

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON RECREATIONAL MARINE FISHING IN TASMANIA MET AT HENTY HOUSE, LAUNCESTON ON TUESDAY 15 JULY 2008.**

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**Mr MICHAEL STEVENS**, AUSTRALIAN FISHING TRADE ASSOCIATION TASMANIA WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Harriss) - Mike, you would be aware, I think, that the proceedings of the committee will be recorded and later transcribed for both our reference and as a matter of public record. If there is any time during the presentation of your verbal evidence that you want to give evidence in camera, the committee can consider that request and move in camera if that is the will of the committee.

Again, thank you for your submission. We would ask you to speak to the submission because it is important to get things onto the public record, not just attach documentation to our report process. You have addressed the terms of reference in your submission, which is always useful for us. Over to you to expand on or highlight points from your written submission, please.

**Mr STEVENS** - Thank you, Paul and thank you everyone else. I suppose I am specifically here representing the Australian Fishing Trade Association which was formerly the Australian Fishing Tackle Association, but I will speak about some other things which are I suppose my own importance as well.

I have been involved in recreational fishing for my whole life. I publish *Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News* every two months. I write a fishing column for the *Sunday Examiner*. I probably wake some of you up on the ABC radio on Saturday mornings. I am on the board of Marine and Safety Tasmania, I was on the Inland Fisheries Advisory Council for some time and I have been on the Ministerial Recreational Fishing Committee since about 1996. I am not too sure of that date, but it was about then.

I currently chair the Anglers Alliance of Tasmania, which is a recreational inland trout fishery group partly funded by the Inland Fisheries Service which, in turn, is the Government.

*Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News* employs three people, all of whom are reliant on our having a good recreational fishery. I suppose the charter, whether it is written or unwritten, is to ensure that we have not just a sustainable fishery but also an improving fishery. We have done a lot of work on that through various means, some of which is ministerial advisory councils from when there were no bag limits, no size limits and virtually you could take whatever you wanted, in the early days, through to now, I think, moving into the third scale fish plan which is pretty significant in regard to the recreational fishery.

It was moved some time ago to make the D'Entrecasteaux Channel a recreational-only fishing area, which has improved that enormously. Also at that time we moved to make

some recreational fishing areas in Tasmania - Duck Bay, originally, and Georges Bay at St Helens, which became no-netting areas. Fishing has improved dramatically ever since.

One of the things that I am really serious about is giving our kids recreational fishing opportunities and improving that so a kid can go and fish off a wharf or a jetty and have a good chance of catching a fish. It is not just about fishing either; it is about giving those kids an activity which goes through their whole life. So a kid can fish off a jetty or a wharf when they are four years old and they can wheel a wheelchair out there when they are 84 years old and still do some fishing, and I think that is a pretty nice thing to be able to do. In regard to that, we need to ensure that there are plenty of those opportunities in good population areas so the kids can go and do that.

I will go back to my submission, now that I have given you that little bit of background, and try to work through that. I guess you will ask me questions as we go.

**CHAIR** - Just on that, you have indicated at the head of your verbal submission that you are presenting on behalf of the Australian Fishing Trade Association. That is still the case because you said you would go back to your submission?

**Mr STEVENS** - This is the submission I put in on behalf of the Australian Fishing Trade Association.

**CHAIR** - Do you have a direct connection to AFTA?

**Mr STEVENS** - I am a member of AFTA, which is a national body that has been around for some years. It was the Australian Fishing Tackle Association. It is just in the stage of renaming itself to the Australian Fishing Trade Association, which encompasses more people on the recreational side, which is a recreational group. It is not a commercial group.

So we go back to point 1, I guess, where it talks about the current recreational fishing body, TARFish. I must say in the early days a committee sat down to try to set up a representative body and I was part of that committee, as were Wes Ford and quite a few other people. Certainly the intention at the time was to enable or try to get full representation for all levels of fishers in Tasmania to become a representative body. It is quite a difficult thing to do because a lot of fishers are very complacent and they like the results of good fishing and in general most of them do not want to be involved in any political wrangling at all; they do not want representation, they just want to be able to go and catch a fish. Regardless of that, it was certainly the intention to represent the peak groups in the fishery but to try to encompass regional representation from people who were not involved in any group, which is probably 95 per cent of people. When we talk about that and when you can go to any place in Tasmania where there is a boat ramp and stand there all day and ask recreational fishers what groups they are involved in, you will not find anyone who is involved in any group.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Has that been done, Mike?

**Mr STEVENS** - I am not sure. I would say probably not. I am not sure but some of the survey work that Jeremy Lyle does for TAFI might have that information, but I would not be surprised if it has not been done at all.

**Mr WILKINSON** - I am trying to get some idea as to how many people are out there involved with recreational fishing.

**Mr STEVENS** - They say it is one in four people, from national survey work that has been done, who go fishing once a year. Whether that is right, way off the mark or right on the mark I do not know. I suspect if you went to Smithton or some places around the foreshore in Hobart, you might find more, or St Helens. It is probably everyone or one in two or two out of three people involved in it because you pull up there and everyone wants to talk about fishing. They are certainly the most difficult group of people to try to represent. There has been that attempt - maybe a small number of people do represent them reasonably well in their views but I am not too sure.

The Government is about to ramp up the scale fish plan and have a public meeting. It seems the only time you get people to a public meeting is when you have something controversial and if you do not have something controversial happening no-one turns up because they are complacent. That goes back to the mid 1990s. I can remember when we had public meetings at St Helens and there was certainly talk then about removing netting from the bay. All the old guys turned up and they were quite vocal in their campaign that that was not going to happen. It did happen. There were five commercial stalwart endorsements in the bay and they eventually all went as well and the same guys now think it is the most wonderful thing that has ever happened because they do not need to go out in their boat anymore; they can just sit on a jetty, Kirwan's Beach jetty being a good example, and catch a few fish. It was only the controversial stuff that got them there and if there was nothing controversial happening they would not turn up.

I think that is the point. The problem with any group is getting that representation from the majority of people who are complacent.

**Mr WILKINSON** - The one point that was put forward is that even though a lot of fishers do not like to be licensed, they believe that it can be bureaucracy gone mad, some say the bag limits are too high - say for flathead, 30 per person, and if you have three or four people on the boat they can come back with 120-odd flathead, which is a lot of flathead for a day. If you catch that many, should that be licensed? Bring it down to 15, a bag limit unlicensed, so maybe the children can go out and not have to be licensed. That gives you an idea as to firstly, who is involved in recreational fishing and secondly, there are some moneys to be put into funding for whatever it might be - new ramps, jetties, whatever.

**Mr STEVENS** - We are probably going all right with ramps and jetties at the moment, but I do get your point. The argument with bag limits has always been as to what is a fair amount and I think a fair amount is generally something that is not a commercial quantity and it gives people a fair chance of catching a few fish. They are actually possession limits, not bag limits; you cannot have any more than that. If you have 30 from yesterday, you cannot have another 30 today.

One of the issues is - perhaps you have a shack at Coles Bay and you would like to catch a few fish - if you have a bag limit of 10, it is pretty restrictive. You only go there once a year and you should be able to catch a few fish. I think the bag limits at the moment are pretty fair. One of the things that may come up in this new scalefish plan is an overall bag limit so the overall bag limit might be 30, 40 or 50, or something like that, so you could have 10 salmon, 10 flathead and 10 bream. I think that is one of the really good things about having these marine fishery plans now in that they must be reviewed every few years and they must be new plans and they must go out for public consultation. In that way everyone gets a say. I must say that when those plans go out, they do not attract a lot of submissions from the people who do not have a vehement view one way or the other. The same thing again, if you put something radical in there you will get plenty of response, but if there is nothing radical to change the bag limits by two, three or five or change the size limit, most people will not have a say; they are happy. I think they are actually happy that someone is managing the fishery for them.

If you go back to licensing that sort of fishery, AFTA, as a group, is very opposed to just licensing a fishery so that they can count who participates in fishery but I think it probably costs about \$5 to issue a licence. So if you are to spend another \$5 on the fishery, you need to collect \$10 and then it probably takes three or four of those dollars to manage spending the money, so you do not end up with much money. I think I would be very happy for there never to be aligned fishing licensing and marine fishery if we can look after the fishery well.

**CHAIR** - Mike, you have reinforced what you have put in your submission, that AFTA opposes the general fishing licence and yet also in your submission you comment on licensing at least being a good way to keep in touch with everybody.

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - There is a bit of a rub there, isn't there?

**Mr STEVENS** - There is, yes, and it is a particularly difficult thing to address. I am not sure how you do it but we do not have a lot of people in Tasmania. I think they are all generally aware of what the rules are these days, so I think the public campaign in regard to promoting bag and size limits is done through tackle stores and various means. The booklet that the department produces is particularly good and well liked. We have volunteers who get around quite a lot and see a lot of people, go to a lot of events, such as Agfest, and they do a particularly good job. So you can get the word out there, and people generally comply with the rules. You always get people who speed and drink-drive and do all those sorts of things, and don't comply with fishery rules, but mostly people will comply and that's what we need to have. Getting to talk to those people is the most difficult thing, but if we have an improving fishery and we have most people complying with the rules, then maybe we're doing a good enough job.

**Ms THORP** - Talking a little earlier about representation of recreational fishing people on TARFish, as a representative of AFTA would you be aware of the rule changes that happened back in July 2006 with regard to regional representation on that committee?

**Mr STEVENS** - No, not 100 per cent. We have a representative on there, Andrew Large, who works in a fishing tackle store in Hobart. AFTA has been a member of TARFish since February 2004, so Andrew would certainly be aware of what happens there.

**Ms THORP** - As the representative of AFTA on TARFish, is it part of the normal course to ask advice of AFTA or does he act unilaterally?

**Mr STEVENS** - I think he would act pretty much unilaterally. You can't go and ask everyone, and there's probably no need to. He can make his own decisions. I am not sure what the actual guidelines are for seeking advice once you are a member, whether it is incumbent on them to go and ask their associations every time they need to make a decision, but I suspect it isn't.

**Ms THORP** - Does that same apply with your submission today on behalf of AFTA. Is it your opinion?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes, it is. We are not a radical group by any stretch of the imagination. The general underlying philosophy, whether it's written or unwritten, is improving the fishery and giving recreational fishers a fair go and trying to improve the fishery. AFTA has done quite large things. AFTA has had some funding from the Fishwise fund, which I will talk about a little later on.

AFTA has done national DVDs about holistic sorts of things rather than specifically targeted things. It is about giving kids a fair go. The DVD *Learn to Fish* has kids in it. They're just doing another one now which has had some funding from the old Commonwealth scheme funding, which is defunct now. That is pretty much what it is about.

**Ms THORP** - What is the size of the financial membership of AFTA?

**Mr STEVENS** - It is financially pretty well off, I can tell you that. I don't know what the actual membership is, but it pretty much represents every major distributor, tackle agent, store or individual members. There's a national tackle trade show which AFTA runs, and you have to be a member of AFTA to go to that show. So it's pretty broad and it is funded entirely from the industry.

**Ms THORP** - It is a stand-alone organisation; it's not a composite group with other organisations?

**Mr STEVENS** - No. Organisations may well be members, but generally no. You can be an individual member, a tackle shop or anyone in the tackle trade, but the major importers and distributors and wholesalers fund it as a percentage of their turnover.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Do you think recreational fishers are properly represented on the TARFish board? Some could argue that a lot of commercial interests are on the TARFish board. Commercial people are probably recreational fishers as well but some might well argue that there are not enough recreational fishers simply because this business arm of TARFish mainly gets commercial people involved.

**Mr STEVENS** - I don't know what commercial people really are. Is that someone who makes money out of recreational fishing?

**Mr WILKINSON** - Well, let us say SCBOOT - Sea Charter Boat Operators of Tasmania. They might be saying there is a conflict of interest with that and recreational fishers because of -

**Mr STEVENS** - People could say that but they certainly operate under recreational rules.

**Mr WILKINSON** - It is easy to get onto TARFish, though, if you're in an organisation as opposed to a simple individual who is a recreational fisher.

**Mr STEVENS** - Perhaps. I think at this stage TARFish is still an evolving group. It comes back to that complacency thing; most people don't want to be representatives. How do you find the right person? Maybe it is the same as government; maybe government doesn't represent everyone but maybe there are just enough people there and they do have the right philosophy. I think the philosophy is to have a better fishery going into the future. Maybe that commercial interest does that better than a complacent fisher who is just there to fill in his day.

**Mr WILKINSON** - You could argue that there are some recreational fishers who aren't complacent. They want to be involved but because of the rules as they presently are they are not as able as the people involved with commercial backing.

**Mr STEVENS** - No, perhaps. Maybe that can be looked at going into the future. I don't think anyone would be opposed to a group like that enjoying better representation in the future.

**Mr WILKINSON** - I'm not criticising TARFish; I'm just putting forward a view.

**Mr STEVENS** - No, I understand completely. I think everyone would like good representation of a group like that. If it can be improved then I am sure it should be.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Do you think that would be an improvement?

**Mr STEVENS** - Possibly, yes. Good representation, whether you agree with people or not, is representation. Having a broader range of views you often get a better outcome. On the RecFAC that I have sat on for years, the west coast representatives sit there and agree with lots and nod their heads and at the end they say, 'But the west coast is different'. We are quite happy for them to be different and quite often they get treated differently under the rules as they are now. If you have a broader range of people maybe you do get better representation. I like to see good representation but I don't have to agree with them. I am sure you people don't all agree about everything.

**Ms THORP** - What is your opinion of the change to the TARFish rules which took regional representative bodies off TARFish?

**Mr STEVENS** - I don't fully understand the rules as they are now, so I would have to have a look at it and make some comment later on if you would like me to.

**Ms THORP** - There was a rule change in July 2006 which abolished the representative regional groups and thereby their chairperson coming onto TARFish. Under the old rules the chair of the regional groups had the right to have a representative on TARFish, but after the rule change that stopped because those committees were disbanded.

**Mr STEVENS** - I would have to have a look at it and make some comment later on.

**CHAIR** - You have indicated in answer to Jim that good, broad representation is always good and I think Lin has just indicated that broader representation has been compressed by that rule change. Doesn't that go against the grain of what you have indicated?

**Mr STEVENS** - Possibly, but I am not fully aware of all the circumstances that made the move to change those rules, so I would like to have a look at it and make some comment.

**Ms THORP** - There are three individuals currently on TARFish and it is not clear at all to me how they are selected. One is a charter boat operator and one is an underwater photographer. Where are the recreational fishing people in all this? I do not really know what John Cleary does.

**Mr STEVENS** - Not much these days. I think John Cleary has a pretty broad understanding of what recreational fishing is, having been a recreational fishery minister in the past and having enjoyed fishing all around Australia. I think he has a pretty good understanding of not only politics but of fishing as well. I am sure he would understand the need for representation.

The underwater photographer sounds like Jon Bryan. Jon Bryan has fished and been all around the world for many years. He is also on the ministerial advisory council, has a very broad understanding of fishery rules and has had the benefit of scale-fish plans, rock lobster plans and abalone plans from his conservation trust and has been very involved. Just because they are part of a group does not mean they do not understand recreational issues as well. I would like to have a bit more of a look at that and make some comment further.

**CHAIR** - Going back to your submission, in the very first sentence you say, 'In the past, other organisations have claimed to represent all fishermen and this was not the case'. Can you expand upon that? Who were the people who claimed to represent all fishermen at an earlier time on TARFish but who, by your evidence, in fact did not?

**Mr STEVENS** - TASFA.

**CHAIR** - So TASFA is an organisation which you claim was not representative of Tasmanian fishermen?

**Mr STEVENS** - There is no-one who is representative of all fishers. I do not want someone else representing me. If I want representation I can go and do it as Mike Stevens or as *Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News* or as several other things. So the group that says they represent everyone is wrong. TARFish cannot represent everyone but they can certainly try. Any other group who may want to come along and try to do that is welcome.

I publish *Tasmanian Fishing and Boating News*. There are about 20 000 readers and I might just say I represent more people than anyone else. I could do a survey and put a case that I have more representation of more members than anyone. I would not do that because I do not think that is the case.

We need to be careful and we will always need to take a variety of views. At the end of the day pretty much the minister decides on what happens with the rules. I think that was pretty much the case that I was just trying to put forward there. I think I say in the next bit that due to many fishers being quite complacent, a vocal few seem to have more influence - and I hold to that theory still. It is simply the squeaky wheel theory.

**CHAIR** - Your contention is clearly that other organisations - and you were referring to TASFA - claim to represent all fishermen. What evidence do you base that assertion on?

**Mr STEVENS** - That may be a little strong but perhaps at meetings they often put the case that they represent more people than anyone else, and I am not sure that that was the case. Once again, I go on to say there is a complacency of most fishers or a lot of recreational fishers and you cannot represent them. If I were complacent I would not be here.

**CHAIR** - Yes. In terms of completeness, your document constitutes part of what we take as evidence. You have made that assertion. It was appropriate, I think, for me or somebody else, as has been the case, to challenge you on that because you have said that they did not. Is that a value judgment?

**Mr STEVENS** - That was my judgment, yes. It was funded by the Government for many years -

**CHAIR** - What was funded? TASFA was?

**Mr STEVENS** - TASFA was to the tune of \$8 000, I think.

**CHAIR** - Per annum?

**Mr STEVENS** - Per annum for many years, as was the Australian Underwater Federation funded for \$3 000, I think, in those days. I think the fact that it was funded gave it some credibility that it was their responsibility, their endeavour to represent as many people as they could.

**CHAIR** - Just to reinforce that position, your further submission there is that TARFish has struggled at some stages but seems to be moving in a better direction now?

**Mr STEVENS** - I would believe so and I think they would be endeavouring to move further forward and to fulfil their obligations to try to represent as many people as they possibly can.

**CHAIR** - The acronym, TARFish, relates to an association for recreational fishing but Jim's visit would give you the notion that the membership of TARFish historically and going forward probably does not change dramatically. Is there an inconsistency, do you think, given that it is a recreational fishing advisory committee? We have RecFAC.



**Mr STEVENS** - That is a ministerial advisory committee.

**CHAIR** - Yes. Ultimately this is too. Any decisions regarding the fishery go back to the minister ultimately.

**Mr STEVENS** - Not necessarily. They do but they are their own body; they do not need to report anything to the minister, I believe. They can lobby the department, they can lobby the minister, they can lobby the Opposition, they can lobby and do whatever they like really. They are under no guidelines - well, I suppose they are under some guidelines but I do not think they need to report to the minister.

**Ms THORP** - They are perceived as the peak body representing recreational fishing in this State when it comes to submissions to things like rock lobster rule changes and issues like that?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Scale fish.

**Mr STEVENS** - Abalone.

They are a lobby group yes.

**CHAIR** - I guess - and other members will speak for themselves - the evidence we have been hearing and comments and contributions by members would suggest that with predominantly commercial interests on the committee, it could be easily contended that it is difficult for one to understand how that can then be representative of recreational fishermen.

**Mr STEVENS** - I do not believe that to be the case particularly. My belief is perhaps those people are just more interested in having an improved and better recreational fishery. They do all operate under recreational fishing rules and I think that probably means they are more likely to have their say and to ensure that there is a good, robust, strong and improving fishery.

**CHAIR** - Could it alternatively be contended that there would be a body of interest when any organisation has predominantly one group of people on it, in this case TARFish, predominantly commercial people, where their interests could be seen to be in great conflict with those of recreational, so that group could then lobby and do whatever it could to ensure that the interests of the commercial fishing industry are advanced to the detriment of the recreational fishing industry because this is where a group of people make their living as opposed to a purely recreational pursuit - perception versus reality?

**Mr STEVENS** - I know all about that. No, I don't believe that is the case. I have sat down with many commercial fishers and we have had joint RecFAC and SFAC - Scalefish Advisory Council - commercial interest meetings and there are very few points that people don't agree on to have a strong and robust fishery. I don't think that is the case at all but I certainly would like to see good and broad representation of recreational fishers who are not involved in any group. Once again, I say they are a particularly complacent

bunch of people and it is very difficult to get them on board and have good, strong, robust opinions about things. The very reason they are not in the group is that they don't want to be involved in the politics of it.

**CHAIR** - Mike, how do you then reconcile that last comment that you made, that you would like to see some people unconnected with any group? Isn't it true that we had that prior to the rule change in 2006? We had that - we had people who were unconnected, elected by their local community to be an individual person representing recreational fishermen.

**Mr STEVENS** - I would like to look at that and make some further comment.

**CHAIR** - Could you do that? Could you make some further comment to the committee by way of correspondence after you've assessed it?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes.

**Ms THORP** - At one of our hearings recently someone who had been previously involved with one of the representative regional groups said that they formed by holding a public meeting. They had quite a few people turn up and it was the vote at that meeting of recreational fishing people that that person or persons became their representative on TARFish. That seems to have been the pattern around the State up until the time when there was a vote at a meeting - and I would love to see the minutes - to say that the rules were going to be changed.

**CHAIR** - And those people would be removed from TARFish by that rule change.

**Ms THORP** - Yes. So if you can have a dig around for us, that would be great.

**Mr STEVENS** - I will.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Are we able to get a copy of the minutes of that meeting?

**CHAIR** - Yes, I think we would be able to source those through Mark Nikolai of TARFish at some stage, so we'll do that.

To move on, Mike, let us have a look at the Fishwise fund and the processes there.

**Mr STEVENS** - I have an interest in that. I have had money for projects from the Fishwise fund for some years, starting off probably from the first Fishwise trust fund under Bill Bonde as the minister.

**CHAIR** - So that is you as distinct from AFTA?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - But you have also said in here that AFTA has as well, I think.

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes. The last funding received was last year for this little booklet - and I will leave some copies for the committee - with the *Learn to Fish* DVD. It was distributed to every house in Tasmania that it possibly could be, which amounted to

about 136 000 people. We did receive some funding for that, which was about one-third of the funding for the whole project. There were some contributions from Road Safety Tasmania, DPIW, Inland Fisheries and AFTA.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - And industry through AFTA?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes, they funded one-third of it, Fishwise funded about one-third of it and other agencies funded the remaining third.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - That would have been a fairly expensive exercise. Do you have a ballpark figure?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes, I did write it down somewhere - \$32 726.40 to be exact. It was a good project. It is simply about getting kids and people to fish, and it is a bit of fun, and you do not need a licence and there are some rules and all those things are in there.

We talk about the Fishwise program and the trust fund, and I will just refresh my memory. Fishwise also funds some department research survey work that should be funded from other areas. When we sit in ministerial committees the survey people constantly ask for money from the Fishwise fund to fund things that probably should be government-funded things without it coming out of a trust fund. Consequently there are a reasonable amount of small projects that could be funded from this so-called trust fund that miss out because the research is really important. Government does not seem to have another avenue where this research can come from, so the money gets taken out of the trust fund to fund things like that. I think that is a pretty serious issue and I am not sure how to address it.

**CHAIR** - We should look at the process for the Garrett grants first of all to be assessed and then to be allocated. Further to that, rather than TARFish, for instance, having to make its submissions to get a trickle of funds for whatever project, that it, if it is going to be the robust body intended, should get an allocation and that it does not have to go with application after application. That might be a reasonable proposition; it seems to have some merit but we need to think about that a bit further.

**Mr STEVENS** - Recurrent funding for projects or associations or whatever certainly should comply with some guidelines, I am sure about that, but certainly ongoing research into recreational fishing should be recurrent funding from somewhere, not Fishwise.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Mike, in that area there has been a suggestion that some of the funds should be allocated to areas of critical need, and I highlight the Georges Bay barway issue. That, in my mind, is a fairly reasonable assessment. Do you see that those sorts of things belong to another government responsibility?

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes, I do, which has just been funded anyway so we do not need to worry about that at the moment. I think if things like that are serious, they should be funded from somewhere else.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Even the jetties?

**Mr STEVENS** - Jetties are a real issue. Jetties do not come under the guidelines of the Fishwise fund, apparently. Once upon a time they did but there is nowhere to get money for jetties. For the fishing jetty that a kid can go and fish on, there is no-one that says, 'Yes, we can fund that'. The community fund, perhaps, but that is about it.

**Mr WILKINSON** - But if you want people to fish, Mike, it seems to me that you might argue to put out a jetty to allow those people to fish, as opposed to other things that the money is allocated for.

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes, I agree. I would like to see that; I would like to see somewhere, whether it's Fishwise or somewhere else, that you can build or repair or maintain little fishing jetties. They're not boating structures. They're not anything apart from somewhere to go and sit, and you see it anywhere in Australia where there's a jetty in the water, where they invariably are, and people are fishing off them. Or they're standing on them, or they're taking photos or they're throwing rocks in the water, or something. They are social and very good things to have.

**Mr WILKINSON** - That's like Prosser River, for example. They've spent money on a good jetty just beside the ramp, and yet you can't get out because of the bar. So what a waste at the moment. They've tried to fix it up on a number of occasions, but it hasn't worked.

**Mr STEVENS** - You just have to go boating on the river.

**Ms THORP** - Mr Chairman, I suspect that this is getting rather parochial. We've got the Georges barway, the Prossers River -

*Laughter.*

**Mr WILKINSON** - I say it is interesting because a lot of fishers go around there, especially in the Christmas period, and yet because of, let's say, the Prosser in this instance - and I'm only using it to say to me it seems a good idea if some of the funds were used to remedy those situations so people could get out and fish, particularly if they're lucky enough to have boats -

**Mr STEVENS** - The amount of money that comes in from licensed recreational fishermen to government and the amount that ends up in this Fishwise fund is minimal. It probably deserves more money or some of that money that comes in and does need to go to research specific projects at a amount a year. There's plenty of research that can be done.

I say in here there may be some room for expert advice to get some projects up. What I mean by that is really that some people put forward a good project idea, but they're not very good at writing applications for projects and it's very easily knocked out during the process. It is a two-stage process now, which has probably made that a little better that people put in an expression of interest now and then it goes forward as a full proposal. But some people could do with some help in writing those projects because they are good projects.

**CHAIR** - You have mentioned in there, and I referred to it earlier, that AFTA has received some funds from Fishwise. Are you aware as to whether, in that process, AFTA, as the applicant, and also as a committee member of TARFish, had any input as to the decision,

as to the success or otherwise of the submission for some funding? And I do not just refer this to AFTA; I am concerned about other like bodies who sit on either TARFish or RecFAC and make decisions about their own application.

**Mr STEVENS** - I can tell you, particularly in respect to the last time AFTA put forward an application, that when it was discussed I, being on the advisory council at the time, left the room while everyone discussed it, and I don't know what their decision was. I will get it in the minutes, perhaps, but I think everyone, if they were involved in anything, are quite happy to leave the room while those things are discussed and take no part in it, unless asked for information about it.

**CHAIR** - That's an entirely prudent and proper process. It has been suggested to this committee that it hasn't always been the case.

**Mr STEVENS** - It is an interesting thing because when you have something like a research project - we've put in an application from TAFI - you probably do want the proponent there to talk to them, to ask them for more information. I see that as a relevant thing, to ask them to stay and talk about the project. These are ongoing projects, and I don't think they should fit into the Fishwise project at all, but if some research needs to be funded, it would be nice to, firstly, have a little bit of input into it and, secondly, know exactly what they're trying to do. So prudence is fine in some aspects, but it might be more prudent to actually have the person there and explain the project a bit more fully.

**CHAIR** - And to vote on the decision?

**Mr STEVENS** - No, not vote.

**CHAIR** - Okay.

**Mr STEVENS** - Most of these things are voted on but people try and reach consensus rather than have a 4:3 vote.

**CHAIR** - Mike, you have addressed the socioeconomic issue and you have indicated that it could be nebulous.

**Mr STEVENS** - Socioeconomically, in the past few years we probably have a better fishery that we used to have. There are more recreational areas and places with improving fisheries and less commercial impact on them. It has been fantastic. At St Helens, for example, we can tell you what the boat increase has been and the boat traffic; it is terrific.

Interestingly there is a socioeconomic study going on in St Helens at the moment, which is just incidental. What comes out of that will be staggering.

**CHAIR** - Who is undertaking that research?

**Mr STEVENS** - A chap called Andrew Duke. He is doing it for his PhD so it will be a good strong robust study of the worth of recreational fishermen.

**Mr WILKINSON** - When is that due out?

**Mr STEVENS** - He is probably a third of his way through it so there is some way to go.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - It is referred to in the back of Mike's submission. It started in November 2007 with an 18-month time frame according to my information.

**Mr STEVENS** - There might be something to leverage this research because I think that is one of the most serious issues. We need research and that can go back to some of this inclusion of people. Research can get all that information and they have done all that. We have had national fishing surveys in the past run by Jeremy Lyle from TAFI, probably the best research that has been done in Australia. He was the leading person in that. We are lucky to have someone like him here but he is hamstrung by not enough money to do all the research he would like to do. The research money should be recurrent.

**CHAIR** - Yes. The sustainability of the stock?

**Mr STEVENS** - I think it is pretty good. It is probably improving but it comes back to that research once again. We have fewer commercial fishers than ever and they are diminishing as well. We still have scale-fish fishermen, sort of a hobby fishing licence which the current minister licensed and probably never should have done. They are slowly disappearing and they are non-transferable so they will all eventually go.

**Ms THORP** - Are you familiar with what is happening with calamari and banded morwong?

**Mr STEVENS** - Calamari in particular has been quite a robust fishery in the past few years but scale-fish sea licence holders all have access to the calamari fishery, which is potentially a problem should the price of calamari go up and you have a great influx of people into that fishery. Banded morwong is a licensed fishery with not many participants - maybe 24 licences or something like that.

**Ms THORP** - Take me back to the calamari again.

**Mr STEVENS** - I am not sure of the numbers, but perhaps about 400 licence holders can participate in the calamari fishery any time they want. The price goes up -

**Ms THORP** - So they divert their attention to calamari for a while.

**Mr STEVENS** - Yes. Many of them do not fish at all; they just hold a licence. They have a trip limit on them and that is all. The trip limit is not a bag or possession limit; it is a licence to go and catch, I am not sure what it is, 20 or 30 calamari. They land them and they can go and catch another 30. The agency will tell you it is a daily limit but it is not a daily limit at all. So if you get a calamari season that is good and the price goes up then all those people can go and participate in the fishery, which I do not think is a good way to run a fishery. We should not have that many people in the fishery. With a commercial fishery, you should be a serious commercial fisherman or you should not be in it. These people do not have a catch history. They did not need a catch history. They get a scale-fish sea licence. You talk to the serious commercial fishermen and they will tell you the same thing. They would like the scale fish sea licences to go.

**Mr WILKINSON** - What about seals?

**Mr STEVENS** - I do not know.

**Mr WILKINSON** - They take a fair amount a fish, don't they?

**Mr STEVENS** - They sure do.

**Mr WILKINSON** - There is an increased number of seals. It is a problem, though, is it not?

**Mr STEVENS** - Go trout fishing; there are no seals.

**Mr WILKINSON** - But would you agree it is a problem? The hard decision I suppose has to be made at some stage. If they continue to increase it would seem to me that somebody has to look at it as say this is problem; they are taking  $x$  amount of fish and it might be ruining the whole food chain for other fish.

**Mr STEVENS** - It would be a brave minister who would take on a seal reduction strategy. I do not know how you would deal with at all. Seals learn that if there is a fishing boat there, it is an easy feed. They are massive animals; they are a serious issue in the aquaculture industry and the person who comes up with an answer to it will be quite wealthy by the next day, I would say.

**Ms THORP** - I gather relocations do not work all that well?

**Mr STEVENS** - They do not seem to. It is a very costly process and seals are very smart. They are like homing pigeons; they know where the food is and they will go back there.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Have there been any studies done in relation to the amount of food they take? If you Google it or whatever it may be they appear to take a significant amount of food, more than recreational fishers and commercial fishers would take.

**Mr STEVENS** - I would like to be able to give you an answer to that.

**CHAIR** - Are there any closing comment that you would like to make?

**Mr STEVENS** - I am pleased you are doing this. I think the most important one is to for the Government to be aware that we should try to get as broad a representation from recreational fishers as we can. If that is through the current body, then as that matures I would hope that it improves. With the Fishwise fund it is very important to look at research as a government-funded proposition for recreational fishers rather than taking it out of something that may be better used in other avenues. Looking at the Fishwise fund to get better outcomes would be welcomed.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - What about a percentage allocation each year to research, or do you say to stay away from Fishwise funds?

**Mr STEVENS** - Research should be funded completely from somewhere else. If from recreational licensing money, it just means less money goes into Consolidated Revenue. Unless there might be some socioeconomic research, for example, which will be quite

important to follow on in the future so we can see some trends, I think the hard core research on netting or catch or whatever it might be - full-on fishery research - should be funded from somewhere else.

**Ms THORP** - You would be aware that over time the balance between commercials and recreational fishing - in rock lobster, for example - was changed and that quite controversially there was a move to put the recreationals on a quota. It is quite feasible that as time passes that proportion of 10 per cent or 20 per cent would have to be looked at because the recreational take was approaching that point. What would your position be on that? Would your position be that at that point there's a buy-back from the commercial to keep the recreational fishermen able to do what they want, or should they have their pot limits reduced, for example?

**Mr STEVENS** - I think I'd fight reducing recreational take. Certainly I was strongly for counting the recreational catch because you can't manage a fishery if you don't know what people have taken. If you have a quota it should be a quota or a take for the whole fishery. So a good, strong, robust accounting for numbers caught and all those things is really important. As to how it is managed in the future, when you have 15 000 recreational fishers they'll have quite a strong voice, so I don't think we need to be too concerned about how it.

Because it is such a strong and valued commercial fishery, and also a strong and valued recreational fishery, and because we have licences and because we have to talk to them, it's quite easy to understand the way the fishery works, what the take is and who takes what. If the time comes where there needs to be some adjustment it will be a relatively simple process to understand the way forward. The outcome might not be relatively simple, but I think the process will be. We are lucky that we have a strong and robust rock lobster fishery, and I think it's probably better managed now than ever. I think it's quite a good licensing system at the moment, and it's a good fishery. I am not sure whether that answers the question.

**Ms THORP** - Not quite. I was just trying to see where you come from in terms of what could be fiddled with. Would it be a percentage bought back from the commercials? Let's face it, they buy and sell them all the time.

**Mr STEVENS** - I think it could be a variety of things. The rock lobster fishery is probably better understood than any fishery, and there is a lot of research done on it. Most of the research is done and paid for by the commercial sector, so we are fortunate in regard to that. The management of it will be under joint recognition of recreationals and commercials. If you tried to cut back the recreational catch, even taking off one rock lobster cuts it back 20 per cent, but that's unlikely to happen while I sit on ministerial advisory committees. Even though I don't go and fish for them, I am a strong defender of it.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - You've made a good point that the rock lobster area is very well supported by their people.

**Mr STEVENS** - It's well researched and it's well respected. If a message needs to be sold to rock lobster fishers, they are quite happy to accept the outcomes of it.



**CHAIR** - Thank you very much, Mike.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**

**Mr JOHN McGIVERON**, BREAK O'DAY COUNCIL, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** - John, welcome to the committee and thanks for giving of your time to travel from the coast to be here and for the council's written submission. As we have been advised in the correspondence, you will be presenting the council position with regard to the written submission which has been made.

The procedures today will be recorded verbatim and they will then be transcribed as though it were a sitting of Parliament. So if at any stage you feel a need to suggest we go into closed session, if there are matters you would like to have considered in closed session then we can consider that. Otherwise, it is a public and open hearing.

To commence we would be grateful if you would speak to the written submission which we have received from the council and then we will ask you some question about it and also your verbal evidence.

**Mr McGIVERON** - This is a fairly localised submission obviously, relating to Break O'Day and Georges Bay and particularly, in our case, boat fishing because that is what I am more involved in.

Our concerns mainly relate to the socioeconomic impact of what happens to recreational fishery and probably brought about because of the St Helens barway situation which we may talk about later which is partially resolved, but only partially at this point; and the impending marine protected areas or bioregional protection areas that may eventuate up and down the coast. We can clearly see that if that happens it would have a major effect on the economics of the area that I come from and the people who fish in that area.

Just as a matter of interest, the people I basically represent spend a lot of money to go fishing and do not catch many fish or they let their fish go. This is the interesting thing. In 2008, the people in the club that I belong to tagged and released 420 fish and weighed in 57. So, to catch those 420 fish they probably spent hundreds of thousands of dollars.

**CHAIR** - What species of fish, John?

**Mr McGIVERON** - Tuna, sharks and the odd marlin, but not many. Basically they were game fish, that they predominantly let go. In 2007, 502 were caught, with 75 captured. These are records that we keep very accurately and last year the St Helens Game Fishing Club won the Australian award for 'tag and release' for Australia - the most fish released by a certain number of people within a club.

If we find that marine protected areas and reserves, such as is happening currently at Bruny or the Hippolytes, happened in our area, people would stop going fishing and people would stop coming to St Helens. Our population goes from 2 800 to about 12 000 in the summer and no doubt, predominantly, they come here because they go boating and fishing.

I also have some figures from the Marine Rescue and the Coast Guard on the boat contacts and it is interesting. In March 2007, 601, 682 and 91; in May, 1 554. On the

competition days in March we had 104 boats with 333 anglers and that is 333 families because the guys go fishing and the families sit at home. So that probably relates to couple of thousand people who move into the area for that weekend. The actual cost to do it, for what they actually bring in, is very expensive.

So that is basically where we are coming from. It is protecting the economics and social side of our industry in the event that the push for marine protected areas moves on - and I think it will. Where do we go from there?

**Ms THORP** - You would be aware that the marine protected areas stuff is coming from an international strategy?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I do understand that.

**Ms THORP** - And they have six different categories of parks - from 'no-take' to pretty well - The point I am trying to make is that an area can be designated a marine park without stopping people from fishing.

**Mr McGIVERON** - Absolutely, I have no doubt, but seeing the problems that are rearing their heads over the Bruny one, it is far from resolved obviously and the areas that are most predominant for what we do are likely to be banned completely - from the Hippolytes to Tasman - and that means that people simply will not go or they have to travel further. For us that is a fairly major issue.

One of the other things we commented on was TARFish and I would like to speak on that. I do not have a lot to do with TARFish and it is only more recently since getting re-involved with the Tasmanian Game Fishing Association, that I have had some dealings with them. But what I do see is that the appointment of Mark Nikolai has made a big difference to where I am coming from.

I have learnt what they do, I have learnt what they are trying to do and I have very serious contact with Mark and I think it might go forward. But prior to that I did not have very much to do with the activities of TARFish, so it has all happened in the last 12 months. Now I think it is very important that an organisation such as TARFish be supported for our benefit anyway - very much so. I think they do represent the amateur fisherman very well or that is how it appears to me at the moment.

**Mr WILKINSON** - So you are saying you have noticed the difference since Mark started? He is here by the way.

*Laughter.*

**Mr McGIVERON** - It has absolutely changed and we have spoken. Now we have contact, we have newsletters, we have information and I now understand what TARFish is about whereas prior to that I simply did not understand it. I did not really have much to do with it.

**Ms THORP** - Are you a member of the Tasmanian Game Fishing Association?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I am a Break O'Day councillor and I am President of the St Helens Game Fishing Club -

**Ms THORP** - Is that part of TGFA?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I am a delegate member of the TGFA, I am the Chairman of the St Helens Barway Committee and I own a boat.

**Ms THORP** - You are well qualified.

**Mr McGIVERON** - There are a fair few reasons why I want to get involved in this.

On the grant program, the only thing I can speak of is the work that has been done by Andrew Duke, which was mentioned. We think that is very worthwhile. If the report finishes up somewhere where it can be used. The concern I have with some of these things - and I do not know about this one - is that they finish up for the purpose that they were started - Andrew is doing this for his PhD - then the whole thing disappears. We would like to see something come out of it and then I believe it will have been worthwhile.

**CHAIR** - With some extra funding if required?

**Mr McGIVERON** - Yes, to support the recommendations and the figures that come out of it. I do have fears that it might disappear in the black hole because it is his project and I do not know where these things normally go but I do have concerns that it may disappear.

**CHAIR** - I cannot speak for the other committee members, but I get the impression that it will be inevitable that we refer to the research or the PhD in our report and at least pursue that as best we can. Of course this committee may well finish its deliberations before that study is concluded.

**Mr McGIVERON** - Down the track I think it is these sorts of things that are important to our industry.

We clearly think that we are going to be confronted with the marine protected areas and that is something we need to consider. Most of our boating is boat trips, not fishing, but if we were restricted and had to travel to other areas for fuel, with all the problems associated with getting there and the cost, I believe that people are simply going to stop fishing.

On the question of the barway, I would like to mention that, yes, we have been funded -

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - I was hoping you would, John.

**Mr McGIVERON** - to the tune of \$2 million and that has been good. Work is underway. I have a meeting in the morning with MAST and the representative body. The issue that they are faced with now is the environmental licence to do the work and that will not be easy. We have already been confronted with issues that some people have with moving the sand and doing the work so we are not out of the woods yet and I do not know how

that is going to go. I can see it being drawn out, unfortunately. I may be wrong but I don't think so.

So, yes, the \$2 million is fantastic and we appreciate the support of the Government, and that of Paul Lennon - very much so - because he supported it very strongly before he left. On top of that, MAST has allocated \$250 000 for the Burns Bay boat ramp, which indicates the importance of fishing and boating in that area, to be spent before the end of this year. So there are some major works that could happen there that will improve that fishery and make it a lot better, but the barway is still an issue in the approval.

**CHAIR** - The social impact is not insignificant in terms of the fishing effort around your municipal area.

**Mr McGIVERON** - Having it done?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr McGIVERON** - I think that if something doesn't happen, I would guess we would have about a 50 per cent decline in what happens in that area. People who normally bring large boats to St Helens and leave them there for the summer will be unable to bring them any more; they simply won't come. Just the perception that the barway is going to have something done to it will change the thinking of a lot of people. This is the first time, I think, since the building of the walls that there has been an engineering plan to do something, not just digging a hole, and that is why we were considered for funding. It is a major gain for that area, no doubt about it.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - John, can I take you back to the TARFish organisation? In this submission - and I appreciate what you said about the relationship you have with TARFish now that Mark has taken over the CEO's position - you stated that TARFish is in good direction and this organisation should be beneficial to the recreational fishing industry with a more transparent approach. Would you say that that transparent approach is happening now since Mark or is a more transparent approach still needed?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I don't know how far it can go, but the difference between what I know now and what I knew about it prior to Mark's appointment is remarkable. I have only recently got back as president of the fishing club, even though I have been involved for 40 years. As part of that, I got back on the TGFA and learnt that TARFish was out there doing work. The next process was when Mark became involved. I got to speak to Mark and then he came along to our tournaments and spoke to the members. The newsletters came out and now we have feedback - I didn't know about that before. It is more transparent and I now know where they are coming from but I didn't know before.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Is there any area of TARFish - and it is okay if you don't want to talk about it now - that you feel there may be opportunity to improve?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I probably don't know enough about it, apart from where I have been involved, to comment on that. I do know that the information we got back regarding the Bruny bioregion was absolutely important and it came through TARFish. I wouldn't have known very much about it without delving into things. I simply wouldn't have known without their assistance.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Did you approach them, John, or did they approach you?

**Mr McGIVERON** - Two ways. It came about with Brett Cleary at a TGFA meeting and then subsequently it came out that Mark had been appointed. I met with Mark at St Helens and it has gone from there. To me it has been enlightening and important and I think it will continue to be very important if we want to survive as recreational fishermen. Without that intermediate contact, I think we will go back to exactly where we were, sitting in the dark and not knowing what is going on.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - There has been some discussion previously to this hearing about the value of regional representation on the TARFish body. Given that you have only come back into the organisation, although you have plenty of prior knowledge anyway, do you feel that you have adequate regional representation at this time or would you like to see that regional representation reinstated in the TARFish body?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I would probably like to see a little bit more from the areas it represents, yes. I think that would be good for the organisation and good for the people involved.

**CHAIR** - There was a document you were going to table for us, John, of statistical data.

**Mr McGIVERON** - It just reinforces what happens out there. This is a log sheet from St Helens coastguard and it lists the number of boats that they speak to daily in the summer time. They just picked out a week or a couple of months in the summer. They also made a comment that they were only getting touch with 40 or 50 per cent of the boats because a lot of people go fishing and do not talk to them. But MAST are talking generally to 1 200 in seven days. That is a lot of people that are sitting out there, three or four people in each boat and it is simply an indication - here are copies of a couple of log sheets.

These two here are for the March fishing competition. In 2007 there were 109 boats and 333 fishermen, which represents 333 families in St Helens. I know what I spend to go fishing. This year, just finished, I spent more than \$10 000 to go fishing and I think I caught about \$100 worth of fish. So the important thing is to be able to go fishing. It is not what we take out of it, it is the fact that we can go fishing and it is reasonably safe and we go within 20 to 30 miles of where the boat is kept and we have very little impact on the fishery. I think that is extremely important where we come from.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - It is a lifestyle culture, isn't it?

**Mr McGIVERON** - Yes and we have probably been doing it since 1960. All my friends who have not passed on are doing it as well and the families are moving on with their sons and grandsons moving on. I still have this very strong fear that we will be losing the area that they can fish in safely, close to the port. The fact is, as I said, they are not knocking around the resource. In fact, they are so determined to protect the resource with tag and release that it should work in their favour when we start talking about marine reserves.

**CHAIR** - Is there anything else that you want to present, John?

**Mr McGIVERON** - No, not really. That is the main grievance with the barway issue because we did not have any money and we needed all the support we could get to get funding available. As I said, there will still be issues with that and I can see that dragging on and I hope it does not fall in a hole because of that.

The other one is, as I said, with the marine protected areas or bioregions, it's getting to know about them before they get to the stage where they are too far down the track.

**Mrs RATTRAY-WAGNER** - But it is a fight?

**Mr McGIVERON** - With the Bruny one it was almost fait accompli - the report, not the action because the action really has not happened yet - before we found about it. That is the value of people like TARFish and bodies that are working with governments and with organisations to get this information out so that the regional connection will be very important in a case like that.

**CHAIR** - So the barway being a really important matter and your concern - and I suppose you are echoing council's concern -

**Mr McGIVERON** - Absolutely.

**CHAIR** - that the restitution works could drag on, who can best drive that then, if it does start to languish?

**Mr McGIVERON** - I have a fairly strong committee that is working well and obviously has the ear of a lot of people. Marine and Safety Tasmania have been first-class in this respect. They could not have done more. They have done all the spray work and the engineering and they have had the right people in. Tomorrow we hope to have the plan ready for the environmental licence to go forward, if we can get it approved. We all sat in a room together in Hobart with Parks and Wildlife and all the other agencies, such as Crown Land Services. So I am not sure who else we can lean on if it does not go forward. But I do have serious concerns about getting the approvals to move forward.

I do not see an issue with the approvals - obviously I would not because I am involved. But the sand that is coming into an area that used to be water, it is not an old area it is only being moved back to where the water used to be - it is just relocating the beach space. But we have had issues with Birds Australia, looking at migrating birds, that we might upset their nests. We have had issues with particular shells that might be disturbed. Obviously Aboriginal heritage will come into it because it always does when there needs to be a plan like this. I can see all the issues rolling on for seven to nine months and if this work does not happen before the summer we are going to really miss the opportunity because that is when the barway goes wrong and that is when the sand builds up and moves around. The actual moving of the sand is about a two- to three-month job. So if it started in August, September or October, it would obviously be finished by January, the first part. So it is achievable and engineering-wise it can be done. We have contractors champing at the bit to go forward and they're ready to do the work. If we get held up in the approval process, I can see that it could create a lot of conflict. The money can't be spent unless we go down this track, so it can't be used for anything else. It can't be used for any other engineering works, it has to be this, and I can see a problem - a serious problem, I think.

**CHAIR** - The session is open for further questions to John.

**Mr WILKINSON** - An interesting point was brought up this morning in relation to seals -

**Mr McGIVERON** - So someone is talking about seals?

**Mr WILKINSON** - Yes.

**Mr McGIVERON** - The fish that we didn't tag and release and the ones we didn't bring home were eaten by seals, so I thoroughly agree with what you're saying. I agree with Mike; they're getting so - how can I put it - aggressive these days. They will take bait from the boat. We fish a lot for sharks. Of 14 makos we caught this year, we let 13 go and we got one home, so that's the sort of thing we do with them, but in every case the seals ate the berley bags, they took the shark baits and we had difficulty getting shark hooks out of seals. That's not easy. They're normally in twos and threes and sixes. My son fishes the Pedra Branca - I haven't been for a while because it's too hard - but last year there were about 25 blue fin and they actually caught two, the seals took the rest.

**Mr WILKINSON** - On the way in.

**Mr McGIVERON** - While they are catching them. They wait at the end of the boat and then they're gone. Anyone who goes to Pedra Branca would know that that's what happens. So there is a lot of frustration about how to tackle what is a serious issue.

**Mr WILKINSON** - The way I'm looking at it - and I agree with what Mike says, it would be a brave minister who said, yes, something should be done - we should be looking at some decision on this, because if nothing is done the seals are going to increase in numbers. If they continue to increase in numbers, you've got to look at the sustainability of the fishing stock, I would have thought.

**Mr McGIVERON** - You're absolutely right because around St Helens they never used to be that much of a concern. You'd see perhaps half a dozen in a season, now you see 15 or 20 every trip. Mike's right, they are incredibly smart - they wait until you've got a fish on, and then they just take it. The boats hold no fear for them - I think they well know that they're protected these days, so there's no fear.

**Mr WILKINSON** - They read Mike's newsletter, I think!

*Laughter.*

**Mr McGIVERON** - I don't know what the answer is.

**Mr WILKINSON** - You say you used to see half a dozen in a season, now you see 15 per trip approximately?

**Mr McGIVERON** - Yes - at least.

**Mr WILKINSON** - At least. And how many trips would you make?



**Mr McGIVERON** - I fish every weekend from December through to about April or June, so hundreds. They're getting bigger, I believe; the seals we see now seem to be twice as big as they were a few years ago, so whether they've just got healthy and fat on the fish or whether they're a new breed, I don't know.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Are you able to assist us to write the numbers that have increased over -

**Mr McGIVERON** - I have no doubts that years ago commercial fishermen used to keep the numbers down a fair bit, and we all clearly understand that could happen. It doesn't happen now, there is certainly no evidence of that. Whether it is the fact that the food is there, whether the fish are more available, I really don't know, but the seals are there and they are a problem.

**CHAIR** - John, thank you very much again for taking the time to come over.

**Mr McGIVERON** - Thank you. It was fairly brief and fairly parochial, I guess, but it's a very important part of the area that I live in, and what we do.

**CHAIR** - It addresses our terms of reference, so we appreciate that - whether it's parochial or not. Thank you.

**Mr McGIVERON** - That's why the submission was put in.

**Ms RATTRAY-WAGNER** - Yours was the only local government area to do so. Congratulations.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**