



# Fishing for the Future

PO BOX 3013 Warner QLD 4500  
www.sunfishqld.com.au

Phone (07) 3882 4518  
ABN 26 590 693 754

## Submission by Sunfish Queensland on "Fishing in the Burdekin community: your view" 24 May 2011

### Background

This submission to the Queensland Government is in response to the Fisheries Queensland/Queensland Government public consultation paper "Fishing in the Burdekin community: your view". It has been prepared by Sunfish Queensland in collaboration with Sunfish member organizations and regional branches comprising a membership of some 45,000 Queensland residents. However particular emphasis has been placed on the views of Sunfish members who live in the Burdekin/Townsville region.

**This submission to Government by Sunfish relates to the section of the Government consultation paper entitled "Proposed changes to netting closures".**

This submission to Government is late in terms of the official deadline of 4 April 2011. Sunfish originally took the view that it would cooperate with the agreed consultation process involving the Burdekin Co-management Committee of which Sunfish had a local representative, and also have input by local Sunfish members to the Government public meeting held in Ayr on 18 March 2011. However the original Burdekin Co-management Committee was recently disbanded and a new local group formed which does not include Sunfish representation. The new group continues to have input to the consultative process. It is therefore important that the views of the Sunfish membership are also put to Government by way of this submission as well as other means such as meetings, correspondence and petitions.

A summary record of the Government public consultation meeting in Ayr on 18 March was produced by Fisheries Queensland and is posted on the Fisheries Queensland website. The outcomes of this meeting in relation to the proposed netting closures are important as they provide the views of the broader local community in regard to these proposals:

#### **Extracts from Summary Record of Meeting, Fisheries Queensland**

"Burdekin Regional Management

Location: Ayr

Date: 18th March 2011

#### **Proposed Commercial Netting Closure - Home Hill Beach**

**Outcome:** There were mixed views whether the closure should be implemented or not from both commercial and recreational fishers. However, there were several suggestions to alternative boundaries should the closure proceed.

#### **Proposed Commercial Netting Extension - Burdekin River**

**Outcome:** There was generally more support not to proceed with the extension. However, it was recognised that more information was needed prior to being able to make an informed decision."

*Representing the interests of Recreational Fishing*

## Proposed changes to netting closures

### 1. Information on recreational fishing levels given in the Government consultation paper.

In justifying the opening to net fishing of the areas within the Burdekin River delta, the Government paper states that “the proposed commercial net fishing area of the Burdekin River is only lightly fished by recreational fishers”. Sunfish members who regularly fish in the region report that the proposed commercial net fishing extension area in the Burdekin River is now heavily used by recreational fishers. Some say that this area is more heavily fished recreationally than Home Hill Beach – contrary to the statements in the Government consultation paper.

If this is true, the paper has biased the perceptions of those who read it and who have little knowledge of recreational fishing in the areas of interest – Burdekin delta and Home Hill Beach. Statements about participation levels should be based on proper surveys, not hearsay.

### 2. Local conflicts between residents and commercial net fishers at Wunjunga, adjacent to Home Hill Beach.

The conflicts between the residents of Wunjunga village and commercial net fishers have a long history, and are not solely or even majorly about the impacts on recreational fishing. There are other issues involved such as lights at night, noise, and dugong by-catch. Sunfish is supportive of a small netting closure at Home Hill Beach in close proximity to Wunjunga as a means of addressing the range of conflict issues.

**3. Features of Home Hill Beach and the Burdekin delta area as recreational fishing venues.** These two areas are **very different** in terms of the opportunities they provide for recreational fishing. This is mentioned briefly in the Government paper. However greater consideration of this important aspect is essential. Home Hill Beach is a great location for those anglers who wish to catch “bread and butter” fish such as whiting, bream and flathead. It offers a sandy beach accessible by car and by walking. It is particularly attractive for family groups and others with individuals who have little fishing experience.

On the other hand the Burdekin delta is a great location for very different reasons. The area of interest in the Burdekin is more difficult to access. Boats are needed and it provides more of a wilderness experience on water. More importantly it is an area for the specialist angler particularly those who target barramundi. The ability to fish for barramundi in an area where net fishing is not allowed is a very special and important feature and attraction of this area.

**4. The proposal to close Home Hill Beach to commercial net fishing, and to compensate by allowing net fishing further into the Burdekin delta.** This is opposed by Sunfish. As mentioned in 2 above, the conflicts at Wunjunga can be addressed simply by closing a small section of beach to commercial net fishing close to the village.

The proposed compensation arrangement or “offset” is totally unfair to those many recreational fishers who wish to enjoy the special features and fishing opportunities that the Burdekin delta currently offers – outlined in 3 above.

Sunfish recognizes that the residents of Wunjunga who do not fish recreationally in the Burdekin delta would regard the changes to commercial net fishing areas as a good and fair compensation arrangement. However those recreational fishers who have strong attachments to fishing in the Burdekin delta must suffer the very adverse consequences.

It is unrealistic and wrong to suggest that Burdekin delta recreational fishers can transfer their activities to Home Hill Beach if they wish to continue to fish in a net-free area.

**5. Impacts on regional commercial net fishing.** The Sunfish proposal is to close to commercial net fishing a small section of beach near Wunjunga village – not primarily for greater recreational fishing amenity, but to reduce conflicts covering a wide range of localized issues. No other changes to commercial or recreational fishing areas under discussion in the Burdekin region are sought by Sunfish. The Sunfish proposal would have little impact on commercial net fishing operators, the local seafood supply, or the regional economy.

The Sunfish suggestion is responsible, reduces existing conflicts at Wunjunga, and allows commercial net fishing and recreational fishing in the region to continue with little if any adverse impact or conflicts.

**6. New net fishing areas in the Burdekin delta - a potential "gold rush".** The areas in the Burdekin River delta proposed as a new net commercial fishing area contain good stocks of barramundi and other valuable fish. If opened, it would be a very attractive target for commercial net fishers both locals, but particularly others. At present there are 159 N2 net fishing endorsements which enable river gill netting on the Queensland East Coast (Fisheries Queensland website). The potential for an uncontrolled "gold rush" exists if the area is opened to commercial net fishing. Such an event would impact on the local commercial net fishers, but be devastating for recreational fishing in the areas currently closed to net fishing. The potential for conflicts is very high in these delta areas. Netting the river mouths will almost immediately remove resident fish such as cod, which have been partially protected by netting closures.

**7. Dugongs caught in nets.** The Government public discussion paper on the Burdekin mentions that dugong could get caught in commercial fishing nets. It is unreasonable and unfair to the recreational fishing sector to suggest that the closure of Home Hill beach to commercial net fishing to protect dugong is offset by allowing commercial net fishers to operate in the important recreational fishing areas currently closed to net fishing in the Burdekin delta. If the incidental capture of dugongs necessitates commercial net fishing closures, offsets or compensation should be applied to the affected commercial fishers which do not adversely impact on recreational fishing.

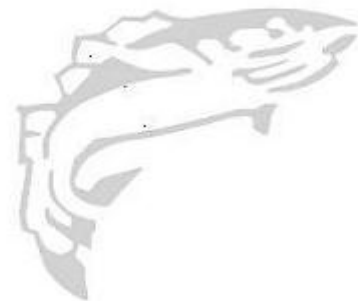
## **Future consultation with stakeholders on the proposed net fishing closures**

Sunfish requests to be included in any future consultations by Fisheries Queensland or the Government with stakeholders in relation to proposed changes to the commercial net fishing areas in the Burdekin region.

**This submission to Government is valid until 30 December 2011. Sunfish reserves the right to amend any statements in this document should circumstances change or new information be forthcoming.**

Judy Lynne  
*Executive Officer*  
**Sunfish Queensland Inc**

Ph 07 3882 4518  
Fax 07 3882 5680  
Mob 0409 056 437  
[www.sunfishqld.com.au](http://www.sunfishqld.com.au)



*Representing the interests of Recreational Fishing*