

Hon Tony Burke
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Dear Minister

Recfishwest concerns over the future of Recfish Australia

Recreational fishing is an important activity for at least one in four Australian's, and an estimated 645,000 people in Western Australia. Fishing generates direct expenditure of at least \$2 billion per annum. It is the lifeblood of many regional areas where employment and development are reducing in many instances. It is one of the most important activities associated with the Australian way of life.

Recreational fishing also has enormous social, health and lifestyle benefits including getting people outdoors, combating obesity, learning about the environment, relaxation, sport and provision of personally caught seafood which is the freshest possible.

It is a very sad fact that the commonwealth government currently provides no financial support to the peak body but spends billions of dollars on federal and state environmental and natural resource management. For example, Caring for Our Country is a \$2.25 billion five-year funding program but recreational fishing does not qualify. The Commonwealth found \$220 million to 'correct' management measures in commercial fisheries. You have recently announced funding for Oceanwatch which is an important organisation but provides a service to infinitely fewer Australians than Recfish Australia. Indeed, recreational fishing is the largest unsupported industry in Australia.

The peak body, Recfish Australia, currently gets no direct support. This must be changed immediately because without a national peak body recreational fishers cannot be effectively involved in key Commonwealth decisions which impact on the future of recreational fishing and all Australians e.g. Marine Bioregional Planning, Mako shark decisions, animal welfare, recreation management and the Coral Sea Conservation Zone.

For nearly 25 years Recfish Australia has repeatedly demonstrated, with limited resourcing, key benefits of strategic leadership and co-ordination of a diverse recreational fishing community:

- Liaison with the federal Government and agencies/departments
- Sustainable fisheries management
- Leadership and community partnerships
- Community monitoring of stocks and habitat
- Increased safety
- Coordinated communications
- Development and education of sustainable fishing practises
- Consolidation of state peak body responses on national issues, including conservation and climate change.

Recfishwest is a committed member organisation of Recfish Australia. We currently supply the Chairman of the Board, even though this frequently means that national business interferes with Recfishwest activities. Although Recfishwest has a reputation for successful negotiation with government in our own right, Recfish Australia undertakes many important tasks at the national level on our behalf.

Recfish Australia has an important lead role on national issues such as the recent Mako shark ban (and other EPBC and CITES issues), the Commonwealth Marine Bioregional Planning process, and importation risks associated with fish products and aquarium fish to name but a few.

The Recfishwest resources at a state level are limited, and issues such as the Mako shark ban highlighted extremely important principles of engagement and process but the issue itself was significantly less prominent in WA than it was in Victoria and Tasmania. It would be impossible for Recfishwest to respond effectively to national issues that affect our recreational fishing sector without an appropriately supported national organisation.

Recfish Australia's mission is "One voice promoting sustainable fishing and representing recreational fishers at a national level." It is highly likely at this stage that Recfish Australia will be wound up from about April 2010 and that voice will be lost.

The future of strategic, sustainable, community supported recreational fishing co-ordination on national issues is under severe threat unless there is recognition of the benefits and importance of recreational fishing in the Commonwealth government and bureaucracy.

The recreational sector has made enormous progress in changing community attitudes to sustainable management and our role in the many diverse processes. This unfortunately does not appear to be recognised at the national level and one of the fundamental activities of the Australian way of life could be jeopardised for want of around \$200,000 per year against GST revenue alone of the order of \$100 to \$200 million.

Recommendations

1. CPI indexed funding for Recfish Australia from the Commonwealth Government of a minimum of \$200,000pa from 1 July 2010 for the next 3 years, which could be provided out of the unspent RFAC funding. Funding would be based on agreed performance targets being met under a service agreement.
2. National grant projects such as Caring for Our Country, and the public good component of FRDC funding are redesigned to allow overt recognition of the benefits of recreational fishing and regional communities so that Recfish Australia can develop partnerships commensurate with the economic and lifestyle benefits which we provide.
3. Recfish Australia and the Commonwealth Government agree on a list of priority projects, issues, timeframes and resources to consult and implement.

Recfish Australia is working extremely hard to overcome the negative perceptions that some people have about its representativeness, services and achievable outcomes. Recfish Australia has joined the Boating and Fishing Alliance to better separate the leadership and representation roles from the lobbying role.

Recfishwest looks forward to a positive response on the recommendations listed above. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any queries or additional information that may be required in support of retaining and financially supporting Recfish Australia for the benefit of Australia's diverse recreational fishing community.

Andrew Matthews

Chairman

Recfishwest