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Line Only Fishing for Mackerel in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park

Sunfish Queensland has requested the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments to phase out net fishing for all mackerel species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Sunfish members in Central and North Queensland say that the situation has now become intolerable.

Conflicts between mackerel line fishers, both recreational and commercial, and net fishers are escalating, particularly as the numbers of licenced power boats continue to increase rapidly with an associated escalation in the numbers of fishing trips per year by recreational fishers in boats within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. Many accessible inshore fishing areas for mackerel are spoilt by net fishing activities resulting in the need for line fishers to travel greater distances to off shore areas. The Queensland Government fishery management agency has attempted to resolve these problems and associated conflicts, but unfortunately this has been unsuccessful. Mackerel net fishers continue to operate in close proximity to popular line fishing areas, resulting in major, ongoing and escalating conflicts in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park..

Mackerel net fishers in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area continue to take and interfere with protected species such as turtles, dolphins and dugongs. This results in adverse public reactions throughout Australia, and criticisms on all forms of fishing, and puts all forms of fishing within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area in a bad light.

Localised depletions of mackerel aggregations by net fishers within the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park are common and of major concern to line fishers. Stage 2 of the review of the East Coast Finfish Fishery in Queensland has failed to deliver any satisfactory outcomes in relation to the problems associated with net fishing for mackerel in the regions of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area. Many stakeholders, not just recreational fishers are frustrated by the inability of Stage 2 to address this major issue.

Supplies of fresh mackerel can be provided to the trade in North and Central Queensland by commercial line fishers. A substantial commercial line fishery for mackerel already exists in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park which provides a superior quality product for the local trade. Commercial line fishing for mackerel has been shown to operate in harmony with recreational fishing in this region.

A recent meeting of all the members of Sunfish Queensland unanimously agreed that:

1. Recreational and commercial fishing for mackerel in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area should only be allowed by using lines.
2. Net fishing for all mackerel species in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and World Heritage Area should be phased out over the next 5 years.
3. Sunfish and its member bodies will cooperate with the Queensland and Australian Governments and all other stakeholders to achieve these outcomes.