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- FEATURE: WALTER STARCK TAKES A GOOD LOOK AT AFMA'S BAD ATTITUDES
- RIBS AND RRBS MAKING WAVES IN AUSTRALIA
- ALL EYES ON WESTERN AUSTRALIA



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EDITORIAL

AFMA – Rotten to the core

Ifully realise that readers from other sectors of the marine industry are probably bored with the misdeeds of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and the problems it has caused Australia's fishing industry.

Although the fishing industry, largely due to its own weaknesses, is worse off than any other sector, I persist with highlighting its problems because "there, but for the Grace of God, go you".

The AFMA debacle provides all of us with valuable lessons of the dangers of a bureaucracy that gets out of control due to lack of political interest. Fishing is a classic case of failing due to inadequate lobbying despite what former AFMA chief Richard McLoughlin claims.

Barry McRoberts and Walter Starck have both written very eloquently elsewhere in this issue on the AFMA mess in general and the McLoughlin departure in particular. They show very clearly the dangers of persisting with this thoroughly dysfunctional and discredited organisation.

Interestingly, I was talking recently with a judge who in a past life was, of course, a barrister. He asked me about AFMA and what it was like to deal with. Before I let loose, he volunteered that he had often acted against governments on a wide range of matters. However, he said, he had never experienced such nasty, vindictive or malicious people as he had at AFMA. I thought that is a view that would be widely shared around that part of the fishing industry that has had to deal with AFMA.

As Walter Starck's analysis of Richard McLoughlin's recent revelations shows, we have in AFMA a bureaucratic organisation that has got out of control. It has become like a police force that makes the laws. Frighteningly, with a staff of well over one hundred people who "manage" or, perhaps "rule" around 600 boats, AFMA is like having a police car for every five vehicles on the road.

While lack of political oversight can, to some extent, be blamed for this sorry state of affairs, it is not the only cause. The "system", whereby policy development now seems to be solely sourced from the bureaucracy is one. Another and very major one is the complete absence of effective lobbying or policy development input on the part of industry.

Fishing has not made itself interesting to politicians. It hardly registers on their radar screens because the industry has failed to even try to make it do so.

Despite this, the industry has been fortunate that its two most recent ministers, Senators Eric Abetz and Ian Macdonald, have at least had their hearts in the right place. That they have been largely ineffectual in controlling the excesses of AFMA is more the fault of industry than of them.

Neil Baird
Editor-in-Chief

NOTE: In light of recent important AFMA activities, Walter Starck's piece on "Where our Fish Come From" will continue in next months edition.

