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Fisheries Division  
GPO Box 990  
Darwin NT 0801  
AUSTRALIA

Mr Neil Byron  
Presiding Commissioner  
ESD Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
Telstra Tower Level 28  
35 Collins Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Mr Byron

Thank you for your letter of 28 August 1998 to Mr Ray Clarke of this Department regarding the Productivity Commission's inquiry into the implementation of ESD by Commonwealth departments and agencies.

Overall, the Northern Territory Fisheries Joint Authority (NTFJA) believes that the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD) are being successfully pursued by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, the Fisheries and Aquaculture Branch of the Department of Primary Industry and Energy and Environment Australia (EA). It is also pleasing to see the increasing cooperation between these agencies in the areas of both policy and research.

For the NTFJA, the activities of Standing Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture and the associated Ministerial Council on Forestry, Fisheries and Aquaculture are also relevant. Both have played a major role in policy making that has led to the development of a National Bycatch Policy (due to be endorsed at the end of this year), National R&D Plan (endorsed in 1997) and National Translocation Policy (currently out for public comment). It has also been a key forum for agreeing to revised jurisdictional arrangements for many fisheries (recreational, charter and commercial southern shark) which is based upon many of the ESD principles.

There is scope for improving the relationship between SCFA and Standing Committee on Conservation where a number of common issues are discussed, eg. marine pests and marine protected areas. Poor exchange of information and inadequate communication has led to some duplication and unnecessary complications in the development of ESD related policy.

In terms of monitoring whether the Commonwealth has implemented an ESD approach in fisheries, I am aware of numerous projects that have either been conducted or are still underway, by the Bureau of Resource Sciences (BRS) and the Marine Research Division of CSIRO. The BRS also provides the annual Fisheries Status Reports for Commonwealth fisheries, which comment specifically on the pursuit (or otherwise) of ESD principles, and is certainly using its own and related research to improve its assessment ability. The close working relationship between the BRS and AFMA is useful in this regard, since it enables easy dialogue to make sure those who are responsible for pursuing the ESD objective are aware of new tools and techniques.

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation is taking a similar approach with its recent launch of 'Fisheries Research Priorities for Ecosystem Protection' which it is seeking to have adopted by both SCFA as part of its existing R&D Strategic Plan, and EA through the Natural Heritage Trust, Coasts and Clean Seas Program.

An important aspect of increased cooperation to pursue ESD principles which is yet to be unveiled are the institutional arrangements which will assist in the implementation of the Oceans Policy. The NTFJA is of the view that given the progress currently being made under existing structures there is no need for major institutional reform or the creation of a new body. A cost-effective approach would be to have designated officers in each jurisdiction perform a coordination function on Oceans Policy matters.

The NTFJA places particular importance on AFMA's involvement in the annual Northern Australia Fisheries Management Workshop in which the NT, WA, Qld and the Commonwealth come together to reach agreement on management, research, education and compliance for the sustainable management of often shared fisheries resources. Underpinned by a formal memorandum of understanding, these workshops have lead to complementary and cooperative arrangements for shared and highly migratory fisheries throughout northern Australia.

In conclusion, the NTFJA is satisfied with the progress being made by the Commonwealth in pursuing the principles of ESD and that the initiatives currently under way in fisheries research and management will further enhance this.

If you wish to discuss the above matters further with the NTFJA, please contact Mr Ray Clarke on (08) 8999 4335.

Yours sincerely

DAVID HALL  
NT Member of the NTFJA