

Hon Dr G I Gallop MLA  
Premier  
24th Floor  
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PERTH WA 6000

Dear Premier

### **Concern over Consultative Processes for Marine Parks**

Recfishwest is becoming increasingly bitter about the process failure which is being demonstrated through the current marine parks planning process.

Our concerns are not new. Indeed, we wrote to you in July 2003 with respect to the need for fisheries involvement in the process. We said in part:

*“The current marine park planning process has failed to achieve community consensus. Recfishwest has previously pointed out to both the Minister for Environment and the Minister for Fisheries the weakness of the present system of marine conservation in Western Australia. It endeavours to achieve its objectives by concentrating only on marine parks instead of the whole range of marine conservation management processes that are available. The lack of formal provision for co-operation between the Departments of Fisheries and Conservation and Land Management (CALM) is a part of this problem.”*

It is our strongly held view that the situation regarding the CALM and MPRA processes has deteriorated significantly in the last year. Even though we have contributed at every single opportunity to the processes in the last year, we have not been heard or been allowed to enter into meaningful negotiations on matters that have the greatest impact by far, on our constituents.

Mr Premier you released a document about Consulting Citizens which your Departments apparently consider to be a farce, because that is how CALM and the MPRA have been treating the commitment of your Government to consult with the community.

For example, at a recent planning session at Perth Zoo, run by the MPRA there was universal concern about the lack of adequate engagement of the wider community in the process or feedback to the community on the reasons for final decisions. We have not seen any proceedings of this workshop or any changes whatsoever to the selective use of supportive submissions while ignoring any other considerations.

This has recently spilled over into a public debate in the Sunday Times with Dr Wilson again attempting to marginalise recreational fishing interests. The assertion that the MPRA is interested in public comment is not borne out by the facts.

The composition and use of the Coral Coast Parks Advisory Committee (CCPAC) as the primary reference group for the marine park management plan has been contentious due to the lack of marine expertise and the primary terrestrial focus of this group.

This CCPAC was not provided with the public submissions and was instead provided with a summary of submissions, which we believe was prepared by CALM staff. Recfishwest has been provided with a copy of this summary of submissions which clearly and grossly misrepresents our submission. Not only was the context of our comments totally lost, areas where we supported or opposed individual proposals were ignored.

This coupled with a total lack of direction on weighting of peak body submissions, meant that the CCPAC could not possibly be aware of the full ramifications of the community feeling on the issues or whether in fact compromises were proposed or contemplated.

We understand that in spite of this handicap, the CCPAC made a number of recommendations for changes to the draft plan. We believe that each and every one of these recommendations has been contemptuously ignored by the MPRA which appears to be accountable to no-one.

The situation in Exmouth and around Ningaloo is reaching flashpoint, with CALM pouring petrol on the flames. Just last week, a visiting elderly gentleman who fishes was told by a CALM employee at the shopping centre that fishermen were no longer welcome in Exmouth. This gentleman was so upset that the local tackle store representative accompanied him to discuss the matter, eventually learning that 'in her opinion' fishing should be banned from the entire Ningaloo Marine Park!

The Ningaloo draft plan is nothing more than a recreational fishing management plan and has been undertaken without adequate consultation or engagement of recreational fishers. The submissions from the local Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee, Recfishwest, Gamefishing Association and many other anglers have been patently ignored. There has been no assessment of risk associated with fishing, rather a power play by CALM and the MPRA to lock up our coast.

Mr Premier, you must understand the depth of feeling towards CALM and the MPRA by the recreational fishing community, a tiny proportion of which was revealed by Mr Hal Harvey in the Sunday Times. Local businesses, recreational fishers and tourists are being greatly affected by a process which ignores your own directives of community engagement.

The situation with Rowley Shoals is at least as bad. There has been NO meaningful consultation with recreational fishers. The comprehensive submission by Recfishwest has not even been acknowledged, but we now expect not even the most common courtesy from the MPRA, CALM processes.

Incredibly, the rationale for locking up 95% of the available fishing areas, according to Mr Chris Simpson from CALM was that a dive charter boat hadn't seen any hump-headed Maori wrasse on one day at the Rowley Shoals reef. When it was pointed out that this species was already totally protected at the instigation of recreational fishers through Fisheries legislation, we were told that only CALM could provide adequate protection. When questioned as to the enforcement difficulties of numerous zones at Rowley Shoals, and the benefits of a more lateral approach such as our submission suggested, these were dismissed as trivial.

Therefore, we ask you Mr Premier, if it is your intention to close off 95% of available inshore waters on a single commercially vested comment which fits CALM's agenda?

Mr Fred Reibling may have already informed you about the depth of feeling about the Dampier Marine Park and CALM's over-riding desire to impact as much as possible on recreational fishing. This proposal, especially when viewed in conjunction with the naïve Moncks Head boat ramp proposal and Ningaloo situation described above is likely to have a huge political impact.

There has been no contact with Recfishwest for many months on Dampier Marine Park and our repeated attempts to work out compromise solutions have been ignored. CALM have also ignored the incredible inconsistency that it will be permissible to drive a jet ski at any speed in turtle or dugong sanctuaries (the boundaries of which have not been subject of controversy), but to troll a lure for Spanish mackerel in vast areas of the park will be banned to preserve biodiversity!

Recfishwest does not know how long it will be able to work within these flawed and ongoing processes. We have attempted to work very hard to achieve compromise and a transparent and defensible result from Marine Park planning but have been ignored patronised or insulted on nearly every occasion. We have always provided carefully considered and responsible submissions in a timely manner but cannot see any evidence whatsoever that they have been given the consideration which our stakeholders believe is at the very least afforded through common courtesy.

Furthermore Recfishwest has not received a response to our letter dated 16 August "***Release of the Ningaloo Marine Park Draft Management Plan***" regarding our bitter disappointment of the treatment of recreational fishing in what is perceived as being a deliberate strategy of the Government, and our request for an urgent meeting in order to discuss these critical concerns.

Recfishwest recently raised concerns about the Cape to Cape process with the Minister for the Environment in conjunction with WAFIC and commercial fishing interests. The Minister agreed that there was a real need.

The response was the allowing of a 15 minute presentation which we were told was to be solely on planning issues and not on process to the MPRA and local Capes Advisory Committee. In discussions with several members of the Capes Advisory Committee, we were told that only process issues were to be discussed. Given the unprofessionalism displayed in the recent past, we can only conclude that we were deliberately misled by the MPRA so that our submissions could be dismissed, as we believe they have been.

Irrespective, 15 minutes to talk about 28 separate zones and over 100 boundaries is shameful. We believe that this inadequate time frame was to be able to convince you and the government that this patronising attempt at consultation was sufficient to meet the community needs.

The inclusion of the Hardy Inlet after less than 10 minutes debate, ignoring the properly transparent council forum on Busselton Jetty and the deliberate avoidance of recreation zoning are only some of the explosive issues that have been trivialised during the Cape to Cape process.

We would like to meet with you, as we have done in the past to explain the extent of the ill-content with the processes and make you aware of the previously indefatigable attempt to reach reasonable and responsible compromise in the past.

If any or all of the above-mentioned parks were to be announced without further consultation, we predict considerable public backlash, far greater than the Jurien fiasco.

Please feel free to contact me directly,

Yours sincerely

Des Wood  
Chairman  
10 September 2004

cc                   Hon Kim Chance MLC Minister for Fisheries  
                          Hon Bob Kucera MLA, Minister for Tourism  
                          Hon Dr Judy Edwards MLA Minister for the Environment