

Communique - FRDC Board Engagement Meeting Perth – 16 and 17 June 2021

After a difficult period of necessary distance that was a product of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the FRDC's Board and staff were appreciative of the opportunity to re-connect with stakeholders from across Western Australia's fishing and aquaculture sectors during their visit to Perth on 16 and 17 June 2021.

Over the two days the Board met with companies, peak bodies, and existing and emerging leaders across fishing and aquaculture. The purpose of the visit was to listen to experiences and observations shared by stakeholders, identify issues and opportunities, and understand how the FRDC can help through targeted investment in Research, Development and Extension.

It was clear that in many ways WA is in an enviable position, enjoying diverse endemic species, well-resourced structures to represent the interests of high value sectors, and growing focus on developing aquaculture opportunities.

The Board noted the significant disturbance caused by trade disruptions associated with the global pandemic, geopolitical tensions and historical environmental events (ocean heat wave), and admired the entrepreneurial spirit evident in stories shared relating to the exploration of new markets and fisheries enhancement solutions.

The FRDC Board and staff were encouraged by the evident support for processes to ensure strong communication of needs across Western Australia through the newly re-established WA Research Advisory Committee (RAC).

The value of the FRDC's long-standing investment in the development of tomorrow's leaders was clear throughout the visit, with scholarship recipients from the various capability and capacity building initiatives represented strongly across all meetings and events.

A number of challenges and opportunities were identified, including:

- The need to invest in capacity building – developing the next generation of leaders and implementing succession planning;
- Improvement to the linkage between FRDC's indigenous reference group to improve engagement with traditional owners to create shared economic opportunities across fishing and aquaculture;
- Establishment of national and regionally integrated data methodologies to inform improved decision making in the areas of market access, recreational fishing and economic valuation of seafood supply chains;
- The need to anticipate and respond to future challenges associated with social license;
- Improved extension to end-users of existing R&D

The need for FRDC to:

- Ensure the historical research on processing is made available to those pursuing alternative marketing and markets for rock lobster;
- Support the science for the expansion of aquaculture, fisheries enhancement, restorative habitat technologies and artificial reefs;

- Support new product and market development to improve supply chain resilience – responding to COVID-19 pandemic;
- Invest in science to support the understanding of the impact of major perturbations (e.g. heatwaves) on marine ecology;
- Invest in science to address interactions with Threatened, Endangered and Protected (TEP) species (e.g. Sea Lions, seabirds);
- Invest in science to inform stakeholders on how to mitigate shark depredation;
- Invest in science to inform resource sharing and access for inshore fisheries, including development of aquaculture;
- Reduce the complexity and delays associated with navigating FRDC’s R&D planning and approval processes;
- Support opportunities for productivity improvements and increased co-management from data and digitisation development; and
- Invest in science to inform emerging climate trends that are impacting fisheries productivity, ecosystem ecology and shifts in stock movement and recruitment.

Looking ahead, Board members noted exciting opportunities to help each sector achieve their aspirations, in partnership with the WA RAC and relevant Industry Partnership Agreements (IPAs). Opportunities to continue to amplify the extension of R&D outputs to relevant end-users was also noted as a crucial ingredient in achieving this. The Board resolved to meet more regularly with Western Australian stakeholders to assist in the process.