

**Submission  
No 899**

## **INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING**

**Organisation:** Monaro Acclimatisation Society

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## Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc

*Sustainable future fishing for trout and native fish*

Director  
Select Committee on Recreational Fishing  
Parliament House  
Macquarie House  
Sydney 2000  
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### **Parliamentary Inquiry into Recreational Fishing – March 2010**

Dear Director,

#### **Introduction**

The Monaro Acclimatisation Society Inc (MAS) of NSW is a voluntary organisation primarily concerned with the development and maintenance of freshwater fisheries in the south-eastern sector of NSW. The MAS is a primary stakeholder with the NSW Department of Industry and Investment (Fisheries). The MAS has been in existence for over 70 years and participates with NSW Fisheries in: the stocking of fresh water lakes and rivers with trout and native fish, maintenance of habitat, and policy and legislation development that affects fishing in NSW. The MAS is the pre-eminent organization concerned with angler access to rivers and lakes for the Monaro Region of NSW. The MAS has over 600 members and is a foundation member of the NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers Inc.

While the MAS is primarily concerned with freshwater fishing matters, many of our members take a keen and active interest in saltwater fishing. The MAS has viewed the submission made by the NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers and agrees entirely with that submission. Accordingly this submission will only focus on freshwater issues as we believe the NSW CFA submission has covered the saltwater issues to an adequate standard.

#### **The MAS makes the following comments in regard to the inquiry.**

We are pleased to make a submission to this inquiry and representatives of the MAS would be available to attend a public hearing if requested.

The Terms of Reference for the inquiry relate to the benefits and opportunities that improved recreational fisheries would represent for fishing licence holders in NSW with particular reference to the following:

(a) the current suite of existing regulatory, policy, and decision-making processes in relation to the management of recreational fisheries in New South Wales, including the

process for the creation of Marine Protected Areas and Marine Parks and the efficacy of existing Marine Protected Areas and Marine Parks,

(b) The effectiveness and efficiency of the current representational system of trusts and advisory committees that advise government departments and statutory authorities,

(c) The value of recreational fisheries to the economy in New South Wales,

(d) The gaps in existing recreational fishery programs, including the number and location of Recreational Fishing Havens, and

(e) Ecologically sustainable development issues related to improving recreational fisheries.

**(a) The current suite of existing regulatory, policy, and decision-making processes in relation to the management of recreational fisheries in New South Wales, including the process for the creation of Marine Protected Areas and Marine Parks and the efficacy of existing Marine Protected Areas and Marine Parks.**

The current suite of regulatory, policy and decision making processes that impinge significantly on anglers seem to be dominated by conservation/national parks/green pushed agendas. Anglers are conservation minded and support some of the green agenda; however aspects of the green agenda impact adversely on anglers. For example, the stocking of recreational species of fish is banned in some areas due to a belief that those species would have an adverse impact on other species. While no evidence has ever been produced to support the theory, the Precautionary Principle has been used to limit some activities. Research to prove or disprove the theory has been promised but has not occurred and this has caused anglers to view the system and its administrators with scepticism. Our fisheries deserve better and if the PP is enacted it should be incumbent on the authority using the PP to undertake the research within an acceptable time frame. Failure to conduct the research within a reasonable time should nullify the PP approach.

In the specific case of trout, which is an important recreational species in the Monaro Region there is no evidence that trout have caused the extinction of any species yet the prevailing theory of many is that they have. The MAS is aware that the Federal Government commissioned the "Review of the Literature on the Impacts of Introduced Salmonids on Australian Native Freshwater Fish" circa early 2008. To date this review has not been published by the Commonwealth, however the MAS has viewed a final draft of the review and noted that the review could not find any evidence that salmonids have had a substantial or worrying impact on native fish species. Unfortunately the Federal Government Department concerned seems reluctant to release the review and we can only guess at the reasons why. Such hostile and unfair processes only lead anglers to conclude that Governments will suppress good science to advance political agendas. While this is a criticism of the Federal Government, it does indicate a modus operandi that governments will pander to the green side of politics, and the current NSW Government has been guilty of pandering in spades. Anglers can only guess as to what is currently being kept "under wraps" in the State's fishing arena due to political deals. Similarly, with the setting up of marine parks anglers have been denied access to many traditional angling areas without any evidence that it will benefit fish stocks or

biodiversity. Promised research to test these claims seems to be thin on the ground yet large sums of money are spent on over zealous enforcement. The net effects of these fundamentalist dominated views is a reduction in angling opportunity and as we will discuss later potential net economic losses to local communities.

To many anglers it appears that NSW Fisheries is not seen to be effective in representing anglers' views on issues such as these and this is probably due to the structure of the various Departments. We can understand that there may be a significant conflict of interests in the way the Department of Industry and Investment is structured and that having fish and marine conservation sections in the Fisheries department compromises Fisheries ability to argue a strong case for anglers.

Recently, uninformed conservationists have called for freshwater sanctuary zones. Once again we see no science to indicate that such zones are required. While these zones will stop fishing they will do nothing to limit water extraction, fish passage barriers and pollution. Anglers have already demonstrated with the Trout Cod and Silver Perch that recreational angling can co-exist with conservation and lead to an increase in biodiversity not a decrease. Calls for such zones do not take into account the successful stocking programs and catch and release programs that support sustainable fishing. Freshwater Sanctuary Zones will see an increase in undesirable species such as carp as they will not be removed from the system. Before any attempt is made to foist Freshwater sanctuary Zones on the public of NSW the proponents of such a cause should be required to provide conclusive and agreed evidence that such zones are needed.

**(b) The effectiveness and efficiency of the current representational system of trusts and advisory committees that advise government departments and statutory authorities.**

The MAS is of the view that the ACoRF structure should be overhauled. The MAS is not pleased that all members are hand picked by the Minister. The MAS believes that while the Minister should be allowed to appoint some members an equal number should be elected from the fishing club movement. This would not only balance ACoRF but would provide the Minister with a balanced view. As it stands ACoRF members are not required to justify their views to anglers, but they spend anglers' funds. Having club members on ACoRF would require those members to report back to members on decisions and its sub-committees and this would lead to more considered decisions.

The MAS also believes that the Chair of ACoRF and its sub-committees should be elected by the ACoRF membership and not appointed by the Minister.

The MAS would like to see a freeing up of the use of anglers' funds to allow anglers to undertake legal action to preserve their fishery. At present the capacity for this is very limited and is not likely to be agreed to by the Minister if the contemplated action was against another department in the Government. This should change.

The MAS would like to see better and more efficient reporting of meetings. At present minutes from ACoRF and other meetings take a long time to be released. The NSW Fisheries web-site should be remodeled to allow easy access to minutes and other ACoRF related documents.

**(c) The value of recreational fisheries to the economy in New South Wales.**

We have evidence of the importance of recreational fishing to the Snowy Mountains economy through the Dominion Report of 2001 that concluded that in 2000 the value of recreational trout fishing to the local economy was \$70 million annually. We are not aware of any other similar survey. This lack of empirical data places anglers and the Government at a disadvantage when it comes to making well informed fishing policy. The MAS believes that recreational fishing will be worth a considerable amount to the NSW economy and this should be taken into account when the Government decides to limit fishing activity. We have observed, over the years, that Governments generally seem to place all their focus and energy into the Sydney metropolitan region. Rural regions such as the Snowy Mountains only seem to feature in the Governments thinking when it comes to cutting services or limiting recreational activity. The MAS cannot point to one instance where the current Government has chosen to expand fishing as a healthy and wholesome outdoor activity. The recent attempt to close the Gaden Trout Hatchery in Jindabyne is a case in point. Anglers were dragged screaming to the table and in the end had to fund Government workers to keep a \$70 million (probably 200 million in today's dollars) industry alive.

The current policy of limiting fishing only serves to diminish small rural communities. It does not take a lot of angling expenditure to make a big difference to small regional economies hit by the rural downturn and drought. In many areas angling effort supports much local infrastructure and jobs. Government decisions that disadvantage one area compared with another are likely to lead to movement of angler effort away from the disadvantaged area. There does not appear to be evidence that the loss of economic returns from anglers is offset by conservation based tourism.

**(d) The gaps in existing recreational fishery programs, including the number and location of Recreational Fishing Havens.**

The issue of access is important in allowing the utilisation of recreational angling assets. NSW Fisheries are undertaking work in this area, once again funded by anglers not the department, but large stretches of water are potentially not available to anglers because they are bordered by private property. The current regulations covering access to water are vague and relatively untested in court and confusion leads to confrontation. The MAS argues that a lack of well understood legal access constrains angling effort and restricts economic benefits in some areas.

The most important document that guides fishing in the Snowy Mountains Region is the Fisheries Management Strategy (FMS). This document is the working face of the Fisheries Management Act 1994. The Strategy governs a wide range of fishing associated activities but the most important to the MAS is the aspect of stocking. For over 70 years the MAS has been the organisation responsible for the actual stocking of trout and native fish into the streams of the Snowy Mountains region. Our members, on a

voluntary basis, collect fish from the Government hatchery and disperse them according to the environmental assessments associated with the FMS. The FMS is long over due for review. There are many unintended consequences associated with the FMS that need to be corrected, but unless the review is enacted these consequences remain.

The MAS is in favour of Recreational Fishing Havens and would like to see them expanded especially in areas where marine parks have not been established (to protect the fishery) and in estuaries where commercial fishing still exists. The MAS notes that commercial fishing in freshwater was phased out long ago and believes that it is about time the same was done for our estuaries.

**(e) Ecologically sustainable development issues related to improving recreational fisheries.**

The key determinant for inland fishing is water quantity and quality. Restoration and maintenance of environmental flows in streams is strongly supported. The MAS believes that fish and the associated aquatic environment have been neglected in the diversion of water from our rivers. The MAS supports ongoing work to return water to the environment, but much more needs to be done. The MAS believes that the NSW Government should establish a minimum standard for water being returned to rivers after having been used by industry. It is about time that we took our obligation to the rivers seriously and required all industry to clean up its act in this regard. The time of using rivers as open drains is long past and action should be enacted now.

Inappropriate land clearing and ongoing poor land use have severely degraded many streams in NSW with resultant reductions in fish stocks and threats to endangered species. In these areas MAS believes it can work cooperatively with the conservation /green movement. However, much of the catchment management work undertaken in relation to willow removal is now appearing to have been poorly researched. Many streams have been left without any shade cover and increased water temperatures can be fatal to fish. Much of this clearing was driven by availability of money rather than by well researched and informed decision making.

Carp is an ongoing problem and we would like to see the NSW Government take this issue seriously. We have heard of all sorts of research being undertaken but it is restricted by limited funding. It would be beneficial to the environment overall if the Government could commit to a serious research effort to remove or at least manage carp in our rivers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The MAS recommends that:

1. The precautionary principle not be used as a defacto management tool. If the PP is used it should be clarified by research within a reasonable time frame. If the time frame is not met the use of the PP should not be allowed to continue and in its place an agreed management strategy devised in participation with anglers.

2. The Government gives greater autonomy to the Department of Fisheries to allow it to actively pursue its charter without fear of compromise.
3. Freshwater sanctuary Zones should not be implemented on NSW waterways.
4. The structure and functions of ACoRF and its sub committees are overhauled to produce better outcomes for anglers.
5. The NSW Fisheries web-site be re-developed to make access to ACoRF related documents easier
6. The Minister agrees to distribute ACoRF documents in a timely manner
7. The NSW Government partners with anglers and the industry to undertake an economic survey into the value of the recreational fishing industry to the NSW economy.
8. If the government uses conservation based tourism as an offset to removing or diminishing recreational fishing from an area, and that conservation tourism does not materialise, the Government compensates the local community to the amount of the projected downfall.
9. The Government clarifies angler access to fresh and salt water environments through the Fisheries Management Act.
10. The Fishery Management Strategy for freshwater is reviewed with public consultation without delay.
11. Recreational Fishing Havens should be expanded. This should be done at no charge to anglers to offset loss of areas associated with Sanctuary Zones.
12. The NSW Government establishes a minimum standard for used water returned to a NSW waterway.
13. Willow removal and other bank-side regeneration projects are fully funded to include replacement planting and erosion works.
14. The Government funds increased research into the carp problem.

We trust that our comments are useful to the inquiry.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information.

Yours sincerely

Steve Samuels  
President  
Monaro Acclimatisation Society  
March 2010