



The Hon Mark Furner MP
Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
and Minister for Rural Communities

Our ref: CTS 14253/22
Your ref: A925545

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14 September 2022

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Services
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 17 August 2022 regarding Petitions received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly No. 3793-22; 3588-21 and 3697-22 on 16 August 2022.

The Palaszczuk Government is committed to ensuring fisheries resources are managed in a sustainable and responsible manner, which recognises the interests of all Queenslanders. It is important we carefully manage sustainable access to these resources to ensure they can provide future generations with the same benefits we enjoy today.

There have been ongoing calls for the reform of fisheries management practices within Queensland, commencing with the MRAG Asia Pacific review *Taking Stock: modernising fisheries management in Queensland*. The Palaszczuk Government committed to the modernisation of fisheries management through the release of the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027*, which recognised that the previous fisheries management framework was outdated and was not keeping pace with community expectations or best practice fisheries management.

The Strategy sets out the reform agenda over 10 years and seeks to create a modern and responsive fisheries management system built upon a foundation of better data and research, stronger stakeholder engagement and more responsive decision-making. This is being delivered primarily through a transition to more comprehensive stock assessments, harvest strategies and adaptive management with ongoing oversight by fishery working groups.

A total of \$45.8 million has been invested by the Queensland Government to support implementation to date, with a further \$16.2 million committed for 2022-23. I am pleased to advise that at the halfway mark of the ten year reform program, more than two-thirds of the 33 actions in the Strategy have been completed.

The Strategy is informed by the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel, which provides independent expert advice to the Minister responsible for fisheries, and also Fisheries Queensland, on best practice fisheries management and implementation of the Strategy. This is designed to ensure that we have a modern, responsive and consultative approach to fisheries management, which ensures fishing is a low risk to Queensland's aquatic resources and meets broader community expectations and values.

This commitment to improvement may result in some dissatisfaction with changing management arrangements across our fisheries resources. However, when faced with information that indicates change is required, the Queensland Government is required to act in the best interests of all Queenslanders and to ensure that our resources are managed sustainably. It should also be noted that many of our fisheries operate in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area.

Following extensive consultation with fishers, industry bodies, recreational fishing groups, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other key stakeholders, new management arrangements for the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery are set to be introduced from October this year. These arrangements strike a balance between providing the vital protections necessary to rebuild the depleted fish stock and allowing more controlled access for recreational and commercial fishers.

Measures include changes to recreational and commercial catch limits and the introduction of seasonal closures in the northern and southern areas of the fishery to address heavy fishing pressure on spawning aggregations and migratory fish.

These measures will be complemented by a new smartphone app that will allow recreational fishers to voluntarily report their Spanish mackerel catch and instances of shark depredation. In addition to this, the Queensland Government will be establishing a new education and awareness program to promote best practice catch, release and handling techniques for Spanish mackerel.

Under Federal and Queensland Government harvest strategy guidelines, appropriate management action is required to rebuild depleted fish stocks where the biomass has fallen below the limit reference point of 20 per cent biomass. Doing nothing is not an option and would go against the fundamental principles of the Strategy, the main objective of the *Fisheries Act 1994* and the Queensland Government's responsibility to ensure our public fishery resources are managed in a responsible and sustainable manner.

If action is not taken to significantly reduce fishing pressure on the east coast Spanish mackerel stock, there is a real risk of further biomass decline and potential collapse, which would result in long-lasting and far more significant economic impacts for commercial fishers, recreational fishers, fish processors, café and restaurant owners and the broader community.

If your office would like further information, please contact my office on 07 3719 7420.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Furner'.

MARK FURNER MP

Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and

Minister for Rural Communities