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Dear Katherine

RE Recreational Fishing in Australia – 2010 and Beyond - Recfishwest Submission

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee discussion paper – *Recreational Fishing in Australia – 2010 and Beyond*.

Recfishwest is the government recognised peak recreational fishing body in Western Australia and have representation on national issues as a member organisation of Recfish Australia. Recfishwest places the highest priority on preserving the future of recreational fishing and the sustainability of the resources it depends upon.

Recfishwest supports the development of a national strategy for recreational fishing to help set the direction for future investment in this important recreational activity to the overall economy. While Recfishwest supported the 1994 National Recreational Fishing Policy, a criticism shared by many including Recfishwest, was the lack of adoption and suitable commitment of funding to ensure the goals and principles were met. Given that the previous policy is 15 years old it is important that it now be reviewed.

Recfishwest is concerned that this new policy document will also struggle to deliver on the ambitious goals and principles outlined without significant increases in funding allocations for recreational fishing. We also believe that the removal of funding for Recfish Australia will seriously limit the ability to extend the outcomes of the strategy to the recreational fishing public.

Recfishwest has the following comments relating to the Goals outlined in the discussion paper;

Goals

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that recreational fishing is acknowledged as an important activity that contributes to the health and well-being of Australian Society?

Strongly Agree – A focus on the associated health benefits, both physically and mentally, has been a significant gap in past investments in recreational fishing. Recfishwest supports the strategy to promote the health and well-being benefits of recreational fishing, however, believe there is insignificant investment in the context of the large number of other priorities identified in the paper.

Recfishwest has run a highly successfully Fishing Clinic program over the past 10 years promoting these important health messages. Funding sources have varied significantly over the years, including state government funding, private investment and commonwealth funding. These initiatives would benefit from a regular commitment of commonwealth funding to ensure community education programs can be run with some certainty.

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that Recreational fishers are respected partners with government, Indigenous Australians and the broader community in the stewardship of Australia's aquatic environment?

Agree – The recreational sector is suffering from a lack of recognition of our significance in the stewardship of Australia's aquatic environment. Recreational fishers are reliant on healthy aquatic resources and have a good track record of proactively canvassing management reform where required.

Recfishwest strongly supports the development of young future leaders in the recreational fishing industry. Recfishwest ran a highly successful young future leaders program in 2008 through funding from the commonwealth Recreational Fishing Community Grants Program. Despite having strong interest to run another program we have struggled to find a suitable funding source for this highly lauded program. We believe this goal should focus heavily in investing in the next generation of recreational fishing leaders through similar leadership programs.

*Is an important goal for the discussion paper that **recreational fishers have access to a fair and reasonable share of Australia's fish resources?***

Agree – A lack of any recognized property right for the recreational sector is an impediment to future resource sharing negotiations of Australia's fish resources. Fundamental to the allocation issue is the need to identify users, define resource shares, allocate and manage them. Integral to achieving this is the concept of access entitlements (who has the right to fish) and ownership of the resource (how secure is that right).

Little work has been done in relation to the precise nature of rights under fisheries legislation and approaches to, and implications of, attaining a change in the nature of those rights. Such work needs to be at the 'grass roots' level and readily understandable by policy makers and stakeholders.

*Is it important that an **information base is made available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community?***

Strongly Agree – The 2000 National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey is now 10 years old and there is a strong need to collect recreational fishing data at the national level. The value of information is dependent upon its relevance and quality. The historical experience of many data capture initiatives is that the quality of information is poor or the right data has not been collected. The data simply does not match the requirements or is difficult or impossible to incorporate into appropriate policy decisions.

*Is an important goal for the discussion paper that **Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future?***

Agree - It is important that recreational fishers develop a stewardship for their environment and fish resources. This is best achieved by effectively engaging with the recreational sector on relevant issues involving stock sustainability as well as enhancement opportunities.

A well-structured and properly funded national recreational fishing peak body is required to ensure Australian fishers are appropriately represented on national issues. The withdrawal of funding for Recfish Australia will severely inhibit progress against this goal and represents a weakness of the strategy.

*Is an important goal for the discussion paper that the **recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation?***

Agree – A strong and vibrant recreational fishing sector should encourage future investment from industry. Improvement of fishing opportunities and facilities should be a priority for encouraging future participation.

Recreational fishing represents a healthy family activity that should be encouraged amongst the Australian population.

Conclusions

Recfishwest is overall supportive of the goals and principles contained with the discussion paper. However, we believe the paper may be over ambitious in what it is trying to achieve given the limited commitment of funding from the commonwealth government for recreational fishing. Recfishwest is looking forward to receiving further advice on the implementation of these strategies as we believe we have a number of projects that could go a long way to addressing them.

If the committee require any further information or clarification regarding Recfishwest's submission please do not hesitate to contact me on (08) 9246 3366.

Yours sincerely

Frank Prokop
Executive Director

13 May 2010