MEDIA RELEASE
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RECREATIONAL FISHING
A RIGHT OR A PRIVILEGE?

Gerry Wood, the Independent Member for Nelson, says the Blue Mud Bay decision highlights a very important issue. That is whether non commercial fishers have a basic right to fish in NT seas between the high and low tides.

Gerry says that the recent court decision and the subsequent decision that permits will be required has meant that many fishers feel they have lost a right they once had i.e. to fish our Northern Territory coast and rivers without requiring a permit.

Gerry feels that all citizens of Australia should be allowed to fish for recreation purposes subject to normal restrictions as bag limits or no fish zones.

Whilst the court may have good reason to limit commercial fishers or professional fishing tour operators to protect traditional fishing areas it seems wrong that the average fisher cannot throw a line in to catch a feed for him/herself or his/her family in the inter tidal zones.

Gerry supports the concept of Land Rights but feels that when it comes to the sea then that is a different matter. Water and the fish that live in that water are moving about all the time and do not just belong to one area. Outside the low water mark fish can be taken without a permit but if they move inside the low water mark they cannot be fished without a permit. How would one police that? How could one define the low water mark at high tide and how could you prove in court that a fisher was inside the permit area? Who is going to police permits for 85% of the coastline? The ruling by the court seems oblivious to the practical and social implications of the wider community.

Surely the taking of fish is something that we all should be able to do. Fishing is not a recreation exclusive to one portion of the population; it covers all races, gender, age groups and beliefs. It is important for families and for mates.

All people should be able to fish our Australian and Territory waters without a permit and bring fish home for a feed.

This issue has the potential to be unnecessarily divisive in our community and the court should have given more thought to the practical problems that would lead from that decision.