

Submission
No 673

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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Legislative Council Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Legislative Council,
Parliament House,
Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee Members,

The Anglers Action Group (Sydney Northside) Inc, or AAG as it is more commonly known, is a group of recreational fishers based on Sydney's Northern Beaches but with members throughout NSW and into Queensland. We welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Recreational Fishing.

AAG would like to address point (b) of the Terms of Reference, namely "the effectiveness and efficiency of the current representational system of trusts and advisory committees that advise government departments and statutory authorities."

We see a properly implemented representational system for recreational fishers with a well experienced lobbyist with experience in dealing with Government and the Media would resolve many of the issues relating to recreational fishing.

The current system of activity base for selection of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing (ACoRF) and the area based trust fund expenditure committees are Ministerial appointees. There is no representation at all. The structure looks good on paper, and may suit the Minister's and Department's requirements, but the people managing the trusts include recreational fishers with varied and/or no qualifications other than they fish. Also include DPI/Fisheries staff who have qualifications in the scientific field being the DPI/Fisheries staff. There is no or little business acumen amongst this group. This results in a poor reporting systems design with poor integration and cross referencing of project to control account. There is basically no separation between the DPI/Fisheries accounting reporting system and that of the two recreational trusts, especially as some of the larger projects are jointly funded.

Recreational fishers need to form partnerships with the Government and research groups via a peak representational body. The body/group that representing recreational fishers needs to be representative and with clear and well defined mission and vision statements. From this measurable and achievable goals can be developed. Partnerships need to develop trust where the partners work with each other. These goals will in turn give rise to, or reject, projects. And this can be funded from the various trust funds.

Below is AAG's submission to the Commonwealth's Recreational Fishing Industry Strategy consultation with the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC). This submission explains how such an approach can significantly improve many facets of recreational fishing. One of the key elements is a lobbyist well experienced in dealing with Government, Government Departments and the Media.

Yours sincerely

Phillip Ingram

President

Anglers Action Group

AAG's Submission to the Recreational Fishing Industry Strategy consultation with the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC).

The Angler's Action Group (Sydney Northside) Inc. is a lobby group of recreational anglers and, though based on Sydney's Northern Beaches, we do have members throughout the state of NSW and into Queensland. As a group we welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to, and make comments on, Recreational Fishing Industry Strategy consultation with the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC).

To address the points outlined in the Terms of Reference (email from Natalie Smart Tuesday 18th August 2009):

1. Provide effective and coordinated advice to the government, through the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, on the development of the recreational fishing industry, including provision and advice on:

1a. The relevance of the 1994 Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy to a contemporary recreational fishing industry

The flowery wording of the motherhood statements in the opening paragraphs of the National Recreational Fishing Strategy (NRFS) of 1994 lost me. This was confirmed with the statement that in the Forward that "... are joining forces to push many fish stocks into decline." Fifteen years on many fish stocks have not been pushed into decline in NSW and this, in my mind, places the legitimacy of what follows in doubt. How many of the species listed in the report "Status of Fisheries Resources in NSW 2006/07" are in decline?

Although the basic tenets of the 1994 NRFS highlights some of the issues that face the recreational fishing industry it does not really address solutions to these issues, but merely states what would be best in the ideal world. For example, it is a motherhood statement to have "Management policies for recreational fishing should become an integral part of total ecosystem management Australia-wide." In practice this will never happen for the following reasons:

- Fisheries management within 3nm of the coast is State Government based, and in NSW under arrangements with the Commonwealth, the management of recreational fishing extend out to 200nm. Management policies are State based and reflect the nature of what is known of particular fisheries at the time eg the proposed recreational licensing fee structure in Western Australia to protect the "Vulnerable 5".
- Interdepartmental responsibilities ensures any coordinated response is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Look at the acid sulphate soils and flood mitigation problems in the agricultural areas on the Northern Rivers of NSW.
- Recreational fisher would be wary of any mention of a "total ecosystem management" following the implementation of various marine parks around the country. Australia's (and NSW's) overarching international commitment to the conservation of marine biodiversity, through the Convention on Biological Diversity (IUCN 1993) is to "conserve and sustainably use

biological diversity.” Following this convention Australia through the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC) committed to “promote ecologically sustainable development through the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of natural resources.” But in most states including NSW this commitment has been hijacked for various reasons so that “effective protection” equates with “fishing closures” and the sustainable use of the resource is ignored.

Some of the objects of AAG’s constitution are consistent with the 5 primary goals of the NRFS 1994:

- To engage in public discussion, debate, research and activity to protect, maintain and enhance the marine and aquatic environment and all fish habitat.
- To co-operate with other organizations, individuals and public bodies in activities consistent with these objects.
- To engage in negotiation and dealings with government agencies and engage in political activity consistent with these objects.

These goals are applicable today as they were 15 years ago, but what is not mentioned in the goals are:

- To protect the interests of amateur fishing, to protect the rights of amateur fishermen, to promote amateur fishing and to protect and enhance its public image
- To disseminate to the public knowledge acquired by anglers.

The Principles

What may change are some of the 16 key principals stated for recreational fishing.

Protecting the Resource

The first principle of “protecting the resource: is a meaningless motherhood statement. Protect the resource from what? Threats are not identified. Protecting the resource should be replaced with “sustainable use of the resource”. A sustainable use of the resource requires quality monitoring of both the commercial and recreational take of the resource coupled with appropriate management.

Protecting the Environment

No-one can dispute the principal of maintaining and improving environmental quality. The problem is, as previously mentioned, how is this achieved and how can it be captured in a similar document without motherhood statements?

The Role of Government

Again, more idealistic principles such as “we must develop a co-ordinated strategy to manage our aquatic resources. Decisions can no longer be made in isolation.” Were any strategies developed? Why are these strategies in the domain of the recreational fishing sector as there are other stakeholders including the community? There may be a role to develop strategies at where an action in one state impacts on another, with water usage in Queensland affecting the flow of the Darling River system in NSW being a notable example. Another situation may be to develop consistent regulations in Commonwealth Fisheries, with the Tuna and Billfish Fishery being a good example in both Western Australia and NSW. Lastly it seems ironic that the Commonwealth mentions “stewardship” and “managing the aquatic resource” when it perceived to have been a poor manager of the resource.

Community Involvement

Recreational fishers and recreational fishing industry should participate in the protection and management of their fishing heritage together with community consultation of recreational fisheries management programs. This is all well and good but is dependent upon two factors, the people representing the recreational fishers and industry knowing how to negotiate with Government and Departments and secondly being supplied with pertinent facts. For this reason "Future Leaders" programs are very important. For community involvement to be successful, and successful community involvement means a sense of ownership of the fishery resource, the environment, the issue or problem. Associated with this are effective peak bodies that are both recognised by Governments and representative of the recreational fishing sector. Funding of these bodies has always been an issue that needs to be resolved, and this may forming partnerships with Industry, Governments and others such as research groups.

Sharing the resource

There are 4 stakeholder groups in any fishery resource, being the commercial, recreational and indigenous fishers plus the community which represents the biomass required to prevent a fishery from collapse. The 1994 NRFS recognises the need share the resource between the recreational and commercial sectors but neglects the other 2 stakeholder groups. The Commercial fishing sector in NSW is currently undergoing restructuring to a Share Managed Fishery, but the other stakeholder groups were not included in resource allocation. Resource allocation will always be a major issue and will often result in conflict between user groups. Bear in mind that bag and possession limits for recreational fishers are a de-facto quota allocation.

Funding: the key to proper management

The two principles here (15 and 16) suggest that recreational fishers should contribute to the cost of recreational fishing management and suggest that costs include research, enforcement and management programs and recognises that this is done in some states through a recreational fishing license scheme. AAG sees there are issues with such a scheme as implemented in NSW. To name just a few:

- Core Government responsibilities should not be funded nor partially funded from recreational money. Core activities include compliance and enforcement (after all, the Government made the laws so it's up to them to enforce them), environmental managers, some research programs
- The lack of business acumen from the Ministerial appointees on the expenditure committees
- The apparent strong influence DPI/Fisheries staff have on the funding recommendations
- The lack of separation of accounting procedures and reporting between the trusts and DPI Fisheries.
- Poor reporting systems design

1b. The development of a Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy

The development of any strategy involves a clear and well defined Vision and a clear and well defined Mission. You need to define what you are trying to achieve. Then comes the how – how will it be achieved. This needs stated goals with measurable

outcomes so you will know when you have succeeded. This is the strategic analysis Solutions need goals. With no goals defined there are no measurable solutions.

Conditions exist to prevent the success of the process. A prerequisite for this strategic analysis to work is there needs to be a will to find the right solution. Politics or other agendas may be at play that become unmanageable and prevent the success of the process. This is the role of RFAC, to understand the political situation to ensure there is a will for the process to succeed, then to develop the What then the How.

1c Specific initiatives to encourage the promotion of sustainable fishing, education and awareness for children and angler communities, and best practice environmental standards for recreational fishing.

- This is quite a large field, and there will no doubt be many initiatives proposed. Let's look at awareness and education for children – this can be achieved via weekend or holiday workshops as exemplified by NSW DPI; or via the State's education system with formal education into aspects of the environment, fish physiology and behaviour and even the concepts of fisheries management, coupled with fishing as one of the weekly sporting activities. As an example of the style of information that could be produced, take a look at: <http://sites.google.com/site/aagfish/Home/technically-fishing> and couple this with practical fishing (note this is only an example).

- RecFish Australia had already developed the NEATFish standard – a document which contains questionnaires and uses a simple 1-5 star rating designed to provide tournament organisers with an objective assessment of how well their tournament meets certain environmental, social and economic criteria. This can be modified and expanded out to include different styles of fishing for individuals. Any such program also requires the publicity.

- Initiatives to promote sustainable fishing: RecFish Australia has produced a National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sportsfishing, but very few people would know about it. Promoting sustainable fishing is basically to do with ethics and ethics is such a personal thing. And hard to alter the older one gets but it is possible. Perhaps the most successful attitudinal change that has occurred is changes in drink driving which has seen the road toll in NSW drop from 1384 in 1978 to 395 in 2008. This was achieved by the combination of legislation, introduction of random breath tests coupled with community education via 5 and 10 year plans. Perhaps the best attitudinal change in recreational fishing came about from the introduction of bag and size limits, and brought the notion of sustainable fishing to recreational fishing via legislation. Unlike road safety there has been no 5 and 10 year plans and little or no education. And education is best undertaken on the young.

2. Work with the FRDC and other research/grant providers to implement initiatives for sustainable recreational fishing

Providing opportunities for partnerships with research/grant providers and industry and recreational fishing groups. There are already some areas where recreational fishers have such partnerships with RecFish Australia, AFTA, InfoFish Services and the FRDC with the brief of "Improving investment and the return on investment in recreational fishing research, development and extension at a national scale" – see <http://www.recfish.com.au/research/RecfishingResearch.pdf> This is a model which

seems to work well, but it lacks pushing the information out to the general public and recreational fishers.

3. Consider options for improved and ongoing consultation and interaction between the recreational sector and government

There are two aspects – first is a national peak body group along the lines of RecFish Australia but it needs to be representative and form partnerships with industry, Government and research/grant providers. As with the development of the strategy, clear Vision and Mission statements need to be developed with the Why's and How's. This is easier said than done, but it needs to be done properly and needs to be recognised by all Governments.

Secondly, there needs to be the continuation of the Future Leaders programs by Recfish Australia at the national level and by Recreational Fishing Alliance at the state level. These programs aim at providing participants with an intensive introduction into the basic principles of fisheries management, introducing a range of stakeholder views and perspectives from commercial fishing, state government agencies, fishing trades, and environmental groups, along with methods for dealing with Government agencies and the art of negotiating.

4. Conclusions

Recreational fishers need to form partnerships with the Government and research groups. The body/group that representing recreational fishers needs to be representative and with clear and well defined mission and vision statements. From this measurable and achievable goals can be developed. Partnerships need to develop trust where the partners work with each other. These goals will in turn give rise to, or reject, projects. Many of these have already been discussed.