

23 June 2010

RDC Inquiry
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
Melbourne VIC 8003

via email: rural-research@pc.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

The Northern Territory Seafood Council (NTSC) is the peak representative body for Northern Territory seafood industry. Representing some 266 licence holders, NTSC membership includes the Trader/Processor sector and all wild catch and aquaculture operations operating within the Northern Territory, with the exception of the Northern Prawn Fishery.

NTSC represents industry's interests in a diverse range of forums at the Northern Territory level. These include a number of regional Aboriginal fishery consultative committees, fishery management advisory committees, conferences and workshops on specific issues such as the environment and native title, formal parliamentary committees, individual government and non government bodies and the media.

At the national level the Northern Territory Seafood Council is involved in a wide range of issues, from maritime and industry training to such issues as biodiversity, marine protected areas, foreign incursions into fishing grounds and resource sharing.

The Northern Territory seafood industry is a key economic contributor to the Northern Territory. The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector contributes 2.4% of employment within the Northern Territory¹ (ABS 2006) and the seafood industry also plays an integral role in supporting both the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Research Development and Extension (RD&E) for the seafood industry is vital to the seafood industry. The utilisation of public resources must be done in a sustainable and responsible manner. The diversity and complexities of the seafood industry warrant the need for stock assessments and monitoring of fisheries to ensure the management arrangements which govern the industry are ensuring the industry can develop, optimise efficiencies and maintain its sustainability.

Investments made by an individual in the RD&E area for the seafood industry is commonly applicable to other operators wither within the same or similar fishery/operations. Additionally the investments made by today's industry contribute to the successful operations of future generations. It is the continued responsibility of both Government and industry to ensure our public resources are managed and utilised in a sustainable manner.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006 Census of Population and Housing

The Northern Territory Seafood Council is supportive of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) and the role it plays in ensuring appropriate and meaningful work is undertaken to advance and improve our seafood industry. The professionalism which the FRDC and its staff continue to display is a valuable attribute that further assists in building industry's confidence in the establishment.

Due to the multiple sectors (indigenous, recreational and commercial) within the seafood industry a high level of coordination is required to ensure appropriate and complimentary RD&E activities are undertaken. The FRDC plays an important role in providing partnerships between the different sectors, various government departments and community groups. The current FRDC structure implements a needed common approach to RD&E for our multi sector, multi species and multi stakeholder resource.

With the assistance of FRDC funding, the Northern Territory Seafood Council has been able to undertake projects which have been critical to the NT seafood industry, two examples of which are described below:

FRDC Project No: 2008/311. People Development Program: Moving to a common vision and understanding for equitable access for indigenous, recreational and commercial fishers:- Northern Territory fishing and seafood industry delegation to New Zealand

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation in conjunction with the Northern Territory Seafood Council, the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the NT and the Northern Land Council supported an historic NT fishing and seafood industry fact finding delegation to New Zealand in April 2008.

The delegation included commercial, recreational, Aboriginal Territorians and NT Government representatives who investigated fishery resource management arrangements in New Zealand to identify how Indigenous participation in commercial operations and recreational and customary use of fish stocks are undertaken.

The fact finding mission was beneficial for all delegates, allowing each to gain an understanding of how the Maori have been able to increase ownership and use NZ fisheries and how the various sectors within the New Zealand fishery and New Zealand Government are dealing with the changing fisheries environment. NT stakeholders, especially Aboriginal Territorians, have since and will be able to use the lessons learned from this experience to more effectively deal with future developments in the Northern Territory.

In addition to the lessons learned, the project allowed for relationships between the sectors to be developed which have been instrumental to date in the success of the on going Blue Mud Bay negotiations.

FRDC Project No: 2004/008. Improving demonstrated environmental accountability in the Northern Territory Fishing Industry

At the time of the project application being submitted in December 2003, predominantly negative media coverage, primarily of the Barramundi fishery, brought home to licensee groups how important it was to their future

investments to be able to physically demonstrate responsibility and environmental awareness to both the Government and the wider Northern Territory community.

The difficulty facing those licensee groups was that the Northern Territory Seafood Council, which administers them, did not have the staff to adequately assist the developments they sought.

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and NT Government funding enabled the Seafood Council to employ a project officer to realise the development and introduction of the identified Codes of Practice and Environmental Management Systems (EMSs).

At the commencement of the project there was quite a degree of scepticism within industry about the value of EMSs to businesses operating in it. The end of the project saw a lessening of that scepticism and a significantly greater understanding of the importance of being able to publicly demonstrate ecological and environmental responsibility. This project resulted in nine full EMSs being developed.

The investment of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, the Northern Territory Government and Northern Territory Seafood Council members in the project has been well worthwhile as the benefits to industry far outweigh the cost of that investment.

The current model which the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation utilises works well to ensure that industry contributions are invested in practical and useful research, development and extension activities that have on the ground applications and outcomes. Of particular benefit and a success of the current model is that the projects administered by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation are focused on the outcomes they will deliver.

The current model does not support projects within the area of marketing and promotion of the seafood industry. This is an area that increasingly is becoming more important to the industry due to a range of external threats to the industry such as imported products and misinformation about the industry in regards to its sustainability credentials. It would be of benefit to have the scope of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation amended to include promotional and marketing activities for the seafood industry.

Yours sincerely



Katherine Sarneckis
Chief Executive Officer