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**Proposals for Community Discussion on the Future Management of
Pink Snapper Fishing in Cockburn Sound and Surrounding Waters**

Dear Nathan

Recfishwest is the peak body representing the interests of the estimated 643,000 recreational fishers in Western Australia. We place the highest priority on preserving the future of recreational fishing and the resources upon which it depends.

Recfishwest welcomes Fisheries Management Paper No. 187 *Proposals for Community Discussion on the Future Management of Pink Snapper in Cockburn Sound and Surrounding Waters* (FMP 187).

Recfishwest have previously played an important pro-active role in the development of management and research into Cockburn Sound pink snapper. Indeed it was Recfishwest with the Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officers who initiated the original Cockburn Sound snapper closure proposal.

The protection of fish spawning aggregations is particularly important to Recfishwest and we place a high priority on working with the Department of Fisheries to make sure that breeding stocks are protected whilst vulnerable to ensure adequate recruitment and longevity of this important recreational fishery.

There is no doubt that the common concern among recreational anglers is the adequate protection of spawning aggregations of pink snapper in Cockburn Sound in a workable, equitable and enforceable manner. Recfishwest believes the proposals outlined in FMP 187 generally represent fair and balanced options to manage pink snapper in the metropolitan area.

Recfishwest strongly supports the following proposals:

Proposal 1: *The boundaries for the metropolitan pink snapper spawning closure be defined as those waters of Cockburn Sound and Warnbro Sound. Anecdotal evidence supports the inclusion of Warnbro Sound to the metropolitan snapper spawning closure. Due to the diversity of recreational fishers who use the Sound, we believe that the main driver should be to protect the majority of the spawning fish the majority of the time. We believe that this closure will achieve this. Recfishwest believes the definition for the proposed boundary of Warnbro Sound needs refinement in the context of this closure.*

Proposal 2 and 3: *The spawning closure should commence on 1 October and end on 30 November. While aggregations primarily coincide with new and full moon phases, it is believed that this proposed closure period will protect the majority of spawning fish over the long term.*

Proposal 4: *A maximum size limit of 600mm (fork length) apply to pink snapper between Two Rocks and Mandurah during the spawning season closure of 1 October to 30 November.*

Proposal 5: *A closed season to the take of pink snapper in Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds apply from 1 October to 30 November.*

Proposal 6: *During the spawning closure a prohibition exist on the possession of pink snapper while fishing in Cockburn Sound. This proposal should also include Warnbro Sound.*

Previous to the implementation of the West Coast Review a slot limit existed for pink snapper for several months when vulnerable to overfishing. Recfishwest suggests that a slot limit is reintroduced for pink snapper for the West Coast region and that a personal bag limit of two fish and a boat limit of four fish over the proposed 600mm (fork length) also be introduced. This would further protect large fish in the months before and after the closure even if they are not in spawning aggregations.

The slot limit will permit fishing for pink snapper to continue but will limit the opportunity to take advantage of larger fish schooling during spawning aggregation. Large pink snapper are also taken between July and February in Cockburn Sound. Recfishwest believes there is a need to limit the number of breeding fish removed from these aggregations to adequately protect recruitment and to ensure a quality fishing experience for future generations.

The possibility of moving to an adaptive form of management regarding the timing of the spawning closure has been discussed in various forums. Recfishwest believes that until such time that environmental cues related to spawning aggregations are more accurately understood the proposed closure period will protect the majority of spawning fish over the long term.

Recfishwest believes that management arrangements for metropolitan snapper should be reviewed in three years to consider its effectiveness and to assess whether a shift to adaptive management is both possible and feasible.

Recfishwest believes that the Cockburn Sound snapper fishery should be a recreational only fishery. The commercial take of pink snapper in Cockburn Sound by the only endorsed fisher represents at least half the total take in the Sound. There is an alarming possibility of the commercial take escalating considerably if any of the other 24 licensed operators in the Cockburn Sound Line and Pot Managed Fishery (CSLPMF) were to exercise their line fishing entitlement.

Recfishwest believes the return to the community by excluding the CSLPMF from line fishing Cockburn or Warnbro Sounds would far outweigh the benefits to one single commercial operator who currently takes half the total catch. We would be happy for the single authorisation with history to be compensated to a reasonable level.

Please do not hesitate to contact our office should further information or clarification be required.

Yours sincerely

Frank Prokop
Executive Director

3rd February, 2005

CC Hon Kim Chance, Minister for Fisheries.
Mr Peter Rogers, Executive Director, Department of Fisheries.