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QSIA

**QUEENSLAND SEAFOOD
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MEDIA RELEASE

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PLANS TO TIGHTEN CONTROLS ON RAW PRAWN IMPORTS WELCOMED

THE Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) has welcomed Federal Government plans to tighten controls on imports of uncooked prawns.

QSIA President Mr Neil Green said the current low level of controls on raw prawn imports risked irreversible damage to the marine environment through possible introduction of foreign diseases.

"We have only just seen the proposed tighter import controls but, at first glance, they look a major win for the marine environment," Mr Green said. "Previous tests have shown imported prawns carry diseases that could cause big kills amongst our native prawns and other crustaceans, including mud crabs and blue swimmer crabs.

"Australia is one of the few prawn-producing nations free of these diseases, and their introduction here on diseased foreign product would be a huge blow to the Australian prawn-trawling and prawn-farming industries and would damage Australia's 'clean, green' image as well."

Mr Green said both Federal and State parliamentarians had worked to have the disease threat recognised and addressed.

"This is basically a federal issue and Nationals Senate Leader Ron Boswell made sure everyone who matters in the Federal Government knew about it, plus facilitating meetings between Biosecurity Australia and the QSIA. He did a great job.

"In Queensland, we had the strong support of Primary Industries & Fisheries Minister Tim Mulherin and his Department. It was the Department that first drew attention to the risk by publishing a warning to recreational anglers not to use imported raw prawns as bait because of the disease risk.

"It has also been an opportunity to work closely with the Australian Prawn Farmers Association, because we both have a common interest in protecting

the marine environment and protecting the disease-free status of Australian prawn stocks.

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“As I said, introduction of foreign diseases would be devastating for both the wild-catch and farmed prawn sectors. This has been a timely reminder how much both prawn fishermen and prawn farmers share in common and the value of working together.”

QSIA Trawl Committee Chairman Mr Robin Hansen, who has been active in working for tighter controls on raw prawn imports, also welcomed today’s announcement.

“This looks like a win for the Australian fishing industry’s future and the Australian marine environment,” Mr Hansen said. “Once diseases like white spot, yellowhead and Taura viruses got into our waterways, they would be there forever, causing major kills amongst wild and farmed prawns and other crustaceans.

“Overseas research and evidence has demonstrated the need for Australia to tighten its controls on imported raw prawns or risk introducing devastating foreign diseases into our wild and aquaculture stocks.

“Australia’s harvest from wild and aquaculture prawn stocks is currently valued at over \$600 million a year, and it is at risk from prawn diseases carried by imports,” Mr Hansen said. “Diseases known to be carried by imported raw prawns could have devastating consequences for both the Australian prawn fishing and farming sectors, costing hundreds of millions of dollars in lost production and hundreds of lost jobs, and blighting the marine environment forever.”

Mr Hansen stressed the QSIA had argued against only raw, uncooked, prawn imports.

“We aren’t talking about cooked prawns but the QSIA argued that raw prawns be banned because they will infect our own wild prawns and the environment. There’s nothing more certain. It’s only a question of when”.

Mr Hansen said Biosecurity Australia today had released a draft Import Risk Assessment (IRA) for imported raw prawns that recommended that, in future, prawns should only be allowed into Australia if they had been cooked or significantly processed to substantially reduce risk of introducing disease.

“This is a large document and it will need careful reading but the first impression is that the recommendations will see imports of most forms of raw prawns strictly controlled in future. The QSIA will certainly be encouraging the Federal

Government to carry through with these recommendations from their quarantine experts.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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