

**SENT ON BEHALF OF:**  
**North Queensland Fly Fishers' Club**  
**ANSA (Qld)**  
**Sunfish**  
**Australian Fishing Trade Association**  
**The Inshore Flats Project**  
**Brisbane Fly Fishing Club**

**ALSO SUPPORTED BY:**  
**Queensland Recreational Fishing Network**

9 February 2026

The Honourable Tony Perrett MP  
Queensland Minister for Primary Industries  
By email: DPIMinisterandDG.Corro@dpi.qld.gov.au

Dear Minister Perrett,

**FishLIGHT program - objection to tunnel net commercial fishing gear trials**

Thank you for the letter from your Chief of Staff dated 23 January 2026. Now that some key tunnel net trial results have been made public<sup>1</sup>, we are writing to you in more detail about the economic, social and environmental reasons why tunnel nets should not progress further in Central & North QLD.

Executive summary

As you know, the vision of your government's 25 year blue-print for Queensland's primary industries (*Prosper 2050*) is that they will be "profitable, productive and sustainable for future generations" (pages 2 and 20). Per *Prosper 2050*, this vision is only achievable where the industries in question are "economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable" (page 21).

The 2025 tunnel net trial data, and other information we have gathered, strongly suggests that this gear type is unlikely to be profitable or sustainable, and will carry economic, environmental and social costs that will far outweigh any likely benefits. As such, it is already apparent that this gear type is unlikely to obtain a social licence or advance the objectives of *Prosper 2050*.

In the circumstances, progressing the tunnel net trials further carries a significant risk that valuable public funds will be wasted. Those funds could now be diverted to supporting commercial fisherman with the 2027 gillnet phase-out in more productive ways. We call on your

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<sup>1</sup> Webinar by the FishLIGHT program's principal Investigator, Dr Sam Williams, hosted by Reef Ecologic on 9 December 2025 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nujJb86PNpE>>

government to take this approach and stop the tunnel net trials, rather than investing further funds in a high risk gear that offers little or no prospect of a meaningful, long-term return on the research trial investment.

### Key points

The key points for you to please consider include the following:

1. **Lower value catch species + higher tunnel net operating costs + operating constraints mean tunnel nets can only provide a small revenue stream, with little or no profit, that may be short-lived:** 97% of the 2025 tunnel net trial catch was “by-product” (lower commercial value) or “by-catch” (discarded) species, with poor or average eating reputation, in QLD’s northern regions inshore fishery. Given each tunnel net shot requires a full days’ work by 3+ fisherman, and operational constraints will limit the number of sites and shots, a tunnel net fishery is likely to contribute only a small annual revenue stream to Queensland (we estimate **less than \$1 - \$2m p.a.** wholesale revenue), with limited or no profit<sup>2</sup>. Presumably for this reason, professional fishermen have questioned whether the tunnel net operations can be government subsidised. The risk of local stock depletion also suggests that any revenue stream will be unsustainable (refer 3 below).
2. **The economic harm of tunnel nets will far outweigh any possible benefit:** On a highly conservative estimate, Central & North Queensland’s globally recognised recreational flats fishery contributes far more to the economy: **over \$125 million** per year<sup>3</sup>. This includes millions of dollars in expenditure by interstate and international angling tourists who visit Queensland to fish its world-class inshore flats for iconic sportfish species – golden trevally, giant trevally and permit – the same low value seafood species that the tunnel net trials caught in high proportions. Introducing tunnel nets will cause a direct resource conflict with the recreational flats fishery: tourist anglers will travel elsewhere, locals will lose the sport and pastime they love, and the lost expenditure will far outweigh any economic benefit a tunnel net fishery can bring. The economic harm includes professional fishing guides losing their jobs, flow-on economic losses for tourism and local communities (hotels, restaurants, tackle shops etc) and lost opportunities for strong future growth. Balanced against this, tunnel nets are not necessary to continue local seafood supply: other gears and aquaculture can be used. For example, the FishLIGHT trial of commercial line fishing for Barramundi (a higher value seafood species, that can also be farmed, and which Queenslanders love eating) shows promising results. *Prosper 2050* also identifies new aquaculture products as an emerging market on page 19.

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<sup>2</sup> See [12]-[19] of Chapter 3, *Trial of tunnel net fishing gear in Central & North Queensland: Fly fishers’ concerns presented to DPI on 19 January 2026*.

<sup>3</sup> See the detailed economic data in Chapter 1, *Trial of tunnel net fishing gear in Central & North Queensland: Fly fishers’ concerns presented to DPI on 19 January 2026*.

3. **Lack of scientific evidence and environmental risk:** You have stated “*We are delivering a plan for Queensland’s future by making fisheries management decisions based on scientific evidence*” (press release 13.12.25). We respectfully agree with that decision making principle. To our knowledge, no scientific evidence establishes that a new tunnel net fishery in Central & North Queensland can be sustainable, without the stocks of golden trevally, giant trevally, permit and other tunnel net catch species being locally depleted. Instead, the trial data proves that tunnel nets can catch over 6,000 fish in a single net shot. This is deeply concerning, given the higher operating costs, and lower value seafood species, will require the operators to harvest a large number of fish per net shot in order to break even (let alone make a profit). The experience of professional charter guides, who have collectively spent tens of thousands of hours fishing the flats, strongly suggests that tunnel nets will locally deplete the fish stocks. In addition, the flats where tunnel nets would be used are fish nurseries. To our knowledge, no scientific evidence exists about the post-release survival and post-release predation rates on juveniles, or other bycatch, that are released from a tunnel net. Also, it is plain from Fisheries QLD’s own documents that tunnel nets pose a risk to threatened, protected and endangered species.
4. **Tunnel nets have low prospects of being permitted in dugong protected areas:** Commercial fishermen have told Fisheries QLD that tunnel nets will not be commercially viable unless they are used in QLD’s sensitive Dugong Protection (Special Management) Areas (DPAs). **This fact alone presents a real risk that any further expenditure on the tunnel net research program will be wasted.** The Federal Government has given repeated assurances to UNESCO that the high value, DPA habitats within and near the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Property will be kept net-free. Consistently with this, we understand that federal and state laws already prevent tunnel nets from being used within the DPAs. Tunnel nets have no place in QLD’s DPAs.
5. **Lack of social licence:** There is no evidence that locals or tourists want large and highly visible 1.6 km long inshore nets within or near the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, in DPAs, or in areas visible from town beaches and foreshores. Common sense suggests the opposite. This is all the more so when the fish being caught have low or no seafood value, poor or average eating reputation, and very high recreational and tourism value. In 2026, many will see the introduction of such a fishery to be a backward step, not a forward looking step towards modern, scientifically based fisheries management.

The above concerns are addressed in greater detail in the **attached** document titled “*Trial of tunnel net fishing gear in Central & North Queensland - Fly fishers’ concerns presented to DPI on 19 January 2026*”, **which includes detailed economic data**, and was presented by a group of fly fishers to the principal trial researcher (Dr Williams) and DPI staff at an online meeting on 19 January 2026. Please note, the environmental concerns (Chapter 2) were prepared with scientific advice and input from Emeritus Professor Marcus Sheaves of the James Cook University, a tropical coastal ecosystems expert, who has generously volunteered his time to assist fly fishers to understand the environmental issues. In addition, the document outlines

important implications for non-fly fisher recreational anglers (lure and bait), who place very high value on many tunnel net catch species, and the inshore fishery in general. Two of the signatories to this letter (Qld Sportsfishers (ANSA) and Sunfish) have many non-fly fisher members.

As we have stated, as more people learn that tunnel nets are being trialled and the trial results, community objections will grow. Consistently with this, our opposition is now supported by the following additional organisations: *Australian Fishing Trade Association, Queensland Recreational Fishing Network, The Inshore Flats Project* and the *Brisbane Fly Fishing Club*. Please see **attached** the letter of support from QRFN.

We look forward to your response, and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss these important issues.

Yours faithfully

Chris Burgess & Justin Webber – *The Inshore Flats Project*  
The Hon. Bob Baldwin – *Australian Fishing Trade Association*  
Shaun Manthey – *President, Qld Sportsfishers (ANSA)*  
David Bateman AM – *Secretary & Deputy Chairman, Sunfish Queensland*  
Dr Marcus Walker – *President, Brisbane Fly Fishing Club*  
Kim Macpherson – *President, North Queensland Fly Fishers' Club*