**National Seafood Body: Why we need one.**

I am disturbed to note a certain reticence from some quarters about the idea of establishing a national peak body for the commercial fishing and seafood industry.

While I respect everyone’s right to an opinion on this very important issue, I would argue that although diversity is a fundamental characteristic of our industry, it can sometimes operate to our disadvantage.

Having a national peak body is a positive step in taking a wide range of differing opinions and presenting a consolidated industry position that can act as a starting point for progress with our political leaders and the broader community.

I believe most people would acknowledge that representation by State peak bodies plays an important role in getting politicians, regulators and the public to recognise the important contribution our industry makes to the economy, the environment and society at large.

Let’s face it, we need industry bodies – from professional fishing associations that represent individual fishers, sector bodies that represent specific fisheries, to peak state organisations that protect and promote the industry at a State or Territory level.

The canvassing of different opinions, the work to collate and reach an agreed way forward and the presentation of those unified positions to the key influencers and decision-makers is a crucial process in ensuring the sustainable future of our industry.

But the very diversity we celebrate can also act as a road block when we attempt to communicate a unified industry position on any given issue. I have seen this occur on several occasions during my relatively short tenure as the independent Chair of the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council.

And while we squabble amongst ourselves, other interest groups push their own agendas – be they green organisations, the recreational fishing sector or other users of the shared marine environment such as oil and gas companies.

Nothing gives opponents greater leverage in blocking legitimate industry goals than the ability to represent our industry as fractured, divisive and unable to reach consensus.

If fishers can recognise the relevance of having a State peak body to combat this dynamic (however effectively or ineffectively they think this is done) then it baffles me why they would think this is something that should not be duplicated at a national level.

A wide range of issues affect us at on the national stage: marine park planning, country of origin labelling, free trade agreements, the diesel fuel rebate, certainty of resource access in the shared marine environment, workplace health and safety, labour arrangements; the list goes on.

Let’s stand united and unequivocally support the work of the Seafood Industry Leadership Task Force and be prepared to back the advice it will make to develop a truly national peak body to represent our fantastic industry.