

LobMAC Meeting – 27 February 2008

Chairman's Comments

GENERAL

An informative and positive meeting, particularly from the perspective of a new Chairman at his first meeting. The opportunity taken by industry and DPI staff to advise the Chairman of their respective roles, responsibilities and issues was most valuable. Particularly satisfying throughout the meeting were what appeared to be open, enthusiastic and frank discussions on a range of matters (especially those regarding the TACC Committee information), albeit that progress on some matters was argued as less than hoped for due to resource and time constraints. The meeting seemingly continued the existing commitment by all parties to effectively address matters affecting the environmental sustainability and economic viability of the industry. The opportunity to supplement meeting discussions through private conversations with industry representatives further enhanced the Chairman's understanding of many issues.

KEY IMPRESSIONS

From the Chairman's perspective there were four important matters raised during the meeting that are important for the future of the industry. These comprise:

- TACC Decisions – the information provided by DPI to the meeting was comprehensive, well received and eagerly discussed. Industry representatives appeared satisfied with what was to be presented to TACC regarding the potential Lobster fishing resources available for the next 3 years. However a concern arose that TACC should avoid a 'feast or famine' approach to allowable catch limits for those single years with potentially low resource availability where such a year occurs between other years of average or above average availability.
- Compliance & Enforcement - industry representatives were very satisfied with the DPI's recent compliance and enforcement activities and noted improvements in the judiciary's reinforcement of the regulations by levying significant penalties. Industry representatives requested that DPI continue this strong approach and ensure that appropriate staff and resources are allocated to this role.
- Agency Co-operation – the need for improved communication between the industry and certain state and federal agencies, as well as between different fishing industry participants, on matters seriously impacting the viability of the lobster fishing industry was raised. Some forceful comments were made with regard to the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change and its attitude to briefing LobMAC on Marine Park issues affecting the industry. (This concern was reinforced when a scheduled briefing and discussion by DECC representatives at this meeting was again cancelled just prior to the meeting commencing.)

Concerns also arose over the continuing damage to lobster fishing gear by large cargo vessels at anchor and the need for Commonwealth Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government to improve awareness of lobster fishing areas amongst these vessels in order to minimise such damage.

The collateral damage occurring from such vessels, as well as that arising from other NSW fishing industry activities, to soft coral areas (as a breeding and development area for juvenile lobster resources) was also raised.

- Resource Constraints - the matter of effectively resourcing the work of DPI in its role of sustaining and managing the lobster resource arose indirectly on several occasions and again, directly, when the matter of management charges being paid by the industry was raised. Concern was expressed regarding the potential for these charges to increase significantly as a 'user pays' approach is more widely applied to the industry and that no regard is had by Government to the knock-on economic benefits that the industry generates for NSW.

More effective liaison between agencies and the industry, as well as more effective and timely inputs to DPI issues by LobMAC, might also be achievable if additional LobMAC meetings, where necessary, were able to be resourced throughout the year.

SUMMARY

A productive and informative meeting. A number of actions to address these and other issues were endorsed by LobMAC. These actions are to be supplemented with discussions between the Minister and LobMAC representatives at a forthcoming scheduled meeting.



A A Dodds
Chairman, LobMAC