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BRIEFING



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# REEF SAFE AQUACULTURE

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**A sustainable barramundi and prawn aquaculture (fish farming) industry will provide regional jobs and income in Queensland, supply high quality seafood for a growing and increasingly demanding market, and also help to conserve marine species and ecosystems.**

The Queensland aquaculture industry employed about 530 full time equivalent people in 2015-16, most of whom live and work in regional areas. The industry was growing at four per cent per annum until December 2016, when 'white spot disease' was detected on a prawn farm on the Logan River. White spot disease is a virulent disease of prawns transmitted through contaminated water. As a result of the outbreak, the prawn farming industry has suffered financial losses of approximately \$25 million with impact on 115 direct jobs.

Aquaculture farms usually take salt water from the ocean, circulate it through their growing ponds, and finally discharge waste water back into the sea. Most aquaculture farms in Queensland are located adjacent to or within the catchment of the Great Barrier Reef. To help restore the Reef's environmental values the industry needs to have zero or very minimal impact on the Reef (be 'Reef Safe'), particularly in the discharge of waste water.

Ensuring Reef Safe waste water and controlling white spot outbreaks can both be achieved by reducing the amount of sea water pumped into the farms, by cleaning and recirculating (re-using) the water, and by treating it prior to discharge. With proper treatment the waste water discharged from modern farms can be cleaner than when it was first pumped in from the sea. Farm trials at the proposed 259 hectare Guthalungra Prawn Farm expansion proves this can be achieved while also creating up to 150 full time equivalent positions.

Queensland should require all new aquaculture farms to achieve zero net impact on Reef water quality.

Government should also provide concessional loans, repayable over ten years, to existing aquaculture farms to help them install a modern water treatment and recirculation plant and equipment. While the cost of this plant and equipment (and associated works) varies, it is generally in the range of \$1.2 to \$12 million per farm. This will enable the Queensland aquaculture industry to continue to grow and stimulate diverse regional economies, while protecting the Great Barrier Reef.

The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is currently working to identify *Marine Aquaculture Development Areas* where Reef Safe intensive fish farming can take place. This process should be completed as soon as possible, ideally by December 2017.

## Recommended policy:

- Legislation to require all aquaculture farms approved for construction after May 2017 to achieve zero net impact on Reef water quality
- Make concessional loans available to existing aquaculture farms to help them purchase modern water treatment and recirculation plant and equipment.
- Identify and proclaim Marine Aquaculture Development Areas where intensive fish farm development can take place.

## Costs and process:

- Legislation to require all aquaculture farms approved for construction after May 2017 to achieve zero net impact on Reef water quality
- A fund of \$25 million per year for three years for grants or concessional loans to assist existing fish farmers to implement biosecurity measures to halt the spread of white spot disease.

## Jim Higgs

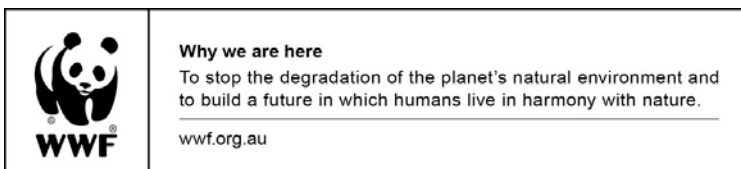
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WWF-Australia Briefing published in May 2017.



WWF-Australia (World Wide Fund for Nature Australia)  
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