FEDERAL GOVERNMENT MUST GET TOUGH ON ILLEGAL SHARK FISHERMEN

The Territory Government is calling on Canberra to step up its security within the Australian Fishing Zone following the detection of an Indonesian fishing boat dropping shark nets just off a Top End beach.

The alarming discovery, reported and photographed by a Territory charter boat operator, follows a letter Fisheries Minister, Kon Vatskalis, sent to his federal counterpart, Senator Ian Macdonald, earlier this month stating that incursions by illegal foreign fishing vessels around the Top End coastline continues to be a serious threat to our well managed fisheries.

“The message is not getting through and illegal vessels continue to defy Australian authorities and fish in our waters,” said Mr Vatskalis.

“What really concerns me is these illegal operators appear to be targeting shark for the lucrative shark fin industry. This defeats the work the Territory has been doing in recent years to address the special management needs of the shark fishery.

“The Federal Government claims the Australian Fishing Zone is under constant surveillance, but one wonders how such incursions are being made so easily, right under the nose of authorities?

“By the end of last year, the Federal Government claimed more than 140 illegal fishing vessels had been caught in northern waters. How many of these highly sophisticated fishing operators escaped undetected?

“It seems the Federal Government is very focused on the Southern Ocean, even deploying the new Customs and Fisheries armed vessel Oceanic Viking - which boasts two .50 calibre machine guns – yet northern waters and our important shark fishery appear to be forgotten.”

Mr Vatskalis said the Territory has the most conservative and comprehensive management arrangements in place for sharks, with our achievements recognised by key conservative groups in the preparation of the National Shark Plan.

“The Territory’s shark fishery has undergone ecological assessment by the Commonwealth. We will receive a full three-year accreditation in the next few months following further management measures recently agreed to by our local industry,” he said.

“Our commercial fishermen are responsible operators and have worked hard to get the industry to where it is today. Together, we are working to keep the Territory moving ahead.
“It’s ludicrous that our local operators are the ones reporting illegal fishing activity. It’s time for the Federal Government to review its approach and step up its action against foreign fishing vessels.

“Words are not enough, now is the time for action.”

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