

Queensland Seafood Industry Association

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MEDIA RELEASE

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FISHERMEN NOT TO BLAME FOR TURTLE DEATHS IN GLADSTONE REGION

THE seafood industry has welcomed official confirmation that net fishermen are not responsible for the spate of turtle deaths in the Gladstone region in recent months.

Michael Gardner, President of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA), said fishermen had been widely blamed for the turtle deaths and were pleased to have been advised by DERM the cause of turtle deaths is due to multiple factors including environmental factors.

“Sadly, turtle deaths have continued unabated during the 60-day closure of the Boyne River mouth to net fishing, so obviously the problem is much wider.

“A meeting was held in Gladstone between representatives of the Department of the Environment & Resource Management (DERM), QSIA and fishermen and other industry representatives to evaluate all current information and develop a code of practice policy for ongoing net fishing operations with the lifting of the Interim Conservation Order (ICO).

Investigations into the turtle deaths are ongoing via the appointment of a scientific expert panel appointed by the Minister with ongoing pathological testing from autopsies performed on some of the turtles continuing. QSIA, like the rest of the community is very concerned that turtle deaths continued unabated during the netting closure.

“The QSIA warned at the beginning of the year that heavy rains and flooding could cause the deaths of dugong and turtles because flood waters often kill off the seagrass beds on which these animals feed. We have seen that happen before, including in Hervey Bay in 1992, when floods caused the deaths of hundreds of dugong.”

Mr Gardner said the State and Federal Government should take note of the damage to the marine environment that could be caused by land runoff.

“Call for net bans including a petition being distributed in the Gladstone and Rockhampton areas plus an online petition is factually incorrect and as such, QSIA has sought to have the petition removed. This is vilification of commercial fishermen in the Gladstone community without evidence.

Mr Gardner said that, despite the fact net fishing had been exempted as a significant cause, local fishermen had agreed to a new code of conduct that would provide more information for the Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS) and Fisheries Queensland (FQ).

Now the ICO has been lifted fishermen will have observers or QPWS officers on their boats and will use a call in system to notify Fisheries Queensland and DERM of any form of netting to be undertaken in the ICO are, the whole of the Boyne River and area at the mouth of the river.

With resumption of netting after the ICO was lifted and early advice from the observer program is despite substantial volumes of fish being caught there has been no turtle interaction. Again, this supports the notion that other factors are operating and causing the death of these turtles. Recent reports indicate an abundance of turtles along the flats to the east of the Boyne showing signs of starvation.

And in Townsville

Mr Gardner also said it was significant that more than 50 turtles had been found stranded on beaches in Townsville since the beginning of the year, more than five times the average number for the same period in previous years.

“It was reported that, of 23 turtles caught and examined by DERM staff last week, only six could be described as healthy. All the others showed signs of ill health, including malnutrition. Again, that looks like their feeding grounds have been affected by runoff.”

FURTHER INFORMATION: Mr Michael Gardner, President QSIA on 0409 991 150