

# Queensland Seafood

Industry Association

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## QSIA SUBMISSION . Assessment of the Coral Reef Fin Fish Fishery

QSIA considers that the Coral Reef Fin Fishery is facing significant issues. These have been highlighted in ongoing discussions with Fisheries Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. These discussions have taken place predominantly in response to the damage suffered by the reef as a result of a series of major cyclones over the last two years (Hamish, Anthony and Yasi) and the impact this has had on the commercial CRFF.

In the last two quota years there has been a substantial fall in the tonnage of coral trout caught associated with a falling CPUE.

The industry is facing difficult times and multiple factors are playing a part in this economic industry downturn. Some of these are out of the control of the industry such as the high Australian dollar. However the demand for the product (live fish) remains high in Asia.

While climatic events have been detrimental to the fishery there is a widespread belief held by fishing industry operators that these events have really only accelerated what is an underlying decline in populations of coral trout in the shallow sections of the reef where live fish vessels focus their operations. This reduction in the catch of coral trout has not been mirrored in the RTE and OS sections of the coral reef fishery where catches have been relatively stable. However many fishermen are convinced that these catches are also declining and the fish becoming more difficult to find and catch.

The general consensus of industry is that the overall level of effort from all sectors (commercial, recreational and charter) is too high and continues to escalate in the non quota section of the fishery i.e. the recreational and charter sectors. It is believed that this is having a detrimental effect on the stocks of coral reef fish. The catch data in the CRFFF is deficient. There is not a real-time reporting system in the commercial sector which means that the time lag in catch data collection makes it difficult to recognize and adjust to changing catch trends such as occurred with the cyclonic events.

There is little data on the escalating recreational catch. A Fisheries Queensland Performance Management System is only used for the commercial fishery because there is insufficient data to make it applicable for the recreational sector. However it is estimated this catch (which includes the charter sector) may exceed the commercial catch and is growing rapidly. It is the opinion of the QSIA and the industry in general that effort control in this fishery is required.

It would be inappropriate to simply reduce the commercial quota in isolation. This is a shared resource and as such when a necessity to adjust catch levels develops then it must be addressed in all sectors of the fishery.

The commercial industry believes it is an urgent necessity to:

1. Introduce real time data collection into the commercial fishery.
2. Develop a reliable data collection system for the recreational fishery.
3. Introduce a resource sharing arrangement that would see the development of an overall TAC with allocation of quota to each sector. Where effort and catch levels need to be adjusted on sustainability grounds then this is to be shared equally between sectors. A precedent for this resource allocation between sectors has already been established in other states such as the South Australian snapper fishery.

There must be accountability in all fishing sectors that access this valuable resource in the World Heritage area.

Michael Gardner for QSIA and the QSIA Line Committee