

Media Release

Bad manna for Swan River crabs.

Recfishwest cannot accept the Fisheries Department refusing to apply the fisheries regulations to Swan River commercial fishermen.

“Last year the Fisheries Department proposed to review the estuarine commercial fisheries.” Executive Director of Recfishwest Frank Prokop said.

It became apparent that commercial fishermen had been and were still using double the amount of net to catch crabs in the Swan River than was permitted by regulation. Recfishwest insisted in a letter last July that the fishermen must only use 512 metres of net as described in Regulation 54 until the matter had been resolved.

Recfishwest thought that it was obvious that the Fisheries Department should enforce its own regulations. However, further correspondence from the Fisheries Department indicated that it was comfortable with its interpretation that although 1024 metres of net was set, the fishermen were only pulling in 512 metres each night.

“We are astounded at this attitude. The nets are in the water and obviously fishing and the regulation is crystal clear. The public confidence in the Fisheries Department has been shattered by this inability to equitably apply its rules.”

“Recfishwest has asked if this interpretation meant that a recreational rock lobster fisherman could set four pots per person as long as they only pulled two pots each day. We were told that this would be illegal and subject to prosecution.” Mr Prokop said.

Recfishwest asked the Minister for Fisheries to ensure that the Department applied the Act but he is reluctant to get involved even though the credibility of the government might well be compromised.

“This decision to favour commercial fishing interests in the Swan River is part of our increasing concerns about double standards for commercial and recreational fishing. The Department is happy to implement reductions in recreational bag limits in the Gascoyne and West Coast regions but has taken years to make even the slightest attempt to bring commercial wetfishing under management. The Shark Bay snapper fishery was closed when it was shown to be in trouble but when the commercially fished whiskery shark stocks are shown to be in trouble the Department has taken no action.”

“There appears to be a pattern of discrimination against recreational fishing. Other recent examples including the issuing of an additional commercial herring trap on the South Coast in spite of other licenses being bought out,



Departmental bias in the Blackwood estuary towards commercial fishing, support for increased sizes of recreational fishing exclusions at two south coast salmon beaches, the department supporting increases for commercial abalone fishers in the metropolitan area and especially the reluctance to implement commercial wetfish management which recognises the importance of recreational fishing to the community.

Most people in Perth would be horrified to know that there could be 4 kilometres of commercial gill nets just to take crabs in the Swan River. The commercial take of crabs is around 3-4 times the recreational take and many people have stopped even trying to catch a crab in the Swan River in recent years.

“The recreational sector believes that it is time for the Fisheries Department to show that it is capable of equitably managing the fish stocks of this state for the community and not just for commercial fishermen. The Department has talked about integrated and fair management on one hand and then gone and given commercial fishermen a gift with the other. It simply doesn't make sense.” Mr Prokop concluded.

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