

Submission
No 728

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

Organisation: Big River Bass Fly Fishing Club

Name: Mr Scott Flynn

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The Director
Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St Sydney NSW 2000

Submission to Select Committee on Recreational Fishing

By

Big River Bass Fly Fishing Club Inc

The Big River Bass Fly Fishing Club Inc is an association incorporated under the Associations Incorporation Act and operates as a not for profit social group of fishers who believe in and practice responsible fishing such as catch and release and minimal harm techniques, abstention and low bag limit policies.

The Clubs main submission is focussed on the value of Bass and Estuary Perch as species of great value to recreational fishers. In this submission a reference to Bass will mean both Bass and Estuary Perch.

The Club is based in the Clarence Valley, Northern NSW. This valley is home to the native migratory bass and naturally numerous other salt and fresh water species of interest to the club and recreational anglers.

Bass migrate from the headwaters of the Clarence to as far as the mouth of the Clarence mainly, according to Fisheries research, during the months of May, June, July and August. The fish spawn in brackish water during these months in the lower sections of the river system from say Ulmarra to the river mouth at Yamba and Iluka. They then return upstream.

The current regulatory regime prohibits the taking of Bass by recreational anglers during June, July and August.

During this time and at all times Commercial fishers are not permitted to take Bass.

Ironically the same commercial fishers are permitted to net the river for other species during the Zero bag limit for recreational anglers and will inevitably catch the same Bass the recreational anglers are prohibited from taking and in greater numbers.

Current regulations permit commercial fishers to set diver nets in the river. These are weighted nets attached to floats that operate like a curtain and which if staggered strategically can effectively cut off the passage of fish across the width

of whole river and at least cover a significant percentage of it. They can have significant impact on migratory movements of bass.

Current regulations permit the placing of mesh nets in a 45 minute attended set known as splashing which is a technique of throwing a net and retrieving it. Inexplicably the Clarence is the only river in which the regulations permit splashing to take place for a period of 45 minutes whereas the technique really requires an immediate retrieval. That technique has the obvious disadvantage that it is difficult to police and open to abuse as if on challenge a fisher could say they have just splashed the net even though it may have been out for a while.

Laws should be capable of enforcement and this one has obvious inadequacies.

Current regulations permit trawling in Lake Wooloweyah near Yamba. This is a shallow lake and easily damaged by trawlers. The club believes trawling damages the ribbon grasses on the lake bed which interferes with a natural spawning and habitat area. This "nursery" area needs greater care. An older aerial photo is attached as an example. The trails are caused by trawlers.

The Club submits that recreational angling is a commercially valuable business to the economy of NSW and in particular to the NSW coastal communities. A copy of a release from the Minister for Natural resources dated 11 Aug 2005 supports the value of recreational fishing. The study reported that the recreational fishing industry was worth almost \$25Million to the Bermagui/Narooma district per year and supported 260 direct and indirect jobs and that 19 percent of tourism employment in the area was linked to recreational fishing.

The Club submits that commercial fishing is not commercially viable to the licensed fishers as it does not provide full time employment to all licence holders. It is believed that many licensees do not use or fully utilise their licence or for economic reasons find it incapable of being used by virtue of the commercial value of the fish caught or low numbers.

The Club submits, without access to adequate data but by reference to widespread belief, that fish stock numbers are dwindling due to commercial overfishing and damage to breeding stock and habitat.

The main objection of the club is to the current netting practice in that

- * Netting is not discriminatory and never can be.
- * Netting which permits bass to be caught as by catch is not sensible management of a finite resource.
- * Policy which permits netting and bans recreational fishing is discriminatory and counterproductive in that more bass would be netted by commercial operators during the zero season than would have been caught by recreational anglers had the ban not been in place.

- * Netting is capable of large hauls and widespread damage.
- * Policy which permits netting of a species during its spawning season is contrary to most fishing protection rules.
- * Current Policy to permit netting is not consistent with the ban on recreational fishers.
- * Current policy, reflected in the regulations, has a negative impact on bass populations as it permits the degradation and reduction of the breeding stock.
- * Current policy does not adequately protect fish and foster breeding as it does not prohibit the catching of fish during vital breeding stages which frankly is a senseless degradation and a reckless attitude.

Current organisation for Rec Fish Committee requires time consuming travel to the city. This alone is a deterrent to most willing to be involved in the current representational system. Further to this, the Club does not consider its interests, and those within the Valley are being heard and the current representational system is city centric and ineffective.

The Club proposes that a new policy needs to be adopted for the better management of the bass population which would require

- * Banning of commercial netting in the Clarence during June, July and August.
- * Continuation of the zero bag limit for recreational anglers during June, July, August.
- * Maintain existing ban on taking eastern freshwater cod.
- * Greater vigilance in enforcement by increasing the number of Fisheries officers patrolling the water ways with more officers permanently stationed in the valley and conducting regular and routine patrols.
- * Routine funding for research on bass and other river species to assess the impact and effectiveness of the law and policy changes and the need for further change.
- * Rec Fishing meetings focussed on Valley needs with Valley based committees and meetings.
- * Greater public accessibility of Fisheries research and better liaison between Fisheries and recreational groups including meetings and an improved input process or information supplied by the public.

The Club submits that while commercial fishing has a value and a place in the valley this is a large and diverse industry and it will not be seriously impacted by the Clubs proposal to extend the zero bag limit to commercial fishers by banning netting activities in the same months recreational anglers are banned.

The Club considers that this period will permit the stock legally targeted by the Commercial fishers to rejuvenate as well.

The Club does not consider that the river is currently being sustainably fished as no sense can be made of the zero bag limit on recreational anglers not being extended to commercial fishers during the same time.

It does not take great mental effort to see that the current bans are inconsistent and counterproductive.

The Club submits that there is a large and viable industry supported by recreational anglers with respect to all areas of fishing from bait and tackle suppliers, to accommodation providers, tourist service providers, boat shops and marine suppliers. This is an industry which must be treated as equally worthwhile if not more so than the commercial operations within the river.

A decline in the numbers of bass and perch will have a negative impact on the industry supported by the recreational anglers and the people who would travel to the valley to catch fish as well as the support of these local services by the local population.

As an example, the Macleay River which has now had severe limitations placed on commercial activities has reported, through our clubs association with similar angling clubs in that area, a large increase in the bass population of that river system with the consequent ability to host and support large catch and release fishing events with the ensuing benefit to the tourism industry.



Signed by Scott Flynn
Committee Member
Big River Bass Fly Fishing Club Inc

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