

Queensland Seafood Industry Association

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Seafood industry says: “Fisheries Minister, come to Gladstone”

THE Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) has called on Fisheries Minister Craig Wallace to visit Gladstone and see first-hand the disease problems affecting fish and other marine life.

QSIA spokesman Michael Gardner said the QSIA was “extremely disappointed” by recent media statements from Mr Wallace and his office on the state of fish health in Gladstone.

“We certainly strongly refute the reported statement by the Minister’s media advisor that the fishermen are talking ‘absolute nonsense’ in saying fish other than barramundi are affected,” Mr Gardner said. “That comment is insulting and just looks foolish to fishermen and marketers who have been handling product from Gladstone waters.

“I am sure Mr Wallace is well intentioned but he is clearly receiving poor advice. The Minister needs to jump on a plane, come to Gladstone, and talk to local people and fishermen who know what’s really going on.

“Virtually all species of fish in the harbour are being affected by disease. Not even the catfish are spared. Sharks and rays in particular are very resistant to environmentally induced diseases but they are now heavily involved with rashes, lesions and ulceration, something that fishermen and processors have not seen here before.

“Both professional and recreational fishermen say there is much less fish life left in the harbour. Why is the Minister’s office trying to focus on just barramundi when there is clearly a serious problem affecting all species of fish and other marine life as well, including turtles, dugong and dolphins? This has been evident for months now and communicated to the government.”

Mr Gardner said that the only positive diagnosis made on the harbour and river is the parasitic eye fluke in barramundi. The other diseases in the fish and sharks are undetermined but make affected fish unmarketable.

Mr Gardner spoke with the Minister yesterday and stressed that it was the industry that has had to lead the way in investigating the multiple health, fishery and environmental issues in the harbour. The Government also has to address the fact there is little belief or trust in some of the government’s publicised results of investigations to date.

“All the risk factors have to be considered, not just flooding and related events that happened almost a year ago. Reports from fishermen and other harbour users clearly identify water quality issues relating to the diseases and rashes seen on fish and some of the human health issues.

“This fish disease is a major issue for the fisheries portfolio. It is not only destroying the livelihoods of fishermen and marketers in the Gladstone region but also downgrading the reputation of all Queensland seafood and bringing down the prices being offered for a wide range of products.

“It’s time Fisheries Minister Craig Wallace took control of this issue and personally saw for himself what is happening in Gladstone, rather than relying on reports from people who seem to be talking down the concerns of the seafood industry and giving him less than the full facts.”

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