

**Submission
No 979**

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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Submission to LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON RECREATIONAL FISHING

Inquiry into recreational fishing TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Clarence Environment Centre's area of immediate responsibility surrounds one of NSW's prolific fisheries. As such we are seriously concerned for the need to protect spawning grounds by way of exclusion zones and marine parks.

This year has seen by far the best fishing seasons for decades, a fact acknowledged by fishermen across the board. What some recreational fishermen refuse to acknowledge is that the good stocks of fish turning up all along the coast might somehow be linked to existing marine parks, and the protection they have provided in recent years.

Unfortunately, rational debate and unbiased examination of the science pertaining to fish stocks, has been hijacked by self-interests in both the recreational fishing community and politicians lining up to jump on the bandwagon.

In this respect, the Centre believes that the Committee Chair should be independent, and as such we have major concerns with the choice of the Hon Robert Brown MLC as Chair, a member of the Shooters Party which has recently moved (Federally) to combine with the Fishing Party. We see this as a conflict of interest and an impediment to impartial decision making.

Some minor political parties, and some opportunistic mainstream politicians are actively collaborating with the extreme recreational fishing body, ECOfishers, in attacking Marine Parks and alleging "lock-out" and "no scientific evidence to prove the Marine Parks work".

This is clearly rubbish, and must be seen for what it really is, a right wing push to allow unrestricted hunting and fishing as right. Typically, such claims they are easily dismissed with recreational fishers free to fish in the majority of marine park areas in NSW.

It should also be acknowledged that the ECOfishers champion, Professor Kearney, who bases his arguments on the fact there is no proof that marine parks work to increase fish stocks, has failed to make any case to show that they don't.

A point that many environmentalists, including the Clarence Environment Centre, have made is that, ever since the Green movement started more than three decades ago, we have campaigned strongly on water quality issues. During that time we have received no support from recreational fishermen who now, hypocritically, blame the drastic reduction in fish stocks around the world over

the past century on unspecified "agricultural practices".

Responding to Professor Bob Kearney's criticisms of the lack of science used in the development of NSW marine parks, Professor David Booth, chair of the Sydney Institute of Marine Science has pointed out that "there appears to be a lot of charlatans in this debate. If you want sensible comment about marine biological issues, you should go to professional marine biologists".

The value of recreational fishing to the economy is not in question. However, what must be considered is the statistical evidence from the Bateman's Bay area showing record tourist numbers and economic activity directly associated with the establishment of the local Marine Park.

Currently we understand there are 30 Recreational Fishing Havens in NSW covering sections of, or whole rivers, bays and estuaries which are steadily improving fish stocks through the removal of professional fishing activities. We also understand the buy-out with money from the fishing licences has been highly successful, and must be continued into the future until such time as fish stocks improve to the point where commercial fishing becomes sustainable.

Yours sincerely
John Edwards
Honorary Secretary.