criteria are not fit-for-purpose for determining the real risk to SOCC from net fishing operations. With this knowledge:
 - i. To what extent was the Level 2 ERA for the SOCC in the GOCIF relied upon by the Taskforce to inform the proposed changes?
 - ii. Why is the Taskforce (and subsequently the Government) using the ERA?

⁶ Queensland Government, [Freshwater fisheries working group terms of reference | Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Queensland \(daf.qld.gov.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au), viewed 27.10.23

⁷ Queensland Government, [Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Fishery Working Groups \(engagementhub.com.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au), viewed 27.10.23

⁸ Queensland Government, [Department of Agriculture and Fisheries | Fishery Working Groups \(engagementhub.com.au\)](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au), viewed 27.10.23



- d) There are significant inaccuracies and incorrect allocations of scores for several PSA analysis attributes and species, and inherent bias toward biological constraints rather than fishery impact. This means that every species is assessed as high risk for simply being present in the GoC, which is neither appropriate or accurate. In addition, many of these failings are indicative of the authors having an ill-informed understanding of set netting operations in the GOC inshore fisheries.
 - i. Given the awareness of Government about these failings, why is it continuing to rely on the ERA?
 - ii. Given the lack of knowledge demonstrated by the authors of the ERA, why did Government choose not to work collaboratively with industry, who hold extensive intergenerational knowledge of the GOCIF?
- e) Whilst there are minimum legal requirements that N3 fishers may adhere to, the ERA does not consider the profound impacts, over and above these restrictions, of commercial fishing practice and intergenerational knowledge in relation to the actual level of risk posed to SOCC by the fishery. These include:
 - o Fishers' equipment and methods are much more refined than minimum requirements, owing to target species ecology, non-target species ecology, prevailing environmental conditions, local hydrology and bathymetry, and family practices.
 - o Typically, N3 fishing operations have been passed down within families, and the same ground fished over several generations. Commercial fishers have an unmatched knowledge of their local fishing grounds, including when, where and how to catch fish, whilst avoiding interactions with SOCC due to an enviable knowledge of their local ecology.
 - i. Why is DAF, not actively avoiding engagement with commercial fishers, a willing partner and key stakeholder?
 - ii. Why is DAF not affording commercial fishers with the opportunity to share intergenerational knowledge that would inform improved management practices?
 - iii. Why is DAF not working collaboratively with commercial fishers to support sustainable fishing practice and achieve our shared objectives and those of the community?

Select questions from those previously submitted (on 24.10.23) but not addressed in the DAF response, received 1 November 2023.

Timing, consultation and process of decisions:

- a) Why did the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments announce in May and June 2023 the introduction of new net free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) prior to consultation with key stakeholders, as required under the *Fisheries Act 1994*?
- b) When did the Queensland Government indicate to the Commonwealth Government that it would implement additional net free zones in the GoC inshore fishery, as the Federal Environment Minister advised to UNESCO in her correspondence dated 25 May 2023?
- c) Does Government have any intent to consider different options to those outlined in the Discussion Paper?
- d) Please clarify the precise nature of the decisions expected to be taken by the Queensland Government following consultation and the exact timeframe.
- e) Please clarify the process undertaken by the Taskforce and/or Government to determine the currently proposed maps of net ban areas as outlined in the Discussion Paper.



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Impact assessment and evidence base supporting the proposed changes:

- a) What were the full range of regulatory, management and policy options considered as part of the proposed framework (and please provide the analysis of these options)?
- b) How does the proposed future direction of the GoC Inshore Fishery provide an operational landscape that is viable for all key stakeholders, including:
 - i. Local communities (including First Nations)
 - ii. The regional economy
 - iii. Commercial fishers
 - iv. Recreational fishers.
- c) How do the proposed changes maximise economic, social and cultural benefits in the context of the expected industry impacts and the associated downstream impacts to community and related industries?
- d) What is the Queensland Government's estimate of the short term and long term future generational economic loss (in gross value added terms and in direct and indirect jobs) associated with the proposed gillnet fisheries?
- e) Has the Queensland Government evaluated a long list of management and reform options in relation to the net fishery management?
- f) Please provide demonstration of the existence of a sound business case that provides balanced consideration of the impacts of the proposed reforms, including:
 - i. Consideration of a long list of reform options.
 - ii. Comparative analysis of management and reform options relative to the achievement of the policy objectives and balancing all of the principles outlined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*.
 - iii. Economic and financial analysis of options considered
 - iv. Balanced scorecard analysis with respect to all of the principles outlined in the relevant legislation.
- g) Given the anticipated catastrophic impacts of the proposed changes to commercial fishers currently operating in the GoC inshore fisheries, how does Government propose to ensure adequate compensation for business, retaining and unemployment services and other downstream economic impact offsets are in place by the time net free zones come into effect on any of the (contradictory) timelines released publicly?
- h) Please provide detailed information on the commercial fisheries compensation, training, buy back or other schemes to minimise the noted impact on commercial fishers and how this compensation and activities have been estimated, a budget determined and criteria for accessing support.



Attachment 2: Initial clarification questions to the Queensland Government on the proposed changes to commercial fishing in the Gulf of Carpinteria (GoC) Inshore Fisheries (*provided 24.10.23*)

1. **The Queensland and Commonwealth Governments have made several misleading and contradictory statements about the timing and nature of decisions in relation to gill net free zone decisions and timing.** The [Queensland Government's Discussion Paper](#) states that "...No decisions have been made at this point time and none will be made until after consultation." The [Queensland Government's website](#) states that "...additional net-free zones being established in the Gulf of Carpentaria from the end of March 2024." In addition, The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Environment and Water wrote to UNESCO on 25 May 2023 noting that Australia had committed to "...establishing additional net-free-zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria...by 31 December 2023".
 - a) What decisions have already been made by the Queensland Government in relation to the GoC Inshore Fishery?
 - b) Why did the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments announce in May and June 2023 the introduction of new net free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) prior to consultation with key stakeholders, as required under the *Fisheries Act 1994*?
 - c) When did the Queensland Government indicate to the Commonwealth Government that it would implement additional net free zones in the GoC inshore fishery, as the Federal Environment Minister advised to UNESCO in her correspondence dated 25 May 2023?
 - d) In advance of the announcement, what was the scope and findings of analysis undertaken by the Commonwealth and/or Queensland Governments, as required under the *Fisheries Act 1994* and *Fisheries Reallocation Policy*, with respect to:
 - i. The alignment of proposed changes to the nine principles of ecologically sustainable development outlined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*. This includes balancing the following principles, with each to be given relative emphasis and ensure access to fisheries resources is allocated in a way that maximises the potential economic, social and cultural benefits to the community. The principles of ecologically sustainable development are:
 - enhancing individual and community wellbeing through economic development that safeguards the wellbeing of future generations;
 - providing fairness within and between generations;
 - protecting biological diversity, ecological processes and life-support systems;
 - in making decisions, effectively integrating fairness and short and long-term economic, environmental and social considerations
 - considering the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies;
 - considering the need to maintain and enhance competition, in an environmentally sound way;
 - considering the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy that can enhance the capacity for environmental protection;
 - that decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues affecting them;
 - the precautionary principle.
 - ii. The seven minimum criteria outlined in the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* have been met. The minimum criteria are to be met before consideration of any reallocation of fisheries resource, with the assessment to be based on maximising the economic, social and cultural value that Queenslanders receive from the sustainable use of these resources. One of the key principles to be applied in the context of reallocation is that there is a



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transparent, predictable and repeatable process with clear reasons for decisions and certainty for users. The minimum criteria to be met for reallocation to occur are:

- there is the data supporting the proposal of sufficient quality.
- the cost-benefit analysis demonstrates that it will optimise the economic, social and cultural benefits Queenslanders receive from the sustainable use of fisheries resources
- there is a workable plan to fund compensation for loss of access
- the required consultation been completed
- there is significant community support from the relevant community
- it is practical and achievable
- it is consistent with relevant policies, the Fisheries Act 1994 and relevant harvest strategies

- e) Please demonstrate through the provision of scopes of work, evidence of analysis, and provision of requisite sources of data, research and consultation how the Future Fishing Taskforce (taskforce) adequately addressed all of the legislative and policy requirements under the *Fisheries Act 1994* and the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* (as outlined above, in point d, section's i and ii). Specifically:

- i. Demonstrated considerations of the *Fisheries Act 1994* nine principles of ecologically sustainable development being applied to the proposed changes and utilised in the assessment of other short, medium and long term management options
- ii. The minimum criteria assessment required under the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* to enable reallocation of resources to occur, with particular regard to the data supporting the proposed changes, the detailed cost benefit analysis, the compensation plan, community support and compliance with the *Fisheries Act 1994*.

- f) Did the Queensland Government make the decision to introduce additional gillnet free zones into the GoC inshore fishery prior to consultation, including the timing of their introduction, despite the assertion in its Discussion Paper that no decisions have been made?
- g) Does Government have any intent to consider different options to those outlined in the Discussion Paper?
- h) What is the expected implementation timeframe for the proposed changes?
- i) What representations, assurances or other commitments has the Queensland Government made to the Commonwealth Government in relation to the implementation of the measures outlined in the Discussion Paper?
- j) What representations, assurances, or other commitments has the Queensland Government made to UNESCO in relation to the implementation of additional measures?
- k) What representations has UNESCO made to the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments in relation to the link between gillnet fishing in the GoC and the total level of ecological risk to the Great Barrier Reef (i.e., accounting for all other contributing factors to ecological risk, such as marine debris, climate change and overfishing in neighbouring international waters).
- l) Please clarify the precise nature of the decisions expected to be taken by the Queensland Government following consultation and the exact timeframe.
- m) Does the Queensland Government have any intent to consider removing, reducing or amending the gillnet free bans as currently proposed, based on the outcomes of the current consultation process?

2. **The Discussion Paper includes many unsourced, unsubstantiated and unclear statements and assertions. In addition, the Discussion Paper does not include relevant information about the environmental threats to the GOC, that notably, do not include gillnet fishing.** Please provide source documentation and additional clarification in relation to the following statements included in the Discussion Paper:



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- a) Please clarify the process undertaken by the Taskforce and/or Government to determine the currently proposed maps of gillnet ban areas as outlined in the Discussion Paper.
- b) Please confirm the rationale for changes made to previous versions of the proposed ban area maps, which have been sighted by industry during meetings with Department officials, to the ones currently in the Discussion Paper.
- c) What is the evidence base for the concern about the transfer of fish between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the GoC Inshore Fisheries, including the species type, extent, volume, risk and independent area assessments for each?
- d) Please provide the analysis measuring "...the cumulative impacts to seafood supply from these decisions..."
- e) Please provide data that led to the Taskforce's "...concerns about the transfer of fishing effort from the east coast into the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery."
- f) Please provide source information that quantifies the extent of the impacts of the proposed changes to commercial operators, acknowledged in the discussion paper as "... It is acknowledged that these changes are likely to make it challenging for some commercial operators to maintain their operations in the same way and may result in economic impacts."
- g) Please provide the source documentation that quantifies how the proposed management options "...optimise economic and social benefits".
- h) How does the closure of GoC inshore fisheries provide "...fair and equitable access by all."
- i) How do net free zones in the GoC inshore fisheries deliver the stated objective of "...safeguarding and future-proofing economic opportunities in Gulf of Carpentaria fisheries and improving the social licence of the industry."
- j) The Government has noted the availability of seafood harvest from the Great Barrier Reef to be 2.6% of the entire East Coast wild caught seafood harvest to consumers. Please provide the same information and its source for wild caught seafood harvest from the GoC proposed areas.
- k) Please provide the list of scientific experts and their respective representations, advice and research, including the specific regions to which those related, who "...the Taskforce heard from...about the costs and benefits of gillnet-free zones in a number of regions in the Gulf of Carpentaria".
- l) Please provide the analysis that enabled the Taskforce to make recommendations that "...balance the social, economic and ecological costs and benefits".
- m) Please outline the other "modern fishery management controls necessary for an effective harvest strategy or protected species management plan" considered by the Taskforce and Government, and the source documentation and analysis of these?
- n) The Discussion paper states that "... An updated stock assessment for king threadfin is currently underway with new catch, effort and biological data."
 - i. When will this (and the study related to Spanish Mackerel) be completed?
 - ii. Please provide assurances that these studies be considered before the Taskforce makes final recommendations and decisions are made (relative to the Stock Assessment Biomass trigger level).
- o) Why doesn't the Discussion Paper acknowledge the substantive environmental risks to the GoC, including marine debris, climate change and overfishing in neighbouring international waters, and the comparatively lower environmental risk of gill-net fishing? Noting:
 - The Commonwealth Government's Gulf of Carpentaria Basin's Marine Bioregional Plan profile⁹ noted the present and emerging pressures affecting conservation values in the GoC as marine debris, climate change (temperature increases and ocean acidification) and foreign illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU).
 - A 2009 report undertaken by Charles Darwin University additionally noted the transboundary risk of environmental degradation and fisheries resource depletion due

⁹ Australian Government, *Species Profiles and Threats Data, Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Bioregional Plan*, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water., viewed 24 October 2023, <https://www.environment.gov.au/sprat-public/action/kef/view/82;jsessionid=C696E761A8CE584930D8475FFB7AF58E>



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to over-fishing in neighbouring countries. The report notes that the northern Australia commercial fisheries catch is only 5.8% (13,340 t) of the total catch (228,165 t) in the neighbouring province of Papua.¹⁰

- p) Why are the Commonwealth and Queensland Government's proposing gill-net free zones when gill-net fishing has not been identified as a substantive risk or of concern to the environmental degradation of the GoC inshore fisheries?
- q) Does the Queensland Government agree that any potential environmental risk posed by GoC inshore fisheries is minimal within the context of the substantive environmental risks to the GoC, including marine debris, climate change, IUU and overfishing in neighbouring international GoC Waters?
- r) What is the QLD Government doing, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, to address these four substantive risks to the GoC ecology and the direct threat they also pose to the sustainability and viability of commercial fishing in the GoC?

3. The changes as proposed will have catastrophic impacts on the short and long term inter-generational viability, jobs, and economic outputs of commercial fishing, and will have significant disruptions on the location and national seafood supply chain. The Discussion Paper has the stated aim of "...establish[ing] a framework for the future direction of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery and a clear vision of the operational landscape that lies ahead, with a focus on providing guidance to all stakeholders, particularly those in the commercial industry". However, the paper does not provide any clarity or certainty of the proposed framework, decision making parameters, or implementation arrangements.

- i) Please detail the Government's "clear vision" for the operational landscape, as this is not detailed in the Discussion Paper.
- j) Please detail how the Government's "clear vision" for the operational landscape accounts for lost current and future generational economic output and value destruction of current and future licenses and quota.
- k) What were the full range of regulatory, management and policy options considered as part of the proposed framework (and please provide the analysis of these options)?
- l) How does the proposed future direction of the GoC Inshore Fishery provide an operational landscape that is viable for all key stakeholders, including:
 - i. Local communities (including First Nations)
 - ii. The regional economy
 - iii. Commercial fishers
 - iv. Recreational fishers.
- m) Please provide the taskforce and Government's analysis of the *Fisheries Act 1994's* nine principles of ecologically sustainable development, and how each principle was considered to ensure "...access to the fisheries resources is allocated in a way that maximises the potential economic, social and cultural benefits to the community."
- n) How do the proposed changes maximise economic, social and cultural benefits in the context of the expected industry impacts and the associated down stream impacts to community and related industries?
- o) What is the Queensland Government's estimate of the short term and long term future generational economic loss (in gross value added terms and in direct and indirect jobs) associated with the proposed gillnet fisheries?
- p) Please confirm the economic impact of this proposed changes on Australian seafood exports, Australia's relative competitive position and reputation, as well as the impact on business, local economies and employment.
- q) Has the Queensland Government evaluated a long list of management and reform options in relation to the gillnet fishery management?

¹⁰ Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)

- r) Please provide demonstration of the existence of a sound business case that provides balanced consideration of the impacts of the proposed reforms, including:
 - v. Consideration of a long list of reform options.
 - vi. Comparative analysis of management and reform options relative to the achievement of the policy objectives and balancing all of the principles outlined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*.
 - vii. Economic and financial analysis of options considered
 - viii. Balanced scorecard analysis with respect to all of the principles outlined in the relevant legislation.
- s) Given the anticipated catastrophic impacts of the proposed changes to commercial fishers currently operating in the GoC inshore fisheries, how does Government propose to ensure adequate compensation for business, retaining and unemployment services and other downstream economic impact offsets are in place by the time net free zones come into effect on any of the (contradictory) timelines released publicly?
- t) Please provide detailed information on the commercial fisheries compensation, training, buy back / other schemes to minimise the noted impact on commercial fishers and how this compensation and activities have been estimated, a budget determined and criteria for accessing support.
- u) Before and after the release of the proposed changes, the DAF has been unable to respond to GOCCFA enquiries, provide a point of contact, provide data and information, or receipt correspondence. Given the complexity of the proposed changes including their assessment, phasing and implementation, what assurance can the Government provide to industry and the community of its capacity and capability to manage the consultation and assessment of the proposed changes, and the implement the proposed reforms in the context of:
 - i. aggressive consultation, decision and implementation timeframes
 - ii. recent senior leadership and resourcing changes at DAF
 - iii. DAF administrative requirements for the release of data and information
- v) If the changes proceed, can Government confirm there will be no gap between implementation of the proposed changes and provision of compensation, retraining and unemployment services to alleviate the significant impacts on commercial fishers and down stream businesses and community?



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Attachment 3: DAF response to GoCCFA clarification questions submitted 24
October 2023, received 1 November 2023



Department of
Agriculture and Fisheries

Our ref: CTS 19828/23

1 November 2023

Mr David Bobbermen
Executive Officer
Queensland Seafood Industry Association
eo@qsia.com.au

Mr David Wren
President
Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial
Fisherman's Association
tina@wrengroup.com.au

Dear Mr Bobbermen and Mr Wren

Thank you for your correspondence of 18 October 2023, 19 October 2023 and 23 October 2023, on behalf of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association and the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman's Association (GOCFFA) regarding a request to extend public consultation on the proposed implementation of new gillnet free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria and fishery reforms for the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery (GOCIF).

I note you are seeking an extension to the public comment period of the discussion paper from 17 November 2023 to 31 March 2024. I acknowledge your concerns to ensure your joint submission captures all appropriate information regarding the proposed gillnet free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria and I appreciate your efforts in representing the commercial fishing industry. This request is under consideration and a response will be provided as soon as possible.

Fisheries Queensland will carefully consider feedback from the public consultation process and provide recommendations for government consideration prior to any decisions being made on the final gill net free zones for the Gulf.

Additional gillnet-free zones were part of the commitments announced by the Australian and Queensland governments on 5 June 2023. I encourage you to work with affected commercial fishers and Fisheries Queensland to help inform the implementation of these zones.

Increasingly there is a need to demonstrate fisheries resources are being sourced in an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible manner with robust and defensible governance and oversight. Regarding social licence to operate, community standards and expectations are increasing as many industries are under greater public scrutiny. The use of gillnets globally is under increased scrutiny, and in order to have a long-term future, the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fisheries will need to build a responsible fishing foundation and be increasingly mindful of the challenges to their social licence to operate. These proposals, together with a harvest strategy, output controls (competitive catch limits or quotas), independent data validation and increased enforcement capability and presence in the Gulf will contribute to ensuring the fishery has a long-term future.

Please note the questions you have raised in your correspondence are answered under several broad themes as defined by the subheading below.

Request for catch data

I note that Fisheries Queensland is currently working with you to assist in providing appropriate access to the requested data in line with business and individual privacy and confidentiality guidelines. Fisheries Queensland cannot release confidential and identifiable catch and effort data to a third party who is not engaged directly by the department without direct permission by the fishers impacted. I recommend you initiate the collation of confidential data agreement forms from all fishers who have not already done so to release their data to Mr Max Giaroli, who I understand is drafting your joint submission.

Please be assured that consideration of logged catch history, a review of historical licence effort, and vessel tracking data will all form part of the analysis in recommending particular zones for government consideration. The most effective and valuable input from industry members would be any individual expertise or advice on personal impacts, finer-scale catch and effort information or insight about individual fishing activities within any of the proposed zones that could inform refining the zone to reduce impacts. This can be obtained from individuals without the need for the whole fishery logbook data.

Threatened, endangered and protected species science and data

There are two level 2 Ecological Risk Assessments published for the Gulf of Carpentaria, one for the target and bycatch species, and one for species of conservation concern. These can be viewed at www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/monitoring-research/data/ecological-risk-assessments.

These reports outline the basis of the risk, what was taken into account and a risk rating for each species. Several species have been rated as high, precautionary high or of medium risk, and inform the Queensland government's view and understanding of the risk assessment from a fisheries perspective. External risks from climate change, marine debris, illegal fishing are all acknowledged risk factors. For the Gulf of Carpentaria, climate change, marine debris or illegal international fishing may present risks; however, we know that not addressing the other direct impacts on threatened species such as gillnetting mortality will reduce the resilience of the ecosystem, fish species and the threatened species populations and their ability to bounce back following extreme events, including increasing water temperature or mangrove die back.

There are many publicly peer-reviewed scientific studies worldwide, including in the Great Barrier Reef, that identify commercial fishing operations being a key risk to threatened endangered and protected species (TEPs). Gillnets are recognised as a method of fishing that continues to pose risks to TEPs. A good starting point for an assessment and collation of the risks and outline of known information is the Level 2 Ecological Risk Assessment - Species of Conservation Concern, 2021 and this can be viewed at <https://era.daf.qld.gov.au/id/eprint/8108/>. There are 16 pages of references listed in that report (many linked to in our online publication). I note that this report is not new, and has been released and presented to industry in the past.

Another good source of collated information is the Department of Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water assessments for the fishery under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. For this information (and many good source documents) please refer to www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/marine/fisheries/gld/inshore-fin-fish.

I am informed that during the ten-year period between 2011-2021, there were 775 reported TEP interactions by inshore gillnet fishers in the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery, including 188 deaths and 47 injuries. As noted by individuals at the GOCCFA meeting, and acknowledged generally, this is likely to be under-reported, and improved and accurate reporting with independent data validation through observers or cameras is most certainly in the near future for commercial fishers in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Future Fisheries Taskforce

The taskforce met on 1 September 2023 to discuss the impacts from gillnetting on threatened species within the Gulf of Carpentaria noting that habitats of the Gulf support threatened and endangered species such as turtles, sawfish, spear tooth shark, snubfin and humpback dolphins, and crocodiles. By transitioning to more sustainable and responsible fishing practices and taking additional measures to maintain fish stocks, we can ensure the long-term viability of good jobs in the fishing industry.

All taskforce communiques that provide expert advice on threatened, endangered and protected species as well as information on financial support available to impacted fishers can be found online here: www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/commercial/future-fishing.

The proposed gillnet-free zones now released for consultation in the discussion paper were informed by multiple sources of information and inputs, including:

- stakeholder and scientific submissions and input made directly to the Taskforce
- First Nation people's submissions and advice
- review and analysis of logged fishery catch and effort information
- the results and risk ratings of the departments level 1 and level 2 Ecological Risk Assessments Consideration of literature and peer-reviewed assessments (including the current king threadfin stock assessment) and reports
- previous discussions with the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel (see www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/sustainable-fisheries-expert-panel/communiques/communique-14-december-2021)
- the working group response and feedback from its meeting on (see www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/fishery-working-groups/gulf-of-carpentaria-inshore-fishery-working-group/gulf-of-carpentaria-inshore-fishery-working-group/communique-5-6-september-2023)

Request for submissions

Regarding the request for submissions that were provided to the Future Fishing Taskforce, a summary consultation report will be published on the Fisheries Queensland public website in the future for your reference. Please note that submissions are not released publicly, nor can they be provided to third parties.

Policy drivers and decisions by government

As you are aware, on 5 June 2023 the Federal and Queensland governments committed to phase out gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef and to establish additional gillnet-free zones in areas of high ecological significance including in the Gulf of Carpentaria. To help mitigate impacts on the commercial fishing industry, over \$160 million has been allocated to support industry through the delivery of a structural adjustment package and additional programs to implement independent data validation and further reduce bycatch in high-risk fisheries.

The announcement on 5 June 2023 was in response to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Report released on 28 November 2022. This Report recommended the Great Barrier Reef be inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger and identified 10 priority recommendations that should be implemented immediately including the phase out of destructive gillnet fishing the establishment of net-free sub-zones in areas of high conservation value for protected species. This report was prepared by the IUCN and UNESCO following a Reactive Monitoring Mission undertaken in Australia in March 2022. While in Australia, the Reactive Monitoring Mission invited multiple stakeholders to present on key issues and concerns. I am advised that QSIA was invited to present but declined. Further, in November 2022, the QSIA was made aware of the IUCN and UNESCO report and recommendations, and was advised that the government was considering its response.

I note your concerns in respect to public consultation not taking place prior to introducing the new gillnet-free zone in the Gulf of Carpentaria. While the policy decision to introduce additional gillnet-free zones has already been made, consultation is presently underway on the implementation of this decision. Again, I encourage you to work with affected commercial fishers and Fisheries Queensland and make a submission through the consultation process to help inform the implementation of these zones.

I note your question raised multiple times regarding what decisions had already been made in relation to the GOCIF prior to the release of the discussion paper. I wish to reiterate that no decisions have been made at this time. Results from consultation will be considered and discussed with appropriate advisory bodies, such as the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery working group and the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel before any decisions are made.

The proposed gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria were summarised from submissions received by the Future Fishing Taskforce from various sectors, including recreational and charter fishers, traditional owners, and conservation groups. These zones were presented to the taskforce and then the GOCIF working group before being refined for public consultation in the current discussion paper.

Recognising there are different policy commitments for the Great Barrier Reef compared to the Gulf, the threat to protected species from gillnet fishing operations has been a key focus of discussion, and an area of escalating concern by the Federal and Queensland Governments over many years. There was also a dedicated species of conservation interest (SOI) workshop held with industry and scientists that developed a Protected Species Management Strategy for the east coast inshore fishery.

Fisheries Act 1994 obligations and reallocation policy

As you point out in your questions, there are several administrative and policy considerations for governments in making decisions about fisheries resource allocation and sharing between competing users. Government decision making processes are necessarily lengthy and complex. The high level, policy framework for such decisions can be found in a suite of public policy handbooks and guidelines found here:

www.premiers.qld.gov.au/publications/categories/policies-and-codes/handbooks.aspx.

Consultation is an important part of decision-making processes and will inform the final decisions. Often decisions require careful weighing up various and conflicting policy options, and qualitative assessment and balance against competing principles. For example, 'ecologically sustainable development', the 'precautionary principle', and 'protecting biological diversity and ecological processes' all form part of the objectives in the *Fisheries Act 1994* and play a significant part of the decision-making processes.

The Reallocation Policy is particularly relevant when considering a deliberate reallocation from one sector to another, usually on the request or by application from a particular sector. For example, the 'recreational only fishing areas' (e.g. Cairns, Mackay and Rockhampton) in 2015 were an example of this. They reallocated fish commercially caught in nets in these regions from the commercial licence holders to the recreational sector. The proposed gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria are more complex than a direct 'reallocation' under the policy as they are an initiative of the government to meet a number of objectives under the *Fisheries Act*, Federal and Queensland environmental legislation, as well as State parties obligations to global pressures and Treaty understandings. Regardless, Fisheries Queensland will consider the litany of factors and information, including input from consultation, as part of the process of providing recommendations to the Queensland Government.

Financial payments to affected fishery stakeholders will be decided by government alongside the commencement of the final gillnet-free zones. If industry has any recommendations around what should be taken into account, or included in such schemes, they would be welcomed as part of the consultation process. Commencement of the proposals and their implementation will appropriately align with payments to impacted fishery stakeholders.

Relationship between the Gulf and east coast

As you will be aware, commercial fishers have licences that entitle them to access Queensland waters. The Taskforce noted and were concerned that the decision to phase out gillnets in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area may result in movement of fishers and activation of N3 licences previously latent. With concerns around king threadfin stocks, any

further expansion of fishing effort in the Gulf may pose sustainability risks for target species, increased competition, and adverse economic and social impacts on the existing operators due to lower profitability, catch rates and market competition. This was validated by reports of east coast fishers exploring options to move and invest in licences in the Gulf, as well as concerns raised by commercial fishers on the activation of latent effort raised in Future Fishing submissions.

GOCCFA's view on the risks of effort shift into the Gulf of Carpentaria would be valuable, as often fishers communication networks can provide more timely information. The extent to which this is a risk that concerns GOCCFA and how it may be mitigated from an industry perspective would be useful input to the process.

Seafood harvest and supply chain

There is some great summary information contained in the 2020-2021 BDO Report (www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/fisheries-economic-and-social-indicators-2020-21/resource/895ed74e-e9a6-4b9b-b970-8fc3d6f89c7a) that will allow GOCCFA to explore and examine the relative economic contribution and harvest between the east coast inshore fishery harvest and the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery harvest. Another great source of information is the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation's Status of Fish Stocks report (www.fish.gov.au/). There is also QFISH (<https://qfish.fisheries.qld.gov.au/>) which provides summary commercial catch information by fishery, species and region that can be accessed and analysed by the public. Fisheries Queensland staff can take you through how to access this information in detail if you require.

The below table indicates a summary that can be derived from examining the data that is published regularly and publicly available online.

Barramundi	Wild catch GBR (average 2017-21)	Wild catch other east coast (average 2017-21)	Wild catch Gulf of Carpentaria (average 2017-21)	Queensland aquaculture 20-21 returns[^]
Production	113 tonnes	13 tonnes	578 tonnes	3478 tonnes
GVP	\$1.36 m (BDO report 2020-21)	\$0.300 m (estimated)	\$15.59m (BDO report 2020-21)	\$35m (Lobergieger report)
Percent	2.7%	0.3%	14%	83%

[^]<https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/aquaculture>

Future Management and Harvest Strategy

As noted in the discussion paper, further development and consultation will occur on the harvest strategy and management framework for the Gulf of Carpentaria fishery, which will set up the decision rules and management responses to pre-determined triggers occurring in the fishery. The discussion paper seeks initial feedback on concepts such as quota, individual allocation and net units, all of which will require further consultation and input from industry, including regulatory reform and may include options around allocation processes.

The management framework adopted will determine the kinds of harvest strategy decision rules and triggers required in a harvest strategy.

Again, please note that no final decisions have been made in relation to the future management framework and it be informed by the results of consultation from the discussion paper and through future opportunities for input on proposals - both informally and through the fishery working group and other industry forums.

Export considerations

As the GOCFFA would be aware, there is no impact on Australian seafood exports as part of the decision. The Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery Wildlife Trade Operation that permits exporting under the Federal Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act* was revoked in 2021, as conditions had not been met specifically addressing the ecological risk to threatened and endangered and protected species in the fishery, implementing independent data validation on vessels, and implementing a harvest strategy to manage impacts on target, byproduct and bycatch species in the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery.

Mental health support during this challenging time

The Queensland Government has committed additional funding for the industry-led mental health and wellness program, Stay Afloat, administered by Seafood Industry Australia. This has been developed to help break the stigma associated with mental health in the commercial seafood industry, to develop a network of trusted industry advocates who fishers can reach out to and seek support and to educate primary healthcare networks about fishing industry pressures.

The Stay Afloat team is currently providing valuable support and assistance to commercial fishers, fishing businesses and their families during this challenging time. If you would like to know more about Stay Afloat or know someone who might be interested, please visit www.stayafloat.com.au. You can also contact the Program Manager, Ms Jo Marshall by email at jo@seafoodindustryaustralia.com.au or on 0408 008 344.

Other issues

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, along with Fisheries Queensland, is dedicated to delivering prompt responses and guidance to various stakeholders, including the commercial industry. Recreational fishers, scientific organisations, other government agencies, local government, Traditional Owners and other interested non-government organisations are also important stakeholders. Department staff are also charged with servicing the needs of the Queensland Government, meeting legislative obligations, and ensuring sound government and policy processes.

Our staff often work across the different teams and business units in the organisation, including fisheries management, operations, fisheries science, reporting, information and digital solutions. This not only builds competency and knowledge but recognises the multidisciplinary nature of the work we do. Fisheries managers will continue to work closely with Luke Albury given his extensive knowledge and integral work in the GOCIF.

In the interim, if you would like any further information, please contact Lauren Jubb,
Fisheries Manager on 0476 879 373 or by email at lauren.jubb@daf.qld.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Graeme Bolton
Deputy Director-General
Fisheries and Forestry



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Attachment 4: Letter to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, including clarification questions, 24 October 2023



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ATTN: Mr Chris Sarra
Director General, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Level 5, 41 George Street, Brisbane QLD 4000

24 October 2023

Re: Urgent action required in relation to the consultation on the Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery reforms

Dear Chris

The Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fishermen Association Incorporated (GOCCFA) has now formally requested information and an extension of time from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) twice since our most recent meetings with you on the 11 October 2023 and 20 October 2023.

- DAF has not acknowledged receipt of these requests or provided the clarification and transparency sought. This is impeding GOCCFA's access to information and capacity to respond to the Queensland Government's Discussion Paper in relation to the above-mentioned reforms.
- DAF has changed its previous advice to GOCCFA that a single consolidated data request could be made through our third party advisor (in this case, Max Giaroli). DAF's new advice that all 84 N3 symbol holders now being required to request data individually adds significant administrative burden to access data that is required in order to formulate considered responses to the Government's Discussion Paper. With our requests not being receipted or acknowledged, we do not have confidence in DAF's timeliness or transparency.
- The issues and changes proposed in the Discussion Paper are significant. **GOCCFA represents the largest group of impacted commercial stakeholders**, and it is necessary that there is sufficient time and access to the required information to provide a considered response. The delays being experienced in relation to information and data access and clarification, coupled with the additional administrative burden being put onto operators in relation to data, do not provide a reasonable timeline or capacity for industry to provide any meaningful response.

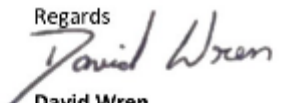
The above issues are the cause of significant concern for GOCCFA. It is imperative that DAF and the Queensland Government provide adequate time, capacity, and transparency of information to ensure a fair and balanced process that affords all stakeholders the opportunity to provide a considered response.

In the above context, we hereby submit the following three additional requests to DAF:

1. An extension of time **until 31 March 2024** to respond to the Queensland Government's Discussion Paper.
2. Confirmation of a direct contact within DAF with whom GOCCFA can liaise on a day-to-day basis to address questions and be assured of a written acknowledgement of receipt within one (1) business day and appropriate action being taken with three (3) business days. *NB. GOCCFA are a separate entity to the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) and require communication directly back to our point of contact, President David Wren, with a CC to QSIA.*
3. GOCCFA hereby submits the attached clarification questions to DAF and the Queensland Government.

We request your urgent prioritisation of these matters and an assurance from you, on behalf of DAF, of full and timely disclosure of information and clarifications we seek to inform our response to the Discussion Paper. **This is necessary to ensure there is a continued presumption of good faith from DAF through this process.**

Regards



David Wren
President
GOCCFA
david@wrengroup.com.au



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Attachment 1: Additional clarification questions to the Queensland Government on the proposed changes to commercial fishing in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) Inshore Fisheries

1. **The Queensland and Commonwealth Governments have made several misleading and contradictory statements about the timing and nature of decisions in relation to gill net free zone decisions and timing.** The [Queensland Government's Discussion Paper](#) states that "...No decisions have been made at this point in time and none will be made until after consultation." The [Queensland Government's website](#) states that "...additional net-free zones being established in the Gulf of Carpentaria from the end of March 2024." In addition, The Hon Tanya Plibersek, Minister for the Environment and Water wrote to UNESCO on 25 May 2023 noting that Australia had committed to "...establishing additional net-free-zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria...by 31 December 2023".
 - a) What decisions have already been made by the Queensland Government in relation to the GoC Inshore Fishery?
 - b) Why did the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments announce in May and June 2023 the introduction of new net free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) prior to consultation with key stakeholders, as required under the *Fisheries Act 1994*?
 - c) When did the Queensland Government indicate to the Commonwealth Government that it would implement additional net free zones in the GoC inshore fishery, as the Federal Environment Minister advised to UNESCO in her correspondence dated 25 May 2023?
 - d) In advance of the announcement, what was the scope and findings of analysis undertaken by the Commonwealth and/or Queensland Governments, as required under the *Fisheries Act 1994* and *Fisheries Reallocation Policy*, with respect to:
 - i. The alignment of proposed changes to the nine principles of ecologically sustainable development outlined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*. This includes balancing the following principles, with each to be given relative emphasis and ensure access to fisheries resources is allocated in a way that maximises the potential economic, social and cultural benefits to the community. The principles of ecologically sustainable development are:
 - enhancing individual and community wellbeing through economic development that safeguards the wellbeing of future generations;
 - providing fairness within and between generations;
 - protecting biological diversity, ecological processes and life-support systems;
 - in making decisions, effectively integrating fairness and short and long-term economic, environmental and social considerations
 - considering the global dimension of environmental impacts of actions and policies;
 - considering the need to maintain and enhance competition, in an environmentally sound way;
 - considering the need to develop a strong, growing and diversified economy that can enhance the capacity for environmental protection;
 - that decisions and actions should provide for broad community involvement on issues affecting them;
 - the precautionary principle.
 - ii. The seven minimum criteria outlined in the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* have been met. The minimum criteria are to be met before consideration of any reallocation of fisheries resource, with the assessment to be based on maximising the economic, social and cultural value that Queenslanders receive from the sustainable use of these resources. One of the key principles to be applied in the context of reallocation is that there is a transparent, predictable and repeatable process with clear reasons for decisions and certainty for users. The minimum criteria to be met for reallocation to occur are:
 - there is the data supporting the proposal of sufficient quality.



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- the cost-benefit analysis demonstrates that it will optimise the economic, social and cultural benefits Queenslanders receive from the sustainable use of fisheries resources
 - there is a workable plan to fund compensation for loss of access
 - the required consultation been completed
 - there is significant community support from the relevant community
 - it is practical and achievable
 - it is consistent with relevant policies, the Fisheries Act 1994 and relevant harvest strategies
- e) Please demonstrate through the provision of scopes of work, evidence of analysis, and provision of requisite sources of data, research and consultation how the Future Fishing Taskforce (taskforce) adequately addressed all of the legislative and policy requirements under the *Fisheries Act 1994* and the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* (as outlined above, in point d, section's i and ii). Specifically:
- i. Demonstrated considerations of the *Fisheries Act 1994* nine principles of ecologically sustainable development being applied to the proposed changes and utilised in the assessment of other short, medium and long term management options
 - ii. The minimum criteria assessment required under the *Fisheries Reallocation Policy* to enable reallocation of resources to occur, with particular regard to the data supporting the proposed changes, the detailed cost benefit analysis, the compensation plan, community support and compliance with the *Fisheries Act 1994*.
- f) Did the Queensland Government make the decision to introduce additional gillnet free zones into the GoC Inshore fishery prior to consultation, including the timing of their introduction, despite the assertion in its Discussion Paper that no decisions have been made?
- g) Does Government have any intent to consider different options to those outlined in the Discussion Paper?
- h) What is the expected implementation timeframe for the proposed changes?
- i) What representations, assurances or other commitments has the Queensland Government made to the Commonwealth Government in relation to the implementation of the measures outlined in the Discussion Paper?
- j) What representations, assurances, or other commitments has the Queensland Government made to UNESCO in relation to the implementation of additional measures?
- k) What representations has UNESCO made to the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments in relation to the link between gillnet fishing in the GoC and the total level of ecological risk to the Great Barrier Reef (i.e., accounting for all other contributing factors to ecological risk, such as marine debris, climate change and overfishing in neighbouring international waters).
- l) Please clarify the precise nature of the decisions expected to be taken by the Queensland Government following consultation and the exact timeframe.
- m) Does the Queensland Government have any intent to consider removing, reducing or amending the gillnet free bans as currently proposed, based on the outcomes of the current consultation process?
2. **The Discussion Paper includes many unsourced, unsubstantiated and unclear statements and assertions. In addition, the Discussion Paper does not include relevant information about the environmental threats to the GOC, that notably, do not include gillnet fishing.** Please provide source documentation and additional clarification in relation to the following statements included in the Discussion Paper:
- a) Please clarify the process undertaken by the Taskforce and/or Government to determine the currently proposed maps of gillnet ban areas as outlined in the Discussion Paper.
 - b) Please confirm the rationale for changes made to previous versions of the proposed ban area maps, which have been sighted by industry during meetings with Department officials, to the ones currently in the Discussion Paper.



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- c) What is the evidence base for the concern about the transfer of fish between the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the GoC Inshore Fisheries, including the species type, extent, volume, risk and independent area assessments for each?
- d) Please provide the analysis measuring "...the cumulative impacts to seafood supply from these decisions..."
- e) Please provide data that led to the Taskforce's "...concerns about the transfer of fishing effort from the east coast into the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery."
- f) Please provide source information that quantifies the extent of the impacts of the proposed changes to commercial operators, acknowledged in the discussion paper as "... It is acknowledged that these changes are likely to make it challenging for some commercial operators to maintain their operations in the same way and may result in economic impacts."
- g) Please provide the source documentation that quantifies how the proposed management options "...optimise economic and social benefits".
- h) How does the closure of GoC inshore fisheries provide "...fair and equitable access by all."
- i) How do net free zones in the GoC inshore fisheries deliver the stated objective of "...safeguarding and future-proofing economic opportunities in Gulf of Carpentaria fisheries and improving the social licence of the industry."
- j) The Government has noted the availability of seafood harvest from the Great Barrier Reef to be 2.6% of the entire East Coast wild caught seafood harvest to consumers. Please provide the same information and its source for wild caught seafood harvest from the GoC proposed areas.
- k) Please provide the list of scientific experts and their respective representations, advice and research, including the specific regions to which those related, who "...the Taskforce heard from...about the costs and benefits of gillnet-free zones in a number of regions in the Gulf of Carpentaria".
- l) Please provide the analysis that enabled the Taskforce to make recommendations that "...balance the social, economic and ecological costs and benefits".
- m) Please outline the other "modern fishery management controls necessary for an effective harvest strategy or protected species management plan" considered by the Taskforce and Government, and the source documentation and analysis of these?
- n) The Discussion paper states that "... An updated stock assessment for king threadfin is currently underway with new catch, effort and biological data."
 - i. When will this (and the study related to Spanish Mackerel) be completed?
 - ii. Please provide assurances that these studies be considered before the Taskforce makes final recommendations and decisions are made (relative to the Stock Assessment Biomass trigger level).
- o) Why doesn't the Discussion Paper acknowledge the substantive environmental risks to the GoC, including marine debris, climate change and overfishing in neighbouring international waters, and the comparatively lower environmental risk of gill-net fishing? Noting:
 - The Commonwealth Government's Gulf of Carpentaria Basin's Marine Bioregional Plan profile¹ noted the present and emerging pressures affecting conservation values in the GoC as marine debris, climate change (temperature increases and ocean acidification) and foreign illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing (IUU)
 - A 2009 report undertaken by Charles Darwin University additionally noted the transboundary risk of environmental degradation and fisheries resource depletion due to over-fishing in neighbouring countries. The report notes that the northern Australia commercial fisheries catch is only 5.8% (13,340 t) of the total catch (228,165 t) in the neighbouring province of Papua.²

¹ Australian Government, *Species Profiles and Threats Data, Gulf of Carpentaria Marine Bioregional Plan*, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water., viewed 24 October 2023, <https://www.environment.gov.au/sprat-public/action/kef/view/82.jsessionid=C696E761A8CE5B4930DB475FFB7AF58E>

² Patterson, Ruth G, 2019, *The Gulf of Carpentaria*, Charles Darwin University (Australia)



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- p) Why are the Commonwealth and Queensland Government's proposing gill-net free zones when gill-net fishing has not been identified as a substantive risk or of concern to the environmental degradation of the GoC inshore fisheries?
- q) Does the Queensland Government agree that any potential environmental risk posed by GoC inshore fisheries is minimal within the context of the substantive environmental risks to the GoC, including marine debris, climate change, IUU and overfishing in neighbouring international GoC Waters?
- r) What is the QLD Government doing, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Government, to address these four substantive risks to the GoC ecology and the direct threat they also pose to the sustainability and viability of commercial fishing in the GoC?

3. The changes as proposed will have catastrophic impacts on the short and long term inter-generational viability, jobs, and economic outputs of commercial fishing, and will have significant disruptions on the location and national seafood supply chain. The Discussion Paper has the stated aim of "...establish[ing] a framework for the future direction of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery and a clear vision of the operational landscape that lies ahead, with a focus on providing guidance to all stakeholders, particularly those in the commercial industry". However, the paper does not provide any clarity or certainty of the proposed this framework, decision making parameters, or implementation arrangements.

- a) Please detail the Government's "clear vision" for the operational landscape, as this is not detailed in the Discussion Paper.
- b) Please detail how the Government's "clear vision" for the operational landscape accounts for lost current and future generational economic output and value destruction of current and future licenses and quota.
- c) What were the full range of regulatory, management and policy options considered as part of the proposed framework (and please provide the analysis of these options)?
- d) How does the proposed future direction of the GoC Inshore Fishery provide an operational landscape that is viable for all key stakeholders, including:
 - i. Local communities (including First Nations)
 - ii. The regional economy
 - iii. Commercial fishers
 - iv. Recreational fishers.
- e) Please provide the taskforce and Government's analysis of the *Fisheries Act 1994*'s nine principles of ecologically sustainable development, and how each principle was considered to ensure "...access to the fisheries resources is allocated in a way that maximises the potential economic, social and cultural benefits to the community."
- f) How do the proposed changes maximise economic, social and cultural benefits in the context of the expected industry impacts and the associated down stream impacts to community and related industries?
- g) What is the Queensland Government's estimate of the short term and long term future generational economic loss (in gross value added terms and in direct and indirect jobs) associated with the proposed gillnet fisheries?
- h) Please confirm the economic impact of this proposed changes on Australian seafood exports, Australia's relative competitive position and reputation, as well as the impact on business, local economies and employment.
- i) Has the Queensland Government evaluated a long list of management and reform options in relation to the gillnet fishery management?
- j) Please provide demonstration of the existence of a sound business case that provides balanced consideration of the impacts of the proposed reforms, including:
 - i. Consideration of a long list of reform options.
 - ii. Comparative analysis of management and reform options relative to the achievement of the policy objectives and balancing all of the principles outlined in the *Fisheries Act 1994*.
 - iii. Economic and financial analysis of options considered

- iv. Balanced scorecard analysis with respect to all of the principles outlined in the relevant legislation.
- k) Given the anticipated catastrophic impacts of the proposed changes to commercial fishers currently operating in the GoC inshore fisheries, how does Government propose to ensure adequate compensation for business, retaining and unemployment services and other downstream economic impact offsets are in place by the time net free zones come into effect on any of the (contradictory) timelines released publicly?
- l) Please provide detailed information on the commercial fisheries compensation, training, buy back / other schemes to minimise the noted impact on commercial fishers and how this compensation and activities have been estimated, a budget determined and criteria for accessing support.
- m) Before and after the release of the proposed changes, the DAF has been unable to respond to GOCCFA enquiries, provide a point of contact, provide data and information, or receipt correspondence. Given the complexity of the proposed changes including their assessment, phasing and implementation, what assurance can the Government provide to industry and the community of its capacity and capability to manage the consultation and assessment of the proposed changes, and the implement the proposed reforms in the context of:
 - i. aggressive consultation, decision and implementation timeframes
 - ii. recent senior leadership and resourcing changes at DAF
 - iii. DAF administrative requirements for the release of data and information
- n) If the changes proceed, can Government confirm there will be no gap between implementation of the proposed changes and provision of compensation, retraining and unemployment services to alleviate the significant impacts on commercial fishers and down stream businesses and community?



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Attachment 5: Letter to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 13
October 2023



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13th October 2023

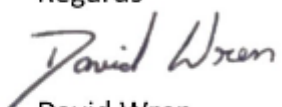
To the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries,

Further to the Annual General Meeting for the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman's Association on Thursday 12/10/23 I wish to follow up officially with the following requests made to the department verbally during the presentation for additional proposed net fish zones ;

1. DAFF to make contact with all gillnet primary license holders with attached N3 symbols, requesting their logbook and VMS records be released in confidence to the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman's Association.
2. DAFF to provide copies of all Stakeholders submissions that were presented to the Fishing Taskforce.
3. DAFF to provide copies of the science based evidence, including migration evidence, supporting the link of Threatened and Endangered Species from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park zone and the Gulf of Carpentaria region.
4. DAFF to confirm that any changes to current net free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria will not be implemented and enforced during calendar year 2024.
5. DAFF to consider an extension to the Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman's Association timeline to provide feedback through it stakeholder submissions from the 17/11/23 until the 31/3/2024, noting the depth of the material that will need to collated and fair consultation with effected fishers regarding any changes to net free zones, as well as the harvest strategy consultation that has been incorporated into this round of public consultation.

We thank you for prompt reply on above mentions matter and we look forward to a constructive engagement with fishery managers.

Regards



David Wren
President GOCCFA



GOCCFA

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Attachment 6: Letter to the Hon Mark Furner, Queensland Minister for
Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries, 18 September 2023



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18th September 2023

To Fisheries Minister, Honourable Mark Furner

We support Robbie Katter's call for you to Stand Up or Stand Down as our Minister for Fisheries.

As Minister for Fisheries (not Minister for the Environment) you appear to either be blissfully ignorant or perhaps woefully misinformed about the business of fishing in remote areas of Australia namely the Gulf of Carpentaria (GOC).

You appear not to have taken into any consideration the livelihood and economic flow on of the fishing industry from the pristine waters of the GOC.

We the Commercial Fishing Association of Gulf of Carpentaria would like to bring to your attention the following points.

We as a collective group have been severely let down by your department with your lack of a sensible Harvest Strategy and lack of the most basic of Fisheries work, being proper scientifically acceptable Stock Assessments for our area. We are aware your department has fiddled with our data to ensure your models, particularly in the case of the farcical King Salmon assessment to make it fit with your required outcomes. Your department has not been open, honest and transparent about such.

Two years ago you the Fishing Minister let everyone down in the GOC losing its WTO accreditation – this means there are no export opportunities for any GOC fish.

Yet we believe you must support the policies of the current Qld Government so can you please give us commentary on your governments 30 year vision. Which includes but is not limited to

*"Qld government believes is leads Asian region in food production – and consistently generates new industries and **export** opportunities throughout Asia". **Strange then to allow the loss of the accreditation that allows fish to be exported?***

*"With growing world population, food production will be in higher demand. Support development of northern Qld and a new food – belt". **And at the same time close an entire food supply down for your own people, unless you are one of the 20% of Queenslanders who is a recreational fisher.***

We believe you have failed to recognise the considerable private effort fishers in the Gulf have instigated being but not limited to:



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N3 Barra fishermen in Karumba have for years bought mature female barramundi into Karumba at the end of each year and bred her with males – they then restock rivers in the Gulf with thousands and thousands of fingerlings. The work done is so renown the council built a big barramundi centre in Karumba as a tourist attraction – the work continues behind the scenes all funded and supported by local barra fishers. This is almost fish farming Aquaculture at its finest an industry you do appear to support.

To suggest the blanket closing all the rivers and creeks on the Qld side of the GOC – 23 of which already have restricted areas or closures, is the death knell for all of the N3 Barramundi Fishers in the GOC.

- a. That is an economic fallout not just for the immediate fisherman but
- b. deck hands, engineers, unload crews, truck drivers and freight companies, Coldstores, fish mongers, fish and chip shops, restaurants, - then all the suppliers of cartons, nets, plastics for cartons , staples staplers, providores, refrigeration suppliers, refrigeration mechanics, electricians, boiler makers, ship chandlery stores the list is endless in the flow on effect.
- c. Without a doubt there will be a loss of jobs throughout those supply chains as the demand will not be there.
- d. You would be aware there are over 350 fishermen working in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

The original N9 fishery was created with fishermen converting (so purchasing from their own pocket) 2 x N3 licences and handing them in for 1 x N9 licence another substantial cost to the fisherman.

Wren Fishing Pty Ltd (2 x brothers David and Frank Wren) have done considerable work in the past to ensure it had a viable sustainable fishery to carry on into the future, in 2011 to 2012 David and Frank purchased all the QJFA Permits and all the N9 licences in the GOC they then approached DAF and handed them all in but 3 licences – reducing the overall net used in the fishery by 19000 metres. The N9 was then renamed the N12 with the 3 only licences for the entire 7 miles to AFZ, they do not interact with the coast line. The current fish managers seem to have completely disregarded this sacrifice moving forward.

Area 10 of the proposed closure is of huge importance to Wren Fishing:

With this closure Wren Fishing is effectively shut down as it would be economically unviable to keep fishing.

This would mean the loss of six hundred thousand kilos of protein high in omega 12 going into the Australian market each fishing season. Consider that six hundred thousand kilo of fish converted to 6 million 100 gram portions of fish at \$10 a portion (at the check-out) that's 60 million dollars of revenue in the wider community lost. That's not counting the supplier side of the balance sheet the money spent to keep the operation afloat.



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Let's move on to current issues

GOC fishers were working with DAF by way of a working group called the GOCIFF Working Group – you had to apply and be appointed to be in the group (it is not open forum) The group has representatives from all the sectors – commercial fishers, recreational fishers, charter boat fishers, Indigenous people, conservationists, green groups, fish wholesalers, fish retailers, research scientists and DAF. It is supposed to be an independent group but it is run and the members were picked by DAF it is supposed to meet regularly but has only met about 4 times at appalling intervals of approx. 6 to 8 months. The group was working on ways to ensure sustainability in GOCIFF that were acceptable to all stakeholders.

Then separate to the GOCIFF an expert panel was set up and meets every three weeks – it's so secret we are not even allowed to know who sits on it – but we do know charter fishermen, recreational fishermen, indigenous fishermen all have a representative on the panel – but there is no commercial fisher?? And the commercial fisher is to be the one most affected by the closures???

Seriously?? Your office supports and condones this sneaky underhand behaviour?

The day before the last meeting of the GOCIFF held on the 5th of Sept 2023 there was a Fisherman only meeting with DAF held in Cairns; at this meeting the Fisherman were shown the new proposed closures and advised they had 7 to 10 days to respond. I understand that has now been pushed out – but we are unclear as to what date.

We as an association are appalled at the current suggested closures which have been proposed by said expert working panel once again with no commercial fisherman input – no stock assessments – no dedicated GOC science. Isn't that what the GOCIFF Working Group was about??

Whilst we appreciate the government is responding to a UNESCO assessment of the East Coast we do not believe it has considered the economic ramifications of these suggested closures as they have been applied to the GOC.

When the Commonwealth Marine Parks were proposed a proper economic study of stakeholders was undertaken by the Commonwealth. We answered and completed a number of questionnaires and were interviewed a number of times by a consultant paid to do the work. The whole process took just over 2 years. At the end Marine Parks did come in, but we felt we were at least part of the process. And believe boundaries of the Park were adjusted to take into consideration area vital to the economic certainty of fishers in the field.



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The Government and particularly your department seems confused with its policies, on the one hand job creation and the other with this proposed ban job losses – big losses in area's many of them aboriginal communities that have no or very few job opportunities. We bring to your attention again your own party's strategy.

*Agriculture and Fisheries 2023- 2027 Strategic Plan –
Vision is "Qld is prosperous and resilient, leading global food security and sustainability"
T8: Double the regional population outside Southeast Qld
G9: We capitalise on unique regional opportunities and assets.
G11: We value and invest in local businesses and workers.*

If your Department were genuinely concerned with genuine conservation of Endangered and Threatened Species this would not be limited to Qld waters. Your scientists, would, one hopes be intelligent enough to realise you are forcing your public to go offshore for its fish protein, to countries with little or no management policies in place, to make us eat imported Indonesian Basa injected full of chemicals and called mackerel?

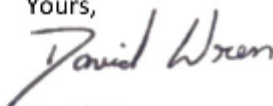
You should perhaps be calling for better practices overseas and banning the importation of such product.

If you were genuine in your approach you would be rewarding and supporting the endeavours of such fishers as Wren Fishing Pty Ltd who at the time of this announcement were on the verge of signing an agreement with Charles Darwin University to explore the options of zero shark catch with use of LED Lights and Shark Guards across the entire Gulf including both Qld and NT waters.

We don't come to you on bended knee asking for your consideration, we come to you demanding you Stand Up and start acting as a Fishing Minister and start protecting the industry and portfolio assigned to your care.

We invite you to come to our end of year Fisheries meeting, to be held in Karumba on the 12th of October 2023 to have discussions directly with Gulf Fishermen.

Yours,

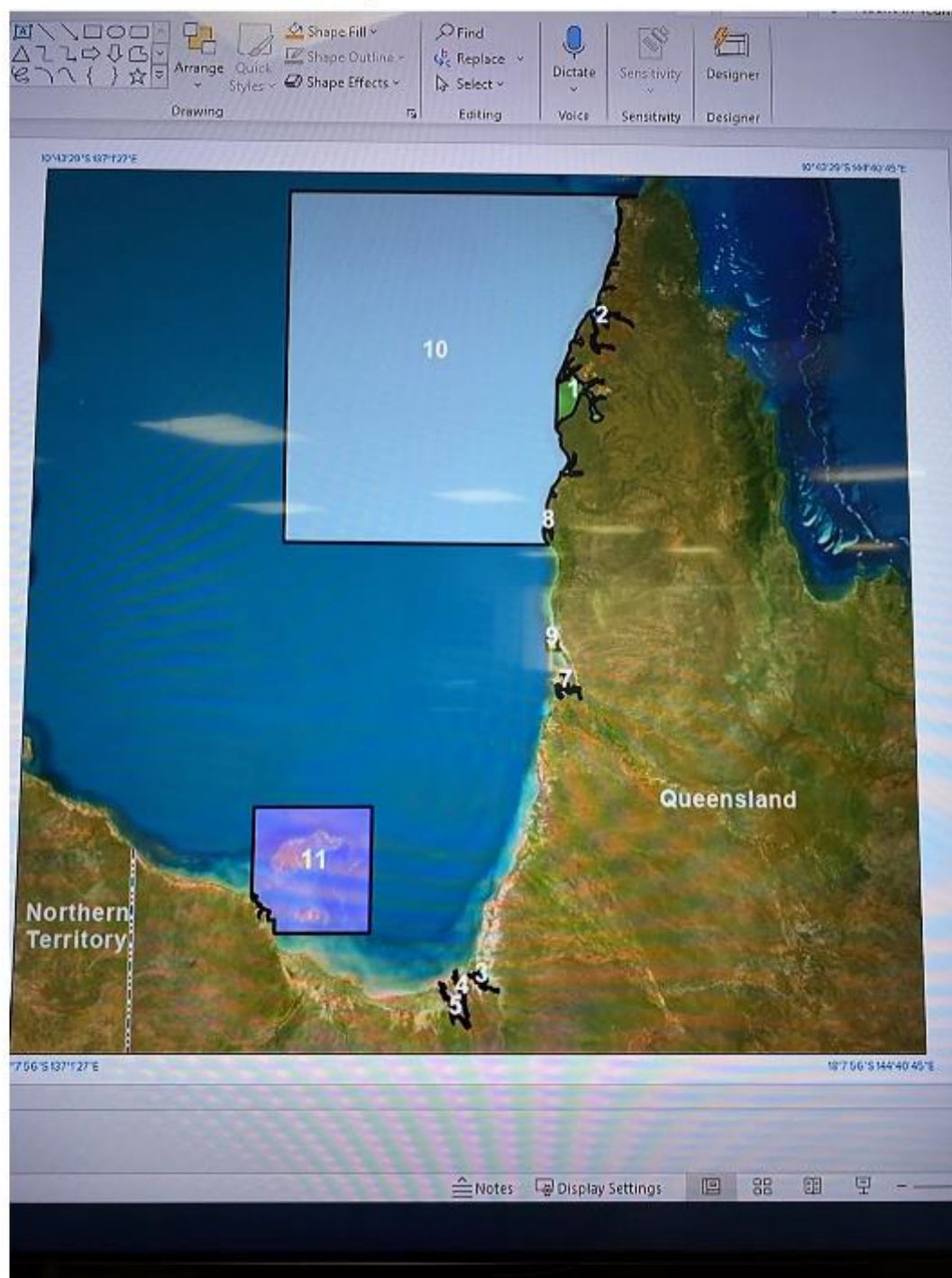


David Wren

President Gulf of Carpentaria Fisherman's Association

#	Area Closure
1	Albatross Bay (Weipa)
2	Wenlock/Ducie Rivers
3	Norman River (Karumba)
4	Bynoe River
5	Flinders River
6	All Rivers and Creeks
7	Mitchell River
8	Kirke River
9	Pormpuraaw
10	Northern Closure*
11	Mornington Island

*Includes all net symbols: N3, N12, N13, N11 & Fish trawl developmental fishery





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