

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Apologies to those who have contributed but are not mentioned.

OBSERVED FACT

- Since about 2003, Douglas fishers have noticed a big drop in numbers of Inshore fish including:
 - Grey Mackerel & Queenfish,
 - Long-tail tuna & various Trevallies
 - Fingermark, Snub-nosed dart

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

- The frequency and size of schools of some species is readily observable, our “*indicator of stock abundance*”.
- Some offshore netters agree that others may enter false catch data into their logbooks
- No mechanism for verifying net catch returns
- QLD Net catch data are therefore unreliable and not suitable as sole basis for management decision making, *community observations must be taken into account*

CORRELATION

- The significant drop in numbers of larger inshore fish species followed the start of offshore netting in the region
- Previously local Grey mackerel had been commercially line fished for 30 years with an agreement “not to net”
- Start of offshore netting was also accompanied by an increase in observed numbers of turtle and dugong deaths

GREY MACKEREL CATCHES FROM THE "OLD DAYS" WONGA BEACH



HISTORY OF PRESENTATION OF SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS

2006 August: petition with 658 signatures given to Jason O'Brien MP, requesting ban on netting of Grey Mackerel because of low numbers in recent years



2006 September: Jason O'Brien hears first hand the concerns of local fishers, traditional owners, caravan park owners and patrons.



SOME PRESS CUTTINGS from 2006 - 2007

BAN OFFSHORE NETTING IN DOUGLAS SHIRE WATERS

TAXS Tax returns
 Faster than any
 Another speedy benefit!
 90% SUCCESS RATE!
 Ph: 4089 4158
 Fax: 4089 4158

PORT DOUGLAS & MOSSMAN
Gazette
 AUGUST 31, 2006 90c

Mackerel fear



No other! Geoff Cook from Laidley shows local fishermen concerns about the disappearing fish stocks off nearby Port Douglas. Local fishermen are protesting the commercial netting of grey mackerel.

Local fishermen fear species will disappear

By STEPHANIE SAUER
TEMPERS flared between local fishermen, out-of-towners commercial fishers and officers from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries at the first consultation meeting to ban net fishing in waters off the Douglas Shire.

More than 50 concerned fishers had their say on the current state of grey mackerel aggregation numbers in the Douglas Shire and voiced their fears for the future of the species if over-fishing in the area was allowed to continue. A 35-year gentleman's

trailerboat fisherman
 ACROSS THE TOP
 RICH EBBERS

Line Burner
 Priceless!
 Volume 71 November 2006

The Locals Have Their Say
 In 2006

Gazette
 TO THE EDITOR
 Stop netting

PORT DOUGLAS & MOSSMAN
Gazette
 OCTOBER 26, 2006 90c

Fishermen call for netting ban at fiery consultation meeting

By STEPHANIE SAUER
TEMPERS flared between local fishermen, out-of-towners commercial fishers and officers from the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries at the first consultation meeting to ban net fishing in waters off the Douglas Shire.

More than 50 concerned fishers had their say on the current state of grey mackerel aggregation numbers in the Douglas Shire and voiced their fears for the future of the species if over-fishing in the area was allowed to continue. A 35-year gentleman's

aggression to not net fish in the Douglas Shire between local fishers has ensured the survival of the grey mackerel species for local fishermen who have accused "out-of-towners" fishermen of over-fishing the area.

Two meetings for commercial and recreational fishers were held on Monday night with commercial fishermen from Cairns attending to defend their actions of heavily netting tin fish in the Douglas Shire.

David Cook is leading the push for a complete ban on fish netting between Cape

Trillickton, Low Island and Yale Point.

Mr Cook said many fishermen were unaware that DPI had called a meeting.

"There was no advert put out and it was for a 10pm meeting when we, Cook's fishermen here for have so in mind the last year fraction, were ce ago he

Calls for fish bans

PORT DOUGLAS Fishermen here that Cook's commercial operations over netting local waters are unsustainable.

Local fishermen have also expressed concern over recently to those state fishery officers, in a meeting, meeting Corrie Ballantyne, senior fisheries officer.

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Weekend Post
 Increased protection needed



Shire may lose treasured gem

Local fishermen are protesting the commercial netting of grey mackerel in Douglas Shire waters.

Breeding site being bled dry

Local fishermen are protesting the commercial netting of grey mackerel in Douglas Shire waters.

Fishing action will come "too late"

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The Cairns Post
 THURSDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2006 • 31

environment

Anglers' anger boils at fisheries review



Local fishermen are protesting the commercial netting of grey mackerel in Douglas Shire waters.

Weekend Post

DPI BLASTED FOR 'ALLOWING SERIAL OVERFISHING'



The Cairns Post

Call to ban gill netting

OFFSHORE NETTING BY LARGE MECHANISED BOATS IN INSHORE WATERS IS UNSUSTAINABLE - LOCAL STOCKS ARE COLLAPSING
 E-mail or write to DPI&F Minister Tim Mulherin: dpi@dmirnserial.qld.gov.au, DPI&F, PO Box 46, Brisbane, 4001

DUGONG DEATHS



8 FEEDBACK

LETTERS

Requesting good fisheries management is not radical, but common sense

In last week's *Gazette*, the owner of the big white, two-masted, Cairns-based gillnet boat, fishing local inshore waters, is quoted as calling me a "radical ruffian". I hope the irony of this was not lost on readers.

Perhaps only as QM, the Smart Star, could it be considered radical to link our observed decline in dugging numbers to the obvious risks of dugging drowning in the huge unregulated gillnet fishery that these Cairns-based boats now use to fish our inshore waters.

Only in the Smart State do fisheries regulations allow these large offshore gillnetters unlimited targeting of our small, local inshore spawning schools of inshore species such as sparrowfish, triggerfish, grunts and grey mackerel.

What a post-graduate student of Tropical Fisheries Management, 1985-81,



Cooktown Local News, Wed. 11 March, 2009

Spotlight on remote area 'rogue' fishers

WPALE shark catches are being blamed for the deaths of protected dugging off coast. Port Douglas Beach near the diggery community of North Beach, offshore north-west of Cooktown.



Port Douglas Beach. Alan Rowley has photographed and reported on activities of the local fisherman, here without a diggery or social media, which he has also reported to State and Federal government authorities.

My research will mean media reports on the issue had prompted a temporary stop to fishing by the fishermen.

But he claimed that authorities' boats were out over the area because the inshore had landed a boat, making some of their work less lawful.

"The primary concern is the diggery needs and the beach," said Mr Rowley, who has run the Port Douglas Beach Shack in the inshore community for almost 10 months.

"They need all all the fish and the diggery has unfortunately got caught up."

Mr Rowley said local police had also reported digging at the diggery site.

not was seen in the area
only to those who still believe
it is flat and global warming a
ruffian, well I guess beauty is in
of the beholder.

David C
Wong B



Increased protection needed



Walter, 64, says his father-in-law, Dennis Walter, has been protecting dugging for years and is happy to see the shire taking steps to increase protection.

Shire may lose treasured gem

Byline: This
and photo: [unreadable]



Increased dugging near
Walter's home.

WALTER could be wiped out of Douglas Shire waters within a decade if the shire's marine area, coastal waters, is not protected.

Shire councillor Dennis Walter has called for increased protection for the marine area near Port Douglas, north of the shire's town, after a diggery boat was spotted in the area.

Walter says the shire's marine area is a "treasured gem" and should be protected.

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Cairns Weekend Post, 15-16.03.08

Elders fear for dugongs

DUGGERS' elders have issued a plea to the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries for a dugging protection zone in waters off Douglas Shire.

The Shimonon Elders Justice Group says proposed changes to the East Coast Inshore Fishery will allow netting in dugging habitat.

"We strongly oppose against this and wish to raise our concern for a dugging protection zone to be established in Douglas Shire waters," a letter from the group, dated March 10, said and addressed to the DPI, reads.

The group also says our diggery is of "premium" abundance.

They say would allow professional fishermen to use 100m nets to catch grey mullet.

"This is twice the size of nets that have already existed in local waters of grey mullet in almost nothing," the letter says.

Fisheries manager Murray Mark Lightwood and staff from the group across the shire would be notified before any changes to the fishery were implemented.

"The issue raised by the Shimonon Elders Justice Group will be considered through this process," it said.

Port Douglas - Mossman Gazette April 16, 2009 p.7

Dead dugong raises net boat questions



THE DEATH of a dugong has raised questions about the safety of a net boat in the Port Douglas area.

The dugong was found dead on the beach near the diggery site.

The diggery boat was found with a net that had been used to catch grey mullet.

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NUMEROUS LETTERS SENT TO QDPI&F, THE MINISTER LOCAL POLITICIANS AND MINISTER GARRETT

RESULTS, FROM A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE, ARE VERY UNSATISFACTORY FROM ALL EXCEPT MINISTER GARRETT See Gunn, Meere & Stevens (2008), "The Independent Review"

<http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/fisheries/qld/east-coast-finfish/index.html>

Evidence indicates QDPI&F /QF whilst paying lip service to community concerns, make their decisions based on the commercial fishery lobby and the perceived need to keep netting for short-term profits and political gains regardless of long term impacts on stocks and biodiversity.

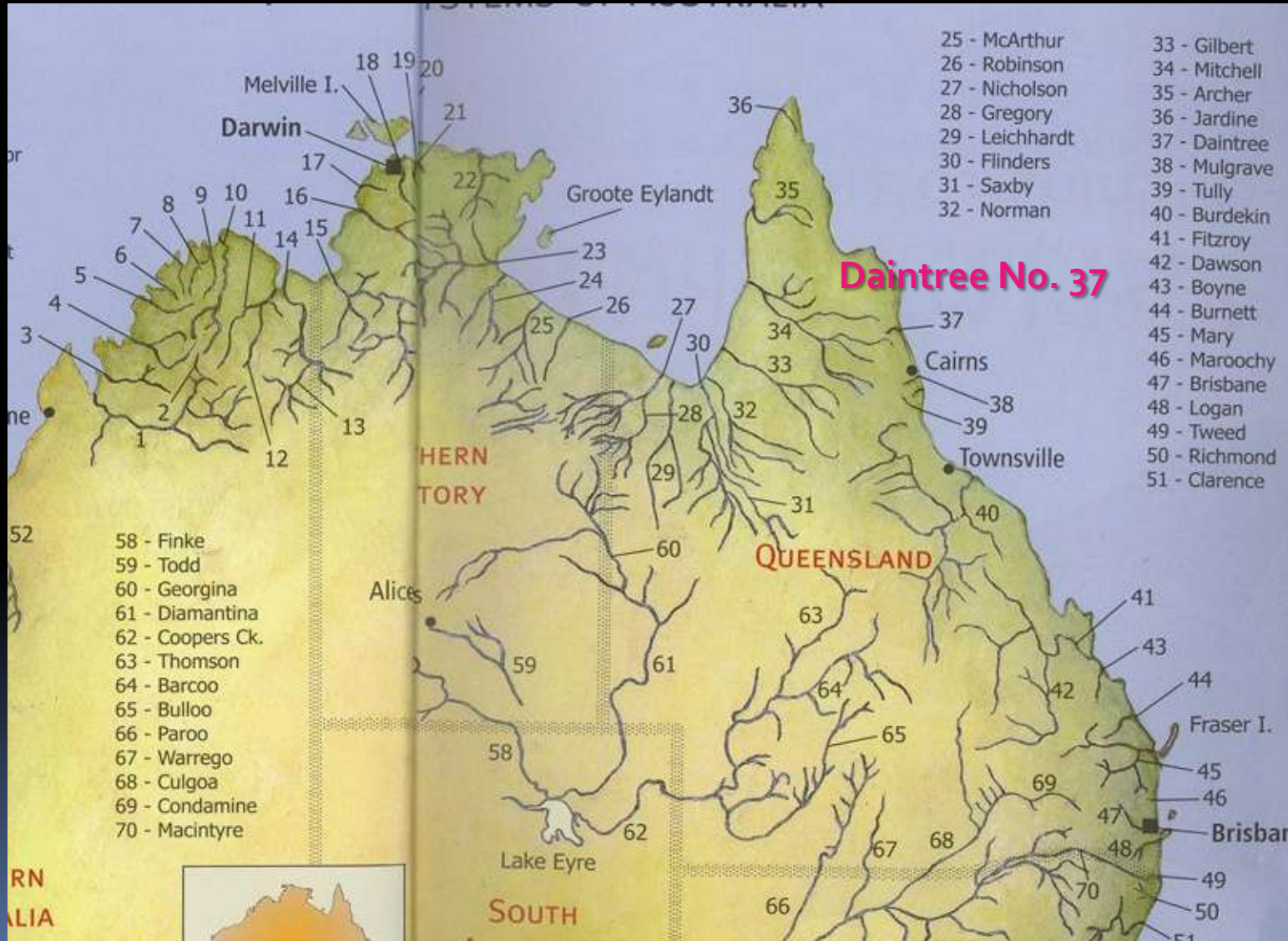
Just Google:

"Grey Mackerel, case study"

The possible collapse of a grey mackerel population and the decline of an inshore fishery within the **World Heritage Great Barrier Reef Marine Park**: the need to implement the **Precautionary Principle** to immediately close local inshore waters to all offshore and itinerant gillnetting:
A CASE STUDY

By: David C. Cook *BSc(Hons1), Post Grad. Dp. Fisheries Mgt.*
Conservation & Liaison, Mossman Boat & Fishing Club
Secretary, Network for Sustainable Fishing in FNQ
Latest update: 22 March, 2009

TINY CATCHMENT = LOW PRODUCTIVITY



Politicians & non-technical fisheries administrators are confused by claims that GBR fisheries have a fraction of the production of Asian Fisheries. Industry preys on this in an attempt to make them feel guilty of over-management of fish stocks.

Two very simple, very logical reasons for lower productivity:

1. Our catchment area is only a tiny fraction of that of larger Asian fisheries, so has a tiny fraction of the estuaries, nursery areas and nutrient outflow of these Asian systems.
2. Asians take a far wider range of tropical species than Australia, e.g.
 - Small pelagics from anchovies, small herrings to scads & small schooling trevallies, and
 - Fusiliers, garfish, longtom, rabbitfish, goatfish, surgeonfish, unicornfish, etc.

.... SO OF COURSE WE ARE TAKING FEWER KG/Ha OF FISH FROM OUR WATERS!

CONCLUSIONS

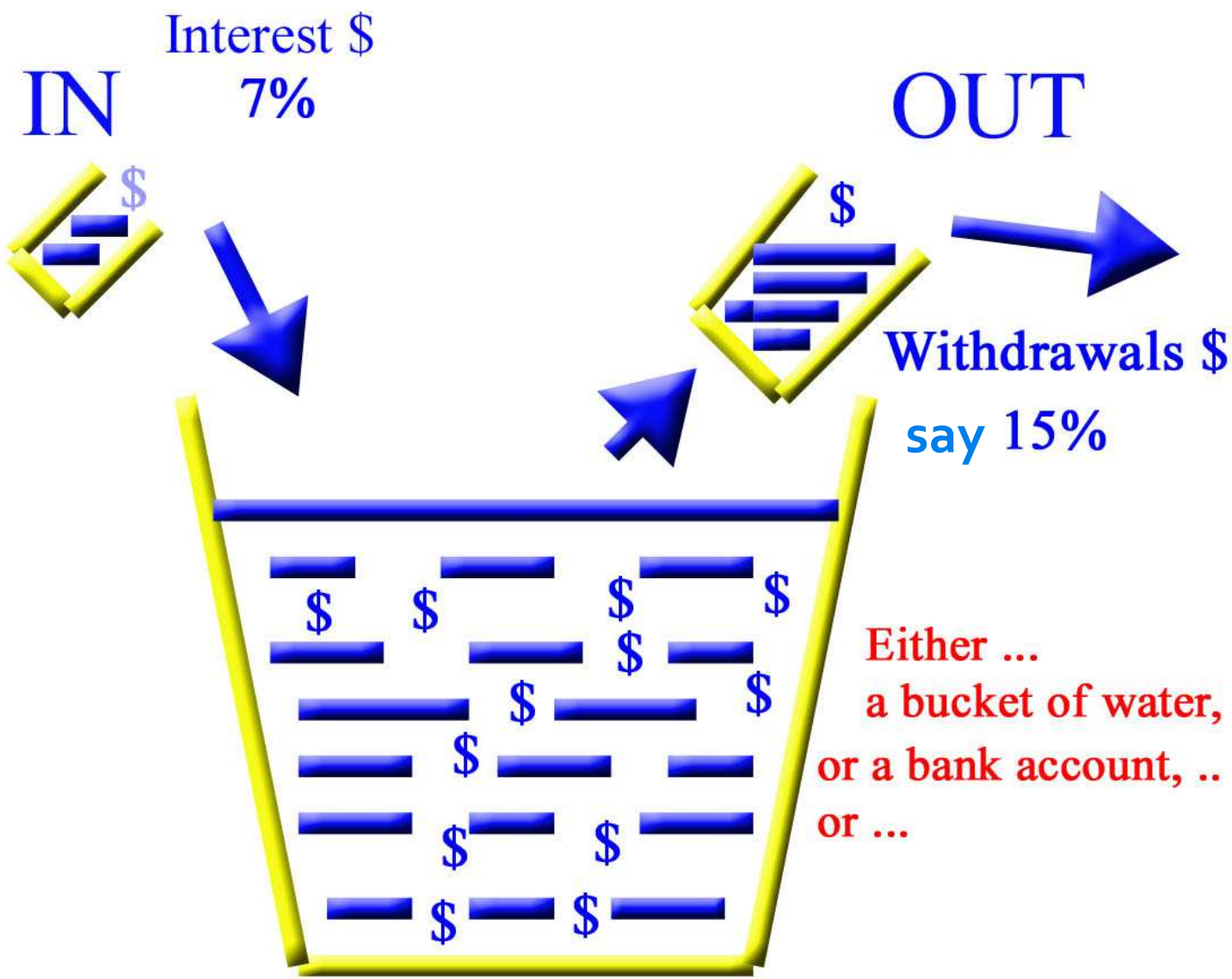
- Where catch and by-catch species are poorly researched, administrators must learn to use and eventually help communities refine their observations regarding their local *indicators of stock abundance*.
- Administrators must not feel guilty about regulating a fishery when *indicators of stock abundance* show they must.
- Administrators should not let the commercial fishing industry lobby bully them into hiding behind shonky data!

GLOBAL SUSTAINABILITY QUESTION

WHY HAVE SOME FISH STOCKS
SUDDENLY COLLAPSED IN VARIOUS
FISHERIES AROUND THE WORLD
WITH VERY LITTLE WARNING?

OR

“Why did they ‘suddenly’ become
‘unsustainable’??”



HYPERSTABILITY EXPLAINED

Hyperstability ...

(from “*Hyper-*” : meaning excessively, and “*-stability*” from stable or constant)

... is when catch data gives the impression of stocks being stable whilst they are in fact declining



One small bucket in for each large bucket out ...
and what happens? And when?

CONCLUSION 2

HYPERSTABILITY explains why net fishers are still making some good catches of grey mackerel whilst the line fishers can clearly see the sizes of the schools are going down dramatically. The greys are coming to the same spot every year to prepare to spawn. With no closed season enforced, the nets are so highly efficient they are catching at a faster rate than the fish can breed (the "*interest rate*"). The legal catch size is 15cm below size at first maturity so the fish may not get a chance to spawn even once. As stock size and productivity is unknown this is unacceptable management practice and must be stopped before it is too late. Fishing should be by line only.

RECOMMENDATION

In view of the undisputable decline in numbers of larger inshore fish in the local area since offshore netting commenced, we have to recommend an immediate moratorium on offshore gillnetting and indeed all out-of town set gill netting within the Douglas partially smooth and smooth waters.

This should be a requirement before further meetings on co-management proceed, otherwise these discussions risk being just a waste of time, similar to the Zonal Area Committees further south during the 1990's. They will be used as an easy option for QF and political parties not to do anything before it is be too late.



TWO “DRIVERS” FOR THIS RECOMMENDATION

1. SUSTAINABILITY CONCERNS

- The community had a gentleman’s agreement not to net the grey mackerel,
- line fishing for greys was carried on for 30 yrs before netting commenced and, as at Bowen,
- a rapid decline followed the onset of netting of pre-spawning schools
- We conclude offshore netting is unsustainable



Netting captures both aggregating Grey and Spanish Mackerel in breeding condition



THE SECOND "DRIVER" FOR THIS RECOMMENDATION

2. ECONOMIC CONCERNS

- Offshore netting delivers nothing to the Douglas community
- Fish stock decline hurting tourism and fishing support sector
- Local line fishers going out of business
- Net caught fish command much lower price than line caught fish and a fraction of the value of fish landed on fishing charters
- Offshore net-caught fish not landed locally so local shops and restaurants short of locally caught fish
- Local rec. inshore fishers not going fishing, this is hurting support sector; others are having to go to outer reef using much more fuel.

CAIRNS POST
6 July 2007

YOUR SAY

Mackerel decline hurting tourism

I'M writing in response to "The plan to manage mackerel" (14-6-07). Since recent years when the netting of school mackerel started to become very efficient, the numbers of school mackerel catches off inshore Cairns such as the last channel markers out off Trinity Inlet have gone from great to almost non-existent.

Many local charter boat operators are mostly saying the same thing.

School mackerel and even the majestic queenfish have become very scarce in recent years and it is a shame to see many keen fishos from southern states and internationally with wads of tourist dollars starting to bypass Cairns as an inshore fishery for more prolific waters such as the NT.

This isn't fair on the locals, tourist and the fish. It is a shame that complaints seem to fall on deaf ears.

D. Merle, North Close, Cairns.

PORT DOUGLAS Gazette

SEPTEMBER 14, 2006

Fish stocks impact tourism

LOCAL inshore fishers have started a petition to have netting banned in waters off the Douglas Inlet.

Independent marine fisheries contractor David Cook said the DPI had a responsibility to ensure the survival of the inshore.

"It's very disappointing that the DPI have made those comments saying there is no evidence to support it when they have all the

evidence they need to support by books," Mr Cook said.

Shoreline Pleasure Village Holiday Park manager Kathy Maguire said tourists were leaving town because they were not catching any fish.

"We've had people coming up here for the fishing for 20 years and now they're saying they won't come back because for the past few years they have not been

catching anything where they used to bring home buckets loads every day," Mr Maguire said.

"The area is frustrated and they're pushing up and going other places because the fish just aren't here anymore. It's very upsetting," she said.

Douglas Shire Council will write to Federal Minister Ian Campbell and State Government to show their support to ban netting in the in-

WHY RECENT REGULATION CHANGES WILL NOT PROTECT GREY MACKEREL STOCKS OR THE BYCATCH OF DUGONG & TURTLE

- **Increase of minimum size for Grey mackerel to 60 cm is irrelevant they first breed at 75 cm;**
- **The “increase” in mesh size to 6.5 inches whilst important is the size used at present at Snapper Is.;**
- **Being “in attendance” at nets is irrelevant as nets are bottom set in water over 10 m depth so drowning turtles and dugong are not visible from the surface;**
- **A single TAC of 150 tonnes of Grey mackerel has no scientific basis, does not take into consideration hyperstability and, since there are at least two distinct stocks of grey mackerel, there should be at least two TACs to account for different stocks.**

Why the Grey Mackerel Offshore Net Fishery should fail Accreditation under the EPBC Act 1999

- **the rapid local decline in spawning stock observed since commencement of netting indicates over-fishing;**
- **There is no reliable information collection system appropriate to the scale of the fishery, e.g. no on-board observers, no means of verifying catch returns, no independent recording of landings, no checking of dockets/invoices, still no VMS;**
- **the distribution and spatial structure of the stock has only partly been established (breeding grounds not confirmed, where the species goes for most of the year unknown);**
- **The spatial structure of the stock has not been factored into the TAC;**
- **There is no sound estimate of the productivity of the stock nor the proportion that can be harvested;**

Continued/

Post-meeting note: Grey mackerel (Gm) Researcher, David Welch suggested at the meeting it was inaccurate to state that “they first breed at 75 cm”.

However the only published Gm literature states the following (quotes here adjusted to total lengths in cm extrapolated from fork lengths given in mm according to published formulae):

- “*the smallest ripe female (measured) was 89 cm*” (Welch et al, 2009, p 47)
- “*the smallest ripe female Gm caught on the east coast was 83 cm and the largest immature female was 93.9 cm (!!!)* (Cameron & Begg, 2002 p106)
- “*at least 50% of female Gm between 75.2 and 80.8 cm were mature*” (C&B 2002 p106)
- “*Gm attain sexual maturity between 72.6 and 80.9 cm*” (C&B 2002 Summary, p11)
- “*the ESTIMATE (my caps.) of size at which 50% of the females were mature was 69.7 cm*” and “*The sizes at which 95% of the females ... were estimated to be mature was 80.2 cm*” and “*the estimated age at maturity was ..(50%) . 0.8 yrs ... and 95% maturity 1.3 yrs for females.*” (Welch et al, 2009)

**NOTHING IN THE ABOVE IN ANY WAY DETRACTS FROM MY MAIN POINT
THAT IT IS UNACCEPTABLE MANAGEMENT TO ALLOW NETTERS TO
TARGET AGGREGATING FISH FROM A MINIMUM SIZE OF 60 CM
WHEN THE MAJORITY OF FEMALES ARE CLEARLY NOT MATURE**

Further reasons why the Grey Mackerel Offshore Net Fishery should fail Accreditation under the EPBC Act 1999

- Management fails to control fishing effort according to productivity of different areas, or stock structure, 400 or so licences can fish anywhere on the East Coast of QLD.
- The fishery management regime has failed to respond adequately to community concerns raised concerning greatly reduced sizes of spawning aggregations.
- Fishing is conducted in a manner that continues to catch dugong and turtle. Despite emphatic denials by operators, circumstantial evidence points to capture of dugong, turtle and whale shark and risks entanglement of dolphins and whales. Spanish and Spotted mackerel with roe are landed in significant numbers.

Green turtles mating on Grey mackerel grounds during the Grey's season



Humpback whales on the Grey Mackerel grounds, day after netter had left, Snapper Is. in background





STRANDED TURTLES FAIRLY REGULAR IN AREA



Five different turtles photographed between Wonga Beach and Daintree Estuary by David Cook; NB the two showing Snapper Is. in the background were taken in different years, definitely different individuals. All reported to Marine Parks, local office. Vet Jenny Gilbert says of about 100 turtles she has autopsied, none had ingested plastic bags.

THANK YOU !

*OUR CASE HAS BEEN MADE,
WE SHOULD NOW TAKE IT TO
ALL POLITICAL CANDIDATES
& THE NGOs*



Spanish mackerel being landed, above and right, from breeding ground, and, below, with roe captured same place, similar date



Whale shark



A dumped netting catch (2009) included whale shark, top right

145°30'

145 deg 40'

145 deg 50'

SHOWING INSHORE AREA of H15-H16



145 deg 2'

MNP-16

16 deg 30 min 5

DAINTREE NATIONAL PARK

Port Douglas

MNP-15-1047

MNP-15-1046

CP-15-4028

CP-15-4030

CP-15-4031

MNP-15-1047

MNP-16-1051

CP-15-4032

Daintree National Park

Port Douglas

MNP-15-1047

MNP-15-1046

CP-15-4028

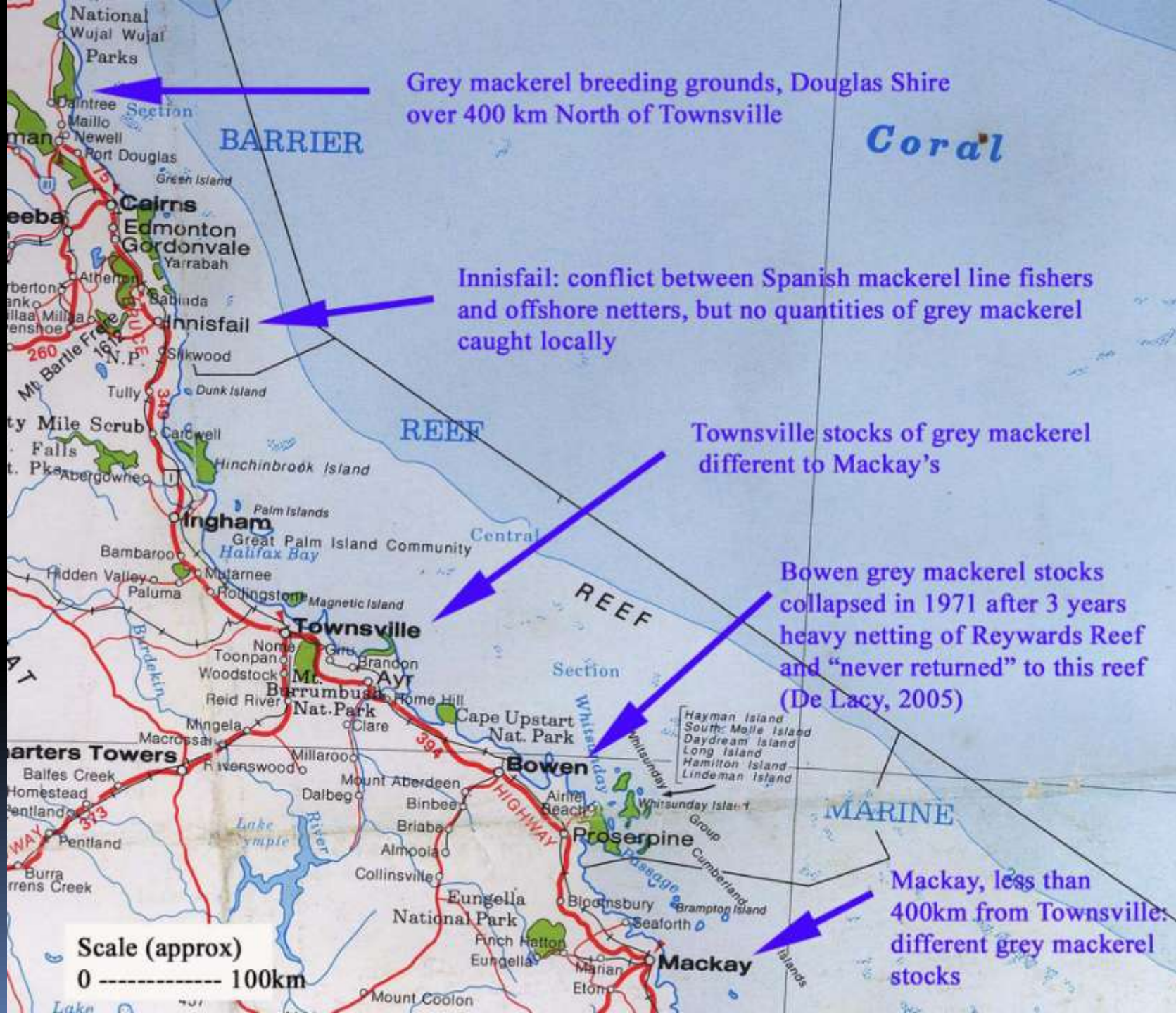
CP-15-4030

CP-15-4031

MNP-15-1047

MNP-16-1051

CP-15-4032



Grey mackerel breeding grounds, Douglas Shire over 400 km North of Townsville

Innisfail: conflict between Spanish mackerel line fishers and offshore netters, but no quantities of grey mackerel caught locally

Townsville stocks of grey mackerel different to Mackay's

Bowen grey mackerel stocks collapsed in 1971 after 3 years heavy netting of Reyard's Reef and "never returned" to this reef (De Lacy, 2005)

Mackay, less than 400km from Townsville: different grey mackerel stocks

Scale (approx)
0 ----- 100km