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

6 March 2026
The Honourable Senator Murray Watt
Federal Minister for the Environment and Water
By email: Minister.watt@dcceew.gov.au

Dear Minister,

Tunnel net fishing gear is a serious new threat to the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Property, a Matter of National Environmental Significance that you can stop

As recreational fishermen, we are committed stewards of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Property and a major community of users. For this reason, we, the seven recreational fishing organisations listed in Annexure A, are writing to raise our serious concerns about the 1.6 km long tunnel nets being trialled by Fisheries QLD as potential new commercial fishing gear within and near the GBR World Heritage Property. The gear is being trialled as part of the $9 million FishLIGHT program. Half of this funding derives from the *Fisheries Research and Development Corporation*, which the Federal Government in turn co-funds.

The tunnel net trial data generated in 2025, and other information referenced in the Annexures to this letter, demonstrates that tunnel nets are <u>not</u> an acceptable replacement gear for the gillnets being retired in 2027. Action should be taken to stop the tunnel net trials now, so that the funding can be diverted to support the remaining 27 gillnet ("NX") licence holders in more appropriate ways.

<u>Allowing a new tunnel net fishery within and near the GBR World Heritage Property:</u>

1. Is inconsistent with Australia's commitment to the World Heritage Committee (**WHC**) to establish net-free zones in high value habitat areas (see Annexure C) and to implement the QLD Sustainable Fishing Strategy (see Annexure D).

2. Will negatively impact tourism and diminish the economic contribution of the GBR World Heritage Property (more than $9 billion per year and 77,000 jobs). Recreational fishing is a major contributor to this economic value and jobs (see further Annexure D at [10]-[13]). Many jobs within QLD's recreational fishing and tourism sectors depend upon the GBR World Heritage Property's globally

recognised reputation for providing a world-class, sustainable fishing experience. This reputation, the inshore fishing experience, and its economic contribution to Australia, are likely to be seriously damaged, if a new tunnel net fishery is established within and near the GBR World Heritage Property.

3. Poses serious environmental risks (see Annexure E, which was prepared with expert input from Emeritus Professor Marcus Sheaves of James Cook University).

4. Lacks a social licence, and is incompatible with the World Heritage Listing Criteria (see Annexure F).

5. Is inconsistent with [119] of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, which states that "*Properties may support a variety of ongoing and proposed uses that are ecologically and culturally sustainable and which may enhance the quality of life and well-being of communities concerned. The State Party and its partners must ensure their use is equitable and fully respects the Outstanding Universal Value of the property*".

6. In view of points 1 to 5 above, unnecessarily increases the risk of the GBR World Heritage Property being listed as "World Heritage in Danger", which would have catastrophic economic and reputational consequences for Australia.

A basic fact sheet about the tunnel net trials is included as Annexure G.

<u>Next steps</u>

Unlike the climate change and water quality risks to the GBR World Heritage Property, tunnel netting is a risk that can be stopped with immediate effect, before the gear is commercialised. We ask that the Federal Government stop the trials of tunnel nets in Central & North Queensland now, having regard to the risk that tunnel nets pose to the outstanding universal value of the GBR World Heritage Property, a matter of national environmental significance. Please advise us of your response.

Thank you for your time considering these important issues. We would welcome the chance to meet with you to discuss them further. We would much prefer for this matter to be resolved domestically, than to resort to writing to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and the WHC before their meeting in July 2026.

Yours sincerely,

The recreational fishing groups listed in Annexure A
CC to: the persons listed in Annexure B