



Hon Vicky Darling MP
Member for Sandgate

Ref: CTS 13612/11



**Queensland
Government**

Minister for Environment

- 1 SEP 2011

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I refer to your letter of 4 August 2011 enclosing a copy of Petition No. 1711-11 and 1736-11 lodged in the Queensland Legislative Assembly.

The Petition draws to the attention of the House that during April this year, 28 green turtles were found dead on our beaches, and that the majority of these deaths can be attributed to the use of commercial nets in the river to harvest the new barramundi stock as a result of recent flooding from Awoonga Dam.

The Petitioners request the House to enact permanent laws to prevent further netting activities in the Boyne River and surrounding inlet area, to protect the aquatic species including dugong and marine turtles in the Boyne River.

Queensland's extreme weather events earlier this year have had a significant impact on the green turtle population along the Queensland coastline and more specifically near the Boyne River.

Assessments from the Gladstone area indicate the primary food source of the green turtle, seagrass, has dramatically declined due to increased turbidity and sediment run-off associated with the flooding events in January and February 2011. This situation has resulted in a green turtle population which is in poor condition with individuals required to travel further distances, modify diet and exhaust fat reserves. These individuals consequently become more vulnerable to boating and fishing activity they could normally avoid, due to spending more time at the water's surface, having reduced breath holding capacity and being less responsive.

During May and June 2011, the Government made an interim conservation order (ICO) prohibiting netting for 60 days on the Boyne River. This prohibition was in response to a number of turtle deaths in a short period of time correlating with a rise in netting activity from barramundi spilling over the Awoonga Dam.

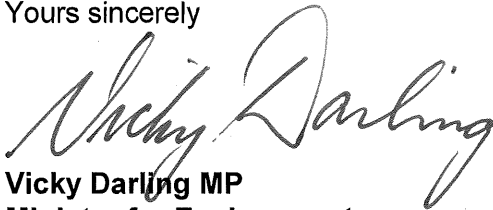
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While in place, the ICO was successful in reducing the incidences of dead turtles near the mouth of the Boyne River. Since the conclusion of the ICO, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) officers, in conjunction with local net fishers and the Queensland Seafood Industry Association, have developed and implemented a voluntary 'Code of Practice' aimed at mitigating the likelihood of future negative turtle/net interactions. The Code prescribes the adoption of improved netting techniques such as reduced net 'soak' times, higher net inspection regimes, avoiding known turtle aggregation areas, the regular presence of independent fish observers on board to monitor for by-catch, presence of QPWS officers at net retrieval, and call in and reporting requirements for recording all netting operations and any turtle interactions.

Importantly, since the recommencement of netting and the implementation of the Code on 29 June 2011 there has been no known or observed turtles deaths associated with netting activity on the Boyne River. The existing netting regulations (for example, seasonal netting closures) coupled with the voluntary 'Code of Practice' are currently considered adequate to mitigate any risks from commercial netting for the Boyne River green turtle population while it recovers.

Should you have any further enquiries, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Damien Head Regional Manager, Central Queensland Marine, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Environment and Resource Management on telephone 4967 7350.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vicky Darling', written in a cursive style.

Vicky Darling MP
Minister for Environment