

From: [REDACTED]
To: [State Development, Natural Resources and Agricultural Industry Development Committee](#)
Subject: Submission to Sustainable Fisheries Strategy from Scott Butterworth
Date: Wednesday, 26 September 2018 12:54:43 PM

To whom it may concern

Please allow me to make the following submission to the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy.

My name is Scott Butterworth and I have been a commercial fisherman for the past 16 years.

Commercial fishing has been my only form of income for most of that time.

In my time as a commercial fisherman I have complied with all the regulations and changes to management policies without any infringements.

I consider myself a competent fisherman and fishing out of the heavily populated port of Mooloolaba I have managed to find many fishing areas that have allowed me the opportunity operate my small fishing business.

I manage these areas in a way that I consider to be farming, as in I harvest certain areas and then leave them alone for prolonged periods in order for them to replenish. I believe this practice has allowed me to stay in business for the last 16 years.

During my time as a fisherman I have closely guarded my fishing areas that have taken me many years to find and understand their natural environmental cycles.

I have lost many areas to recreational fisherman who are usually "on the lookout" for commercial fisherman and the areas that they fish. I have witnessed my hard found areas being discovered by recreational fisherman and seen them decimated to the point that they no longer hold fish.

I have a goal of managing the fishery so I can one day pass my business on to my sons and I find it is very frustrating when these areas are lost to recreational fisherman who are only looking for bragging rights.

I understand that fisheries need to be properly managed, although I believe that the upcoming policy where by all commercial fishing vessels are to be fitted with Vessel Monitoring Systems will expose all my hard found fishing spots for all to see.

I consider that the information and experience I have acquired is my intellectual property and do not believe I should just give it away as it has cost me thousands of dollars and thousands of hours to acquire. How can I be expected to just hand over, at a substantial cost to myself, all this intellectual property that has been very difficult and very costly to acquire.

I understand that the policy has stated that Vessel Monitoring Systems will be fitted to some recreational vessels if they are repeat offenders to the Fisheries Act. I feel that this is discrimination to commercial fishers that have made every effort to comply with Fisheries Act and have not been repeat offenders.

Fisheries Queensland has notified me that the VMS has been in place on Trawlers for many years and that having the VMS on line boats will not be any different. Trawl operators did not have to pay for their VMS units and the ongoing subscriptions, whereas we are required to pay for all associated costs.

I do not know of one single Recreational trawler operator yet there are approximately 700 000 Recreational line fisherman in Queensland. This would mean that closely guarded locations I fish in a manner similar to farming, whereby I fish the areas then leave them alone to give them time to recover, could be absolutely devastated if they were to fall into the wrong hands.

I believe that the information gathered from Vessel Monitoring Systems will be eventually leaked from the third party organizations that gather the data and the Department of Fisheries and it will become available to other fishers who will then share this information. My own personal experience has seen my confidential information leaked from the department to other fisherman.

The costs of running my fishing business have increased substantially since I first began the business. This has at times placed great stress and anxiety on me personally. The annual turnover of my business has remained quite stable yet the rising costs have made it very difficult to remain profitable. The introduction of Vessel Monitoring Systems is going to be another, quite substantial, increase in costs for my already struggling small business.

I am an honest law abiding member of society and small business owner. I feel that I am being treated as a criminal due to the fact that I am a commercial fisher. I recently saw a news article about child sex offenders being fitted with GPS tracking devices to monitor their movements. I immediately thought that I was being held in the same regard as these child sex offenders due to myself having to be tracked at all times whilst undertaking my business activities. This feeling of persecution is very soul destroying and mentally degrading for someone who has never committed an offence and adheres to all laws in a very diligent manner.

I feel that commercial fishers are being treated as criminals, and by treating us as such, it will be the answer to a Sustainable Fishing Management Policy. The sustainability of fisheries management will not miraculously be solved by placing so many demands on commercial fishers. There are so many other environmental and manmade activities that affect fisheries sustainability. I do not see these other activities having similar demands placed on them in the same way as is being done to commercial fishers. We represent a very small percentage of the pressure being placed on our marine environment yet we seem to be coping most of the blame.

The increases in fines for accidental reporting oversights show that we are being treated as less than human because as far as I know it is quite humanly to make mistakes. I have personally experienced the Department making humanly mistakes yet it is OK for the department to make these mistakes without consequence. If we make similar mistakes we can be severely fined to a point that we could lose our entire life savings.

I ask that the policies of the latest Fisheries Management Reforms including Vessel Monitoring Systems for commercial line fishing vessels be reviewed and rejected. As commercial fishers we are already heavily monitored and our reporting obligations are already very stringent and thorough. There is no guarantee that data collected from Vessel Monitoring Systems will not be made available to the wider community. I do not trust third party data collectors or the Department of Fisheries to keep my intellectual property confidential.

I believe that the introduction of VMS will have a devastating impact on fisheries sustainability by potentially giving hundreds of thousands of recreational fisherman access to previously unknown fishing locations and environmental cycles.

The extra costs associated with the introduction of Vessel Monitoring Systems and the loss of my intellectual property and privacy will cause me extreme hardship and potentially destroy my commercial fishing business.

The future of commercial fishing in Australia is in danger of being severely eroded due to the increase in imports from countries that have fisheries far less regulated than we have in Australia. Persecuting our small Australian commercial fishing fleet is the last thing we need in these already difficult times.

The future of the Australian seafood industry is in your hands and we as commercial fishers need your help not your persecution.

Please take this into consideration when reviewing the upcoming changes.

Yours sincerely

Scott Butterworth.

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