

**No Native Plants = No Habitat = Poor Water Quality = No Fish**

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The environment necessary for the long-term health of our fish is under threat. This threat is coming from a number of sources including commercial, residential, industrial and rural development. Some of the threat is new and some of it is cumulative from ill considered development in times when perhaps we did not know any better.

However, as we approach the year 2000, we are becoming increasingly aware of the impact that this massive loss of native habitat is having on our environment. Sunfish North Queensland is specifically concerned about the loss of fish habitat and resultant reduction in water quality which will impact on our native fish.

Over the last 12 months we have seen or become aware of the following:

- SIIP proposal for the Herbert area which we believe will destroy critical fish habitat.
- SIIP proposal for the Tully-Murray region which will allow the development of a further 30 000 hectares of land for sugar planting. We believe that this will impact adversely on the fishery well beyond the immediate area.
- A small fish kill in Townsville as a result of poor tide gate management by the relevant authority. Only tilapia and some tarpon survived.
- A massive fish kill at Lagoon and Victoria Creeks from an unnatural cause yet to be determined.
- Outpour of untreated waste into natural waterways from a sugar mill between Giru and Brandon.
- The destruction of important ephemeral wetland for sugar planting between Ingham and Rollingstone and between Cardwell and Tully. This includes the clearing of riparian strips.
- The capture of an increasing number of fish in the Hinchinbrook region and adjacent critical feeder areas that appear to be diseased possibly as a result of acid sulphate run-off.
- A significant fish kill immediately downstream of a levee in the Burdekin River.
- The lifting of the moratorium on ponded pastures which will deny more habitat to fish.
- Yabulu untreated effluent overflow under licence into Halifax Bay.
- Numerous levies in the Burdekin River delta and other river systems for the benefit of rural industries which deny tidal flow and access for fish.

These incidents cannot be allowed to continue!

Sunfish North Queensland is not opposed to sustainable development in any sector of industry or the community. The key word is 'SUSTAINABLE'. The environment in north Queensland is an extremely valuable commodity. Individual industries are not able to make decisions on their impact from a holistic perspective and their pecuniary interest has the ability to influence decisions. Each area considers that its impact is minimal, but the combined impact is significant. Only government can control impacts from a neutral and a whole of community based perspective.

State and Federal Governments have recognised the importance of both the rainforest and the reef but have neglected the important wetland areas in the middle that join these precious resources. At the moment we are rapidly divorcing the rainforest from the reef in a way that is not sustainable.

Most native fish spend a considerable and important part of their life cycle in wetlands well above dry season water levels. Without this wetland, their survival rate is decreased dramatically. Species dependent on these areas include barramundi, mangrove jack, jungle perch and tarpon. Respected fisheries biologists have recommended that 'the wetlands be left alone'.

Official government figures are reporting reduced catch of important commercial species and available recreational records are indicating a significant reduction in catch/effort ratios. This continued loss will not only impact adversely on our lifestyle in years to come but it will also harm us economically in the tourism industry. Already fishing tourists are driving past north Queensland on their way to the Northern Territory because of a well-advertised healthier fishery. This is costing Queensland millions of dollars in lost revenue.

It is time for Queensland to take stock of its resources and develop a coordinated approach to the management of our coastal plains that feed into the Great Barrier Reef lagoon. We are only now becoming aware of the adverse cumulative impacts of our ill-considered past actions. We must learn from this and repair the wrongs of the past and at the same time give greater consideration to the potential impacts of future land clearing and unnatural drainage modification.

State and Federal governments must come up with a plan for a coordinated approach for the management of this rich and rare resource. We need to look at the mistakes of our more developed areas and preserve what we have for the benefit of future generations.

We **must** manage our environment for the long term benefit of **all** Australians – not just a select few.