

FACT SHEET 1- NET FREE AREAS (NFA’S)

Unfortunately much misinformation and dishonest campaigning has characterized the public discussion regarding the proposed creation of three commercial Net Free Areas on the east coast of Queensland. The following information and data relating to the proposed Net Free Areas has been compiled by the Queensland Recreational Fishing Network. All quoted catch data has been sourced from various publicly available Fisheries Qld (FQ) publications and sources and has been verified with FQ as accurate.

**#1. Will Net Free Areas see local fresh fish disappear from seafood outlets as claimed by the commercial fishing sector?**

The simple answer is absolutely not!

The average total annual net harvest by commercial fishers from the east coast of Queensland has been around 5,000 tonnes/year since 1999. The species make-up of the total catch has changed during this period, but the total tonnage has remained quite static.

Currently, the combined total commercial net harvest from the three proposed NFA’s is a mere 6***% of the total east coast harvest***.

Therefore to claim that the removal of 6% of the total harvest will somehow result in the disappearance of fresh fish from local outlets is clearly dishonest scaremongering and is designed to mislead the community into supporting calls and petitions objecting to the NFA’s.

**#2. Where do fish netted by commercial fishers end up?**

Since the industry was effectively deregulated when the Qld Fish Board was abolished decades ago, commercial fishers have been allowed to sell their product wherever they like – most often to the market that offers the highest prices. It is a reality that for a long time, higher prices for fresh fish are paid in our southern capital cities and on international markets. So it should come as no surprise that many commercial fishers choose to sell their product directly into these marketplaces, or through large wholesalers who then on-sell the product to far flung marketplaces where the prices are best.

Although exact figures are not available publicly, any regular monitoring of what is available from local fish shops and major supermarket chains reveals that the quantity of locally sourced fresh fish is extremely small compared to the total volume of fish being sold through these outlets. The reason for this has nothing to do with product availability, but purely price positioning and consumer preference.

The retail cost of local (Qld) fresh fish is seldom competitive with the likes of cheaper imported and farmed product, so it is only a very small boutique market that exists for genuine local (Qld) fresh fish in the retail sphere. A procession of well-intentioned business ventures have tried and failed to succeed by promoting and selling solely local/Qld sourced product. The harsh reality is that the true market is not large enough to sustain a business catering solely to consumers who specifically choose to source and consume local Qld fresh fish.

**#3. Who are the real consumers of locally caught fresh fish?**

This is actually a no-brainer. There are close to 700,000 Queenslanders (government data) who like to go recreationally fishing. Add their immediate families to this number and we’re looking at over 1,000,000 Queenslanders who are directly involved with someone who goes fishing.

Fishing is the last remaining true hunter/gatherer pursuit legally available to the average person these days. Recreational fishers in the main, like nothing better than to return home with a feed of fresh fish for the family. Unfortunately with our inshore fish stocks in particular being serially overfished and depleted, fewer and fewer recreational fishers are succeeding in catching and consuming their own inshore fresh fish these days.

So the answer as to who are the most significant consumers of locally caught fresh fish, are recreational fishers and their families by a very long way. Sadly to date, this huge segment has been essentially neglected and ignored by state governments of both political persuasions when it comes to fundamental fair fisheries resource allocation among users. The biggest single group of consumers, recreational fishers, have always been relegated to receiving the minor allocation of the resource when allocation decisions are made.

The creation of NFA’s will go a long way towards addressing and rebalancing this gross social injustice, as well as seeing our inshore fish stocks in some key areas afforded the opportunity to rebuild.

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FACT SHEET 2- NET FREE AREAS (NFA’S)

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**It is being claimed that hundreds of commercial fishers will lose their livelihood if NFA’s are introduced – is this true?**

In terms of gross exaggerations, this takes the cake, as only 6% of the total annual east coast net harvest will be impacted by the creation of three new NFA’s. There are currently around 300 large mesh entitlements on the east coast, as well as a further 300+ supposed commercial bait net entitlements, many of which are being misused to catch species for human consumption.

If we apply the simple formula of reducing the number of licences commensurate with the percentage reduction in harvest, we discover that at worst, the equivalent of just 15 large mesh licences would be removed from the fishery.

It is unclear what process the government intends to apply in terms of compensation/settlement for the affected commercial fishers adversely impacted by the creation of the three new NFA’s, but there is $10m set aside for this compensation. It would appear likely that the compensation/settlement package will be incredibly generous compared to what normal employees are entitled to when made redundant.

The east coast inshore commercial net fishery is desperately in need of a complete overhaul and reform if it is to be financially viable into the future, sustainably harvest the resource and be a socially respected enterprise.

A simple comparison with the situation in the Northern Territory demonstrates beyond any doubt, how poorly structured our inshore net fishery is.

There are now just 11 licenced commercial inshore net operators in the entire Northern Territory. A majority of their rivers are closed to commercial netting (NFA’s), yet the 11 remaining commercial netters continue to collectively harvest a significant quantity of fish annually and are extremely financially viable, with licence values on the open market around the $1m each.

So we shouldn’t be moaning about the possibility of losing 15 netters from Queensland as a result of the new NFA’s, because in truth, we should be aiming to reduce the fleet by many times that number if the industry is to viably exist into the future and inshore fish stocks rebuild to levels they were just a few decades ago.

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