

**Submission
No 920**

INQUIRY INTO RECREATIONAL FISHING

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The Honourable Robert Brown MLC
Chairman, Select Committee on Recreational Fishing
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Brown

We are grateful for this opportunity to present our views to your committee's inquiry into recreational fishing.

Spearfishing is enjoyed by thousands of NSW citizens, playing an important part in their recreation, family and community life, health and wellbeing. Spearfishing also makes a major and underestimated contribution to the state's economy, especially in regional and rural areas.

For more than 60 years NSW Spear fishers have had a proud record of involvement and volunteerism in the stewardship and management of recreational fisheries and have had a positive and productive relationship with government departments and agencies. However despite the best efforts of Spear fishers their views are often dismissed by the government, particularly by agencies outside the Fisheries area. It is not easy for Spearfishing organisations, all of which are operated by volunteers, to bring together the views and efforts of fishers who are regionally remote, and who have diverse and unique local fishing opportunities and problems. The government needs to be more proactive in fostering and facilitating representation from Spear fishers, and would benefit considerably from the better communication that would ensue.

USFA

By way of a brief historical interlude, the USFA was formed in 1948 and for over 60 years has been at the fore front of conservation in fishing in NSW. The USFA has conducted spearfishing competitions along the entire coast of New South Wales. At all of these competitions eligible species lists were carefully compiled with a restricted score sheet subject to that area of coastline with a minimum weight of (originally) one pound and this present day a minimum of 450 grams with only one species of each eligible fish to be permitted to be weighed. Also collected on these sheets was information about weather and marine conditions.

USFA was the first organisation to implement bag limits using our score sheets and also implementing size limits which today still extremely conservative compared to Fisheries size and bag limits. Despite the merit of this data, none of this has been used (let alone in our favour) by any other government body in assessing our sport. On the strength of this information collected over 60 years we can comfortably argue that spearfishing has no impact on biomass as the quantity and weight of fish has not declined over this period. There is potentially similar merit towards recreational fishing as a whole, considering the proof within this data. The other key fact to highlight is that spearfishers generally can only dive to twenty metres, they must contend with currents, water visibility, sea swell, sea temperature, wind and other marine hazards.

With this in mind and considering our long association with Fisheries, the question then has to be asked; why are spearfishers the first group to be excluded from the following(?):

- Representation on marine park committees
- Access to marine parks e.g. Lord Howe Island (only fishing group that cant fish there)
- Grey Nurse Shark (GNS) sanctuary zones. There is no evidence to link spearfishing which is sight-based fishing as threatening to GNS. Furthermore, spearfishers were instrumental in showing that data purported by (so called) scientists to show critically low numbers of GNS was grossly incorrect. We continued to argue the case and substantiated this through the provision of sites previously unknown to science, but known to divers as carrying comparatively large populations of GNS. The issue that prevails is that there is now a low confidence in GNS data from scientific academics and spearfishers who know the locale of important GNS populations are understandably cautious or disinclined to share this information.
- Representation on the relevant fishing advisory councils "MACs" in Fisheries such as; LOBMAC and ABMAC as opposed to "TRAP and LINE" which is comparatively outside our remit although a MAC in which we are involved.
- The creation and of fair and reasonable bag limits. This especially pertains to Rock Lobster where we would have expected an increase in the recreational limit and reduction in the commercial quota for fairer sharing of the resource; and Abalone where the recreational limit could have been maintained and the commercial quota reduced to allow the resource to recover.



What do spearfishers hope to see as an outcome from the Legislative Council Select Committee Inquiry on Recreational Fishing

1. Proper representation of spearfishing on all relevant government advisory groups that directly or indirectly impact recreational fishing.
2. The USFA recommends an alternative representative and management structure for recreational fisheries management in NSW, with the formation of an independent NSW Recreational Fishing Council
3. The USFA recommends that the representation on parties on recreational fishing advisory councils and committees not be allowed unless reciprocal arrangements are in place for anglers and spearfishers to be present on all government conservation committees that could affect the status of recreational fishing in NSW.
4. The USFA recommends that there should be frequent research and monitoring of the social and economic value of recreational fishing in NSW and that the outcomes of the research be applied to regional development, community and health planning
5. The USFA recommends that core funded and non-core funded activities of Fisheries be clearly delineated and that Fisheries should not be allowed to make applications to the Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust and Recreational Fishing Freshwater Trust for funding of core activities.
6. The USFA recommends that the status of Fisheries within government should be restored by the appointment of a Director of Fisheries, reporting to a Minister for Fisheries.
7. The USFA recommends that plans of management should allow for recreational fishing access and recreational fishers should be involved in the development of those plans.
8. The USFA recommends that the NSW government addresses its appalling record of consultation with recreational fishers on marine parks, and its failure to develop recreational fishing management regulations for marine parks without regard to proper scientific research and diligence.
9. The USFA recommends that Fisheries should be recognised as the sole regulator of recreational fishing in marine and national parks
10. The USFA recommends that once the need for protection is identified by robust science, a variety of management tools should be used to achieve that protection, within a management framework that accommodates all marine park users.



11. The USFA recommends that plans of management should allow for recreational fishing access and recreational fishers should be involved in the development of those plans. In marine parks and national parks.
12. The USFA recommend that the Scuba Shops and Scuba Divers PAY a licence fee to dive on marine park sites, dive sites and grey nurse protection sites with limited scuba diver numbers visiting these sites daily also they should also provide an environment impact study for their sites
13. The USFA recommends that on the salt water fishing licence a tick box showing what fishing sport people do with another box if personnel information can be used and information sent to the fisher. Also on the licence email address would be handy

Extremist conservation groups such as the National Parks Associations freely admit that their objective is to achieve an increase sanctuary zones in marine parks. This is a move which should not be made without rigorous scientific research and not be driven by their heinous desire to eliminate recreational fishing at all costs.

14. The outcome we would be seeking is a process of proper consultation that is fair, equitable, supported by science and to which we have input and we ultimately are agreeable to.
15. The USFA *again* recommends that Fisheries should be recognised as the sole regulator of recreational fishing in marine and national parks.

To illustrate this point, within some marine parks there is a conflict between normal Fisheries bag and possession limits and those imposed by the Marine Parks Authority, creating confusion and anger among well-intentioned recreational fishers who believe that are properly following the law. Extremist conservation groups have managed to persuade the government to use the Marine Parks Act to control fishing, after having little or no success through the Fisheries Management Act.

The USFA recommends that plans of management should preserve and maintain traditional public access routes for Spear fishers. This is because many of the most popular Spear Fishing locations in NSW are within national parks, and the number and extent of national parks is increasing. Numerous Spear fishing access points are being closed, depriving spearfishers of rightful access to legitimate fishing grounds.

The USFA does not support the current percentage process, with an average of 20% of total marine park areas 'locked up' as sanctuary zones, taking away the majority of safe and accessible fish habitat from Spear Fishers.



16. The USFA recommends that arbitrary percentage zoning is not acceptable as a means of managing marine biomass, biodiversity and habitat, particularly when it cannot be proven that "locking up" areas of the ocean is or is not viable as a strategy in the first instance.

However the USFA does support that protection of areas representative of critical habitats using (if necessary) sanctuary zones, providing it are being used to protect specific ecological communities, critical habitat or specific species, and these zones are not being used as a de facto recreational fishing management tool by the Marine Parks Authority.


Whilst the extent of issues for recreational fishing is wider than marine parks I will however close on this matter.

We believe that when properly qualified research has identified a genuine need for the protection of marine biological diversity and marine habitats then the remedial process may be accomplished using a variety of methods which could accommodate all marine park users, such as:

- Rotating sanctuary zones once regeneration is complete
- Seasonal closures for spawning or migration of species
- Seasonal access to pelagic species
- Localised recovery plans for specific species
- Stock enhancement through breeding programs
- Habitat enhancement through artificial reefs
- Stock enhancement and recruitment through fish aggregating devices
- Multi-use sanctuary zones
- Access to marine sanctuaries by accredited recreational spearfishers targeting a limited number of approved species.

We look forward to an opportunity to present our submission directly to the committee and to trust that the final report reflects our contribution to this inquiry.

Yours sincerely



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