

Submission
No 832

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

Organisation: Southern Sydney Branch of National Parks Association of NSW
Name: Mr Gary Schoer
Position: Secretary
Date received: 18/03/2010



Southern Sydney Branch

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

SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY RECREATIONAL FISHING INQUIRY

Introduction

This submission is supported by our Branch executive representing about 400 members in Southern Sydney and is compatible with NPA State Policy created by its State Council representing about 4000 members statewide. Allusion to these figures in Summative documents is respectfully requested.

NPA's state submission outlines the nature of National Parks Association...an environmental education, recreation and conservation organisation encouraging Community Action to conserve our natural areas on land and sea.

To protect our oceans for future generations we need to improve our marine management and ensure our fishing practices are environmentally sustainable. This will help ensure we have healthy and thriving NSW oceans for us all to enjoy.

Fishing is an important part of the social and economic lives of communities in NSW, and with proper management this can be balanced with environmental needs. Our Branch believes that BOTH Recreational and Commercial fishing is a threat to many commercial species. Many people argue that Commercial fishing is the only big threat, but decades of anecdotal information from anglers points to the fact that numbers and size of recreational fish in NSW have plummeted...even where commercial fishing is banned. Research will provide specific data for specific areas, but the Government cannot accept generalised statements from recreational fishing lobby that their activities do no harm.

NPA acknowledges the value of "catch and release" at large fishing tournaments, but such large scale competitions often lead to deaths of huge numbers of fish that cannot survive raising to surface and hook ingestion. A recent competition at Port Stephens resulted in a Marlin death, despite catch and release provisos. The degree of mortality from strategies often promoted to be in lieu of Sanctuary zones needs to be investigated by objective science studies. Too often the Government passively accepts the PR from Recreational fishing bodies without any scientific investigations.

Marine Parks are another important tool to supplement fishing practice and appropriate gear practices. The common use of GPS systems, fish finders and electronic fish attractors point to the need for the NSW Government to promote extensive research into impacts of these technologies and to use an enhanced marine Park Network with no take sanctuary zones as control areas for much needed research.

The State Government is reminded that the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority just created increased sanctuary zones from 14-35% due to research that demonstrated that such a low % of sanctuary zone was not sustaining fish populations. Coral Trout targeting etc could be compared to massive targeting of reefs in NSW for snapper. Hardly an angler in NSW would agree that the snapper they sometimes catch now have retained their populations and sizes in heavily targeted reefs...and such targeting is becoming more sophisticated as technology improvements occur and population pressures increase along our coastline.

Research using Marine No Take zones as reference areas can help solve such problems as determining whether targeting predatory fish such as the seasonally common Yellow Tail Kingfish can give a ripple effect and severely disrupt food webs which can in turn apply pressures and possible collapse parts of or even whole ecosystems. Without reference no take areas, these and many other fisheries problems cannot be validly investigated.

Terms of Reference

A. Regulatory, policy and decision-making processes in relation to the management of recreational fisheries in NSW

NPA's Southern Sydney Branch fully supports NSW's marine parks, the immediate creation of a multiple use Sydney Marine Park and Grey Nurse Shark Sanctuaries, and improved zoning outcomes for the Jervis Bay and Solitary Islands Marine Parks.

Throughout NSW's marine waters only 6.7% of our marine waters are in fully protected sanctuaries, both within and outside multiple-use marine parks. This is still far below the minimum long-term target of 20% as set by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (*Marine Sanctuaries 5th World Parks Congress, Durban, September 2003*).

In 2008 the NSW Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) released a consensus statement supporting marine parks and their sanctuary zones and pointing to over 250 scientific studies reinforcing this support (*NSW AMSA Position Statement on Marine Protected Areas and No-take Marine Sanctuaries, May 2008*). In 2009 AMSA again called for the NSW State Government to honour its word in establishing parks to conserve the State's marine life stating "there is no more time to waste in setting up an effective marine park system in NSW and vital sanctuary zones". (*Media release: Marine Scientists affirm Support for NSW Marine Parks, 16 January 2009*)

Meanwhile a scientific overview published in 2009 of 140 studies on 124 marine sanctuaries across 29 countries, both in temperate and tropical environments, showed sanctuaries show an average increase of 446% in biomass, 166% in density, 21% in species richness and 28% in organism size. The paper states these improvements in marine life are not due to sanctuaries being placed in better locations, nor are they due to displaced effort outside of reserves (in fact, if anything, it appears biomass can increase outside these areas due to a spill over of fish to outside sanctuary areas). Importantly for NSW, it shows that sanctuaries in temperate environments show effects as great (or sometimes greater) than those in tropical reserves. (*Lester et al., Biological effects within no-take marine reserves: a global synthesis, 2009*)

Our Southern Sydney Branch regularly witnesses the community's confusion about the meaning and values of MPAs. Southern Sydneysiders are often incorrectly believing that marine parks are not multiple use and there is much confusion over what activities are permitted in other MPAs. This only serves to unnecessarily worry our local anglers, who in general are quite conservation minded, but when fed the incorrect information then question the value of marine conservation areas, torn between a desire to fish and a desire to protect their local patch of ocean. In fact, it is not an 'either/or' option, as the reality is that marine parks enable both. We have found from our educational street stalls and Branch meetings that when local fishers (many of which are in our branch) are given the correct information about multiple use marine parks, they are generally highly supportive of these conservation areas.

The misunderstandings about marine parks have been amplified by certain lobby groups spreading misinformation amongst local communities and particularly amongst recreational fishers. This behaviour is non-representative of fisher views but simply is a loud voice of a minority group claiming to be the voice of fishers. Their action hinders community MPA support, antagonise community-based MPA processes and therefore can affect MPA outcomes. Our NPA branch has sought unsuccessfully on at least 2 occasions to urge the NSW Government through its marine parks Authority to defend media statements from Ecofishers that the Creation of Marine parks is not based on science. That there has been no such defence augers badly for any positive outcomes from our Branch's position as enunciated in the current submission.

NPA Southern Sydney Branch would like to see improved communication from government agencies and fisher community groups about what MPAs are, the science behind them and the benefits to community members. In particular, there needs to be an increased effort to communicate positive examples of marine parks to recreational fishers around Sydney as part of a targeted MPA education program

Marine Park zoning in multiple use marine parks is critical. More security is needed for the protection offered by marine park zones with them their objects being transferred from the Marine Parks Regulations to the Marine Parks Act to ensure they are protected by legislation. These zoning types of marine parks should also be standardised so they can be more easily interpreted by community members. Currently the differences in zoning regulations between parks only serves to further complicate communication issues about marine parks.

Our branch would like to see a Sydney Marine Park and all future marine parks follow the current MPA process of having marine park boundaries set when new marine parks are announced and having public consultation on just zoning options. This is a more efficient process than having additional consultation on the park boundaries since it is only the marine park zonings that affect use by local communities. Additional consultation will only serve to prolong the creation of new marine parks and waste valuable time and resources of stakeholder groups.

Our Branch has led the way, arguably in NSW by proposing a marine park off Royal National Park over 20 years ago. Indeed the NSW Government promised then to create a Curracurrong Marine Park before the state election. Ironically the NSW Government "pronounced" before the last state election that a Sydney Marine Park would not be established then...and the sidestepping and lack of response to formal Branch correspondence to the Minister for Environment is continuing. This is despite the statement in the NSW State Plan that the Government will create a "Comprehensive, Adequate and representative network of Marine Parks". If there

was one outcome from this Inquiry to proceed with a community participation program on the proposed Sydney Marine Park for our local Hawkesbury Shelf Bioregion, that would be a result that our Branch would strongly support. NSW needs to continue to build its MPA system. Our Branch strongly recommends that the NSW Government catch up with its rhetoric and do something to replace the tokenism we have seen so far in responding to this issue.

The lack of a Sydney Marine Park is a massive gap in NSW's marine park network and its creation should be of the highest priority. We believe that additional resources should be allocated to new and existing marine parks. This would help fisheries and MPA regulations are adhered to. Improvements should enable more frequent fishing licence checks, bag limit checks and ensure no fishing is occurring in sanctuary zones.

What is clear is that whilst some steps have been taken to protect our oceans, these have not been enough to ensure the preservation of our marine biodiversity. And when biodiversity declines, the risk of population collapse increases. If we think about the fluctuations that will arise due to climate change, we need to ensure such populations are stable enough to cope with these changes or we could be potentially facing a real crisis for our oceans.

There are many habitats and ecosystems that are poorly represented or unrepresented in the existing NSW marine protected area system. For example our estuaries – the nursery grounds of our fish – need significantly more protection as fully protected marine sanctuaries to ensure their viability. We are still far below international recommendations for the percentage of marine waters to be fully protected. And such sanctuary areas need to be functionally connected, creating a network of healthy ecosystems for NSW marine life.

NPA at its stalls has been told on a number of occasions of anglers attempting to contact NSW Fisheries hotline over the weekends to report illegal activity. They were frustrated by lack of personnel on duty and resented being told to be the person to prepare witness statements etc. This is yet another poorly managed system that cumulatively does not give desired degree of protection to recreational fisheries. NPA requests that the hotline be supplemented by on call officers in different parts of the NSW coast, especially those with concentrated recreational numbers.

B. The effectiveness and efficiency of the current representational system of trusts and advisory committees

Our NPA branch has many concerns with the current system of trusts and advisory committees for recreational fishing. We do not believe they represent the true average fisherman who recognises a balance between fishing and conservation is needed.

Recreational fishing peak bodies, whilst not able to control all recreational fishers and their opinions, should provide facts. Much of the information arising from these sources is misrepresented at present, at odds with scientific opinion, economic statistics and community opinion.

In particular our branch noted the actions of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing (ACoRF) following on from NPA's release of its Torn Blue Fringe MPA document. We were concerned to find that ACoRF turned down offers of help from prominent marine parks scientists to review this document and did not listen to the advise of the NSW branch of the Australian Marine Sciences Association, nor heed the findings of hundreds of MPA scientific papers. Instead ACoRF favoured the

controversial opinions of a fisheries scientist whose agenda fitted a strong pro fishing bias.

C. The value of recreational fisheries to the economy in NSW

The world, and NSW, is at a historic junction. It is a time when nations and leaders are responding to the unequivocal call of climate change and "*the environment*" is now regularly nudging "*the economy*" off the front page of newspapers the world over. We are all recognising more and more, the fragility of our natural environment and accepting more the role that we must play in ensuring its future.

But that is not to say it need come at a cost to our economies.

Evidence suggests that multiple use marine parks can be compatible with ongoing recreational fishing business, have fisher and non-fisher support, present tourism opportunities and can provide a more sustainable future for marine based industries in NSW.

Certainly there is no evidence to suggest economic damage to NSW local communities following on from marine park creation, the subsequent introduction of sanctuary areas and the consequential adjustments to recreational fishing in these areas. In fact marine parks can increase tourism, be regional marketing tools due to their 'clean, green' image and create job opportunities.

Eurobodalla Shire tourism (Batemans Marine Park) has seen a significant increase in tourist numbers and accommodation sales since the park's creation. Shoalhaven City Council (Batemans Marine Park & Jervis Marine Park) has also reported increased tourism whilst Coffs Harbour City Council (Solitary Islands Marine Park) has seen *'significant benefits to the tourism industry flowing from the Solitary Islands Marine Park (SIMP) as well as benefits to the community through additional recreational marine pursuits and the SIMP is widely recognised as a major draw card to the region.'* (Letter to NPA from Coffs Harbour City Council, 26 March 2004).

We are at a time where the historical unsystematic or often reluctant approach to conservation has become an outdated, and now largely unpopular, option. Marine parks have been found to be popular with both fishers and non-fishers. A survey published on World Oceans Day. *Monday, 8 June 2009* found that more than four fifths of people support the introduction of reserves in our seas to protect stocks of fish. Community surveys in the Jervis Bay Marine Park and Solitary Islands Marine Park have shown over 80% support marine parks and their sanctuary zones, and this is consistent amongst fishers and non-fishers.

Certainly recreational fishers can benefit from the creation of marine parks as these can improve fishing in the area due to reduced commercial effort and potential for spill over from the marine park's sanctuary zones. Batemans Marine Park has had regular media coverage citing improved recreational fishing in the area since the park's creation and fishers continue to contribute valuable dollars to the local economy.

D. The gaps in existing recreational fisheries programs

Our NPA Branch would like to see a Sydney education program targeted at recreational fishers to highlight the need for marine parks and sanctuaries. This is a

massive gap in existing recreational fisheries programs. This educational program should have input from MPA experts and not be permitted to include agenda driven information from the anti-marine park lobby.

E. Sustainability issues related to improving recreational fisheries

We believe that recreational fishing impacts need to be monitored through further studies. Studies could include any effects of selectively removing larger fish, targeting of certain species of fish and survival rates of fish that escape before capture or are released post capture.

Whilst positive steps have been taken to reduce the impacts of recreational fishing waste, in the form of lost gear, bait bags and other litter. However, this still remains a problem. Research is needed to benchmark current impacts and efforts made to reduce it. There needs to continue to be improvements in this area.

We believe that fish stocking should only be used as a last resort as it merely serves to temporarily mask the real causes of fish decline and can hamper recovery efforts. Stocking of non-native fish damages the natural environment and is harmful to native species and is not supported.

Conclusion

Our branch has been heavily involved in marine issues for decades. We have strong networks with community groups and individuals within our area including with recreational fishers.

Fishing is a major part of Australian and Sydney life and we want people to continue to go out and cast a line, catch some snapper for dinner or be able to brag about catching a massive fish. But unfortunately unless we put in place proven protection measures in the form of marine parks and their sanctuaries we are going to continue to see the decline of the numbers and the size of our marine life and that has impacts for us all – fishers and non-fishers alike.

The submission we present here voices our concerns and proposes improvements to our recreational fishing management here in NSW. If we get the balance between conservation and fishing, future generations will look back and thank us for it.

Yours sincerely,

Gary Schoer
Secretary
Southern Sydney Branch of National Parks Association of NSW
17/3/10