

Marine Fisheries and Aquaculture
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

SUBMISSION ON THE MARINE FISHERIES AND AQUACULTURE DRAFT REPORT

Recfishwest is the peak body for recreational fishing in Western Australia representing the estimated 750,000 recreational fishers who participate in fishing in Western Australia every year. Recfishwest have been strong supporters of the Productivity Commission review and provided comment on the issues paper released earlier this year. Recfishwest is pleased a lot of the issues we raised during the stakeholder consultation period have been addressed in the draft recommendations and findings.

The identified opportunities for co-management, the need for contestable research, the development of Harvest Strategies, the need for improved transparency in management decisions/expenditure, citizen science opportunities, allocation between sectors, quota management and recommendations on customary fishing are important issues affecting the recreational fishing community in Western Australia and Recfishwest is pleased these issues have been considered.

Recfishwest is also pleased Recommendation 4.5 will address the need for more comprehensive information in relation to the level of recreational participation, catch, effort and value. This information has been a priority for Recfishwest for a number of years and we believe a better understanding of the level and value of recreational fishing will be especially useful in informing management decisions.

There is a growing body of information in relation to the social and wellbeing value provided by recreational fishing and Recfishwest would suggest Recommendation 4.5 would benefit from including some of these values. The attached link to a report conducted by Curtin University on the wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing demonstrates some of these values. <http://recfishwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Recfish-Report-Final-September-2014.pdf>

Although recreational fishing comprises a single chapter in the draft report the recommendations relating to recreational fishing have attracted a disproportionate amount of media attention. This demonstrates the importance of recreational fishing and as the peak body for recreational fishing in Western Australia this submission will focus on aspects, recommendations and findings that directly relate to recreational fishing.

Some of the issues discussed in the draft report that will be covered in this submission include:

- The notion that recreational effort is related to catch
- The absence of identified opportunities for productivity improvements
- Harvest Strategies
- Aquaculture and how it is complimented by recreational fishing.
- The cost to manage fisheries (commercial and recreational)

The notion that recreational effort is related to catch

The draft report has identified concerns from both commercial fishers and fisheries managers about the growing risk associated with the growth of recreational fishing. The draft report states '*It is probable that the recreational sector's impact on fisheries will grow with population growth and utilization of new fishing technologies*'. While there is a direct relationship between commercial fishing effort and the level of catch this relationship does not extend to the recreational fishing sector as catching a fish is often not the primary driver of participation.

Recfishwest is currently involved in a commonwealth funded project looking to future proof the marron fishery. As part of this project the drivers for participation were examined and catching marron was not in the top three reasons for participation. Some of the fishers questioned in the project had not caught a marron for years and were not expecting to catch one in future years yet were keen to continue to participate in the fishery.

Another reason recreational effort should not be linked to catch is because catch is not distributed evenly between recreational fishers. It is well known that a small number of fishers account for the majority of fishing catch and that a large number of recreational fishers catch no fish at all. Increasing the number of fishers that do not catch fish (or catch a minimal amount of fish) will have zero effect on the catch levels attributed to recreational fishing.

Recent Australian data shows that around 20% of fishers account for between 55 and 60 per cent of total fishing effort. It is likely these avid fishers are responsible for an even larger percentage of the recreational catch. It is also extremely likely that the vast majority of new recreational fishers will be amongst those that catch little or no fish.

The estimated number of recreational fishers in Western Australia has risen by over 50% since 2000 and the Western Australian Department of Fisheries (WADoF) reports show recreational catch has not risen by 50% during the same period, for many species the recreational catch level has actually fallen.

Linking recreational effort to catch is a misguided notion and one that the draft report should avoid. There is a need to recognise the different drivers of each sector and to develop recreational fishing management based on managing expectations and experience rather than simply managing effort and catch.

The absence of identified opportunities for productivity improvements

The report has focused on the regulatory burden imposed on the Australian marine fisheries and aquaculture sectors as outlined in the Terms of Reference however the absence of recommendations or findings in regards to some of the opportunities to increase the productivity of Australian fisheries is surprising.

While the report has focused on regulating management and extraction of the fisheries resources it has failed to recognise habitat enhancement and stocking. These areas provide multiple opportunities for increasing the productivity of Australian waters.

There is an exhaustive body of knowledge showing artificial reefs drive fish production. Many countries now use artificial reefs and habitat enhancement technologies to supplement their commercial wild capture fisheries and these reefs can be over five times as productive as natural reef systems. Despite the well-established science behind habitat enhancement structures the only mention of artificial reefs in the report refers to their potential to '*adversely affect fisheries*'. Currently the process to obtain approval for the establishment of artificial reefs in Australia is expensive and overly burdensome. This report would benefit from recommendations to improve this process.

The offshore oil and gas industry currently has a substantial amount of infrastructures in place that is effectively acting as artificial reefs and some commercial fishing operators already obtain a significant proportion of their catch by fishing around oil and gas pipelines. As some oil and gas operations approach the end of their working life they are being prepared for decommissioning which involves removing infrastructure from the water. Retaining some of the infrastructure that is planned for decommissioning or moving/modifying this infrastructure to ensure the ecological benefits it is currently providing are not lost would benefit fisheries and fisheries production. The offshore oil and gas sector can provide benefit to fisheries production and the report should include a recommendation on encouraging productive infrastructure to remain in the water.

Another form of habitat enhancement that has great potential to increase the productivity of Australian waters is through habitat restoration. Australia has lost a large amount of nearshore shellfish reef and estuary habitat. These areas are important nursery areas and their loss has likely led to a gradual decline in the level of recruitment to a number of fisheries. In 2013 the Fisheries Research and development Corporation (FRDC) released a business case for repairing coastal ecosystems to improve fisheries productivity, water quality, catchment hydrology, coastal biodiversity, flood control, carbon sequestration and foreshore buffering.

As over 75 % of species contributing to Australia's commercial fish catch and up to 90% of all recreational catch spends part of their life cycle within estuaries and inshore wetlands revitalising these

areas will increase fisheries productivity. The FRDC business case identified a \$350 investment in repairing key estuary assets would produce more than \$350 million in increased productivity within five years. A copy of this business case can be found on the FRDC website or by clicking the following link http://frdc.com.au/research/Documents/Final_reports/2012-036-DLD.pdf

In addition to habitat enhancement there are opportunities for fisheries enhancement through the stocking of fish. Recfishwest recently supported a project funded through recreational fishing licence fees looking at the feasibility of collecting fertilised pink snapper eggs and culturing these eggs for a few weeks through the most vulnerable stage of their life cycle. The initial idea behind this project was to see if this was a viable method of stock enhancement that could be used to smooth out variations in recruitment thereby providing greater certainty over available harvest levels. This project was successful and funding to continue the project for another two years has been secured. More information about this project can be found by clicking on the following link. <http://recfishwest.org.au/snapper-guardians/>.

Harvest Strategies

Recfishwest is pleased the report has recommended the development of Harvest strategy policies for all jurisdictions that current do not have these policies. However it should be noted that simply having a policy is of little value if they are not followed when developing harvest strategies for individual fisheries.

Recfishwest support the use of harvest strategies and have a clear position in relation to what we expect harvest strategies to contain. These expectations can be read by clicking on the following link. <http://recfishwest.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Harvest-Strategy.pdf>.

Recfishwest believe a harvest strategy is essentially an agreement between the regulator and the community. This agreement should provide the public with confidence that community owned resources are being effectively managed to achieve agreed objectives. As such, there is an expectation the community should be able to reasonably understand the contents of these agreements and be able to identify what management actions will occur when a reference point is reached.

The report has requested information on the factors that should guide government decisions on take limits (in particular, target reference points)? Recfishwest believe take limits should be guided by the best return to the state (community) and should take into account community expectations about what is an acceptable use for the resource. It is the regulators responsibility to ensure the level of take is sustainable and it is the community's responsibility to ensure that the resource is being taken for an acceptable use. If the community do not believe a proposed sustainable use of a public resource is

acceptable then the regulator should not allow the resource to be used for that purpose. There is no justification for utilising a fish resource simply because it is sustainable.

For example there are currently no sustainability concerns for West Australian Salmon and the recreational bag limit has been set at four fish per person per day. This limit could quite easily be raised to 20 fish per person per day without jeopardising sustainability however this is out of line with community expectations about what is deemed to be a suitable use of the resource.

The same applies to a commercial operation that may want to use a resource for a low value product such as fertiliser, bait or fishmeal or may want to use a harvest method that does not have the support of the community. If the community do not believe a proposed activity is suitable then it is up to the sector that wants to use that resource (and not the regulator) to convince the community to change their mind.

Harvest strategies can be a useful tool in determining what constitutes an acceptable use. All harvest strategies should contain at least three reference points. Target, trigger (threshold) and limit reference point are commonly used. These reference points should reflect social, economic and ecological management objectives and they should be easily measured.

Recfishwest believe the limit reference point should be based purely on sustainability and be developed by the regulator guided by the best available research. Once sustainable levels have been identified the regulators input into target and trigger limits should be greatly reduced. Once a resource is deemed to be at a level where extractive use does not place sustainability at risk the reasons for utilising the available resource must be assessed. The only reasons to extract a resource are for either social or economic purposes. As such it should be the main responsibility of industry and the community to develop measurable threshold and target reference points with clearly defined associated management actions.

An example of a harvest strategy where the management action has not been clearly defined and appears not to align with the overarching policy can be seen in the Peel-Harvey fin fish fishery in Western Australia http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/management_papers/fmp274.pdf. This strategy is 28 pages long and community members would struggle to identify how this resource is managed after reading this document.

This strategy identified a threshold of 13t for yellowfin whiting, a popular recreational species and a secondary commercial species in the fishery. This threshold has been exceeded since 2013 (Fig 1.1) yet the regulator has repeatedly stated that there is no intention for management action to return catches to below threshold levels. This inaction reduces the value the community see in the Harvest Strategy and therefore reduces the value they see in any other strategies.

In order for harvest strategies to retain any value to the community the regulator must ensure they follow the overarching policy that has been developed by their respective jurisdictions. Having a policy that is not followed destroys community confidence and is worse than having no policy at all.

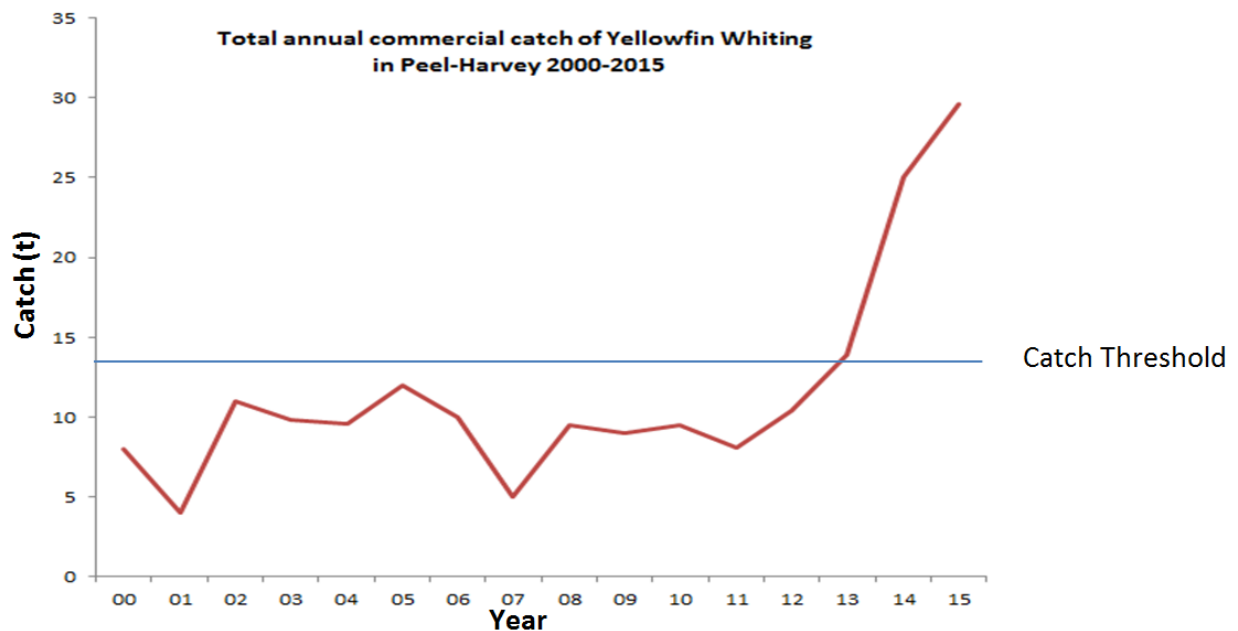


Fig 1.1 Total annual commercial catch of Yellowfin whiting in Peel-Harvey 2000-2015

Aquaculture and how it is complimented by recreational fishing

The reports section on aquaculture concentrates on the regulatory environment governing aquaculture and the only mention of recreational fishing in this section is in relation to potential conflicts with the sector. Recreational fishing can provide significant support for aquaculture, especially for hatchery operations in the early stages of aquaculture development. Recfishwest have worked closely with the Australian centre for Applied Aquaculture Research (ACAAR) and the North Regional Tafe (NRTafe) on a number of occasions. ACAAR were responsible for culturing a number of important recreational species for restocking including river prawns, pink snapper, blue swimmer crabs and mulloway. While NRTafe recently cultured over half a million barramundi for stocking into Lake Kununurra to create an impoundment recreational fishery.

A strong aquaculture sector can provide substantial benefit to recreational fishing and the report should reflect the positive relationship this sector has rather than solely focusing on potential conflicts.

The cost to manage fisheries (commercial and recreational)

The report quotes a figure approaching \$290 million per annum (12% of Gross Value of Production [GVP]) as the cost of managing Australia's wild catch fisheries and aquaculture production. It is not clear if the \$290 million figure includes the cost of managing recreational fishing. If this is the case the cost of managing recreational fishing should be subtracted from the \$290 million figure as recreational fishing does not have a GVP equivalent. The actual percentage of GVP is likely to be significantly lower than the 12% that has been quoted once recreational fishing management costs have been removed.

It is commonly known that the majority of commercial catch value is taken by a small proportion of fishing businesses in a limited number of fisheries. A large proportion of the 165 commercial fisheries in Australia have more spent on managing these fisheries every year than the government receives in licence fees and in some cases the value of management even exceeds the GVP of the fishery. Recfishwest acknowledge fisheries (both commercial, recreational and indigenous) provide value other than GVP. There are social, economic, cultural and wellbeing values provided by both recreational and to a lesser extent commercial fisheries that are often hard to quantify.

It is pleasing the report has highlighted the need for recreational fishing to receive greater recognition in fisheries management (Key Points Page 2). In Western Australia the six licenced recreational fisheries collectively contribute over \$7 million dollars to government in licence fees. There are only a few commercial fisheries in Western Australia whose contribution to government through their 5.75% GVP payment exceeds any of the six licenced recreational fisheries. Despite this, recreational fishing is not proportionally represented in the WADoF research, monitoring, assessment and development plans http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Documents/occasional_publications/fop122.pdf.

The report has recommended the introduction of recreational fishing licence in states that do not already have a recreational licencing system. It is worth noting that without transparency in how licence revenue will be spent there will be resistance from recreational fishers in these states. Most fishers will not be opposed to paying for a recreational fishing licence provided they know how that money is being spent.

There is no doubt that a number of commercial fisheries in Western Australia would not be viable under a full cost recovery model and Western Australia abandoned this model in favour of a system of flat percentage of GVP some years ago. This effectively means a few high value fisheries, most notable Rock Lobster are subsidising the majority of commercial fisheries in Western Australia. A review of Western Australian fisheries management to ensure the benefits and efficiencies associated with cost recovery has not been lost in the flat GVP model would be beneficial.

In much the same way National parks are not fully cost recovered there is little doubt that full cost recovery should not apply to recreational fishing. Fisheries are a public resource and the government has an obligation to ensure the community has adequate opportunity to access these resources. Recfishwest was pleased to see the report identify the price of licences as a secondary objective to their primary use of gathering information to assist management of the resource. Recfishwest agree that ultimately, licences should be readily available at low cost for the majority of fishers.

In addition to the issues raised in the report it is worth noting the difference way successful commercial and successful recreational fisheries are often treated by regulators. When a commercial fishery is successful (sustainable and profitable) it is held up as a beacon of successful management while a successful recreational fishery (sustainable and popular) always seems to be shadowed by concerns over participation levels or lamented for the lost commercial opportunities. It would be nice for successful recreational fisheries to be treated with the same level of support as successful commercial fisheries.

For example the Western Rock Lobster fishery (recreational) has shown substantial growth over the last four years growing by around 50% during this time. Over 50,000 people pay a licence fee to government to access the Rock Lobster resource each year and the 50% increase in licences represents a 50% increase in the income returned to the state. The recreational sector has been allocated 5% of the Lobster resource and provides a larger return to government (per % of the resource allocated) than the commercial fishery which is the most valuable wild catch fishery in Australia. Despite this success there is very little mention of this recreational fishery while its commercial counterpart is held up as one of the best examples of sustainable management on a regular basis.

The report has raised another important issue worth noting. Throughout the report there is reference to potential conflict between recreational and commercial fisheries. The commercial fishing sector and regulators need to recognise imports rather than recreational fishing is the biggest threat to most Australia fisheries that supply the local market.

Most of Australia's high value seafood is exported. These fisheries are generally not competing with recreational fishers. It is the fisheries with lower value products that are competing with imported white flesh fish and canned products.

If all recreational fishing was removed Australia's seafood exports are likely to remain largely unaffected yet there would still be a large number of fisheries that would struggle to survive against imported products. With two thirds of Australian seafood consumption consisting of imported products which are often cheaper than local produce the argument that the commercial sector is feeding those who can't fish for themselves falls flat and cannot be used as a moral argument when making comparisons with recreational competitors.

Another reoccurring theme throughout the report is a pervasive fear of political interference in operational decision making. Rather than view this interference as the result of interference by 'greedy recreational fishers' regulators and commercial fishers would benefit from looking at this issue from the recreational fishing perspective.

Recreational fishing aspirations are often ignored by management and the needs of recreational fishers are seldom reflected in management. Recfishwest have developed management proposals on special separation around selected urban areas. Some of these proposals are many years old and have never been properly addressed. Meanwhile proposals for commercial fishing are actively being developed and pursued by the regulator on the behalf of the commercial fishing sector.

When the regulator fails to address the needs of the recreational sector political influence is often the only option available to this sector. The report has highlighted the need for recreational fishing to receive greater recognition in fisheries management. Regulators and commercial fisheries would benefit from heading the advice of this report as the inevitable consequence of continuing to ignore recreational sector needs and continuing inequitable management arrangements between the sectors is political intervention.

It should be pointed out that much of this submission has been written from a national perspective drawing on some Western Australian examples. The relationship between the regulators and industry in Western Australia is arguably better than in any other state or territory (including at a national level).

Unlike other states where the relationships between the commercial and recreational sectors are often strained in Western Australia these sectors are managing to largely work together. An example of this positive partnership can be seen by the awarding of Marine Council Certification to both Recfishwest and the Mandurah Licenced Fisherman's Association for a shared fishery. The positive working relationship between the sectors is largely due to peak bodies receiving adequate funding.

In Western Australia there is also new rights based Bill that will become the primary legislation for the management of Western Australia's fisheries and aquatic biological resources. This Bill will establish an integrated cross-sectoral planning and management framework which should hopefully address many of the issues raised in this report.

Recfishwest support many of the recommendation contained in the report. The table below summarises our support for each recommendation.

Draft recommendations and comment	
2.1	This recommendation does not apply to Western Australia although all harvest strategies need to be consistent with the overarching policy and the national policy.
2.2	This recommendation does not apply to Western Australia although promoting the best use of fishery resources is supported.
3.1	Supported especially the public release of reasons for the approach taken to each fishery.
3.2	Agreed, reviews should be undertaken more regularly than when harvest strategies are reviewed.
3.3	Agreed, this recommendation should extend to recreational and customary fisheries.
4.1	This recommendation does not apply to Western Australia
4.2	Recfishwest reserve comment on this recommendation and will comment on tagging management proposals on a case by case basis
4.3	This recommendation does not apply to Western Australia although Recfishwest is supportive of this recommendation and believe it should be extended to selected pelagic species as well.
4.4	The penalty regime that applies to recreational fishing in Western Australia already provides a strong deterrent. Greater protection against infringements for fishers who can demonstrate there was no intent to breach regulations should be considered.
4.5	Supported
5.1	Any clarifications on the regulations appealing to customary fishing are supported.
5.2	All allocations should be based on the best return to the state. With the cultural value of customary fishing it is highly likely customary allocations will receive priority. Clarification on customary fishing management arrangements will be appreciated by all sectors of the fishing community.
5.3	A greater knowledge of this issue is required before Recfishwest can voice an opinion.
6.1	Agreed although there is some doubt as to whether the Australian government is best placed to take the lead in this recommendation.
6.2	Agreed
6.3	This recommendation does not apply to Western Australia
6.4	This recommendation does not apply to Western Australia
6.5	Agreed
6.6	Agreed. Recfishwest reserve judgment on changing <i>The Principles Guiding Revision of the OCS Fisheries Arrangements</i> until the effect of any proposed changes on Western Australia's recreational fisheries can be examined.
7.1	Agreed
7.2	Agreed
7.3	Agreed

7.4	Agreed
9.1	This recommendation does not apply to recreational fisheries
9.2	Agreed
9.3	This recommendation does not apply to recreational fisheries
10.1	Agreed
10.2	Agreed
10.3	Agreed. Recfishwest strongly agree with this recommendation.
10.4	Agreed
10.5	Agree with the transparent disclosure of services or regulatory activities for which costs are recovered, and the amount and extent of costs recovered.

Should you require any further information in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely

Dr Andrew Rowland
Chief Executive Office
14 October 2016