

Property Right Submission From Tebco Fishing Company

To the WA Legislative Councils Standing Committee into Property Rights.

Our family business Tebco Fishing company has licenses in a few WA fisheries mainly lobster and in a few other demersal fisheries. We have always understood that we don't own the resource we only have access to take an annual share of a community resource.

We are very fortunate in Western Australia to have very robust fisheries management backed up by good science. This has allowed for the successful commercial exploitation of these community owned resources providing seafood for consumption and employment opportunities leading to the development of many coastal towns and regional infrastructure. The fisheries management has been very inclusive with the active fishers, the scientific analysis of data is given and rationale behind management decisions is explained. This approach gives fishers a great understanding of the individual fisheries and an acceptance for catch reductions.

Historically all fisheries in WA have been effort based. Management starts by restricting the number of people who can access the resource and then other input controls are placed to reduce the catch. As time passes and technology advances fishing effort becomes greater more input controls are used reducing a fisher's efficiency. This poor management technique has led in modern times to catch quotas which directly control the harvest level.

While the fishing licenses might not have property right the same as land we have always treated them as if they did, if you own land you must look after it or the land will lose its value it's the same with fishing licenses. This has led commercial fishers to become custodians of the fish resources and aquatic environments.

Governments in the past have been reluctant to issue more secure property rights to fishers as fisheries management is not an exact science and subject to large environmental changes. The fisheries resource allocation policies in WA have led to very well defined shares of fisheries. All of the fisheries we are involved with are fully allocated; no more units can be issued. Each unit represents a small share in that commercial allocation, be it catch kgs or effort used. Property right should be strengthened to reflect this. It is not a defined tonnage, or unit of effort, it is a share of the total commercial allocation. It must be explicitly defined to reflect this.

The modern nature of fishing has meant that these catch shares can be very valuable. It is unfair to have such assets potentially reduced or even removed by poor Governmental policy. A strengthening of the property right associated with fishery assets will give more security to investors and finance lenders.

In December 2018 Fisheries Minister Kelly announced proposed changes to the Western Rock Lobster fishery and everyone across all fisheries in Australia were horrified. The draconian socialist nature of the policy went against everything fishers have been told in the past when catch reductions are announced. The WRL fishery had massive cuts and changes in the previous decade from a big stock reduction to a very good recovery and become very profitable fishery again.

This is why Fishing Licensees need a more secure right, fishers and owners of entitlement need some certainty when they are taking big catch reductions and reduced income that if or when a fishery returns to a safe stock level that the increased stock won't be reissued in new licenses like the proposed lobster fishery changes.

We have Gascoyne snapper quota this fishery has many issues and the stocks are low, the fishery is currently only fishing 10% of the allocated quota. This is a desperate effort to rebuild the stocks. The fishers understand that these reductions must be in place even though they could catch more in the short term and make a extra profit but it is about the long term. These massive catch reductions would not have been accepted if the catch does not return to fishers when the stocks increase.

I am sure you will get many more submissions and they will cover all the other aspects regarding property rights our view is very basic. Fishing licenses need to be as secure as possible so that the resource is managed with a long term view to preserve the stocks and create the best economic harvest of the resource.

Regards
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Tebco Fishing Company

