

**Submission
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INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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15 March 2010

The Directors
Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Parliament House
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INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the Recreational Fishing Inquiry. The make up of this Select Committee leaves us with a great deal of skepticism. The Shooters Party have in the past sided with the NSW Labor Government in the creation of vast marine parks and their associated lock out zones, which were created without appropriate science or meaningful public consultation. As there are three Labour representatives, recreational fishers fear that they will tow the party line of expanding the existing parks and the creation of more parks before the 2011 election, which will appease the Greens and attract their preference votes.

The Green representative will make the most of their opportunity leading up to the 2011 election and will grab as much of the offshore reefs and rocky headlands as they can, and have them locked away in sanctuary zones. For the Greens it's a case of "making hay while the sun shies".

The Liberal Party are at best, vague on their stance with recreational fishing groups, which leaves the National Party representative, who was recently shown some support for recreational fishing.

WHO IS REPRESENTING THE FISHERS?

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Recreational fishers have a right to feel they are under siege. We are being held responsible for all the real and perceived dangers to marine biodiversity. More sanctuary zones, smaller bag limits, heavier fines and increased legal lengths which we have endured in the past neither protect the habitat nor have they produced an increase in fish stocks.

the club with a million dollar view

Marine Parks with the associated sanctuary zones are an imposition to recreational fishers which should not be there. As a group we are not a threat to the marine biodiversity. Our extractive activities do not endanger any species.

The CSIRO Australia's peak scientific body informs us that no fish species targeted by recreational fishers is under threat, nor is the fishery in danger of collapse. So the question must be asked, why are there sanctuary zones? What real purpose do they serve other than banning Australian families from fishing their favorite rocky headland or offshore reef?

This Inquiry must introduce a moratorium on the creation of new parks and the expansion of existing parks until sound science, not "green" emotional rhetoric is used. Who will police an increase in marine park numbers? There are not enough patrol officers to cover the existing parks. Who will pay for an increase in officers numbers? Public consultation has in the past been a joke, and we use the Cape Byron, Solitary Islands and Bateman's Bay political parks as an example.

The community and industry groups were given little lip service. Petitions, public rallies and industry protests were ignored. Although it was a Federal decision, we can also use The Coral Sea Conservation Zone as another example of minimal consultation. A Conservation Zone is the first step to a Sanctuary Zone. 972,000 square kms of conservation zone? This is environmentalism just for the sake of it. Again, Minister Garrett has shown no evidence of public or industry consultation when he recently banned the catching of some popular sharks species in Australian waters. Where was the backing science? Again, it's environmentalism just for the sake of it.

The outcry by rec fishers, the coalition and industry groups forced a back down by Mr Garrett. Mr Garrett has shown this same dismissive attitude towards game fishing clubs, charter operators, commercial fishers and tackle shops as he showed in the Coral Sea declaration. It seems, fringe green groups are dominating his decision making.

There is fear, and rightly so, among rec fishers that this same dismissive attitude may filter down through the State Fisheries. Community and industry consultation as well as transparency should be an Inquiry priority.

The real threats to marine biodiversity such as introduced species, sewerage outfall, mangrove degradation, loss of sea grass beds and farming malpractices have not been addressed.

Instead of concentrating on managing the fishery and fishers, which is not rebuilding fish stocks, it is now critical that this committee concentrates on managing the habitat. A healthy habitat means more fish.

Healthy wetlands, water quality, mangroves, riparian vegetation, seagrass beds and uninhibited fish access to these critical areas should be the focus. Flood gates and badly planned drainage systems, acid-sulphate soils and inappropriate coastal development all contribute to unhealthy habitats. An increase in artificial habitats will mean more fish.

As a prime example of artificial habitats at work, we only need to look at oyster leases and sunken vessels. These attract marine biodiversity from the most basic sponges to the top predators. Rebuilding habitats, natural and artificial, must now take priority as the major goal of fish management.

The use of overseas experimentation with marine parks must be ignored. The use of cyanide and explosives in foreign lands was a common fishing practice, so anything would be better. Lantana, rabbits and cane toads work well in some foreign land, but they don't work here.

This Inquiry must be site specific, must relate only to the NSW coast, must be based on reproducible science, not on emotional rhetoric, not based on the warm and cuddly (whales, dolphins, seahorses, etc).

Scientific consensus is NOT scientific fact. The more extreme environmentalists frequently use the phrase "scientific consensus" and always from the scientific community that has a distinct "green lean". This is not acceptable to rec fishers, we want future planning based on scientific facts.

However, recreational fishers recognize the need to support any species that is in genuine danger. We, more than any other group, know the importance of marine conservation. We are in this environment on a weekly, even a daily basis. We wish to continue our chosen recreation and introduce our children to it, so it's our desire to conserve it.

There is a vast difference between conservation and preservation. With land based National Parks we have seen a prevalent preservationist attitude of locking it up and throwing away the key. This affects Australian families who bush walk, horse ride or are four wheel drive enthusiasts. This same attitude is having an influence on decisions made in the marine environment. You cannot remove the human animal from the environment.

Recreational fishers do not support the "Precautionary Principle", (don't cross the road just in case you get hit by a car) which is used by environmentalists to support sanctuary zones. It really is pie in the sky stuff; it's an attempt to lend weight to environmentalism just for the sake of it. There is no science.

There is no scientific backing for the "spill over" theory, (once a sanctuary zone fills up with fish, they will spill out into areas adjacent to that zone) and presumably, onto the hooks of fishermen waiting along that line on the map. It's rubbish, sanctuary zones are not nest boxes for fish. They have fins, they can swim. However, this theory is exploited by supporters of these zones.

To have AcoRF representing recreational fishers is a farce. To have this body of "experts" as the Prime Ministerial advisors, completes recreational fishers skepticism. They are selected by the state government, NOT elected by rec fishers. The general view of rec fishers, who are wise to the process, know that the selected committee will and do tow the party line in order to

keep their position. To have true representation, this organisation must have an elected committee and elected by those they are to represent.

As an example, a recent development that will effect rec fishing is the proposed banning of the use of electric reels by rec fishers. This ban is supported by AcoRF. In deeper water, cod and gemfish are occasionally targeted , however they are so far offshore that trailer boats rarely go there. The bag limit on these species is so low that rec fishers would not be a threat. It makes us wonder if "our representative body" is bowing to pressure from commercial fishers and voting against those they are selected to represent.

The extreme environmental groups, the Nature Conservation Council, a group dedicated to banning recreational fishing, along with the National Parks Association of NSW, both non governmental bodies, seem to have the ear of this State Government. They have presented "The Torn Blue Fringe" a non scientific paper, an opinion which the NPA admits is written from the perspective of a conservation advocacy organisation, to the State Government for serious consideration, and will probably get it. Who weeds out the facts from the fiction? The skepticism continues.

This committee must address the problem of true representation for rec fishers at all levels of government, and representation in proportion to their numbers and value. The value of recreational fishers to the NSW economy is spread over many industries.

A survey conducted by NSW Dept of Primary Industries informs us that there is approximately 1,000,000 rec fishers in NSW and during survey year, spent more than \$550 million on fishing related items. The flow on effect was much greater. This is broken down to \$276 mill on boats and trailers, \$118mill on vehicle and travel costs, \$54mill on accommodation, \$46mill on tackle, \$26mill on boat and charter hire, \$12mill on bait/burley/ice. This equates to about \$550 per fisher per year.

To emphasize the importance of rec fishing to the NSW economy it should be noted that almost 24% of the NSW male and 10% of NSW females went fishing. The estimated time spent recreational fishing in NSW, during this survey, was 30.4mill hours. Plus the \$10.4mill raised by recreational fishing licence fees. An economic study conducted by Ernst & Young (Dec 2009) quantifies the net benefit and economic contribution of recreational fishing to Victoria to be \$2.3billion. Western Australia's recreational fisheries are claimed as a major community asset and are estimated to contribute over \$500mill a year to the economy.

The Queensland DPI estimates that the contribution to the Queensland economy from individual fishers is \$880mill per annum. In the Northern Territory a total of 430,000 days are fished annually by rec fishers for an estimated \$30mill per annum of direct expenditure. These figures should make any political representative sit bolt upright and quickly find ways to consult with recreational fishers instead of finding ways to suppress fishing activities for the sake of preference votes.

As you are aware, there is a growing movement of dissatisfied fishers in NSW. Led by EcoFishers, now the peak representative body of recreational fishers with almost 20,000 members and rapidly growing, rallies of hundreds of fishers have been organized along the NSW coast, expressing this dissatisfaction. Petitions with thousands of signatures have been presented to State Parliament expressing this dissatisfaction.

The car bumper sticker "**I fish and I vote**" should not be ignored. The gap to existing programs and ecologically sustainable development lies in addressing the real threats to the marine biomass. Nobody is doing that, least of all the Greens. Again, we will harp on the Green's mind set of just locking it up.

Healthy habitats mean more fish. Access to critical breeding areas means more fish. More Marine Parks, sanctuary zones, conservation zones or marine protected areas, call them what you like, are not the answer. They are not increasing our fish stocks and they are not protecting the habitats. Stop this mind set of locking it up and hope the real threats will go away.

To summarize, Coffs Harbour Deep Sea Fishing Club requests that this Select Committee address the real threats to the marine biomass, which have been listed above. The lack of meaningful public consultation which was highlighted in the creation process of the Solitary Islands, Cape Byron and Batemans Bay Parks must not be repeated and there is a need for a moratorium on the creation of new parks and to stop the expansion of existing parks and their associated sanctuary zones until sound science can prove the efficacy of Marine Parks and associated zones.

There is the need to establish and act on the socio/economic impacts these parks have on coastal communities and recreational fishers should have true representation through an elected committee, and not be represented by a politically selected group. This representation should be proportionate to their value to the economy. All decisions that effect recreational fishers must be transparent and the Committee has the chance to fix the real problems and maximize the effort into rebuilding habitats, real and artificial.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Geoff Parker', written in a cursive style.

Geoff Parker
Director
Fisheries and Environmental Spokesperson
Coffs Harbour Deep Sea Fishing Club Ltd