

Integrated Fisheries Management - Speak up or miss out?

BWA Newsletter 15 February 2006

Whether your preference is diving or dropping a couple of pots in the water each summer, fishing for western rock lobster is a very common accompaniment to boating in Western Australian.

Interesting times lie ahead in western rock lobster management with it being the first "cab off the rank" for the Department of Fisheries new Integrated Fisheries Management (IFM). IFM is an initiative aimed at addressing the issue of how fish resources in Western Australia can be best shared between competing users. The three user groups are; indigenous, recreational and commercial. What IFM aims to achieve is through fisheries research the setting of a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for a fishery which is then managed by allocating set proportions to the major user groups.

Recfishwest as the peak body representing the interest of the 643,000 recreational fishers in Western Australia have a keen interest in making sure the IFM process results in an equitable return to the recreational sector. It is this pursuit of equity in fisheries management that has resulted in many late nights at our monthly board meetings debating the best possible outcome for the recreational sector and the sustainability of the resource.

With the wheels having been in motion now for a couple of years in regards to western rock lobster IFM the current challenge is deciding what percentage of the resource will be allocated to the recreational sector. Currently the draft allocation report for western rock lobster is open for public submission. If you are amongst the 47,345 licensed recreational rock lobster fishers it is important that you put in a submission advising that you wish to continue fishing for rock lobster under the Department of Fisheries current bag and size restrictions. Recfishwest is lobbying hard to make sure that recreational fishers are allocated a reasonable share to allow for the future growth in population of recreational fishers.

The Integrated Fisheries Management Allocation Advisory Committee (IFAAC) recommended that the recreational sector's allocation should be based on the Department of Fisheries predictions of catch shares in 2009/2010 - 4.9 per cent overall and 7.5 per cent in the southern region (Zone C) and 0.9 per cent in the northern region (Zones A/B).

Recfishwest strongly believes that the capacity of the recreational sector to grow in numbers and catches beyond 2010/2011 must be explicitly recognised. Recfishwest has therefore proposed that the recreational sector be allowed to grow incrementally until it reaches a proportional take of twice its current "real" catch share or its projected catches after 20 years, whichever is the greatest, to accommodate this natural growth in the recreational sector. Based on the latest information on catches from the Department of

Fisheries, an overall allocation of 8 per cent of the substantial harvest level for the resource is equivalent to about twice the current estimated catch share.

If the recreational catch exceeds the allocated catch share it is granted under IFM, the recreational sector may be forced to buy back a share from the commercial sector. To make this section of the community pay to claim their share of the resource is not acceptable. This would be highly controversial given that the recreational sector already makes a significantly higher relative contribution than does the commercial sector for its small share of the catch.

After playing around with a few scenarios of what it would cost for the recreational sector to purchase back a 0.5 per cent share of the commercial fishery, the projected cost of a recreational license to fund this buy back would be \$140. It is totally illogical to expect the community to pay commercial fishers to access a part of the resource that should belong to the community as a common resource.

What the IFAAC must remember is that western rock lobster are a community resource and must be shared to give the best possible return back to the community. Recfishwest believes that the social and economic returns from recreational lobster fishing are both vitally important and it must be given a suitable allocation to allow the activity to continue in the future. This is the only way many people in the community can get access to local lobsters.

Public consultation meetings organised by IFAAC generally were poorly attended by recreational fishers, partially due to poor publicity. Over all grass roots recreational fishers so far have barely made a whimper about the recommended recreational allocation and unless we make our selves heard the recreational fishers will pay a big price in the future. Many recreational fishers have not realised the impact of the recommendations and so the level of concern is not as great as it should be.

Recfishwest urges that recreational fishers make themselves heard during the IFM process. After rock lobster IFM moves onto abalone and then the all important West Coast and Gascoyne wetfish. Recfishwest will continue to look out for the best interests of recreational fishers in relation to IFM, however, we urge that you the general public also make your thoughts heard and put in a submission or get along to community meetings.

Recfishwest as the peak body representing the interests of the recreational fishing community invite any concerned recreational fishers to drop us an email (recfish@recfishwest.org.au) if you have any questions regarding the IFM process. Previous Recfishwest submissions on a wide range of issues can be found at www.recfishwest.org.au.