QUEENSLAND RECREATIONAL FISHING NETWORK

Caring about our natural resource…

Objection to Fish-light project design

QRFN has endeavoured to be advised of and involved in the design and operation of the Fishlight project in GBRMP waters since its inception. Despite some initial overview level communications with QRFN regarding the project, subsequent requests for updating and engagement have largely been ignored.

QRFN has expressed some grave concerns from the outset regarding the project's structure, consultation and implementation.

The publicly stated justification for the project from the then ALP government and Fisheries Qld, was "to explore alternative commercial fishing apparatus that might be used in the tropical inshore fishery to replace product lost to local fresh fish purchasers with the removal of the majority of large mesh gill net licences in GBRMP waters."

While this intent sounds plausible, at no time has any data been published or produced pertaining to exactly the quantum and composition of the locally purchased and consumed fresh fish taken by large mesh gill nets that this project is supposed to be replacing.

Despite numerous requests for this specific and critical data by QRFN, no data has been forthcoming from FQ.

Surely any high school economics student would understand the concept of "demand and supply" and its vital role in structuring a business case for developing and marketing a product? It would be sheer folly for a business to design and launch a product into the marketplace without first undertaking an extensive potential market evaluation and proof of concept process.

It would be lunacy and a sure path to bankruptcy for a business to spend $9m developing a product that actually only had a market potential of say $2m at best. However, it appears this is exactly what has been done with the Fishlight project.

Without knowing exactly how many tonnes/kilos of fresh fish from large mesh gill nets had historically been purchased and consumed by local communities adjacent to the GBRMP waters, how is it possible to objectively evaluate the success or otherwise of the various apparatus flagged for assessment under the Fishlight project?

Do they need to catch 2 tonnes of barramundi or 10 tonnes of barramundi to replace what was lost from gill nets? Is it 3 tonnes of King salmon or 1 tonne? Was it 100kg of queenfish or 2 tonnes? How much was sold and consumed in the Mackay area? How much was sold and consumed in the Townsville area?

Without this level of accurate data, how on earth can anything tangible be concluded from the Fishlight project?

But digging down into the murky depths of the project further, the trialling of tunnel nets on tropical flats is an absolute nonsensical type of apparatus to deploy in this fragile tropical inshore habitat. The species diversity is such, that the overwhelming majority of the catch is juvenile species and/or species of little or no real commercial value.

However, many of these species which have no relevance to replacing species historically taken by large mesh gill nets, have very high recreational fishing economic and social value.

For all the reasons so eloquently and factually provided in the recent paper authored and distributed by fly fishing and professional guiding interests, QRFN are calling for ***an urgent cessation and subsequent banning of the use of any form of commercial tunnel netting north of Moreton Bay in the state of Queensland.***

By any scientific, economic, environmental or social measure, Tunnel netting cannot possibly be the answer to providing, let alone “replacing fresh fish in local north Queensland market places”.

This apparatus must be removed immediately from the Fishlight project before more damage is inflicted on local inshore fish stocks and communities!

Produced and published by QRFN

27 January 2026