

Submission
No 963

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

Organisation: Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing
Name: Mr Bruce Schumacher
Position: Chair
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The Director
Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Sir/Madam

The NSW Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing wishes to provide the attached submission as part of the Select Committee's inquiry into recreational fishing in NSW.

The Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing is established under the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* to provide advice to the Minister for Primary Industries on fisheries related matters to improve the quality of recreational fishing opportunities in NSW, as well as appropriate expenditure of funds from the Recreational Fishing Trusts.

An estimated one million people go recreational fishing in NSW each year, demonstrating the importance of this outdoor leisure activity to a wide cross section of society. The Council wishes to convey the significance of the social and economic benefits that individuals and communities, especially in regional areas of NSW, gain from recreational fishing. The following submission outlines the Council's position on a number of major issues relating to the Select Committee's Terms of Reference for this inquiry.

Please accept the attached submission on behalf of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing.

Yours sincerely



Mr Bruce Schumacher
Chair
Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing
18 March 2010

**NSW Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing submission to the
Select Committee on Recreational Fishing inquiry**

Introduction

The Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing (ACoRF) is established under the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* to provide advice to the Minister for Primary Industries on matters relating to recreational fishing.

An estimated one million people go recreational fishing in NSW each year. Recreational fishing activities provide the opportunity for people to relax and enjoy the outdoors, as well as the ability to catch fish for sport and consumption of fresh seafood, demonstrating the importance of this outdoor leisure activity.

ACoRF is aware that fisheries resources are a public resource and must be managed to ensure their optimum use for current and future generations. These resources also need to be shared equitably across different user groups. Council therefore aims to provide robust, expert advice to the Minister for Primary Industries on issues relating to recreational fishing to achieve sustainable fisheries and a high quality recreational fishing opportunity.

The following submission outlines the Council's position on a number of major issues relating to the Select Committee's Terms of Reference for this inquiry.

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

1. Recreational fishing rules and regulations

ACoRF seeks to promote responsible fishing practices to ensure sustainable harvest of fisheries that minimises environmental impact and in turn, provides for a quality angling experience. There are a wide range of rules to restrict the harvest of fisheries resources by recreational fishers and to appropriately share the catch between fishers. ACoRF has been extensively involved in the consideration of current issues relating to regulatory controls. This involves identification of issues, reviewing available information, negotiating and developing workable and effective options and then providing recommendations to the Minister.

Recreational fishing rules such as bag and size limits, gear restrictions and fishing closures are the main management controls used to restrict the amount of fish that recreational fishers can take.

Council is involved in the periodic review of NSW recreational fishing rules and regulations, including previous reviews undertaken by I&I NSW in 2000 and 2007. During the 2007 review, ACoRF was involved in a joint consultative process with the Seafood Industry Advisory Council to provide advice on fishing rules relevant to both sectors (such as size limits for species targeted by recreational and commercial fishers). However, outside of this formal review process, ACoRF plays a key role in identifying issues regarding any changes in regulatory arrangements that may be

required, particularly in response to the release of new scientific research findings, changes in the status of fisheries resources or community and/or industry concerns about fisheries resources.

Some key issues regarding regulatory processes previously considered by ACoRF are outlined below to demonstrate Council's role in considering and providing advice on regulatory controls to the Minister:

1.1 Bag and size limits for cobia

ACoRF recently expressed concern about the current management arrangements for cobia in light of new information on increased targeting of the species by anglers, particularly on the mid to far north coast of NSW. Cobia is a large fish species (up to around 60kg) mostly harvested by recreational fishers although small commercial quantities are taken each year. Anecdotal information suggests there has been an increase in the recreational catch of cobia over time. There is currently a recreational bag limit of 20 per person per day. The next bag and size limit review is scheduled to commence in 2011, however, Council considered that a reduction in the bag limit from 20 to 5 was required to provide increased protection for the species in the interim. It was also noted that the bag limit for kingfish is 5, which is similar in size to cobia.

Council also recommended implementation of a suitable size limit to provide protection of the breeding stock for this highly valued species. ACoRF has been advised that I&I NSW is facilitating consultation with the commercial Ocean Trap and Line Management Advisory Committee regarding the introduction of an appropriate size limit, prior to broader consultation during the next review of fishing rules.

1.2 Size limit for snapper

The size limit of snapper was increased in 2000 from 28 to 30cm and has been shown to be successful in increasing protection for the breeding stock. ACoRF has previously supported a further increase in the size limit to 32cm to protect a greater proportion of 2-year-old snapper, which should result in increases in the spawning biomass. The Council has indicated that a further increase of the size limit to 35cm should also be considered in the future. In the long term, this increased protection would enhance the quality of recreational catch of this iconic species.

1.3 Striped marlin

Striped marlin is a popular commercial and recreational species found in the coastal waters off NSW and, along with other game fish (e.g. blue and black marlin and tuna species), are responsible for a sizeable component of the gamefishing tourist industry along the coast. Much of the recreational catch is tagged and released under the NSW gamefish tagging program. These fish have become increasingly targeted over the past 10-15 years by commercial longline vessels, licensed by the Commonwealth Government. This has led to concerns within the community that fishing pressure on this species is increasing at an unsustainable level. ACoRF commissioned a study which identified the importance of the species to recreational fishing in 2002. ACoRF has since maintained strong support for the Commonwealth Government to recognise striped marlin as a recreational fishing only species in NSW.

1.4 Australian salmon

Current restrictions apply to the commercial harvest of Australian salmon in NSW. As part of these arrangements, there is a 100 tonne/year catch trigger for salmon taken by eligible commercial fishers for bait north of Barrenjoey Headland (Sydney). Council has supported retention of the current commercial fishing arrangements for Australian salmon for resource sharing purposes. The Council has acknowledged an increase in the abundance of salmon, especially on the north coast. ACoRF previously commissioned research on biology of salmon populations in NSW to provide information for future decision-making and is currently awaiting the completion of the study. It is

noted that two members of ACoRF are not supportive of the Council's current position on this issue.

1.5 Size limit for Murray cod

Murray cod is an iconic inland recreational fishing species in NSW and elsewhere in Australia. During the previous review of fishing rules in 2007, available research showed that the largest immature fish sampled in a river was 59 cm. Furthermore, the research showed that the current size limit did not provide any protection in areas where growth rates are high, for example, the smallest mature female fish sampled in Lake Mulwala was 61 cm. ACoRF strongly supported increasing the size limit to 60 cm to provide increased protection for cod, especially for immature fish in rivers. This increase was subsequently implemented in 2 stages to minimise the impacts on recreational fishing activities. Coupled with prohibiting set lines, the fishery has shown improvement with large numbers of fish now being caught and released that are just below the new size limit as well as an increase in the number of fish over the size limit. With more fish breeding and breeding at a larger size the flow on benefits of these changes will continue to assist the fishery in years to come. The fishery has developed into an iconic sports fishery with significant social and economic benefits to the inland regions of NSW.

1.6 Use of electric fishing reels

Over time, the community has expressed concern about increasing investment in, and use of, electric fishing reels by recreational fishers, particularly when they are used to target high value, deep water fish species such as gemfish, blue-eye trevalla, hapuku, banded rock cod and bass groper. There is currently a combined bag limit of 5 deep sea fish in total, including only 2 gemfish, and a boat trip limit of 10 gemfish.

Electric reels appear to be increasing in availability and popularity. However, the impact of increasing fishing pressure using electric reels is currently unknown. ACoRF has deliberated over whether electric reels can be considered to be an acceptable form of recreational fishing. Noting the complexity of the issue and the need for widespread consultation on the issue, Council recommended that the issue be considered during the next major review of recreational fishing rules to provide the opportunity for broader consultation. ACoRF acknowledges that electric reels are often necessary to allow people with disabilities to fish successfully and should be factored into future discussions.

1.7 Fishing closures

Fishing closures are necessary from time to time for a variety of reasons and ACoRF plays a key consultative role during the implementation of new closures, amendment to current closures and revocation of closures that are no longer required. Each closure proposal is reviewed by ACoRF prior to implementation. Two examples of recent Council consultation regarding fishing closures include:

- Renewal of Durras Lake *Caulerpa taxifolia* (marine pest) closure – ACoRF supported the renewal of this recreational net fishing closure in the Lake to prevent the further spread of *Caulerpa*, which is a marine pest impacting on the ecosystem and fish stocks.
- Implementation of Penrith Weir Fishing closure - ACoRF supported the implementation of a new fishing closure above and below Penrith Weir to protect aggregating Australian bass whilst a fishway is being rebuilt at the weir. The fishway will improve fish passage for a wide variety of freshwater species, including Australian bass which is a popular recreational species. Following completion of the fishway, ACoRF has supported amendment of the closure which will allow recreational fishing in part of the weir pool but also provide for ongoing protection of aggregating fish negotiating the entrance to the fishway.

2. Marine Parks and Marine Protected Areas

ACoRF strongly supports maintaining and enhancing access for recreational fishers to provide for a wide variety of fishing opportunities in rivers, impoundments, estuaries and the ocean. Council is aware of the dependence of fish stocks on fish habitat and recognises that habitat protection is an important component of resource management. Six marine parks have been implemented in NSW to conserve the diversity of marine life and ensure that marine resources are carefully managed for the use and enjoyment of people today and in the future.

Council is aware that buyouts of commercial fishing businesses were undertaken by the Government during the creation of the parks, which had broader environmental benefits, as well as benefits for recreational fishing from a resource sharing perspective. Although most of the area in marine parks is still open to recreational fishing, including habitat protection zones, no fishing is permitted in sanctuary areas, which historically included some key fishing locations. Council also recognises that recreational fishing havens were not included in sanctuary zones. However, ACoRF is not supportive of the introduction of any new Marine Protected Areas and expansion of existing Marine Parks unless irrefutable scientific evidence indicates that such action is required. Council also considers the current level of monitoring to measure the effectiveness of the Marine Parks (sanctuary zones in particular) to be inadequate.

Following the release of the National Parks Association (NPA) marine protection proposal, "The Torn Blue Fringe", ACoRF commissioned an independent scientific review of the report funded by the Recreational Fishing Trust. The report concluded that the NPA's proposal was biased and misrepresentative of the need for additional marine conservation in NSW.

ACoRF is also concerned about minor inconsistencies between regulations that govern activities within Marine Parks (under the *Marine Parks Act 1997*) and areas outside of Marine Parks (under the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*). ACoRF recently requested clarification from the Marine Parks Authority regarding the stowage of fishing gear when transiting through sanctuary zones. Clarification of the compliance policy in relation to this issue was received, which was subsequently conveyed to relevant recreational fishing groups, including the NSW Gamefishing Association of Australia.

In a positive move to advance ACoRF's discussion of marine park issues, the Council recommended that an observer from the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water/Marine Parks Authority be invited to attend future ACoRF meetings to provide information and have input into relevant discussions, when required. The Minister for Primary Industries has subsequently written to the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment regarding the proposal.

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

1. Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing

The Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing (ACoRF) is the statutory advisory body established under the *NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994* to provide expert advice to the Minister for Primary Industries on matters relating to recreational fishing. The Council was formed in 1996 (replacing the Recreational Fishing Advisory Council). ACoRF provides an expert forum where issues relating to the recreational fishery can be discussed in a robust and rigorous manner, problems identified and possible solutions and options developed. The outcomes of these deliberations ultimately become recommendations to the Minister for Primary Industries. Any other matters on recreational fishing may be referred to Council by the Minister.

It is important to note that ACoRF has a clearly defined advisory function for recreational fisheries related consultation with the NSW Government. It does not represent a peak body or industry representative group in NSW and such groups should be completely independent of Government.

Mr Bruce Schumacher is the chair of the ACoRF. The Chair is not a member of the Council and is not entitled to vote at Council meetings. Membership is made up of representatives with expertise in the following areas: estuary fishing, offshore fishing, freshwater fishing, underwater fishing, sale of fishing tackle, fishing media, charter boat fishing, Aboriginal culture, and a nominee from the Nature Conservation Council. There is also a nominee of the Director-General, I&I NSW. Most current members on ACoRF have expertise in more than one area of fishing in NSW, which increases the overall expertise and knowledge of the committee. Three Council meetings were held in Sydney in 2009.

Membership is widely advertised through an expression of interest process to encourage applications in a state newspaper, Newscast (recreational fishing newsletter), on the I&I NSW website and sent to around 900 fishing clubs and organisations on the I&I NSW recreational fishing organisation database.

ACoRF considers that appointment to Council brings with it a number of important responsibilities. To be effective, Council members:

- are expected to express their views clearly based on sound knowledge and understanding of the relevant recreational fishing issue.
- should be prepared to negotiate to achieve the best outcome for NSW recreational fishers.
- should actively seek solutions that result in the best possible outcomes for NSW fisheries resources and the recreational fishing industry through consensus-based discussion, notwithstanding issues that might not directly benefit their interest group or organisation.
- should be prepared to make the necessary commitment of time to ensure they have an understanding of the background to issues being discussed by the Council.
- should be willing and prepared to consult closely with recreational fishing organisations and the broader community. Business cards enable members to facilitate committee interaction with the community. Members' names and details of their affiliations are also displayed on the I&I NSW website.

Council members carefully review all issues raised and hold a formal vote on each major issue, with a majority of members needing to be in favour of a motion for the issue to be supported. At times, there can be vastly different views expressed by individual members on certain issues, which often leads to thorough and robust debate by Council. At times, members may choose to abstain from voting or specifically request for a recording of the vote to be detailed in the minutes. This open exchange of ideas not only demonstrates the commitment of the Council's members, but also the genuine and transparent function ACoRF has in considering recreational fishing matters on behalf of the broader community.

Members of government committees are appointed for their expertise and skill in particular areas relating to recreational fishing. As a consequence, there is potential from time to time for conflicts of interest to arise between a member's duties to the committee, and his or her personal interests. For example, a conflict of interest may arise from involvement in a fisheries program or issue, employment or professional and business interest and associations.

ACoRF members have a duty to declare any private interest that may impinge upon a committee decision and disclose details of the interest or issue to the committee. The Chairperson usually makes a decision as to how to manage the conflict of interest. The usual method of managing the conflict of interest is for the member to not take part in any discussion of the Council relating to the

interest or issue, and not vote on the matter. This would also include a requirement for the member to be absent from the meeting room when any discussion or vote is taking place.

The role of ACoRF was extended following the re-introduction of the freshwater fishing licence in 1998 and extension of the licence to all waters in 2001. All licence fees are placed in the Recreational Fishing Freshwater and Saltwater Trusts.

The Act stipulates that Recreational Fishing Trust funds may be allocated to the following:

Freshwater Trust

- stocking freshwater with fish or taking other measures to enhance recreational fishing
- research into freshwater fish and their ecosystems
- management and administration of recreational freshwater fishing
- ensuring compliance with recreational freshwater fishing regulatory controls
- providing third-party insurance coverage for landowners where recreational fishers use private land (or water over private land) for freshwater fishing
- consultation with freshwater recreational fishers

Saltwater Trust

- enhancement of recreational estuarine and marine fishing
- research into estuarine and marine fish and their ecosystems
- management and administration of recreational estuarine and marine fishing
- ensuring compliance with recreational estuarine and marine fishing regulatory controls
- consultation with marine recreational fishers

The Minister must consult with ACoRF with regard to expenditure from the Recreational Fishing Trusts. The Minister also consults about the annual allocation of funds to the Freshwater Trust, with the remaining fee income allocated to the Saltwater Trust. ACoRF also provides advice to the Minister on expenditure from the Charter Fishing Trust. The outcomes from ACoRF and Expenditure Committee meetings are published on the I&I NSW website.

2. Recreational Fishing Saltwater and Freshwater Trust Expenditure Committees

The recreational freshwater fishing fee was re-introduced on 1 July 1998 and the Recreational Fishing Freshwater Trust Expenditure Committee (RFFTEC) replaced the Recreational Freshwater Licence Expenditure Committee that was established to assist with the introduction of the freshwater fee.

Similarly the Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust Expenditure Committee (RFSTEC) replaced the General Recreational Fishing Fee Implementation Committee that was established to assist with the introduction of the recreational fishing fee across NSW in March 2001.

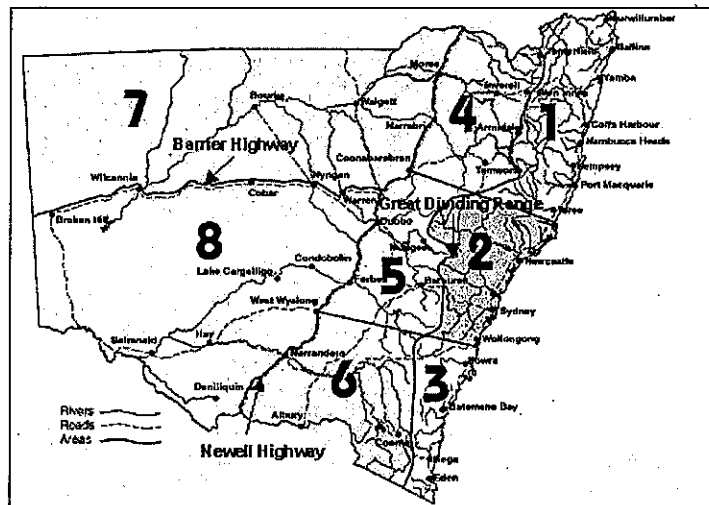
These two non-statutory subcommittees of ACoRF assist with overseeing the Recreational Fishing Trusts and were established in light of the financial responsibility associated with the trusts to provide a mechanism for the thorough review of applications for funding from the Trusts to ensure there are benefits to recreational fishing. In some cases, the benefits to recreational fishing are obvious e.g. a fish cleaning table or construction of an artificial reef. However, in other cases, there may be benefits for other user groups e.g. a platform for fishing and boating or the benefits may flow-on to anglers over time e.g. habitat restoration. Therefore, each application requires a detailed analysis of the extent of benefits, the cost effectiveness of the methods, level of support from recreational fishing groups and degree of innovation. In many cases, there is vigorous discussion about the perceived benefits of Trust applications and very often, there are dissenting views about whether applications should be funded by the Trusts. At the May 2009 meetings, the Expenditure

Committees reviewed a total of 79 applications following a community call for applications for funding from the Trusts.

Sometimes applications are deferred by the Expenditure Committees so that additional information can be sought prior to deciding whether or not to support an application. The Expenditure Committees also have a major role to monitor the performance of Trust funded programs by reviewing project reports to ensure program delivery and accountability. The Expenditure Committees follow the same operational procedures as ACoRF.

Positions on ACoRF are expertise based while the Expenditure Committees are regionally based. This is designed to maximise stakeholder input into the Trust consultative process and to ensure the flow of benefits from the recreational fishing fee is across NSW. The Expenditure Committees also function to identify gaps in expenditure in the state which can then be addressed.

RFFTEC has members from 8 different regions throughout the State (see map below for regions) and one member from a major stakeholder group, which is currently the Australian Fishing Trade Association.



RFSTEC also has members from 8 different regions throughout the State (see map for regions) and five members from major stakeholder groups, which are currently the Australian Fishing Trade Association, the Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW, the Australian National Sportfishing Association (NSW Branch), the NSW Game Fishing Association and the Nature Conservation Council.



There is no overlap in function between ACoRF and the Expenditure Committees as ACoRF does not review each Trust program application in detail. Rather, ACoRF oversees that the expenditure recommendations from the Expenditure Committees are broadly consistent with current Trust funding priorities and policies. ACoRF therefore relies heavily on the expert advice of its subcommittees when determining expenditure priorities and acknowledges the important role and extensive effort of the Expenditure Committee members. ACoRF believes there is good community acceptance for the current operational arrangements of the Trusts because expert recreational fishers oversee the Trusts and have responsibility to provide recommendations on Trust expenditure. Independent audits of the Trusts were also undertaken in 2006.

Hundreds of programs have been funded by the Trusts since 2001. Many small and large programs have been completed such as research, fishing infrastructure and education programs while other programs are ongoing in nature e.g. fish stocking, Fishcare Volunteers, fishing clinics, fish aggregating devices, construction of artificial reefs in estuaries, fisheries officers and recreational fishing haven loan repayments. Following the implementation of an accountable and transparent system for allocating Trust funds to programs since 2001, ACoRF and the Expenditure Committees recognised the need for a more strategic framework for the Trusts in the longer term. All three committees were integral in developing an Investment Plan to guide expenditure of funds from the Recreational Fishing Trusts over a five year period from 2008/09 to 2012/13. This provided capacity to allocate funding to ongoing programs whilst still providing funding opportunities for short term or new ongoing projects. The Plan provided a basis for more consistent decision making by the Committees. New programs approved for funding from the Trusts by the Minister are included in the Investment Plan. The Plan is also subject to annual review by the Expenditure Committees and ACoRF.

Funding is allocated under 7 key platforms, including:

- Recreational fishing enhancement programs
- Recreational fishing education
- Aquatic habitat protection and rehabilitation
- Research on fish and recreational fishing
- Fishing access and facilities
- Enforcement of fishing rules
- Fishing fee coordination and payment network

3. ACoRF and other working groups

There are a number of working groups and subcommittees of the Council that have been established over the years, either at the request of ACoRF or where recreational fishing participants have been nominated by Council. These groups provide essential information and feedback to ACoRF on various issues for consideration. For example:

3.1 Marine Parks Fishing Tournaments Working Group

The NSW Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water (DECCW) and I&I NSW are developing a policy for the management of fishing competitions in NSW marine parks. In August 2009, a subcommittee of ACoRF was set up to assist in the development of the policy. The Working Group subcommittee, staff from DECCW, I&I NSW and recreational fishing and conservation stakeholders, have developed a set of principles to address the major issues associated with fishing competitions in marine parks. This process is ongoing and ACoRF is kept up to date on developments by its subcommittee members.

3.2 ACoRF East Marine Bioregion Marine Park Subcommittee

The Australian Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) is currently developing Marine Bioregional Plans for each of Australia's five marine regions. The East Marine

Bioregion includes all Commonwealth waters from the eastern side of Cape York to just north of the New South Wales-Victoria border, covering an area of 2.4 million square kilometres of the Coral Sea and Tasman Sea. To promote effective consultation between DEWHA and NSW recreational fishing stakeholders, in December 2009 the Council recommended the establishment of a working group to be directly involved in the planning and consultative process with DEWHA. This will ensure recreational fishing interests in NSW are addressed during the planning phase of the Commonwealth East Marine Bioregion Marine Park.

3.3 Resource Assessment Review Committee

Three members from ACoRF are on the I&I NSW Resource Assessment Review Committee, which has stakeholders from various sectors, including commercial fishing and conservation. This Committee reviews changes to the exploitation status of commercially and recreationally important fish species, as part of I&I NSW annual fisheries resource assessment process. ACoRF representatives have raised the priority of a number of popular recreational species in recent years, including striped marlin, cobia and mangrove jack, to facilitate research and monitoring of these species, which will aid decision making in the future. Outcomes from these meetings also provide Council with up-to-date information on the status of fisheries resources which is used during discussion of management arrangements for recreational fishing.

3.4 Other committees

Most members of ACoRF and the Expenditure Committee are also members of fishing organisations or clubs, which allows opportunity for feedback to be provided to ACoRF on major recreational fishing initiatives. Some Council members and the chair attend other committee meetings, which may have some relevance to recreational fishing. For example:

Mr Max Castle attended a Marine Parks Review Committee meeting in November 2009 on behalf of ACoRF to present ACoRF's perspectives on current and future research and monitoring directions for NSW Marine Parks as part of a review of the Strategic Framework for Evaluation and Monitoring of NSW Marine Parks & NSW Marine Parks Strategic Research Plan 2005-2010. Mr Castle is also the Council's nomination as the ACoRF delegate on the Recfish Australia Board 2009/10.

Mr John Clarke represents NSW recreational fishers on the Marine Parks Advisory Council and Mrs Ann Garard is the tourism industry (charter fishing) representative on the Jervis Bay Marine Park Advisory Committee.

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

Recreational fishing has long been one of Australia's most popular outdoor leisure activities with an estimated one million individuals enjoying this pastime every year in NSW. ACoRF recognises the significant social and economic benefits of recreational fishing, especially in regional areas of NSW. Many inland and coastal communities in NSW are particularly focused on providing quality recreational fishing experiences to create tourism and associated employment opportunities. The flow on effects to the local economy, particularly during peak holiday periods, can be significant.

The charter fishing boat industry is also an important part of the recreational fishing sector in metropolitan and regional areas of NSW. Recreational charter fishing boat operators provide fishing expertise and well-equipped boats to enable fishers to access the recreational fishery which may not normally be available to them. Council also recognises that this sector generates considerable economic benefits for many of the state's coastal towns.

A number of relevant studies have been undertaken to highlight the economic impact of recreational fishing. Some of these programs were recommended for Trust funding by ACoRF:

- The Australian Fishing Trade Association (AFTA) reported that the retail value of fishing tackle sales alone in Australia was \$665 million in 2003/04. A significant proportion of this expenditure would have occurred in NSW, due to the relative population and participation rate of angling in NSW compared with other states and territories.
- Expenditure attributable to fishing in the Snowy Mountains region was measured to be up to \$70 million per annum. This was a Trust funded survey.
- Expenditure by Sydney anglers in coastal NSW was estimated to be \$134 million in 2002. This was a Trust funded survey.
- Recreational fishing is worth almost \$23 million each year to the economy of Port Macquarie, and \$25 million each year to the local economies of Bermagui/Narooma.

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

ACoRF is committed to working with Government on behalf of recreational fishers to identify and address information and management gaps that exist in the existing recreational fishery programs. Council notes that fishing opportunities in the state are currently very good, despite ongoing drought conditions in the inland region.

There is a wide range of programs, including many funded by the Trusts, which have enhanced recreational fishing opportunities throughout the state. Many of the programs are described in the Trust Investment Plan and include, for example: comprehensive freshwater fish stocking (impoundment and river stockings; dollar-for-dollar community stocking program); recreational fishing havens; fish aggregating devices; construction of artificial reefs in estuaries; community grants for fish habitat restoration; Fishcare Volunteers; fishing clinics; and trial stockings of mulloway and prawns.

Despite the wide range of programs completed or underway to improve recreational fishing, ACoRF recognises the opportunity for new innovative programs and partnerships, which could further enhance the angling experience in NSW.

Some of the priority issues identified by Council include:

- Updated socio-economic information is required to assist with the management of recreational fishing in NSW. ACoRF has been supportive of a proposed survey to measure the economic value of recreational and charter fishing in NSW. Trust funding has been allocated to this program.
- A legal entity may be required to operate on behalf of the Recreational Fishing Trust to purchase and own property rights e.g. purchasing commercial fishing entitlements on behalf of NSW anglers.
- Completion of the Environmental Impact Statement and development of a management strategy for marine stocking is anticipated soon to enable ongoing marine fish stocking along the coast of NSW.
- Completion of the Environmental Assessment of the deployment of 3 offshore artificial reefs off Sydney, Newcastle and Wollongong is anticipated soon.
- Investigation of the capacity for limited fishing of endangered species relevant to recreational fishing in stocked impounded waters to enhance recreational fishing opportunities (e.g. a catch and release Trout Cod fishery in selected impoundments) in line with conservation objectives of the National Trout Cod Recovery Plan.

1. Recreational Fishing Access

ACoRF recognises maintaining and enhancing recreational fishing access as a key priority for ongoing program and policy development. Over time, planning and development processes have impacted on recreational fishing through the loss of various access points, road and trail closures,

locked gates etc. There is a need for ongoing negotiation between recreational fishers, management agencies and landowners to ensure current access is maintained and where possible, enhanced.

ACoRF previously initiated the proposal for 2 dedicated Trust funded I&I NSW access managers which currently play a key role in reviewing management plans, crown land acquisition proposals, road closure applications and other proposals involving crown land and road adjustments adjacent to waterways. Council has also recently supported a Trust project application designed to investigate the potential for creation of crown reserves which promote recreational usage. The project will be managed by the Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW and will firstly identify key areas of importance for recreational fishing and then work with government and recreational fishing groups to implement crown reserves reserved for recreational fishing and other recreational uses.

Other fishing access issues that ACoRF has considered recently include:

- Ensure recognition of the importance of access to recreational fishing havens in National Parks during the development of plans of management for parks and nature reserves, including Meroo National Park (Meroo Lake) and Mimosa Rocks National Park (Nelson Lagoon).
- Work closely with local national parks staff to identify important access points and develop options for maintaining access during review or implementation of new plans of management.
- Conflicting anecdotal and scientific evidence concerning the population status of Grey Nurse Shark (GNS) and assessment of the management need for critical habitat zones. ACoRF is very supportive of further research on the GNS population status, and studies that investigate the effects of different fishing gear types (e.g. lures and baits) on GNS capture rates.
- Identifying existing crown land and reserves that could be formed into reserves dedicated to recreational usage, which would secure recreational fishing access for the future.
- Investigation of opportunities for increased recreational fishing access in freshwater impoundments by potentially reducing restrictions which could alleviate pressure on river stocks.

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

With a growing population and the noted popularity of recreational fishing, ACoRF appreciates the need for dynamic rules, including those for recreational fishing, to effectively manage the aquatic resources of the state in line with the principles of ecologically sustainable development.

The Council acknowledges that recreational fishing rules (e.g. species bag and size limits, permitted fishing equipment) may need to become more restrictive over time, particularly if proposals are based on reliable and robust scientific findings. ACoRF supports the notion that research be used to inform decision-making processes. It is also noted that the value-based nature of the underlying ecological, economic and social issues will continue to play a significant role in fisheries management.

1. Conservation Management

ACoRF has a clear understanding of the need for quality fish habitat which is closely linked with fish populations, which rely on habitat for feeding, cover and as nursery areas. It is essential that existing fish habitat is protected during foreshore development works and that the value of fish habitat is highlighted during planning processes. As a result, the Council continues to support the allocation of Recreational Trust funds for an inland and coastal Conservation Manager positions within the I&I NSW Aquatic Habitat Protection group.

2. Code of Practice for Recreational Fishing Events

Recreational fishing representatives and I&I NSW have developed a code of practice for fishing competitions in NSW, to improve environmental and social impacts of these events. The vision is for all NSW fishing events to follow the voluntary code so that the organisers and participants

operate in a safe, environmentally and socially responsible way. Some event rules and activities are being modified to demonstrate best practice fishing techniques and, where possible, enhance the economic benefit for the community.

3. Assessment of fisheries enhancement programs

A number of major fisheries enhancement programs are being supported by ACoRF and the broader recreational fishing community to provide quality recreational fishing opportunities, whilst minimising impacts on freshwater and saltwater aquatic ecosystems (using detailed environmental assessments to identify and mitigate risks). For example:

- Freshwater finfish production and freshwater fish stocking
- Potential stocking of marine species
- Estuarine artificial reefs
- Offshore artificial reefs

The Council believes that these examples demonstrate the recreational fishing sector's commitment to ecologically sustainable development and sensible use of fisheries resources in NSW.