



Policy

Recreational Netting

Preamble

Recfishwest has maintained a policy since 1999 that haul netting and set (gill) netting were not acceptable catch methods for the recreational take of finfish. The use of throw or cast nets for the take of bait was supported.

The reason for that policy was that recreational fishing should emphasise the active involvement of the fisher to gain the maximum benefit from the use of the limited resource. Recfishwest had concerns about possible catches in excess of the daily bag limits, unwanted and illegal by-catch, and high mortality of excess catches due to the lack of control on the catch in set nets, particularly unattended nets.

In February 2010 it was agreed to review this policy to cater for limited responsible and properly managed recreational netting in designated areas in Western Australia.

Policy

Recfishwest recognises that netting has a number of by-catch issues and as a result may not be the optimum use of what can be limited resource. This is particularly the case in estuaries that act as important nursery grounds for juvenile fish.

Nevertheless, Recfishwest recognises that if closely managed, recreational netting can be an acceptable fishing method in certain areas.

In recognising this, Recfishwest has the following policy on recreational netting:

- Recfishwest supports ocean haul netting in a limited number of designated areas within each fisheries bio-region. These areas should be developed in consultation with local fishers and accompanied by a review to simplify the complex and lengthy regulations.
- Recfishwest does not support unattended set (gill) netting.
- Recfishwest supports a standard requirement that all set nets must be attended and checked and cleared at least once every hour.
- Recfishwest supports set netting to continue in currently permitted Estuaries on Wednesday evenings from 4:30pm to 12:30am, with nets being attended, checked and cleared every hour. Existing seasonal closures should continue.
- Recfishwest supports the phasing out of set netting in estuaries over the next five years.
- Recfishwest supports the length of net allowed in estuaries to be reduced to 30 metres.

- Recfishwest supports the use of cast nets for the collection of bait, and the removal of the requirement for a recreational netting licence for this method.

Background

Recreational gill netting has been undertaken in coastal marine and estuarine waters of Western Australia to take fish since the State was first settled. As the recreational usage of coastal waters and estuaries has increased over time, competition for fish resources has become more intense and methods such as unattended gill nets that are indiscriminate with respect to target species, have become less tolerated by the general community.

Net fishing tends to polarise opinions amongst recreational fishers into those that strongly oppose the method and those that strongly support it as a result of a historical connection to netting as their preferred recreational fishing method. This has made recreational netting a highly contentious issue in some areas and its continuance has relied on political intervention in the past.

As a result of this, recreational netting regulations in Western Australia have become extremely complex and lengthy. Regulations and management have been developed on an ad-hoc basis with a number of previous commitments to phase out the practice having not adhered to their proposed time schedule.

Adopted at the April 2010 Board Meeting