

# THE NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING<sup>1</sup>

in DOUGLAS SHIRE (NSF) - *FIRST DRAFT*

## What is NSF?

- an informal, non-political network of community members and community and special interest groups concerned about the sustainability of local fish stocks, especially inshore and estuarine species

## Why is NSF necessary?

- simple, everyone with any history of fishing in local inshore waters over the years and still actively fishing has noticed a dramatic decline in catches over the last few years
- Grey mackerel pre-spawning and spawning grounds are being targeted consistently for the first time by “out-of-town” offshore gill netters, up to 50 ft boats with large hydraulically operated drum winches hauling 600 m of monofilament gill nets in inshore waters, to the extent that local fishers are seriously concerned for their survival
- there is no closed season for grey mackerel offshore gillnetting, the by-catch must be considerable with concerns expressed for turtles, dugong, Spanish and Spotted mackerel (which may not be legally targeted by gill netting but shore common spawning grounds and season with the Greys

## How does NSF work?

- recognizing that fishing covers a wide number of sectors, we take a community approach aiming to establish good networking between and within different sectors for optimal exchange of information and ideas, achieving solutions beneficial to the community
- by working as a network and recognizing the amount of fishing done in the shire has greatly increased over the year to a point which appears unsustainable, at least in inshore waters, we aim to recognize existing and potential fish stock problems, bring these to the attention of the authorities and ensure timely and appropriate remedial action is taken
- NSF has the potential to act effectively through rapid exchange of facts, ideas and views, empowering individuals to make their views known and support debate and contest the need to take specific action, including the application of pressure on the authorities to take action to prevent the type of fish stock collapse now common world wide.

## Who can join NSF?

- Anyone willing to contribute constructively.

## How can I join NSF?

- Simple, just write or email the secretary with your contact.

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<sup>1</sup> Draft ideas drawn up following discussions with many people, please do send your recommendations for amendments before a final version is accepted.

## **Will the NSF be holding meetings?**

- The beauty of an informal network such as this, we don't need to hold formal meetings as such and go through all the official processes - we just network!
- as such regular meetings will not be necessary.

## **How will the NSF be managed?**

- An informal committee is being set up responsible for relaying views and comments back and forth between their sector and other committee members
- it is proposed there will be a secretary guided by the consensus of committee members to co-ordinate and respond to the views expressed by committee members and other input.

## **What will be the output of NSF?**

- The provision of a convenient means of making known to the authorities concerns relating to local fish stock management,
- a positive contribution to ensuring sustainable and improved fishing in local waters

## **So what is your vision?**

### ***We look forward to a time when:***

- ***under appropriate fishery management and with significant local input, inshore fish stocks in waters along the Douglas Shire coast have recovered to levels approaching those of the past,***
- ***fish stocks and all fishing in local waters are managed with local input, such that good catches can be made in a day's fishing by appropriate levels of commercial, charter and recreational fishing, and***
- ***there is good communication, understanding and co-operation between all stakeholders in fishing-related activities based in Douglas Shire.***

## **What is your Mission statement?**

NSF will pursue all legal means to impress upon the Queensland State Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries, the Hon. Tim Mulherin, M.P., the need for urgent measures to address the locally obvious, serious decline in inshore and estuary fish stocks. These measures must include the introduction of a moratorium on all offshore netting within 6 nautical miles of the Douglas Shire coastline, by 1 June 2007.

Should the Minister refuse to recognize the need for urgent action and fail to take appropriate action by 1 June we shall scale up the level of our activities to ensure action is taken as soon as possible on a "better late than never" basis.

Following the introduction of a moratorium on offshore netting NSF will continue to assist develop

and promote appropriate fishery management measures aimed at rebuilding local inshore fish stocks.

## **What are the Objectives of NSF?**

The time has come when we can no longer wait for inadequately resourced fishery management programmes to provide scientific proof as to what factors are depleting fish stocks. Common sense must be used to recognize and help halt and reverse on-going stock depletion.

Our objectives are based on the best available evidence, common sense and giving due heed to the precautionary principle. These are:

- initially a ban on all offshore netting along the Douglas Shire coastline within 6 nm. from the coast,
- eventually a ban on inshore and estuary netting by commercial fishers who do not currently live in Douglas Shire,
- in co-operation with the relevant authorities, the development of a fishery monitoring system that collects, collates reviews and annually publishes, representative data from all three main catching sectors of the local fishery providing a suitable basis for fishery management decision-making,
- again in co-operation with the relevant authorities, the introduction and enforcement of a fishery management regime allowing fish stocks to rebuild to levels approaching those of the 1970's.
- where possible, modification or elimination of activities which significantly contribute to stock depletion.

## **BACKGROUND & STRATEGY**

At the outset NSF makes it plain we are not against commercial fishing, rather we are strongly in favour of sustainable levels of commercial, recreational and charter fishing being established in local waters with preference being given to individuals and businesses based in the Shire.

We recognize individuals are responsible for decisions and ultimately it is the Minister and his senior advisers who will be held responsible for the demise of the local stocks of inshore fish including the especially susceptible Grey mackerel, should the Minister and his advisers continue to recommend current levels of off-shore gillnetting be permitted.

We recognize that the current permitted practice of larger boats (>10m), referred to as offshore gill-netters, coming close inshore at night time (and for that matter, day time as well) and setting their 600 metre, hydraulically-hauled, monofilament gill nets close to estuaries and shallow-inshore reefs in water as shallow as 2m, is unsustainable and damaging to the economy, social fabric and fish stocks of Douglas Shire. NSF understands this fishing method has recently greatly increased in inshore local waters and is currently being practiced without regard to seasonal closures,

One trip by an offshore gill-netter can catch something approaching the equivalent of a whole

season's catch by a significant proportion of the local recreational sector or a full-time charter fisher. Far greater income to the shire is generated when clients of Charter fishers and caravan parks and the general public and local commercial line and inshore net fishers make good catches of fish than when our fish stocks are being depleted by "out-of-town" offshore boats. It is often claimed locally that the operators of the big netters never spend "one brass razoo" in the Shire.

DPI&F do not appear to have given much significant thought and no research on the effects of offshore fishing in Douglas Shire waters. They have no "proof" of what the effects of offshore netting are or are not. However common sense tells us that nets set in this way are likely to be taking their toll on turtles, dugong and populations of any breeding aggregations of fish in the area.

NSF members recognize the days when inshore and estuarine stocks are open to anyone with a Queensland commercial fishing licence are over. This has been and still is a recipe for **serial overfishing** as netters move on from the last area they have fished out.

We recognise Grey mackerel are especially susceptible to such **serial overfishing through a phenomenon known as 'hyperstability'**. They only become available to commercial netting during pre-spawning aggregations and there is no closed season for netting of spawning stock.

Grey mackerel are an inshore species appearing at 'traditional' pre-spawning and spawning grounds at the same time every year. It used to be thought they always moved around in large schools throughout the year but there is no evidence to prove this.

Recent research has shown that stocks in the Gulf of Carpentaria do not come round into East Qld waters as has been claimed by the netters. It is quite possible there are discrete populations up and down the East Coast aggregating only prior to spawning. This is supported by occasional out-of-season catches of individual Greys and sightings of smaller numbers by recreational fishers and divers.

NSF proposes to concentrate on ensuring the authorities are assisted in establishing the sustainability of inshore and estuarine fish stocks.

## **FORMATION OF THE NSF**

***Rather than be fragmented into small and relatively ineffective units with little voice, the NSF will give a pro-active community response from Douglas Shire on fishing issues.***

Those with interests (stakeholders) in local inshore fisheries and healthy fish stocks can be considered as a number of sectors including: recreational fishers, charter fishers, commercial fishers, caravan parks and other providers of tourism accommodation, education sector, fishing press, dive & snorkel industry, local marine advisory committee to GBRMPA (LMAC), fishing gear and ice sales, outboard & boat service agents, Douglas Shire Council and the Douglas Shire Sustainability Group. There are doubtless other groups still to be included in the above.

E-mail, letters and phone are to be the main forms of communication. One or two volunteers from each sector make up the informal Cyberspace Committee of NSF. The NSF Cyberspace Committee will not meet at any physical location as such, but carry out meeting business through

email over the internet. Each “cyberspace meeting” will have a defined period of several days to give committee members the time to respond.

There can be two levels of Cyberspace Committee members “Active” and “Honorary”. Active Committee members will collect and collate views and information from their sector and communicate summaries of these to others on the NSF committee. Active Committee members will also keep their sector informed of progress towards achieving the objectives of NSF and help co-ordinate activities within their sector, e.g. e-mail or letter campaign, if deemed necessary.

Honorary Committee members are people we recognize as being leaders or authorities in their field, and/or who are otherwise in a position to assist from time to time. Honorary Committee members of NSF while being kept informed of all NSF activities will only be expected to respond when they feel it is appropriate and convenient for them to do so.

As there will be few if any formal meetings and minimal costs, it is proposed we do not need a chairperson or president and there will be no membership fee. As secretary, for the time being, David Cook, will collate and record committee decisions and actions and assist committee members disseminate information to and calls for action from members. The position of the Secretary may rotate at intervals decided by the Committee.

## **NOMINATIONS TO NSF COMMITTEE**

The Committee is still open to new members. For ease of management, membership of the committee could be limited to say 3 per sector. Nominations including self-nominations are still invited. Please send these to [davecook@bigpond.com](mailto:davecook@bigpond.com).

## **RELEVANT BASIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS**

*- fairly obvious but seldom discussed -*

Compare fish stocks to your savings or investment bank account. In a savings account the bigger your account then the greater your interest (this being equivalent to annual increase in fish stocks as a result of a combination of reproduction, growth and mortality). However if you withdraw from your account a greater amount of money than the interest earned, then obviously your account will decrease, annual interest will drop and you will eventually empty your account.

Overfishing is like poor financial management. In a similar way, the bigger your fish stock, the more fish we can catch without depleting stocks. As fish stocks are reduced by overfishing and/or environmental factors, then catch levels which may once have been sustainable can greatly contribute to stock depletion. This appears to be the stage we have reached with regards inshore fishing in Douglas Shire. We need much better management of our inshore fish stocks than at present to help our inshore and estuary fish stocks re-build.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

At the meeting which launched NSF at Wonga Beach on 29 March, attended by over 48 people (names and addresses of those 48 are now on the NSF membership list) members pointed out

from the floor, the need to reduce some recreational bag limits and better regulate the use of bait seine nets because of high by-catch mortality.

Thanks to the *initially* widely unpopular but commendable pro-active approach taken by GMRMPA to manage habitats in the area by establishing Green Zones, local offshore stocks appear to be improving and their future looks bright. It is now well past the optimum time for DPI&F to take similar action to ensure sustainability of *inshore* fish stocks.

The NSF is now well-placed to press for appropriate pro-active management by DPI&F and a halt and reversal of the observed progressive decline of inshore stocks in Douglas Shire waters. We can now launch a powerful community campaign which any government would be wise to acknowledge. This is a unique opportunity to ensure the Minister for DPI&F hears what people have to say. They can now conveniently make their views known to their relevant sector Cyberspace Committee Member and/or write an informed letter to the minister for DPI &F through joint email and letter campaigns.

If you are unaware who your Committee Member is, please drop me an email, you could even let me know if you would like to join the Committee - it is as easy as that.

David Cook

**acting Secretary,**

**NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABLE FISHING in DOUGLAS SHIRE (NSF)**

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*file: aa Network for Sustainable Fishing Outline Document\_first draft*