



Northern Land Council

MEDIA RELEASE

Minister should focus on the ‘ones that got away’

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NLC Chief Executive Norman Fry has welcomed the National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey's investigation of the value of recreational and Indigenous fishing, which was released yesterday.

However, Mr Fry said Federal Fisheries Minister Ian Macdonald's focus on sustainable use of marine resources needed to be directed at the recreational and commercial fishing industries, not the Indigenous peoples who have successfully managed their fisheries for millenia.

“Aboriginal people are watching trawlers and net fishermen catch tonnes and tonnes of bycatch in their sea country, which is not sustainable,” Mr Fry said. “We are also largely excluded from the commercial industry despite our traditional links to the sea and its resources.”

“Importantly, in many cases recreational fishermen catch even more tonnage than commercial fishermen, and through new technology such as satellite positioning systems (GPS) they are putting intense pressure on local fishery stocks.”

“As well, we're now finding out that ‘catch and release’ for many species will kill them, so it can't be assumed to be low impact either.”

“Aboriginal people have been managing and hunting dugong, turtle and other species sustainably for thousands of years and are also at the forefront of efforts to conserve these species for the future.”

Mr Fry said Aboriginal people more than anyone had a vested interest in maintaining populations of dugong and turtle, and had watched in dismay as stocks in some areas had declined because of rampant coastal development, pollution, unsustainable commercial fishing practices, boat strike from recreational vessels and destruction of seagrass beds.

“If the Minister is genuine about managing dugong and turtle sustainably for the future then we will work with him, as we have many thousands of years' experience in this area and with the right resources we can get on with the job,” Mr Fry said. “The best way to work together is through involving Aboriginal people in both management and sustainable use of the resource.”

“The NLC supports a number of existing Aboriginal ranger programs and other Aboriginal groups with marine interests, but due to government funding cuts many of these are now facing an uncertain future.”

“It is important that action is taken to rein in unsustainable commercial and recreational fishing practices so that we can reassure traditional owners that the Minister is not using Aboriginal hunting to deflect attention from these issues.”