



SUBMISSION:

Productivity Commission Draft Report:

Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture

[Overview & Draft Recommendations \(Aug 2016\)](#)

The *South Australian Fishing Alliance Inc;* (SAFA) is a legally constituted Association formed in 2015 as an advocate for and behalf of South Australian anglers. SAFA's role is not only to promote SA recreational fishing and anglers' rights, but to also challenge mis-information which attempts to erode or malign those goals.

SAFA is puzzled how the *Productivity Commission* can table the current *Draft Report*, when its statutory obligations require an overview as regards the interests of the economy and community as a whole. Within the existing Draft Report, SAFA considers only the interests of the commercial fishing industry have been duly respected, while those of the recreational fishing sector have not. SAFA is troubled by an approach which frames recreational fishing through perceptions overly reliant on attitudes sourced from the commercial fishing industry and by the attendant use of specious reasoning.

Given the mammoth task of attempting to correct all the errors of reliability and fact within the actual *Draft Report* (pertaining to recreational fishing), SAFA will confine itself to comments on the more pertinent *Draft Recommendations*.

Graham Keegan

Chairperson

Wednesday, 12 October 2016

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 2.2

The Australian, Victorian, Tasmanian and Queensland Governments should develop a policy to guide the allocation of access to fisheries stocks between different sectors.

The allocation policies of all governments should seek to promote the best use of fishery resources and provide certainty in relation to the processes involved in determining resource shares. At a minimum these policies should outline:

- triggers for review of existing allocations between sectors
- the review process, including how consultation will occur
- key considerations that will guide decisions.

These policies should be publicly available.

SAFA RESPONSE: While allocation policies have been developed in South Australia by PIRSA, that have incorporated “trigger” points, this is of little relevance if the procedure for allocation and subsequent review is flawed. For example the share allocation in SA, occurred for the recreational sector only after it had been decided for all other commercial fisheries. There was no initial notification to the recreational fishing sector, let alone participation, as regards the process taking place.

More importantly the share allocations were, in our opinion, inconsistent with the intent of the *2007 Fisheries Act 7(1)(a)(b)*, in that the community (recreational fishing sector) is consistently viewed as a minority, and in many cases, zero share holder. Simply stated, the *2007 Fisheries Act* cannot be re-interpreted by PIRSA to justify the commercial sector receiving a majority share of all South Australia’s aquatic resources. PIRSA has not explained the basis for such an assignment of allocation shares.

Even more damning is that PIRSA has implemented significant changes (reviews) in recreational share allocations when no breach of the “target” or “trigger” has occurred. What is the value of a defined management plan when its very rules and conditions are ignored by the Fishery Manager ?

It is also evident that commercial fisheries are not always affected by the “target” and “trigger” levels. For some commercial species “exemptions” from the rules have been granted. Apparently different double standards are applied to the “same” rules, depending on whether you are commercial or recreational fishery.

The overall allocation facade becomes even more flawed when no TACC is set for any finfish in the entire *SA Marine Scalefish Fishery*. An unacceptable and untenable position for any recreational fishery. Appointment of an independent arbitrator is urgently required to adjudicate on irregularities within such Management Plans and to hold all parties, including the Fishery Managers, to account.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 4.1

Within the next three years:

- the Queensland, South Australian and Northern Territory Governments should introduce licensing for independent recreational marine fishing, and the Victorian and Tasmanian Governments licensing for marine fishing charter boat operators
- governments should minimise license exemptions.

SAFA RESPONSE: many of the *Productivity Commission's* recommendations on recreational fishing are reliant on a single assumption, which the *Productivity Commission* states as follows:

Concerns about the impact of recreational fishers have heightened with population growth (and hence growth in the number of fishers) p106

However the *Productivity Commission* presents no objective evidence to support, what can only be characterised as conjecture. When the available facts are researched, the *Productivity Commission* assertion is shown as inconsistent with findings from both longitudinal Australian recreational fishing surveys and the accompanying academic literature.

All Australian states participated in the *2000/2001 National Recreational Fishing Survey* and at least 5 of those states (NSW, QLD, SA, TAS and NT) have had similarly structured surveys in the past several years. Thus we can compare changes over a period of 10 to 13 years. The median decrease in fishing effort was 50% (14.6 to 7.3 million fisher days), and uniform amongst all the States mentioned. If we now factor in the population increase in each State (overall 21%), the adjusted fall in fishing effort increases to 59%. A hypothesis where an increasing population creates an increasing fishing effort from the recreational sector, is clearly shown invalid. Moreover during that same period the

recreational fishing sector has been subject to increasingly stringent bag/size limits for all species.

The overall decline of recreational fishing and the necessity for an appropriate response has been succinctly presented by Arlinghaus et al's recent conclusions.

Dedicated management and marketing intervention is needed to reverse the track of diminishing fishing interest in industrialised countries ¹

A recent novel approach by Wilde and Pope², based on internet search volume for the terms 'fishing' and 'angling', as a measure of public interest in fishing, showed a large decline in fishing interest between 2004 to 2011, especially for English speaking countries. Australia had a 12.6% decline. This phenomena of declining interest in fishing, and outdoor recreation activity in general, has been recognised and acknowledged. Critical assessment of all these pertinent facts, in regard to the long-term future of recreational fishing, would indicate the need to aggressively recruit new people. An impediment to participation, like a recreational fishing licence (RFL) would be counter-productive.

Presently there is strong opposition to a RFL in SA, and it has been, and continues to be, SA government policy not to institute a RFL. The fact that the citizens of this State support the fishery through their taxes (consolidated revenue) needs to be considered, especially when allocation of state aquatic resources is overwhelmingly biased towards the commercial sector. Cost recovery from the commercial sector is only to meet expenses of management, and no resource rent is applied. Considering that the bulk of the research work conducted by state government scientific fisheries organisations is focussed towards support of the commercial sector, they have little to complain about, but they do.

High administrative costs associated with a RFL, and *de facto* subsidisation of existing programs, means in a State like SA, with a small population, minimal net revenue is raised. In early 2015 a poll on *FishinSA* (SA's leading fish forum with some 5000 members) showed that 89% of respondents opposed a RFL. Other polls have shown that the majority of SA anglers do not support a RFL; some of the main reasons offered include

- Just another intrusion by government into our lives.

- More bureaucracy, more regulations, more time wasted showing the Fisheries boys your licence.
- Another added expense on top of other fishing costs such as boat, fuel and bait.
- Government should be funding research and the general improvement of fishing.
- Distrust of the government to put the revenue back into fishing.
- Taking the spontaneity out of fishing by having to obtain a licence.

SAFA is particularly concerned with the latter reason, that is removing the “spontaneity” from fishing. Since it would directly hinder fishing participation uptake. It is also noted that regions where RFLs exist (including Australia) are continually offering “free no-licence days” just to entice people to take up angling. Realistically an RFL can only act as a deterrent for people to take up angling or simply join in at family or other occasions when the opportunity arises. One can reasonably predict a strong latent effect which will ultimately decrease fishing participation, especially if parents of children do not fish themselves.

The cultural position has been put clearly, and emotionally, by SA ex-Premier Mike Rann, when in refusing to implement a RFL stated

to create a giant bureaucracy to administer a licensing scheme that would effectively be a tax on mums and dads going out in their small boats and sitting on the end of a jetty, is totally unnecessary and we're not going to be doing it

SAFA does not believe introduction of a RFL is justified, when anglers pose no proven threat to fish stocks, and the *Productivity Commission* has not provided any objective evidence to counter that view. SAFA is disappointed in the lack of appropriate assessment the *Productivity Commission* has performed with hidden bias on all the issues we have raised.

To safeguard the longevity of recreational fishing, SAFA cannot support a RFL.

- 1 R Arlinghaus et al., “Explaining participation rates in recreational fishing across industrialised countries”, *Fisheries Management and Ecology* 22: 45–55 (2015)
- 2 GR Wilde and KL Pope, “Worldwide trends in fishing interest indicated by internet search volume”, 2013). *Nebraska Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit -- Staff Publications*. Paper 12

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 4.2

Governments should consider implementing harvest tagging management systems for valuable at-risk species when conventional management controls (such as bag and size limits) are ineffective in achieving sustainability goals.

SAFA RESPONSE: We reject this recommendation, not only because it is both unnecessary, and in a practical sense unworkable, but also because it is specious. The idea clearly has its genesis within the commercial fishery industry, as a solution to their unrestrained overfishing during the past decades. The imprint of *Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association* is recognised, an organisation that collectively reduced tuna stocks from catches of 22,000 tonnes in the mid-eighties to some 5,000 tonnes today.

Similarly commercial fishers have targeted aggregating snapper schools so hard in recent years that the beached price fell to \$4 per kg, and much of the catch was consigned as tinned cat food. All this happened in SA, where there is no TACC limit or ever likely to be, so pardon our cynicism about “tags”. Put succinctly the recreational fishing sector is not willing to be used as a scapegoat to whitewash the continual and ignored overfishing by the commercial sector.

Unfortunately commercial overfishing is an important issue that the *Productivity Commission* fails to adequately grasp and examine.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 4.3

The Australian, state and Northern Territory Governments should sponsor more research on the survival rates of catch and release methods in deep water fisheries.

SAFA RESPONSE: We do not agree with this recommendation because it fails to accept the huge losses associated with commercial fishing in terms of by-catch and mortality. The level of these commercial losses need to be properly quantified by regular and frequent independent surveys. SAFA would certainly support research on the latter. Those findings then could be used to implement changes with potential benefits for sustainable fishing far beyond the token benefits of *Recommendation 4.3*.

Again this typifies a pattern by the *Productivity Commission* to focus on the minor, rather than the major problems, which are inevitably associated with the commercial fishing industry.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 4.4

State and territory governments should review and strengthen penalty regimes for recreational fishing to deter regulatory non-compliance.

Penalties should be proportional to the level of risk posed.

SAFA RESPONSE: we feel greater effort should be directed towards organised syndicates and individuals fishing illegally on a large scale, to directly supply seafood processors and restaurants. Illegal activities, where the mass of fish taken is high, must be the primary focus, if the ultimate goal is to ensure future sustainability.

While there are some 3 million anglers and 10,000 commercial fishers in Australia (a ratio of about 300 to 1), the frequency of serious fishing offences requiring court appearance, based on a brief review of media reports, indicates a rate of approximately 40~20:1, that is a significant over-representation by commercial fishers.

Just to bear out the essence of our argument, in 2012-2013 *The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority* apprehended many individuals for non-compliance, which resulted in 24 appearing in court. The accumulated total of all the subsequent fines was \$121,500, of which \$81,000 came from the 7 commercial fishers.

What concerns SAFA is the scale of the offence, and not merely that an on-the-spot fine was issued for a minor infringement. For example in July 2015 a Wollongong restaurant was fined \$24,000 for illegally purchasing 173kg of lobster from a commercial fisher; in Mar 2014 a commercial fisher had 192kg of lobster for illegal sale; in Oct 2013 a commercial fisher detected fishing in a sanctuary zone had 200kg of fish.

While we agree this would only represent a small proportion of commercial fishers, the weight and number of catch involved is disproportionate to what might ever be expected from recreational anglers.

Once again SAFA is surprised to witness such a sustained focus on recreational fishing, when the inferred threat by anglers, to long-term sustainability of fish stocks has not been demonstrated by the *Productivity Commission* in any objective manner.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATION 4.5

The Australian Government should conduct a national survey of recreational fishing in 2017-18, using a comparable approach to the 2000-01 national survey. The cost of the survey should be shared by all governments.

From 2022-23 all governments should undertake five yearly surveys of recreational fishers, whether at the national level or on a coordinated basis.

Surveys should be consistent across jurisdictions and focus on participation, catch and effort, identification of species important to recreational fishers and information on the value of recreational fishing.

SAFA RESPONSE: We are in general agreement; however the *Productivity Commission* is incorrect with respect to its methodology in the specifications (perhaps this is why it has published an unsuitable angler estimate for Vic in its *Draft Report*[#]). The form of the *2000/2001 National Recreational Fishing Survey* is only appropriate for estimating recreational fishing demographics, provided a sufficient sample size is used. For example, the *SA 2013/2014 Recreational Fishing Survey*, due to a decreased sample size (for cost minimisation), had twice the imprecision of the previous SA 2007/2008 survey.

The 2000/2001 National survey style is unsuitable for calculating actual harvest weights, a point repeatedly made by many authors, but steadfastly ignored by most Fishery Managers, even when told in quite specific terms. The relative standard error associated with catch estimates should be less than 25%, and include the actual error in converting harvest numbers to weight values. The latter error estimate (which also comprises the systematic error), to our knowledge, has never been determined for an Australian fishing survey. Thus all the published recreational harvest weight estimates are less reliable than actually shown, and biased to an unknown extent.

SAFA is also critical of the common absence of statistical significance testing for results. Numerous times statements made as to increased/decreased levels, with respect to past

harvest estimates, are statistically unsupported and thus invalid. But more relevant, these invalid results mislead readers as to the veracity of the claim(s).

It is beyond the scope of our brief comment to dwell on the possible suitable techniques to estimate harvest weights reliably so we defer to the following as a beginning.

1. BW Hartill, M Cryer, JM Lyle, et al., "Scale- and Context-Dependent Selection of Recreational Harvest Estimation Methods: The Australasian Experience". North American Journal Of Fisheries Management 32: 109-23, 2012.
2. J Wynne-Jones, A Gray, L Hill and A. Heinemann, "National Panel Survey of Marine Recreational Fishers 2011–12: Harvest Estimates", New Zealand Fisheries Assessment Report 2014/67, 2014.

on page 107, Table 4.2, a value of 840,000 recreational anglers is given for Victoria, based on an *2013-14 Ernst & Young* study. This value was not calculated using a clearly defined methodology and therefore should not be listed. As for WA, the 2000/2001 National survey value, which found 550,000 Victorians fished for a participation rate of 10.2% should be given.