

Queensland Seafood Industry Association

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Media Statement

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SEAFOOD INDUSTRY “BITTERLY DISAPPOINTED” OVER PROPOSED CORAL SEA FISHING BANS

THE Queensland seafood industry is bitterly disappointed over fishing bans IN THE Coral Sea proposed by the Gillard Government.

The apparent demonising and exclusion of trawl fishing in the Gillard Government’s proposed Coral Sea Marine Reserve would potentially harm both seafood businesses and consumers, an industry spokesman said today.

Mr Geoff Tilton, President of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA), said the Gillard Government proposals to ban trawling in areas currently worked in waters offshore as far south as Bundaberg would cause economic harm in communities right down into southern Queensland.

“The so-called Coral Sea Commonwealth Marine Reserve will have a southern boundary just north of Fraser Island,” Mr Tilton said. “It lines up with the southern boundary of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park but runs east to the outer edge of the Australian 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

“This includes waters currently fished sustainably by prawn trawlers from as far south as Brisbane. It will have a major impact on families in coastal communities, especially fishing crew members, process workers, retail staff and consumers.

“It is ironic that sustainable trawling is an acceptable fishing method inside the GBR Marine Park but appears to be demonised and excluded in the deeper water areas outside the GBR.

“This reflects the influence on the Gillard Government by foreign multi-national environmental lobbying businesses like the American-based Pew Foundation, who clearly hate commercial fishing in general and trawling in particular.

“These overseas organisations and their local subsidiaries like the Australian Marine Conservation Society (AMCS) clearly will take whatever action they can wherever they can to prevent commercial fishermen operating and prevent consumers enjoying fresh local seafood.”

Mr Tilton said the Gillard Government plan to ban commercial fishing risked sacrificing people for superlatives.

“The very first paragraph of the Government statement released today proudly trumpets the fact the proposed Coral Sea marine park will be the largest in the world. So what?”

“The Government admits the marine environment in this vast region -- covering an area more than half the area of the entire State of Queensland -- is ‘in near pristine condition’ and then goes on to propose commercial fishing bans of one form or another throughout the whole reserve.

“At the same time, the Gillard Government is locking away enormous potential future food resources for Australia and the world that could be harvested sustainably. For what? To be able to say Australian fishermen and seafood consumers have made a greater sacrifice than any other equivalent group of people anywhere else in the world?”

Mr Tilton said the QSIA would co-ordinate a representative group of seafood industry participants to examine the proposals in detail and respond within the Government’s 90-day time frame.

“It is obvious that both the seafood industry and seafood consumers will be impacted by the Federal Government proposals but we will now examine the Canberra plan in detail.

“We will put forward recommendations to maintain the pristine nature of this vast area but allow sustainable commercial fishing to continue in line with Australia’s and world’s increasing need for protein foods.

“Whether the Gillard Government in fact has the ability to genuinely respond to community consultation or is already locked into an inflexible deal with the foreign multi-national environmental lobbyists like Pew and AMCS remains to be seen.”

FURTHER INFORMATION: Contact Geoff Tilton, QSIA President on 0438 135 659