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1. Outcomes of the Commercial Wetline Fishing Review

The Minister for Fisheries, Hon Jon Ford, released in January his proposed decisions for the future management of the West Coast and Gascoyne commercial 'wetline' fisheries. Recfishwest has welcomed the final consultation phase in the development of formal commercial management for the 'wetline' fishery.

The recreational fishing sector has waited with anticipation for the implementation of commercial 'wetline' management arrangements. Although the development of management arrangements has been lengthy, the final outcomes of the 'wetline' review will provide certainty to successful entrants and be of substantial benefit to the recreational sector's future management of the resource.

Recfishwest's foremost issue with the implementation of formal management for the 'wetline' fishery is the capacity of those who do not obtain a managed fishery entitlement to take or retain 'wetfish', and the legislative capacity under which this might occur.

Recfishwest views has been consistent throughout the formal consultation of the 'Wetline' Review that, unless endorsed under the 'wetfish' management plan, no commercial fishing boat or fisherman should be allowed to have in their possession fish, or the implements for the taking of fish (i.e. fishing gear). Link <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubWetlineFMP221.htm> has Recfishwest's submission.

2. Geographe Bay Commercial Salmon Fishing Easter Closure

The Minister for Fisheries has advised Recfishwest of his intention to close an area between Cape Naturaliste and the old Dunsborough boat ramp to commercial salmon fishing extending one kilometre offshore. The closure will take effect over the 2007 Easter period from Friday 6 April to Monday 9 April.

We don't win many, but this has been a very good outcome for recreational fishers.

Recfishwest has maintained the commercial south west salmon as a high priority for buy-back for many years. In January 2006 Recfishwest requested that the Minister for Fisheries consider a temporal closure to the commercial south west salmon fishery during the peak recreational fishing period over the Easter weekend and the April school holidays. For many recreational anglers, the Easter break and April school holidays is the only opportunity they have for their families to attempt to catch a large, hard fighting sport fish such as the Australian salmon.

3. Rottnest Island No Fishing Zones

The Minister for Tourism issued a media release on 27th December advising new sanctuary zones would be created at Green Island, West End and Armstrong Bay and the extension of existing zones at Parker Point and Kingston Reef. Exact details on what activities will be permitted inside the sanctuary zones are at this point not clear at this stage.

Recfishwest believes that the West End zone will be zoned a "demersal protection zone". This alternative was presented by Recfishwest to allow trolling for pelagic species such as Spanish mackerel to continue in the popular "chicken run" area. There appear to be a number of anomalies in regards to what will be classified as trolling within this protection zone. Recfishwest is hopeful that they can be clarified before these zones are gazetted.

The Rottnest Island Marine Management Strategy release is planned for the 1st July 2007, when the legislation for the Sanctuary Zones comes into effect.

4. Release Weights Available Again

Depth release weights were not available in the tackle shops at the end of 2006 due to production problems. A new supplier has been arranged [Sunset Sinker Supplies, (08) 9306 8889] and the release weights are now back in production and are now available at tackle stores.

Release weights have proven critical to the survival of released demersal fish. Please spread the news about this method of release. If you are in a tackle shop and you can't see any release weights on the shelves, can you please let the staff know.

For more information go to <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/ReleaseWeightInfo2.pdf> and for preliminary tagging results for the Maximising the Survival of Released West Coast Reef Fish see <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/West Coast Reef Fish Prelim Results.pdf>

5. Wilson Inlet Pink Snapper Size Limit Changes

Minister for Fisheries, Jon Ford, recently increased the minimum legal size limit for pink snapper in Wilson Inlet from 280 mm to 410 mm to apply by mid 2007.

The recreational sector expressed its strong support (67%) for an increase to the Wilson Inlet minimum legal size of pink snapper during the 2005 South Coast Recreational Fishing Review, but the increase was not implemented. Coordination of local support by Mr Robert Robinson and local member for Albany, Peter Watson has been an important consideration in getting this regulation changed. Mr Robinson was responsible for collecting 1700 signatures of concerned local residents and visitors to outline the strong community support for the change to the minimum size limit.

This is another example of where recreational fishers have proactively endorsed tighter restrictions on a fishery to ensure its sustainability in the future, despite some impact on some fishers in the Wilson Inlet as a result of this change. Recreational fishers have been the driving force behind a number of successful management measures for the protection of fish stocks such as the Cockburn Sound and Shark Bay pink snapper closures and proposals for protection of blue groper at Rottnest Island.

6. Recfishwest Submissions to Marine Parks Proposals

Proposals for three new Marine Parks were released for public comment late last year. Recfishwest has been involved in the process leading up to these proposals. In general, it seems that the hard work put in to these and other Marine Parks has resulted in some better outcomes for recreational anglers in these current proposals, although there are still some issues of concern.

Walpole Nornalup Inlets Marine Park. Recfishwest was part of the Focus Group for the proposed Walpole-Nornalup Inlets Marine Park. Input from the broadly local representative group was productive in seeing a reasonably well balanced Indicative Management Plan for the proposed Marine Park. Recfishwest believes the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets Marine Park will serve as an example of how recreational fishing

can coexist with biodiversity conservation. See our submission at <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubWalpoleNornalupIMP.htm>

Shoalwater Islands Marine Park. The Shoalwater Islands Marine Park Indicative Management Plan has been in drafting and consultation since before the inception of Recfishwest. The Department of Environment and Conservation acknowledges in the Plan that there is a lack of significant information regarding the area in question. Recfishwest had concerns with a number of broad ranging statements linked to management changes in the Plan without support of scientific evidence.

The addition of the proposed sanctuary Zone at Point Peron was a surprise for those involved in the consultative process as this was never a part of the proposed Marine Park. To ensure that the Shoalwater Management Plan (SMP) is not delayed any further, the conservation sector, Recfishwest and WAFIC agreed that the proposed Pt Peron sanctuary zone should be dealt with separately in a proper community consultation process and that the SMP is implemented as soon as possible. See our submission <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubShoalwaterOct2006.htm>

Capes - Geographe Bay/Leeuwin-Naturaliste/Hardy Inlet Marine Park. Recfishwest provided extensive and quite detailed comments which are too much to summarise here without losing the meaning. Of particular concern were the errors in the plan which meant that public comments were based on erroneous information in some details. See our submission at the following link <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubCapesDec2006.htm>

7. ACMA Proposed Submarine Cable Protection Zone

The Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA) is proposing a protection zone extending one nautical mile either side of the submarine cable (2nm wide) that is located in an area that encompasses what appears to be the area of highest concentration of recreational boat fishing usage in the metropolitan area.

Recfishwest is a member of the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Western Australian Protection Zone Advisory Committee. Mark Pagano from Recfishwest has been working very hard getting available information and data about the cable to demonstrate that most recreational fishing usage is no risk or minimal risk to the cable.

We are committed to working towards an outcome that is acceptable to recreational fishing community and the cable owners (represented by REACH) and ACMA. Recfishwest believes adequate protection can be provided to the submarine cable in the waters adjacent to the Perth metropolitan area whilst also minimising the impact on the community in terms of restrictions and prohibitions.

Restrictions are proposed for line fishing and prohibitions proposed for rock lobster potting, anchoring and FAD deployment within the protection zone. See our submission including alternative strategies at <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubACMAsubmarineCable.htm>

8. Extension of Cockburn Sound Snapper Closure

Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds are the major spawning areas for pink snapper in the West Coast area, and are closed to fishing for pink snapper during the spawning period in October to mid December. The closures are to protect the breeding stock when they are aggregating and therefore most vulnerable. The closure is widely supported by recreational anglers.

When the area was reopened to fishing in mid-December 2006, the snapper were still aggregating and spawning with large numbers of large breeding fish in the schools. Many recreational boats were targeting them and significant numbers of fish were caught, with some catches in excess of the legal limit. The commercial pink snapper fisher was also fishing the aggregations.

The Department of Fisheries and Recfishwest were very concerned about the effect of these catches on the breeding stocks of Pink Snapper. As a result, urgent action was taken to extend the closure of the Cockburn Sound snapper fishery until 10 January 2007.

Recfishwest supports this decision and wishes to thank Nathan Harrison and Tony Cappelluti of the Department of Fisheries and the Minister for this prompt decision which is clearly in the interests of sustainable fishing and fishing for the future.

9. Halt the Salt Campaign

Recfishwest is a member of the Halt the Salt Alliance which has been formed in opposition to a proposal by Straits Resources for a giant solar salt mine on the eastern side of the Exmouth Gulf.

Details of the proposal and why we believe that it should not proceed are available on the 'Halt the Salt' website <http://www.haltthesalt.org.au/> The website is well worth a visit, with many interesting links and a wide assortment of information and images are available.

The EPA has received about 2,200 submissions. Submissions closed on 12 March 2007.

10. Barramundi and Threadfin Accord

An extremely constructive barramundi and threadfin accord meeting was recently held in Broome. Participants included representatives from Recfishwest, the East and West Kimberley RRFAC's, WAFIC, Commercial Barramundi fishers and the Department of Fisheries.

Concern was raised over the vulnerability to overexploitation from gillnetting of threadfin salmon

Recfishwest is dedicated to an objective assessment of the issues and the appropriate evaluation of the recreational needs for this common property resource.

Included were recommendations for a catch and release only fishery in the Glenelg River (North Kimberley coast), a voluntary sanctuary zone in the King William river (North Kimberley coast), increased spatial separation of commercial and recreational fishers in Roebuck Bay. Outcomes of the Accord meeting will be posted on our website when available.

11. Integrated Fisheries Management (IFM) Issues

Recfishwest met with the Integrated Fisheries Allocation Advisory Committee (IFAAC) and the Department of Fisheries to discuss priorities for Integrated Fisheries Management as a 10 year plan. Prior to the meeting, a questionnaire was sent out to corresponding members asking for their top five priorities for IFM. Recfishwest's priorities were South West Salmon, West Coast Inshore, Demersal Gillnet and Longline Fisheries, Australian Herring and Mackerel.

Recfishwest has proposed a three tiered approach to future priorities which was well received by the members of IFAAC. The approach is:-

1. Bioregional for demersal fisheries
2. Species specific e.g. mackerel, blue swimmer crabs, mud crabs
3. Inshore/estuary e.g. Peel/Harvey and south coast.

It now seems possible that the setting of the "sustainable harvest levels" by the CEO of the Department of Fisheries could change to a determination of a "maximum biologically sustainable limit" by the CEO, while the actual harvest level could be a matter for either or both of IFAAC and/or the particular fishery's "Management Advisory Committee".

An understanding of the fishing aspirations and preferences of the community and how those translate into setting the actual harvest levels to achieve those particular outcomes of management will be challenging. A paper is being prepared with an explanation of the issues in a simplified form to encourage discussion and obtain the preferences of the recreational fishing community.

12. Recfishwest Submission to IFM Draft Allocation Roe's Abalone

Recfishwest has provided a detailed submission on Fisheries Management Paper No 214 "Integrated Fisheries Management Draft Allocation Report Roe's Abalone - Perth metropolitan region."

IFM proposals for Roe's Abalone and Western Rock Lobster set important and some worrying precedents for later IFM decisions and provide an opportunity for Recfishwest to re-state important principles including:-

1. All fisheries resources in Western Australia are common property, owned by the entire community and administered through legislation by the Department of Fisheries which is required to ensure that there is an optimum community return from the available resource. And
2. Natural community growth must be accommodated within the allocation process. Ignoring this natural growth automatically disadvantages the wider community and specifically the recreational fishing sector.

Comments include: "The 'best case' scenario for the recreational sector presented by IFAAC as a realistic solution puts an enormous financial penalty on the recreational sector through a market mechanism in the short term to accommodate population growth."

Full details of the submission:- <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubAbaloneFMP214.htm>

13. Cockburn Sound Crab Fishery Closure

The Cockburn Sound crab fishery has been closed to all fishing for blue swimmer crabs for at least 12 months in order to allow breeding stocks to rebuild.

Recfishwest has been concerned about the crab fishery in Cockburn Sound for quite some time. Commercial catches increased dramatically following the conversion from tangle nets to crab pots while recreational catches remained consistent. In recent years commercial catches have dropped significantly and in 2006 some commercial fishers ceased fishing due to a lack of crabs.

Recfishwest has written to the Dept of Fisheries expressing its concern that recreational crabbing effort will be redirected from Cockburn Sound to adjacent systems such as Swan/Canning and Peel Harvey. Given that significant fishing pressure already exists, particularly in the Peel Harvey Estuary, any further increase in effort could have a significant impact on crab stocks.

The letter includes recommendations on future management for both Cockburn Sound and the Peel Harvey estuary to ensure sustainable crabbing in both these and adjacent areas. Particular recommendations include a winter closure imposed on commercial and recreational fishers to protect pre-spawning female crabs during winter, a reduction in the recreational bag limit, and research into crab recruitment in the Peel/Harvey estuary and the Swan River. Details are on the Recfishwest website at http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubC_SoundCrabClosureLetter.htm

14. Proposed Amendments to the Fish Resources Management Act 1994

Management of fisheries in Western Australia is covered by the Fish Resources Management Act. The government has commissioned a review of that Act which has identified a number of areas where there are limitations, some due to changing circumstances over the years.

Recfishwest has provided comprehensive comments on the proposed changes and has highlighted a number of areas where the Act does not cover some issues which it should cover.

Recfishwest website <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/SubFRMA1994Review.htm> has the details.

15. Recfish Australia Marine Protected Areas Seminar Proceedings

Recfish Australia organised a two day national workshop on Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in November 2006 entitled "Stocking the Tool Box". This was attended by several members of Recfishwest.

Releasing the Proceedings of this workshop, Federal Fisheries and Conservation Minister Sen. Eric Abetz said "It is important when establishing MPAs that a sensible balance is struck between biodiversity conservation and the need to maintain access for recreational fishers and other users. The results of this workshop provide recreational fishers with useful tools to engage in the development of MPAs and help shape their final outcome."

Recfish Australia CEO John Harrison said: "Contrary to some myths, recreational fishermen are as keen on protecting and conserving our marine environment as anybody else is."

The Recfish Australia website <http://www.recfish.com.au/mpa/seminar.html> has copies of the proceedings and program. A CD of the full presentations is available from Recfish Australia

16. What would you like to see on the Recfishwest website?

Currently the Recfishwest website covers the following major categories:- RFW policies, letters and submissions, media statements, newsletters, the Recfishwest Board, your photos, safety tips, interesting links, fishing clinics and fish recipes.

There are many other fishing websites which have a lot of resources available to keep them up-to-date with relevant stuff such as local fishing reports, fishing methods, discussion forums, summaries of articles on other web sites, recent links and the like. The Recfishwest website is not intended, and will not attempt to compete with these other websites because of the amount of work which is required to do all that.

A very definite decision was made that the website would provide lots of information and content, but without any of the latest flashy software and features which are often all about image and solving the challenges of using the latest developments but don't add anything to the information.

The main purpose of the Recfishwest website is to inform its members and the public about the activities of Recfishwest. Of course any website needs to be interesting as well, but one question is:- what will interest people enough for them to keep coming back regularly to read the website?.

What would you like to see on the Recfishwest website? Please let us know.

We can see how that fits with the primary objective of providing information, what would be required to provide those features, and if we can provide them and keep them updated with the resources available. One restriction is that there are many important fishing and environmental issues which already take up a lot of the time of the Recfishwest people.

17. Recfishwest Membership

Recfishwest is the peak body representing the interests of recreational fishers in Western Australia. We are a collection of dedicated and concerned anglers and we are independent of the government of Western Australia.

Our fisheries continue to be under threat from pollution and deteriorating water quality. Increasing fishing pressures from increasing demand and population continue to reduce fish stock numbers. To try and cope with this pressure, fisheries management is changing and Recfishwest is actively participating in these management processes whenever the interests of the recreational fishing community require representation.

Decisions are being made now which will affect future fishing opportunities for your children and grandchildren. One of Recfishwest's functions is to represent the needs of these future generations of recreational fishers and to maintain their access to their fair share of the State's fish stocks, which are a resource owned by the whole community, not by any individual or company who may be licensed to exploit them.

Specifically Recfishwest is your public voice whenever decisions which affect our fisheries, or access to them, are being made. If you are interested in becoming a member of Recfishwest please contact the office on (08) 9246 3366, email to recfish@recfishwest.org.au or apply at the Recfishwest website, <http://www.recfishwest.org.au/MembershipDet.htm> Membership costs only \$22 a year, which to put in perspective, is the about the same cost as a couple of blocks of mulies, a couple of decent lures, 100 yards of fireline, or 20 litres of fuel, which every fisher uses in his vehicle or boat but 20 litres doesn't last very long.