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FirstMate Submission to the Industry Transformation Plan (ITP)

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FirstMate NZ (FirstMate), the Seafood Sector Support Network Trust, supports the health and wellbeing of people across the commercial seafood sector.

Our purpose is to offer people in the seafood community business and personal guidance, direction and support they need to better navigate the pressures and complexities that come with the job. Working at sea can be very challenging – mentally, physically, legally, socially and financially. And as things continue to change, its vital that people in the industry – and their whānau have the support they need to adjust and thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit on this important piece of work. Overall, we note that the actions within the Industry Transformation Plan (ITP) have the potential to create both positive and negative wellbeing outcomes.

FirstMate are not an advocacy group and therefore our comments are specific to aspects of the ITP that we believe could impact the provision of wellbeing services for our people and communities.

Our independent research highlights that regulatory changes, and general changes, are a significant stressor within the industry especially for those operating as ACE fishers within the inshore sector.

It is evident that policy change can cause stress to our fishers. We have many examples of the impact of change, such as the Hector's and Māui Dolphin Threat Management Plan (TMP) implementation and the introduction of electronic reporting.

Largely stressors are amplified when decisions are made in perceived isolation from those on the water. Fishers often have limited resources and can carry a disproportional burden of compliance and financial costs to operationalise new requirements. This must be taken into consideration when assessing the impact of the ITP.

FirstMate encourages you to provide pragmatic information when available on “what this means on the water and in a seafood business” and seek feedback from those who would be required to implement these changes within the supply chain.

We acknowledge that Fisheries NZ understand the impacts of change and have mentioned FirstMate as a wellbeing resource for policy implementation, to assist with applying a fisher centric lens with positive results.

We are encouraged that the Draft ITP recognises key principles such as:

- Supporting people and communities
- Supporting people in the industry to thrive
- Developing the workforce to grow the industry
- Supporting communities to access local seafood

FirstMate understands that the draft ITP is focused on long-term transformation, and to identify actions and initiatives for near-term implementation over 1-to-3-year periods. We hope to be involved to ensure successful outcomes for the sector and our people.

FirstMate have had over 1200 supportive interactions with individuals in our sector. Many of these interactions have required some form of wellbeing input to help our people understand and cope with change. This change can be from personal stressors, but commonly has been linked to regulatory or financial changes within the sector that have created stress and anxiety.

We urge decision makers to look at impacts from a full supply chain lens and apply a people centric approach to all desired outcomes.

This will help ensure our people are supported with relevant information so they can assess operational impacts and realities of each change, and therefore be prepared to transition or adopt the change.

Change can take time and fast change can create stress. As the ITP suggests, involving FirstMate and industry to assist fishers with wellbeing and change management will create the best outcomes.

Providing timely, practical information, support and advice to fishers will be the foundation for any successful change.

We recommend that this is an industry, government and FirstMate collaborative project.

We note the comment “Industry and Government will secure ongoing funding for FirstMate or will agree alternative ways to support those who work in the sector”. We consider this is a priority action for the ITP implementation.

Policy and operational changes have an impact on wellbeing, and it is crucial that wellbeing services are resourced and available prior to significant changes.

FirstMate supports practices that ensure sustainable seafood and a sustainable, healthy workforce who have the tools and a support network to ensure they remain resilient, healthy and with their wellbeing as a priority, as they manage change.

We recommend with any changes, there is a support structure put in place for any transition from the industry for older fishers with older vessels.

Wellbeing interventions and support must be part of this process.

FirstMate supports investing in our people to allow for innovation through a fisher-centric approach. Identifying barriers to success from an industry, financial and regulatory viewpoint will not only encourage innovation and growth but will create purpose and hope for those wanting to create

change that are bound by current constraints. Having a resourced collaborative group will grow innovation within the sector and will have positive outcomes for the industry, our people, and communities.

FirstMate often hears from fishers they are frustrated about the barriers to innovation and support from the SFFF is not fit for their purpose. Having a focus and resource available for smaller innovative inshore projects readily available will provide opportunity to innovate and positive experiences that will contribute to business and personal resilience and wellbeing.

We deal with many fishers who are feeling the financial burden of increased operating and living costs. Any initiative that improves a fisher's financial literacy and position will support better wellbeing and financial outcomes. Fishers advise they often feel undervalued and under-remunerated within the seafood supply chain so creating opportunity for them to be recognised as an essential element would improve wellbeing.

Perceived poor public perception was identified as a key stressor for fishers in recent sector wellbeing research. Formal collaboration between Seafood NZ, FirstMate and Fisheries NZ to positively profile the industry and its people will instil a sense of pride, wellbeing and could offer other positive consequences such as increased recruitment and retention.

We believe we have an essential role to support the wellbeing of our people and therefore the success of the ITP implementation. We hope that industry and government will support our continued efforts to allow us to support our people and the sector through this and many upcoming changes.