

Submission
No 765

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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SUBMISSION: INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING 2010

The Nature Coast Marine Group (NCMG) was formed to actively promote the protection and understanding of coastal, estuarine and marine environments of the Eurobodalla Coast, which extends from just south of Ulladulla to Wallaga Lake on the South Coast. We have a continuously growing membership, which now stands at 225 and includes many recreational fishers. This submission has been authorized by the Nature Coast Marine Group Executive Committee.

Like most of the NSW coast, our area is experiencing a rapid growth in population. We also have a huge influx of tourists during the warmer months. Both these factors are adding to the impacts on the coast and to the number of recreational fishers. It is essential that the management of catchments and marine areas is improved and fishing practices made sustainable if future generations are to enjoy the benefits of healthy seas and resilient fish stocks. The NCMG takes the view that all in the community need to work together cooperatively to protect marine environments and to sustain activities that utilize the oceans, including recreational fishing.

We note the terms of reference of this inquiry and our submission addresses them. At the same time, any consideration of measures to exploit, manage or conserve marine areas must take place within the framework of Australia's Oceans Policy, which was set in place in 1998 and which all Australian governments, both State and Federal, have endorsed, The Oceans Policy describes itself as a:

'framework for integrated and ecosystem-based planning and management for all of Australia's marine jurisdictions. ... It promotes ecologically-sustainable development of the resources of our oceans, ... while ensuring the protection of marine biological diversity'.

As such, it recognises that the ocean and its resources are a concern for all sectors of society, including future generations, and are not the preserve of one or a few interest groups. In developing measures to manage marine areas, it is necessary to take all interests into account. Australia's Oceans Policy stresses the need for integrated and ecosystem based oceans planning and management, which aims to ensure continuing marine ecosystem health and which includes a 'national representative system of marine protected areas'. In order to be viable in public policy terms, any proposals for legislation, processes, structures and so on that relate to the marine environment must be consistent with Australia's Oceans Policy.

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A. Current suite of existing regulatory, policy and decision-making processes in relations to the management of recreational fisheries in NSW

Our submission focuses on issues relating to marine parks. Although this term of reference implies that marine parks are part of the suite of existing processes relating to the management of recreational fisheries, it is important to take care that the central purposes of a marine park are not thereby misunderstood. The objectives of NSW marine parks are clearly set out in Section 3 of the Marine Parks Act 1997. The primary purposes are:

to conserve marine biological diversity and to maintain ecological processes.

The Act states that ‘**where consistent with the preceding objects**’, further objectives are to provide for ecologically sustainable use of fish and vegetation and to provide opportunities for public appreciation, understanding and enjoyment.

Managing fisheries is therefore not a primary purpose of marine parks. We stress this point because some of the debate seems to be based on the misconception that marine parks are not useful unless they manage fisheries for the benefit of recreational fishers.

We wholeheartedly support NSW’s marine parks and would like them to be extended to cover all bioregions, especially the Sydney-Hawkesbury region which experiences the greatest environmental and fishing pressures. This would be consistent with Australia’s Oceans Policy, in that in order for the system of marine protected areas to be genuinely representative, there needs to be protected areas in all bioregions, on such a scale that the habitats of the bioregion are adequately covered.

Sanctuary, or no-take, zones must be large enough to protect biodiversity and ecological processes. Scientists and the IUCN recommend that 20% of each bioregion be protected. In the case of the Batemans Marine Park, there are adequate sanctuary zones in many types of habitats, though some still remain under-represented. The removal of trawlers has allowed bottom ecosystems the chance to recover.

The way Batemans Marine Park was created has generally worked well, although the quality of communication from the Government at the beginning of the process could have been better. Unfortunately, there was a lot of misinformation about marine parks, including that they are not multiple use. This has confused locals and tourists alike. This situation will need better communication from government agencies and standardised zoning types in all marine parks to overcome the confusion.

The process of setting marine park boundaries then consulting with the community on the location of the different zones seems to provide the best way of ensuring input from all interest groups. Obviously, not everyone will get everything they want, but with a reasonable approach from all, broadly acceptable outcomes can be achieved. It is important to observe that zoning decisions are based primarily on the comprehensive, representative and adequate coverage of the sanctuary zones. Because of this, they lend themselves to community consultation and negotiated outcomes. Also important is the precautionary principle, which holds that protection should not be delayed because of the absence of data.

The question of the ‘efficacy’ of marine parks can only be considered in relation to the purposes for which they were established, i.e. the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of ecological processes. Clearly, the creation of sanctuary zones creates conditions whereby those areas can return to a natural state of biological diversity and

ecological processes. It will take some time, however, for many of the changes to take place. Experience in a comparable area in New Zealand has shown that it can take many years for some habitats to return to a natural state, for example, for more and larger predators to start reducing grazing urchin numbers and then allowing kelp forests to regenerate. The process of data gathering should be given priority and appropriate resources provided by government so that the changes can be tracked.

With regards to the secondary purposes of marine parks, i.e. the sustainable use of marine resources and public enjoyment of the amenity, the NCMG is pleased with the way the Batemans Marine Park is functioning. It has given a boost to the local tourism industry and, on anecdotal evidence, has led to increased catches for recreational fishers. At the same time, people need to hear much more about the science behind marine parks and about the positive outcomes for recreational fishers of marine sanctuaries in other parts of Australia and the world. There is a wealth of scientific data and popular information available that shows how the increased size and number of fish within marine parks can benefit nearby fisheries.

When the zones are reviewed, we would like to see some increase in the areas set aside as sanctuary zones in the Batemans Marine Park, without changing significantly the general zoning balance that presently applies. At the same time, we would like to see all known key habitat sites for Grey Nurse Sharks given full sanctuary protection, as this is one area where science clearly demonstrates a need to protect a specific species in specific areas.

It would be less confusing, and much better for sustainable fisheries, if the Marine Parks Act (1997) and Fisheries Management Act (1994) were used to manage all forms of marine-life protection and recreational fishing havens. The objectives for zones that are now in the Marine Parks Regulations should be incorporated into the Marine Parks Act. This would provide greater security and certainty for marine park management.

B. The effectiveness and efficiency of the current representational system of trusts and advisory committees

We consider that the membership structure of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing should be reconstituted to include representatives of other sectors with an interest in fisheries, such as conservation groups, marine scientists and the scuba diving community. This would bring the structure of this advisory body into line with the advisory committees relating to marine parks. It would promote more representative outcomes and would promote better mutual understanding among the various interest groups.

C. The value of recreational fisheries to the economy in NSW

Recreational fishing is important to the local economy and will continue to be so into the future. But while recreational fishing contributes to the economy, it is not the only activity or even the main one in coastal areas like ours. Recreational fishers share our coast with thousands who just want to enjoy the beaches or go on sightseeing tours such as seal and whale watching. Cafes, restaurants and the like have grown exponentially in number in recent years compared to other types of businesses. From observation, more people are participating in sports such as surfing, snorkeling, diving and kayaking with a growth in customers for the suppliers of their equipment. There is scope for operators in these areas to expand in order to take advantage of the opportunities presented by marine parks.

A few years ago, those opposed to the establishment of the Batemans Marine Park were gloomy predicting that it would have a seriously adverse effect on the local economy, because, it was alleged, fishers would go elsewhere. Experience has shown that the opposite has been the case, with bumper tourist figures in both summers since the Marine Park was declared, even though an economic downturn has hit tourism elsewhere. Tourist feedback suggests that the marine park has been a positive attraction for tourists and a boost to the local economy. It is time for all involved in marine-based activities to get behind the marine park and, instead of talking it down, to start disseminating information about the benefits of marine parks to fishing.

In looking at the contribution of fishing to the local economy, particularly in relation to smaller tackle shops, it is also necessary to factor in the impact of discount stores and large firms like K Mart, which have made their appearance in the area in recent years.

D. The gaps in existing recreational fisheries programs

A stand-out area here is the need for educational programs on the benefits of marine parks for the maintenance of biological diversity and ecological processes and for recreational fisheries. Government agencies involved with fisheries should look at ways to promote better awareness, but to be genuinely effective, more effort will have to be made by recreational fishing organisations themselves. We have noted that at least one prominent recreational fishing journalist has written supportively and positively about the Batemans Marine Park, but this needs to be replicated within recreational fishing organisations and magazines.

E. ESD issues related to improving recreational fisheries

In the last 50 years Australia's population has more than doubled and this growth is set to continue. Even faster has been the growth in numbers of recreational fishers and fishing boats, which now nearly all have fish finders and other high-tech equipment which greatly improves the ability of fishers to target schools of fish and their habitats. There is an urgent need to collect accurate data on the recreational fish catch if stocks are to be sustainably managed. Some species are much more heavily fished by recreational fishers than by commercial ones (Status of Fisheries Resources in NSW 2006/07).

As noted above, education programs for recreational fishers are a sound idea and more of the money from fishing licences should be used for such programs. They should include:

- promoting the benefits of marine protected areas,
- emphasizing the need to abide by size and bag limits,
- requiring the use of biodegradable line and non-stainless steel and circle hooks, and
- reducing the amount of litter, lost gear and other waste.

More research is needed on appropriate minimum and maximum size limits and the findings implemented. For example, it is known that 95% of female Dusky Flathead need to be larger than the current minimum size limit of 36cm before they breed¹.

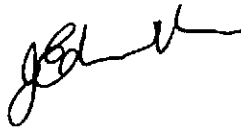
There also needs to be more research on the survival statistics of fish that have been caught and released. An animal that has fought for its life and escaped with injuries is much more at risk of either dying from its injuries or eventually being unable to successfully compete for food and breed.

Fish stocking is no substitute for intact natural ecosystems and healthy biodiverse fish populations. If our aquatic ecosystems are managed sustainably then native species will thrive.

Conclusion

There have been huge impacts on NSW fisheries since European settlement and these impacts, including that of recreational fishing, continue to grow. However, the Nature Coast Marine Group believes that improved research and management can produce better outcomes for our marine environment and for the people who enjoy it, including recreational fishers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Barnes', written over a light blue horizontal line.

President

Reference

1. Gray CA and Barnes LM (2008) *Reproduction and growth of dusky flathead (Platycephalus fuscus) in NSW estuaries. NSW Department of Primary Industries – Fisheries Final Report Series No. 101. 26pp. ISSN 1449-9967.*