

Submission  
No 785

## INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

**Organisation:** Coast and Wetlands Society Inc.

**Name:** Ms Ellen O'Brien

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# COAST & WETLANDS SOCIETY INCORPORATED

P.O. Box A225, Sydney South, NSW 1235  
A.B.N 84 775 415 708

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

## **Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee on Recreational Fishing. Inquiry into recreational fishing.**

The Coast and Wetlands Inc. welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry. The submission has been prepared following discussion within the Committee of the Society, and the conveying of the Submission to the Inquiry has been authorised by the Committee.

One of the main objects of the Coast and Wetlands Society Inc. is the promotion of the conservation and wise use of coastal and wetlands ecosystems (both marine and freshwater). We note that the terms of reference for this Inquiry are couched in terms solely of recreational fishing. From the Society's perspective what matters is the effective management and conservation of aquatic resources, and recreational fishing is only one factor to be considered in achieving overall goals.

We recognise that recreational fishing has probably the largest number of participants of any outdoor activity, and this is of considerable benefit to society. We also recognize that recreational fishing injects substantial sums into the economy from purchases of tackle, accommodation and meals.

It is also the case that globally there are many commercial fisheries, perhaps the majority, where evidence of overfishing and unsustainability is real. Australia is not different from the rest of the world in this regard. Clearly there is a need for continuing reform, regulation and restructuring of the commercial industry, however the solution is not necessarily closure of commercial industry in favour of recreational fishing. Greater development of aquaculture is frequently seen as the replacement of wild capture fisheries, and this will occur to some extent, although aquaculture is not without its own environmental problems. However, for the foreseeable future, wild fisheries will remain as an important part of the human food chain.

In terms of marine fisheries resources the State's jurisdiction is limited to 3 nautical miles off shore. This importantly gives the State control over estuaries, but in coastal waters many fish stocks would move between State and Commonwealth jurisdiction.

### **Terms of reference 1(a):**

There has been a long history of measures taken by the State Government to protect fish stocks and their habitats. These include catch and bag limits, protection of marine vegetation (mangroves and sea grasses) under the Fisheries Management Act, protection of individual species and populations under threatened species provisions of the Fisheries Management Act and Threatened Species Conservation Act. Habitat protection is paramount under SEPP14 (Coastal Wetlands) and SEPP71 also has an important role to play. Catchment Management Authorities have significant functions in relation to estuaries, inland rivers, and wetlands.

An important component of the measures to protect and conserve fish habitat is provided by the declaration of Marine Parks and Marine Protected Areas. The Society is aware that declaration of Marine Parks has been controversial and has attracted considerable opposition from elements amongst the recreational fishing community.

The process of deciding which areas are candidates for inclusion in Marine Parks has involved detailed analysis of data from the entire coast. As is always the case, in either aquatic or terrestrial environments, the data will never (and probably can never) be an exhaustive and definitive account of the biota. Nevertheless the data base is substantial and allows recognition of biogeographic variation along the coast and identification of biodiversity hotspots and habitats of particular concern. The reserve system in its current form does not yet provide a Comprehensive Adequate and Representative System but it is heading in the right direction.

A lot of the opposition to Marine Parks appears to centre on the zoning within the parks and in particular the extent of no-take zones. (We note that zoning within Marine Parks represents a fundamentally different approach to that employed in the terrestrial environment.) We are aware of the frequent assertions that no take zones provide no conservation advantages.

There is, however, a growing body of empirical evidence, published in peer reviewed journals which would argue to the contrary. The most recent publication is that by McCook et al (2010) Adaptive management of the Great Barrier Reef: a globally significant demonstration of the benefits of networks of marine reserves. Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS). PNAS is one of the most prestigious and rigorous scientific journals in the world. The paper was published electronically, prior to appearing in hard copy, in February 2010 at [www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0909335107](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0909335107). There is also an extensive file of supporting information. This publication provides clear evidence of the effectiveness of no-take zones for biodiversity conservation and the contribution to ecosystem health and resilience.

The Great Barrier Reef is a different system from that of NSW coastal waters, nevertheless, we see no reason why the general conclusions which could be drawn from this paper would not be more widely applicable even though detail of response of particular species are likely to be system specific.

Although marine parks have attracted a great deal of attention there has been less discussion of other marine protected areas in NSW. Intertidal protected areas, such as occur along the Sydney coastline, are also important but difficult to police particularly given the widespread ignorance of their occurrence and role. While both local and state governments have been involved in public education about intertidal and protected areas, it is our impression that the message has not got across, and that thought needs to be given to new ways of information exchange, including greater use of ethnic media.

#### **Term of Reference 1(e):**

We would like to comment briefly on some issues which might be captured as ESD issues:

- **Introduced species**  
Introduced species occur in virtually all habitats including aquatic environments. Introduced plants can adversely affect ecosystem structure in both freshwater (numerous examples) and marine environments (where at present in NSW there are relatively few examples, of which the best known is *Caulerpa*) but experience elsewhere in the world indicate the potential for more problem species. These species, through altering habitats, can affect fish communities and also impact on the fishing experience (if lines get clogged with weed, for example). To date control has been expensive and limited, and this is an area where both more research and greater control effort is required. There is also the potential for humans, including fishers, to accidentally spread problem species, and greater attention to hygiene measures is required.

Introduced animals are a major problem. In the marine environment the major source of introductions is from shipping. We are not aware that, as yet, introductions have impacted on recreational fishing, although there are impacts on ecosystem and it is an issue where continuing vigilance is required.

In the freshwater environment carp in particular have caused major impacts on native species and on their habitat. Continuing and more effective control measures are required. The aquarium trade remains a continuing potential cause of further introductions of both plants and animals.

The Society expresses its concern over the continuing release of trout – while this is to the benefit of recreational angling, trout are aggressive carnivores which impact on native fish such as galaxids and also on frog populations.

- **Littering**  
Members of the Society have, for many years, been involved in Clean Up Australia in coastal locations. While we are not aware of data it is our impression that the amount of fishing associated litter has declined, for which the fishing community is to be commended. However, there are still problems with discarded lines and hooks, and with discarded bait bags, so that further education is required.
- **Rock fishing**  
Rock fishing is an extremely dangerous activity, and while the majority of practitioners may be careful and responsible there is a significant minority who are not, as evidenced by the number of fatalities every year. One of the consequences is the provision of rescue facilities and access for emergency service at favoured rock fishing locations. These services are both expensive and, to non-rock fishers represent visual intrusions into natural landscapes. It is clear, that at least to date, safety education campaigns have not been notably successful and that it may be appropriate to consider establishing a regime of 'no rock fishing' days under particular sea conditions (analogous to fire bans) which would permit authorities to require fishers to cease their activities before accidents occur.

Yours faithfully,



Ellen O'Brien  
President  
Coast and Wetlands Society Inc.