

NTGFIA

NORTHERN TERRITORY GUIDED FISHING INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

GENERAL MEETING 22 SEPTEMBER 2005 MINUTES

PRESENT: Allan Beale, Ian Brett, Michael Chick, John Dagan, John Jordan, Dave Gardiner, Mark Grosvenor, Grant Hatcher, Leslee Hills + Les Reif, Chris Hurt, Chris Jones, Mike Jones, Darren Kenny, Russell Kenny, Tom Kontos, Rob Marchant, Jim Metcalfe, Martin Metcalfe, Dan Naujok, Darren Nickolls, Stevan Raines, Paul Salotti,, Dennis Sten, Simon Sten, Russell Trimble, Steve Trouchet, Graeme Williams.
Justin Altaeas +Tony Pearce (ACP F/C) Tony (Gold Cat)??

APOLOGIES: Geoff Corrie, Rod Cole, Les Woodbridge

Meeting opened at 1915hrs.

After welcoming members, Graeme Williams proceeded to outline the history of the NTGFIA and the circumstances relating to the appointment of its current executive committee. (Graeme Williams Chair, Grant Hatcher Vice Chair, John Jordan Secretary, Darren Nickolls Treasurer, Steve Trouchet Gen Committee Member). The NTGFIA had been given a grant of \$40,000 by the Government to employ an Executive Officer whose prime tasks would be the formation of an Association under the Associations Act and the submission to Government of recommendations on ways to make the Association self supporting. The motivating factor behind this initiative was an increasing emphasis on consultation with all sectors of industry in developing sustainable management plans for the exploitation of the Northern Territory's fish resources.

Lloyd Browne, was selected for the position of Executive Officer from a wide field of applicants. As noted on the NTGFIA website, Lloyd was an Assistant Director of Fisheries in the 1980's and possesses considerable experience in Fisheries management and administration.

At its inaugural committee meeting the NTGFIA Executive instructed Lloyd to

- (a) review and report back on the status of FTOs under the NT Fisheries Act;
- (b) scrutinize existing Licensing and Nominations policies for conformity with current legislation – especially the Privacy Act.
- (c) undertake a recruitment drive for members.

Graeme then asked Lloyd to report his progress on these matters.

- (a)Lloyd said that the provisions in the Fisheries Act relating to the FTO Fishery appeared to be something of an afterthought. The fishery is established under Part 11, Division 3 (Regulations 192 – 198) of the Fisheries Regulations and is suffering a lack of identity and professional status as a consequence. At the very least the FTO Fishery needed to be included in the body of the Act in a way that is commensurate with its importance to NT Fishing Tourism and to the NT Economy generally. One of the purposes of this current meeting would be to

consider appropriate measures which might be introduced into the Fisheries Act to establish and enhance the status and identity of FTOs.

(b)The requirement to submit Tax File Number Declarations to establish the bona fide status of employees prior to Nomination approval being granted was a breach of the Privacy Act and unnecessary under the policy quoted (the Nominations Policy) which was designed to preclude circumvention of the restriction on licence transfer in a licence limited fishery. Recent talks with the Licensing Authority have resolved these differences to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

(c)NTGFIA membership currently stood at 66 out a total of some 105 licences.

INTRODUCTION OF LICENCE FEES:

The Chairman then raised the issue of the introduction (or otherwise) of an FTO licence fee stating that in discussions with the Government an annual fee of \$800 had been suggested. This amount was based on the lowest licence fee paid by commercial fishermen. Graeme said it was totally inappropriate to regard FTOs as commercial fishermen and there ought to be another basis for calculating the fee assuming it was to be introduced. It was up to FTOs at this meeting to decide whether they were prepared to pay a licence fee and if so how much.

Discussion on the matter was led by Steve Raines and Tom Kontis, the concensus being that members wanted something in return for the imposition of a licence fee, and that an \$800 fee was far too high. Discussion then ensued on measures which members would like to see implemented to enhance the commercial viability of FTO businesses in return for a licence fee - including Licence Limitation, recognition in the Fisheries Act and the activation of the Assistant Fisherman as a legal operating entity .

Lloyd said that the Fisheries Act was currently under review so there would never be a better time to press the Government on such matters.

The introduction of a moratorium on new FTO licences and the level of recognition required for the fishery within the Act was then discussed but no resolution was reached.

General discussion followed on the deleterious impact of Commercial fishing at Endalgout Island and barra cages in Port Hird.

MOTION

Rob Marchant proposed the following motion:- **that there should be a staged introduction of licence fees over a three year period with incremental increases in fees as follows:- Year 1 – \$200; Year 2 - \$600; ; Year 3 - \$900. Fee increases should be linked to satisfactory progress towards major goals for the fishery as previously discussed ie licence limitation and increased recognition of the FTO Fishery.** The motion was seconded by the Chairman.

General discussion on the motion followed, which resulted in it being split into three separate items,:-

Item 1: that the NTGFIA endorse the principle of the introduction of licence fees on the proviso that official measures are adopted to enhance the status of

FTOs and to raise the standard of professionalism within the industry along the lines of the preceding discussion.

Item 2: that there be a staged increase in licence fees over a three to five year period. Fee increments to be negotiated with Government on the basis of progress towards NTGFIA objectives.

Item 3: That the initial fee be \$200.

Each of the Items was discussed separately as follows:

Item 1: The possibility of the Government accepting a vote **against** the introduction of a licence fee was first canvassed. Members of the Executive Committee expressed their opinion that the introduction of a licence fee was inevitable and that if the Association did not make a positive move in that direction it was highly probable that the Government would introduce a fee anyway. In that eventuality the Association would have sacrificed whatever bargaining power it has. The general consensus of the meeting was that the introduction of licence fees was inevitable and that the Association's best tactic was to minimize the amount of any such fee by linking it to a three or five year plan for the industry which would aim at increasing standards of professionalism and economic viability eventually leading to the ultimate goal of Licence Limitation. Jim Metcalf and Tom Kontis opposed Item 1 of the motion, which was then put to the vote and passed by a majority of 25 votes to 2.

Item 2: General discussion was centered on the nature and extent of changes/enhancements the Association saw as critical to enhancing the economic viability of its spectrum of businesses. In depth discussion and specific identification of such issues was deferred pending the outcome of the vote on the entire motion. A flexible time frame (3 – 5 years) was decided to allow both the Government and the Association ample time to consider the ramifications of proposed policy changes.

Item 2 was then put to the vote and was passed unanimously.

Item 3: There was minimal discussion and on being put to the vote Item 3 was passed unanimously.

Discussion then turned to the various provisos which the Association needed to negotiate with the Government as part of the first year Licence Fee Package.

Essentially these were

- (i) Full and unqualified recognition of the NTGFIA as an important Fishery in its own right coupled with the inclusion in the revised Fisheries Act of provisions designed to achieve this goal.
- (ii) To cut red tape and facilitate day to day business operations, the devolution of more autonomy to FTO Corporations by enabling them to hire assistant fishermen in accordance with the conditions of their (Corporate) FTO licences. To implement this proposal a change to the current nomination provisions will be required in the new Fisheries Act.
- (iii) On-line submission of Fishing Returns. Using the internet will minimise administrative workloads for both Industry and Government and preclude or significantly lessen the chance of returns going astray in the post.

(iv) Clarification and formalization of the role of the Assistant Fisherman within the current Fisheries Act.

Other Business

Rob Marchant proposed another motion concerning the previous Fishing Tour Operators Association as follows:- that the remaining assets which amounted to some \$1200 in a bank account be transferred to the NTGFIA. The motion was seconded by Grant Hatcher and was passed unanimously. Lloyd undertook to investigate the winding up of the old Association and the transfer of the funds.

There was general discussion on a number of matters – eg Fuel Subsidies, Survey Requirements, Kakadu Licences but no resolutions were reached.

The Chairman thanked the members for their attendance and closed the meeting at 10.30pm.