



Fish Stocking and Translocation of Fish Species in Western Australia

Policy

Recfishwest supports responsible fish stocking, stocking and stock enhancement which is undertaken using current best practices for the benefit of recreational fishers.

Recfishwest will support translocation only when there are no unacceptable adverse impacts on any native species, or existing successfully introduced desirable species, arising from any translocation. Recfishwest will consider supporting translocation where clear evidence indicates social and economic benefits. The ability of any translocated species to establish viable self sustaining populations should be carefully considered prior to their introduction into waters where they could not be eradicated.

Purpose

Fish stocking and restocking is now Government Fisheries policy and Recfishwest endorses the use of these practices as a viable fisheries management tool where fish biomass has been reduced to unacceptably low levels as a result of environmental changes, migration impediments, recruitment failures or over-exploitation.

However, Recfishwest believes that there exists varying risks associated with translocation of non-endemic aquatic species, which require an objective set of protocols being met. The assessment of the risk and the key factors in quantifying the risk should be applied to all industries including aquaculture, aquarium fish and recreational fishing enhancement prior to Recfishwest providing support to any translocation proposal.

Definitions

Translocation – is the movement and release of fish outside their area of natural distribution for stocking, aquaculture, aquarium or ornamental fish trade.

Restocking – is the augmentation of depleted wild stocks inside their area of natural distribution.

Stocking – is stocking fish into areas outside their area of natural distribution.

Stock enhancement – is the augmentation of wild stocks that are not depleted to any great extent.

Background

Fish stocking and restocking is now be used in Western Australia to replace depleted fish stocks, primarily in fresh water environments. Over time Recfishwest has identified the potential of using restocking techniques for some salt water species to improve biomass numbers, and so improve catch rates for the recreational sector.

Recfishwest recognises that there are three basic water types into which a translocation could be possible and that the risk descends for each of these types of water bodies:

1. Natural water bodies with free movement of fish and water.
2. Modified environments where fish passage is controlled or unlikely due to the modification (eg. irrigation dams)
3. Highly modified environments such as farm dam or aquaculture facility where fish movement of the species concerned is only possible through deliberate intervention or via accidental transportation of eggs or larvae by birds or other animals.

Recfishwest believes that there are four types of fish species which can be considered for translocation in descending risk order:

1. Fish not found in the bio-geographic region capable of establishing reproductively viable populations in competition with existing endemic species.
2. Fish not capable of establishing reproductively viable populations in the waters into which they are stocked.
3. Fish not capable of establishing reproductively viable populations in ANY waters into which they may be deliberately released.
4. Fish found in the local area giving full regard to the genetic and disease management of any stocking.

In practice Recfishwest recognises that the above considerations means that few proposals would be capable of meeting its requirements. However, we also recognise that many aquarium fish would also represent an unacceptable risk and should thus be excluded from sale. The adoption of the overriding principle of ensuring long term sustainability of existing endemic and desirable introduced species necessarily places a critical onus on proponents to demonstrate the merits of their proposals.

Recfishwest is committed to ensuring that the undesirable impacts of any translocations do not exceed the benefits.