

## **Submission by Sunfish Queensland on the Gulf of Carpentaria Finfish Fishery Review, 29 October 2010**

### **Background**

This submission is in response to the DEEDI Regulatory Impact Statement of 2010 in relation to Management Arrangements for the Gulf of Carpentaria Fin Fish Fishery. It has been prepared by Sunfish Queensland in collaboration with Sunfish member organisations and Regional Branches comprising a membership of some 45,000 Queensland residents. Input to this submission has also been obtained from fishing charter operators who make trips to the Gulf of Carpentaria, particularly to Albatross Bay, Weipa. Additional input to this submission was obtained from a public meeting of recreational fishers on the Atherton Tableland organised by the Tableland Regional Branch of Sunfish.



**Photograph of a meeting at Mareeba on the Atherton Tableland run by Sunfish Tableland on 19 October 2010 to develop community input to the Gulf Finfish review. The attendance was 170 persons.**

## **KEY ISSUES**

### **1. Albatross Bay**

Sunfish draws attention to the undertakings and informal agreements of the previous Gulf Finfish MAC that Albatross Bay, Weipa will be set aside for recreational fishing and recreational fishing charter operations. There is an undertaking that commercial netting will be stopped in Albatross Bay when the numbers of net fishing licences reach low levels as at present.

Albatross Bay is a large semi-enclosed embayment east of the line joining Boyd Point and Jantz Point. Four large rivers flow into Albatross Bay. These are the Mission, Embley, Hey and Pine rivers. Netting closures already exist for all these rivers except for the Pine river and bay which has a large net closure along its eastern side. The current level of commercial net fishing in Albatross Bay is small as noted in the RIS. However Albatross Bay and its associated township of Weipa have become a Mecca for local and visiting recreational fishers. Several charter fishing operators in Weipa and from the east coast provide facilities for tourist anglers. Recreational and charter fishing are the basis for significant economic and business opportunities in the region. Albatross Bay and Weipa are becoming increasingly attractive for the growing recreational fishing tourist trade. There is a strong economic and social justification for Albatross Bay to be dedicated as an iconic recreational fishing location in far North Queensland.

**The justifications given in the RIS to continue net fishing in Albatross Bay are completely unacceptable to Sunfish, Sunfish member organisations and**

**individual recreational fishers, the charter fishing sector who operate in Albatross Bay, all those 170 persons who attended the public meeting on the Atherton Tableland, and thousands of other recreational fishers.**

**It is also totally unacceptable to defer a decision on the netting closure of Albatross Bay, or to consider this issue as a regional issue.**

**THE DECISION ON FUTURE NETTING OF ALBATROSS BAY MUST BE MADE AS PART OF THIS DISCUSSION PAPER, AND NOT DEFERRED OR DELAYED. THIS MATTER IS NOT SOLELY A LOCAL ISSUE AS IT HAS MUCH WIDER REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR NORTH QUEENSLAND, AND FOR NUMEROUS ANGLERS, CHARTER OPERATORS AND BUSINESSES THROUGHOUT QUEENSLAND.**

As mentioned above, Albatross Bay, Weipa is an iconic recreational fishing location not just for local residents, but also for the many tourists and people who make use of many charter fishing businesses in the region. The RIS acknowledges that netting in the Bay is at a very low level so now is the time to stop it completely. There is presently not one location in Northern Queensland which can match the vast areas and economic development opportunities in the Northern Territory dedicated to recreational fishing and support businesses such as accommodation facilities, gear sales, and charter fishing opportunities. Albatross Bay would be the first such location in Queensland that could be compared with iconic recreational fishing locations in the Northern Territory. This is also an important issue from an economic perspective as Weipa is easily accessible for visitors and tourists. **Sunfish respectfully implores the Queensland Government to close Albatross Bay to net fishing and promote this area as an ideal recreational fishing adventure location in tropical Queensland – somewhere to rival what has been done by the Northern Territory Government!** From an overall commercial fishing perspective to loss of Albatross Bay is almost insignificant when compared to the vast productive areas that remain open to net fishing.

## **2. Commercial catch limits on Longtail tuna.**

On the Australian East Coast Longtail tuna has been recently established by the Commonwealth Government as a recreational species. Sunfish appreciates that longtail are sometimes taken incidentally in offshore gill net operations, and a small bycatch component should be provided for longtail tuna.

Sunfish is opposed to any change to the current allowance for commercial fishers to have 10 Longtail and some other species in possession.

**SUNFISH TOTALLY OPPOSES A BYCATCH LIMIT OF 500KG IN POSSESSION FOR COMMERCIAL FISHERS AS PROPOSED IN THE RIS. THE CURRENT ALLOWANCE OF UP TO 10 IN POSSESSION IS REASONABLE AND DOES NOT ENCOURAGE TARGET FISHING OF THESE TUNA.**

## **3. Size and bag limits for recreational fishers.**

Sunfish strongly supports the following size and bag limits for recreational fishers in the Gulf. These may differ from those on the East Coast, but the situation is much different in the Gulf especially for visiting recreational fishers who stay in the region for extended periods.

Blue threadfin: bag limit of 20

Giant Queenfish: No bag limit necessary, NOT 5 as proposed in the RIS

Fingermark/Golden Snapper: bag limit of 10, NOT 5 as proposed in the RIS

Black jew: bag limit of 5, and a minimum size of 60cm, and no maximum size

Barramundi minimum size of 58cm as proposed in the RIS

**4. Regulated waters/commercial net fishing closures.**

Sunfish does not oppose the proposed changes in the way that regulated waters will be described using GPS marks and map references – PROVIDED these changes do not alter the size and locations of any of the existing regulated waters/net fishing closures.

*This submission is valid until 1 April 2011. Sunfish also reserves the right to amend any statements in this document should circumstances change or new information is forthcoming.*