

Submission
No 981

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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President of Eco Divers

Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Parliament House
Macquarie St
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Dear Director,

As President of Eco Divers, I would like to express my concern for upcoming implementations to fishery regulations, and provide recommendations for action. Eco Divers is a nonprofit marine conservation organisation comprised of over 40 volunteer divers who assist with removal of coastal and marine debris, specifically targeting fishing debris and plastic. Our team includes scientists, teachers and other professionals, who share a long-standing commitment to protecting and preserving the marine environment.

Eco Divers has removed mass amounts of fishing debris from our local marine areas, has witnessed illegal fishing activity and has assisted with marine animal rescues. Based on extensive experience and knowledge of the marine environment it is apparent the current situation regarding recreational fishing practices is unsustainable. Our comments on the terms of reference are listed below.

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. FACTS

- There is great evidence of major depletion of fish stocks worldwide. Fishing pressures on our waterways and coasts are increasing with improved technology and population growth.
- Marine protected areas are essential for maintaining marine habitat for reliant species, such as juvenile fish and sea grass.
- As fish populations decline, more undersized fish are caught. At least 50 percent of all catch and released fish die as a result of stress or injury.
- 99 percent of the coastline can be legally fished and only one percent is protected.

- Catches by recreational fishers are prohibited from sale; however, negligible enforcement allows for illegal sale of seafood. This leads to a higher number of fish being removed.
- Fishing debris is often left behind. Frozen bait in plastic bags is thrown into water as an attractant. Tears or holes in the bags allow slow release of bait. Loaves of bread are also commonly used to attract fish and can be found on wharfs and rocks at all popular fishing sites. The plastic bags, which smell like food to marine animals, are ingested. Also glow sticks, containing toxic chemicals, are commonly used, discarded, and found on most beaches. When consumed, these plastics cause the animal to feel full without providing nutrients, and can cause lesions in digestive tract and/or death. These fish are most likely consumed by other animals or humans.
- Each person can legally use 4 rods, which can remove hundreds of fish per day. This quantity is unnecessarily large and heavily impacts the ecosystem of that area.
- Lack of enforcement allows illegal removal of fish and eliminates the potential to collect large amounts of revenue from fines. Many fishermen do possess a fishing license and remove/injure "no take" species.
- No marine fishing areas are cleaned up by fishermen. At least 20 to 30 percent of the waste collected by Eco Divers is fishing gear. Even more is land-based food, drink and smoking rubbish left behind.
- Observation and interviewing fishermen shows a widespread poor knowledge of fish identification, a lack of environmental concern, and disregard to the importance of maintaining marine biodiversity.

2. OPINIONS

- The current regulatory, policy, and decision making processes are unaware of many current impacts on local marine areas. To preserve marine areas for future use, we must fully understand ecosystem processes and our impacts to them.

- The small percent of “no take” species should be increased to sustain current populations. Current global scientific studies recommend at least 20 percent of coastal areas are provided total protection for species to survive, and 30 percent to allow any chance of regeneration.
- Fishermen knowingly fish in protected areas. Without being properly monitored, it is negating the benefits of these important designated marine areas.
- Marine protected areas must be declared based on an immediate need to save what areas we still have that are not yet beyond repair. The benefits to preserving our priceless natural resources far outweigh any gain from short term overfishing.
- Lack of education, awareness, and an understanding of ecosystem processes results in misuse and damage to our environment, where fishermen are only one of many stakeholders of our natural resources.
- Closure of specific areas will allow the preservation of marine animals and habitats. If left unprotected, marine degradation may be irreversible.
- Current rules and regulations regarding exclusions, size limit, bag limit and seasonal limits are not enforced and are largely ignored by fishermen.

3. ARGUMENTS

- The current conditions of our local marine environment are a result of decades of unregulated actions, which continue today.
- Some animals are intentionally harmed by people with no legal consequences. Last week two stingarees listed under IUCN had their tails cleanly sliced off and head wounds from pliers, and were thrown in the pool at Palm Beach. This is a common occurrence, which will continue to occur if not legally enforced.
- Populations of certain species have declined due to non-compliance of fishermen and a lack of knowledge of these delicate areas. Vessels anchor on native sea grass without realising the damage they cause. This can be a \$10,000 fine, but responsible persons are not being fined.

- If our marine areas are not protected now, these recreation sites and tourist attractions will soon collapse. The long-term financial and aesthetic benefits will be irretrievable.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- Implement mandatory education about the marine environment to all recreational fishing license holders, policy makers, tourists, and the general public. This will provide fishermen with knowledge based tools to understand the importance of maintaining the resources they rely on. When applying for a fishing license they should also sign a waiver informing them of their responsibilities and potential fines if regulations are broken.
- Illegal fishing activities must be regularly enforced to ensure protection of listed species and monitor amounts of fish taken. This enforcement will generate a large amount of profit from collection of fines.
- Marine protected areas and other prohibited areas must be regularly monitored
- Areas containing significant marine biodiversity, such as Chowder Bay in Mossman, should be designated as protected areas. Current overexploitation has caused obvious marine degradation. Protecting these areas will provide long-term habitat for significant species and also provide appealing recreational destinations.
- Citizens should be clearly provided a means of easily reporting abuse or illegal activities.

Summary

The precautionary principle states that if an action or policy has suspected risk of causing harm to the public or to the environment, in the absence of a scientific consensus that harm would not ensue, the burden of proof falls on those who would advocate taking the action. Effectively, this principle allows policy makers to make discretionary decisions in situations where there is evidence of potential harm in the absence of complete scientific proof. The principle implies that there is a

responsibility to intervene and protect the public from exposure to harm where scientific investigation discovers a plausible risk in the course of having screened for other suspected causes.

One of the primary foundations of the precautionary principle,

This definition is important for several reasons. First, it explains the idea that scientific uncertainty should not preclude preventative measures to protect the environment. Second, the use of "cost-effective" measures indicates that costs can be considered. This is different from a "no-regrets" approach, which ignores the costs of preventative action.

Recreational fishing is recognized as a key threatening activity to all protected marine animals
Waste from recreational fishing continues to kill and injure wildlife.

Minimal effort has been made to reduce waste from recreational fishing activity ie degradable bait bags, line, hooks ...

Fishing in all its forms is exploitation of resources, which are not the sole right of anyone to take, damage or deplete, as we now know it is a finite resource, one that is very complex and intrinsically connected on all levels, and while biodiversity is bandied about a lot it is the key to having the best option of a workable environment both marine and on land as the two have always been connected and our survival depends on the condition of the ocean, it's not rocket science.

Marine protected areas are just the start of a list of actions we must take to attempt to save the marine environment .. we are doing what we can already your time starts now!