

**Submission  
No 990**

## **INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING**

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

Dear Sir

**Recfish Australia submission on Inquiry into recreational fishing**

The Australian Recreational and Sportfishing Industry Confederation INC (Recfish Australia) has been the national peak body for recreational fishing for 27 years. Founded in 1983, Recfish Australia membership comprises national and state peak bodies representing recreational fishers from a range of disciplines and constituencies. Our collective representation numbers in the hundreds of thousands and we are arguably the most widely representative national organisation for Australia's 3.5 million recreational fishers.

We are honoured to be invited to make a submission to this inquiry and 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 license 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.

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We provide our responses against these key points.

a) regulation and policy

Recreational fisheries in NSW have generally fared better than some Australian jurisdictions due to a legislative and policy framework that has recognised the value of recreational fishing and the ongoing development of recreational fishing opportunities. In particular, the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* makes specific provision for the enhancement of recreational fishing opportunities:

**3 Objects of Act**

*(1) The objects of this Act are to conserve, develop and share the fishery resources of the State for the benefit of present and future generations.*

*(2) In particular, the objects of this Act include:*

*(a) to conserve fish stocks and key fish habitats, and*

*(b) to conserve threatened species, populations and ecological communities of fish and marine vegetation, and*

*(c) to promote ecologically sustainable development, including the conservation of biological diversity,*

*and, consistently with those objects:*

*(d) to promote viable commercial fishing and aquaculture industries, and*

*(e) to promote quality recreational fishing opportunities, and*

*(f) to appropriately share fisheries resources between the users of those resources, and*

*(g) to provide social and economic benefits for the wider community of New South Wales.*

The Act also references the Common Law right of access to tidal waters for recreational fishers, which is uncommon in other fisheries legislation around the country. Another significant feature of NSW policy and legislation is the recreational fishing fee which has allowed much of the development of recreational fishing opportunities to occur. Jurisdictions without such a mechanism to collect funds (with the notable exception of the Northern Territory) rely on consolidated revenue to fund recreational fishing development projects. Such funding will always be at risk as government priorities change.

The *Fisheries Management Act* also provides unique recognition of recreational fishing as distinct from other forms of fishing in a manner that is not apparent in some other jurisdictions. Examples include: the obligation of the fisheries management agency to consult with the fisheries advisory committee on issues such as bag and size limits (Section 17 (6)) and provision for the declaration of Recreational Fishing Havens and recreational only species (Section 20).

In terms of marine protected area planning and recreational access, Recfish Australia hosted a conference in 2006 to examine the issue of marine protected areas. Outcomes of that conference include a policy on marine protected areas *Marine Protected Areas: Stocking the tool box for recreational fishers* which is attached as an appendix to this submission. The document clearly outlines the need for ongoing monitoring of existing MPAs and significant gaps in R,D&E associated with the creation of MPAs. Recfish Australia also has a national policy on MPAs which clearly indicates support for risk-based assessment and honest and open engagement of recreational fishers from an early stage.

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b) current representation system

As noted in the Fisheries Management Act, the minister is obliged to consult with the advisory committee on recreational fishing (ACORF) as well as peak bodies representing recreational fishers, especially about management plans (Section 58 (2)). It is our belief that adequate resourcing should be provided to both the advisory council and a strong peak body that is able to effectively engage the disparate recreational fishing interest groups and provide a wide-ranging view of the recreational fishing community. The peak body provides for a level of autonomy and independence that the advisory council cannot achieve given its legislative constraints. Resourcing for a peak body should be tied to an agreed list of tasks and deliverables that the body is required to report to the Minister on. The peak body should not, however, be constrained in its activities but funds provided for an agreed consultation, engagement, education and leadership role cannot be used for other purposes. There are challenges to forming a single peak body in NSW but an incentive in the form of government funding should be considered.

c) value of recreational fisheries

NSW, like other jurisdictions lacks significant statewide recreational fishing information. The national survey held in 2000-01 has not been repeated and as a result participation and expenditure data for NSW is a decade old. Recently, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory have implemented statewide recreational fishing surveys using the national survey methods. Participation figures from South Australia indicate that participation has fallen both in real numbers and in terms of recreational fishers as a percentage of the overall population. Limited economic studies in NSW (Snowy Mountains trout and gamefishing tournaments in Bermagui and Port Stephens) have indicated huge economic impact of recreational fishing for regional and rural economies.

The facts of a falling participation rate and significant economic value from recreational fishing activities suggests that more attention should be paid to promoting sustainable recreational fishing practices through targeted education campaigns in schools and through community groups. Further investment in the collection of economic data using world's best practice methods should be encouraged. The recommendations of the recent FRDC research project *Development of a strategy to address national needs for recreational fishing data for fisheries management and development FRDC 2008/042* should be considered as part of a long term strategy for recreational fisheries data collection. In particular with regards to economic data:

**Recommendations**

*In outlining a strategic approach to the collection and management of economic data for recreational fishing, it is recommended that a similar approach be employed to that of Rolfe et al (2005) and that collection of economic data be targeted toward achieving the following objectives:*

- *Measurement of the economic impacts of recreational fishing (obtained by identifying the expenditure of recreational anglers from different spending categories, for specific fisheries). In focussing on the analysis of expenditure on recreational fishing within a specific region, this objective will involve assessment of both the direct and indirect impacts of additional spending. Indirect impacts are estimated through the application of multipliers or input-output analysis.*
- *Identification and measurement of the economic benefits of recreational fishing (will be different to the economic impacts as economic benefits account for the private satisfaction that fishers derive from fishing after their costs have been accounted for). This objective is*

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achieved through application of the Travel Cost Method (TCM) which uses information about the amount of money and time that people have expended to reach a site to assess how valuable it is.

- Identification and measurement of the change in additional benefits and values should fishing experiences be altered as a direct result of management (i.e. issues in relation to access). Information is obtained through application of the Contingent Valuation Method (CVM) and Contingent Behaviour Method (CB) which uses information about the extent to which fishers are prepared to pay more for their fishing experience in consideration of altered fisheries management arrangements.

d) gaps in current programs

It is beyond Recfish Australia's scope to comment on specific gaps in NSW fisheries programs. There are however, key issues of significance to all jurisdictions which can be improved.

- The need for up to date information on the recreational fishing industry is vital. This is beyond the basic information of catch and effort which is useful for resource management. Increasingly there is a need for social, economic and demographic information for all sectors of the industry. If recreational fishing is to truly develop to its full economic and cultural potential, there is an urgent need to identify significant issues and barriers to development.
- Habitat is the key to sustainable fisheries. Existing programs to improve and rehabilitate aquatic habitats in both fresh and saltwater need to be fully supported and new programs involving recreational fishers need to be considered. Most recreational fishers are committed to conservation and are ready to assist in habitat improvement projects.
- Control of chemical pollution from pesticides and other agricultural and domestic products – the impacts of endocrine disrupting chemicals that impact on the reproductive ability of Australia's native fish are only now being discovered. The dangers of such chemicals have been well known in Europe and the USA but to date; little has been done in Australia to address the potential impact. Without the ability of fish to reproduce, any management measures aimed at restraining recreational and commercial catches will have little impact on rebuilding fish stocks.
- People development – the recreational fishing community is in desperate need of new, skilled leaders that are able to advocate on behalf of their community and provide appropriate leadership. NSW has hosted one future leaders course in 2009 which was well attended. There is an ongoing need to identify new leaders, especially in regional areas and more importantly to provide these leaders with the opportunities and resources to make a valuable commitment to their communities. At a national level, the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation provides opportunities for leaders to develop their skills through a People Development Program. Some courses offered require industry sponsorship. Compared to the commercial industry, the recreational fishing industry is limited in its ability to support participants and as a result, only those that can fund themselves attend such courses. It is in the best interests of state fisheries managers to engage with productive and responsible leaders and some level of commitment for people development should be considered.
- Climate change – there is very little information of direct relevance to the recreational fishing industry relating to the impacts of climate change. In some scenarios, extreme weather events will lead to loss of coastal infrastructure including boat ramps and fishing platforms. Similarly, drought conditions in inland regions will mean that existing infrastructure is left high and dry as impoundment and river levels fall. Impacts of increased temperature on species with low temperature tolerance such as introduced trout and salmon and some native species would severely impact recreational fisheries that target these species. Either, fishers and

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businesses that rely on these coldwater species will need to adapt to new species or measures need to be investigated to increase the resilience of the species (through selective breeding for instance). Investment in specific research that considers the impact on recreational fisheries would greatly benefit the industry.

e) ESD issues

Ecologically sustainable development requires an equal focus on three elements: ecological or environmental, social and economic. To date, the implementation of ESD across Australian fisheries and natural resource management has focused on the first aspect with very little consideration of the other two elements. Traditionally, it has been considered too difficult to objectively assess social and economic impacts. New techniques in both social and economic sciences mean that the tools are there to conduct the appropriate evaluation. What is needed is commitment by government to ensure that the true intention of ESD is adhered to.

We trust that our comments prove useful to the inquiry. Recfish Australia has enjoyed a productive relationship with New South Wales, both through official government channels and with our members, the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing and the Recreational Fishing Alliance of New South Wales. Our newest member, the Professional Fishing Instructors and Guides Association comprises many members with direct links to the NSW recreational fishing industry and our other national bodies, Australian National Sport Fishing Association and Australian Underwater Federation: Spearfishing have traditionally had a strong support base in NSW.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information.

Yours sincerely



Len Olyott MSc  
Chief Executive Officer  
Recfish Australia  
10 March 2010

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