

Naomi Wolfe
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Dear Naomi

Mermaid Reef Marine National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2007-2014

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Mermaid Reef Marine National Nature Reserve Management Plan 2007-2014 (Management Plan).

Recfishwest is the peak body representing the interests of the estimated 643,000 recreational fishers in Western Australia. We are formally recognised and funded by the Government in that role. Our Board of Management comprises five General Board members including representatives of the WA Game Fishing Association, the Australian Sportfishing Association (WA), the Australian Angling Association (WA) and the Australian Underwater Federation it also includes six Public Board members.

Recfishwest places the highest priority on preserving the future of recreational fishing and the resources it depends upon. Of particular importance to Recfishwest is the habitat in which fishing is carried out and access to those areas.

The Rowley Shoals are a very important area to many of Recfishwest's game and sportfishing constituents. Recreational anglers have visited the Rowley Shoals since the late 1970's, and the ethos since that time has included only retaining enough fish for consumption on-site, a practice also followed by the many dive groups that also frequent the shoals. We would also like to point out that recreational fishers were instrumental in introducing protection for Maori wrasse and coral trout at the Rowley Shoals.

The Rowley Shoals offer a unique environment where several species of billfish are found in proximity to the waters fringing the reef system. For many years game and sportfishing devotees have been involved in tagging and releasing billfish under recognised and scientifically designed tagging programs run by organisations such as the Billfish Foundation.

Tagging research has facilitated conservation and enhancement of billfish populations around the world. Tagging research helps elucidate important population assessment, biology, habitat, genetics, socio-economic surveys, etc. adding enormously to billfish conservation strategies worldwide.

In keeping with the Research values of the Management Plan, the Marine Nature Reserve could provide an exciting and unique opportunity to develop tag and release research of the highly migratory billfish species that frequent

the Rowley Shoals region, namely sailfish, blue, black and striped marlin short billed spearfish.

Recfishwest would welcome the opportunity to discuss controlled access on a responsible tag and release basis of the peripheral waters at Mermaid Reef. We request that you give consideration to allowing controlled, limited fishing access to the outer waters of Mermaid Reef and we are optimistic that the high level of stewardship that currently exists can be expected to continue if recreational anglers are permitted a limited form of access to Mermaid Reef.

If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me at our office on (08) 9246 3366.

Yours sincerely

Frank Prokop
Executive Director

13th March 2006

CC John Harrison, Recfish Australia