

Submission  
No 860

## INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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**Date received:** 18/03/2010

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

16 March 2010

Dear Sir/Madam,

### **Submission: Inquiry into Recreational Fishing 2010**

National Parks Association of NSW (NPA) is a non-government conservation organisation that seeks to protect, connect and restore the integrity and diversity of natural areas in NSW through campaigning, community activities and bushwalking.

NPA is the largest membership based organisation in the state with 18 branches and over 5000 supporters.

Our organisation believes that 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.

### **Terms of Reference**

#### **A. Current suite of existing regulatory, policy and decision-making processes in relations to the management of recreational fisheries in NSW**

**Marine Protected Area (MPA) science:** Today in NSW we have 6.7% of our marine waters 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 Vth World Parks Congress, Durban, September 2003*).

Whilst there have been unsubstantiated claims in the NSW media to the contrary, there is overwhelming scientific support for marine parks and their sanctuaries, some examples of which are listed below:

- 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)

- In Europe, 260 European marine scientists from 24 countries, have published a declaration urging governments to take action to implement a network of marine reserves in order to halt and reverse the current oceans' crisis. (*European Scientists' Consensus Statement on Marine Reserves*, June 2007).

- 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 spillover 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)

- Dan Laffoley, IUCN's World Commission of Protected Areas Vice Chair for Marine, stated "*The role of MPAs in reducing the impact of overfishing and other stress factors on the marine environment cannot be overstated.....A stronger network of MPAs would mean that oceans are in a better position to survive and thrive despite the impacts of global warming....IUCN has been urging governments to massively scale up actions now to put MPAs in place throughout the oceans as part of the solution to the impacts of climate change.*" (October 2009)

- In 2010 a study showed increases for fish biomass in sanctuaries of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, (*McCook et Al., Adaptive management of the Great Barrier Reef: a globally significant demonstration of the benefits of networks of marine reserves*, 2010).

**Communication:** NPA believes the various forms of MPAs are confusing for community members. There is a perception that marine parks are not multiple use and there is much confusion over what activities are permitted in other MPAs. This misunderstanding has been amplified by certain lobby groups spreading misinformation amongst local communities and particularly amongst recreational fishers. This hinders community MPA support, antagonises community-based MPA processes and therefore can affect MPA outcomes.

Better communication from government agencies and community groups is needed about what MPAs are, the science behind them and the benefits community members. In particular, there needs to be an increased effort to communicate positive examples of marine parks to recreational fishers as part of a targeted MPA education program.

**Legislative arrangements:** Currently recreational fishing in NSW follows a number of regulatory and policy processes. There are 3 different legislations for NSW MPAs. In addition there are non-MPA protective areas including Recreational Fishing Havens (RFHs) and Grey Nurse Shark Critical Habitats (CHS). MPA and other marine protective water processes can be simplified by using just the Marine Parks Act (1997) and Fisheries Management Act (1994) to manage all current forms of MPAs, RFHs and CHS as Marine Parks and Aquatic Reserves. This would enable RFHs to continue to be used by recreational fishers but provide adequate protection against development as well as enabling RFHs and Grey Nurse Shark Critical Habitats to contribute to Australia's National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas (NRSMPA).

More security is needed for the protection offered by marine park zones. The objects for zones currently in the Marine Parks Regulations should be instead transferred to the Marine Parks Act and all zoning types of Marine Parks be standardised. This would not only ensure that zonings can not be easily altered in marine parks, but would also help different marine park zonings be more easily communicated to the community across NSW marine parks.

**Processes:** NPA supports the current 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.

**Enforcement:** Additional resources are required to ensure 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.

**Future directions:** NPA fully supports marine parks. The current MPA processes need to continue to build the CAR system of MPAs for NSW. Of particular importance is the creation of a Sydney Marine Park for the Hawkesbury Shelf Bioregion. 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. Also of importance is the creation of Grey Nurse Shark aquatic reserve sanctuaries at key habitat sites for this critically endangered species, and improved zoning outcomes during the current reviews for the Jervis Bay and Solitary Islands Marine Parks.

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

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

NPA has concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of the Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing (ACoRF), with the group demonstrating a very strong pro fishing bias. Of particular concern is ACoRF's association with a fisheries scientist with opposing MPA views to the scientific community. Whilst NSW scientists strongly support marine parks, Professor Kearney is a solitary critical scientific voice against the creation of these

areas. His opinions, whilst at odds with wider scientific opinion are used by ACoRF to attack proposals for strengthening NSW's marine park network.

As an example, in 2009 ACoRF commissioned a review of an MPA document, *The Torn Blue Fringe*, written by NPA. Whilst marine park scientists were available to review the document, ACoRF did not take up their offers of support. Instead of spending the money of the NSW fishing community on objective analysis by a marine parks scientist, an impartial scientist or a representative panel of scientists, ACoRF commissioned Professor Kearney who predictably provided an agenda driven review.

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

Recreational fishing is good for the economy and holds an important place in the social and economic future of NSW. However other recreational marine based activities are also very valuable to coastal communities including boating, swimming, diving and kayaking.

All marine activities as well as much local tourism relies on a healthy marine environment. Therefore it is critical that steps are taken to ensure effective management is put in place to safeguard the economic future of not just recreational fishing, but of all marine based industries and tourism in coastal communities.

Community surveys around the Solitary Islands Marine Park showed very high levels of satisfaction with the Solitary Islands Marine Park were associated with its scenic values and appreciation of the park's conservation ethos (*Visitors to Solitary Island Marine Park their behaviours, attitudes and perceptions. An analysis of surveys: 2002 to 2005 Ryan, 2005*). This also showed users preferred non-extractive activities. Swimming and surfing accounted for about 70% of all activities with only 10% of respondents mentioning fishing. The importance of seeing marine life was rated as six out of seven on an importance scale for visitors whilst catching fish only rated about four out of seven.

This information suggests that visitors to the region come to appreciate a healthy environment and fishing, whilst important, is not the most significant activity in coastal areas, as is often quoted by anti-marine park lobbyists. These lobbyists frequently misrepresent the financial value and popularity of fishing in MPA debates.

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).

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 spillover 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.

In summary, 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.

#### **D. The gaps in existing recreational fisheries programs**

Recreational fishing programs need to include MPA educational information to help gain widespread awareness, understanding and support from the recreational fishing community for the establishment and management of MPAs. A statewide recreational fisher targeted educational program would enable unbiased, accurate and relevant MPA information to be provided to this group. 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. ESD issues related to improving recreational fisheries**

EIS and catch and effort data must be determined for all NSW recreationally targeted species otherwise effective fisheries management is near impossible. This is the only way forward to ensure ESD. Without this information we cannot be sure if the industry is growing sustainably, be able to determine whether it is already too big, or be able to provide the most effective forms of management for individual species.

While the general perception is that commercial fisheries have a larger footprint on the environment due to methods used and overall catch levels, in some cases, the total recreational catch is equal to or sometimes significantly greater than the total commercial catch, as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of total annual catch by NSW commercial and recreational fisheries. (*Status of Fisheries Resources in NSW 2006/07*).

Species	Exploitation status	Commercial catch (tonnes)	Recreational catch (tonnes)
Bluespotted Flathead	Fully Fished	125	320-450
Dart	Undefined	<5	15-50
Dusky Flathead	Fully Fished	120	570-830
Flounders	Undefined	<20	10-20
Grey Morwong	Overfished	40	130-210
Hammerhead Shark	Undefined (IUCN Vulnerable/Endangered)	<5	10-50
Luderick	Fully Fished	350	270-550
Mackerel Tuna	Undefined	15	<50
Mahi Mahi	Undefined	<5	100
Mako Shark	Undefined (IUCN Vulnerable)	6	30-140
Mulloway	Overfished	40	100-500
Pearl Perch	Uncertain	13	<30
Sand Whiting	Fully Fished	14	230-460
Snapper	Growth Overfished	200	180-250
Spanish Mackerel	Fully Fished	5	10-100
Spotted Mackerel	Fully Fished	25	10-100
Sweep	Fully Fished	40	30-60
Tarwhine	Fully Fished	75	130-210
Teraglin	Fully Fished	10	70-110
Tiger Shark	Undefined (IUCN Near Threatened)	5	10
Yellowfin Bream	Fully Fished	360	820-1070
Yellowtail Kingfish	Growth Overfished	125	120-340

The higher catch rates and, importantly, the uncertainty in the total recreational catch for many species demonstrates the need for significant improvements in research if ESD principles are to be met.

Waste, in the form of lost gear, bait bags and other litter, either lost accidentally or left behind through carelessness, has an impact on the environment but that impact needs to be quantified and efforts made to reduce it. Once again, an EIS accompanied by further research are the obvious tools to start this process. There have clearly been positive steps taken to reduce damage in this area with the invention of biodegradable line and the use of non stainless steel hooks and circle hooks. NPA asks that there will continue to be improvements in this area.

An EIS and targeted research might also determine any negative effects of selectively removing larger fish and highlight instances where maximum, as well as minimum, size limits might be appropriate.

NPA would also like more research to measure cryptic mortality of fish that have either escaped before capture or have been released post capture and believes this is important in any ESD assessment.

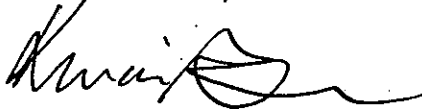
NPA does not believe the policy of fish stocking fits with ESD principles. Fish stocking should only be used as a last resort as it merely serves to temporarily mask the real causes of fish decline and can hamper stock and ecosystem recovery efforts. Stocking of non-native fish, such as trout, in freshwater systems, damages the natural environment and is harmful to native species and we do not support this.

### **Conclusion**

Most activities have some impact on the natural environment. Recreational fishing, by its very nature, has a direct impact. That impact should be managed to ensure it does not conflict with environmental sustainability. This requires significantly improved research and management practices to ensure we achieve the correct balance between fishing and conservation.

If you have any queries about this submission please do not hesitate to contact Nicky Hammond, Marine Program Manager on :

Yours sincerely



Kevin Evans  
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