

Keep Australia Fishing



Report for the Boating and Fishing Council of Australia
Martin Salter April 2011



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*A Fresh Approach to the Challenges
Facing Recreational Fishing*



Australia Marine Engine Council ...toward sustainable boating



Keep Australia Fishing

Foreword

My name is Martin Salter. As well as being a passionate recreational fisherman I am a retired member of the British Parliament and a former spokesman for angling. I'm currently living and working in Sydney as an angling writer and policy and campaigns consultant. Like many anglers across the world, I have some grave fears about the future of our sport.

I've been asked by representatives from angling bodies, the tackle and boating trade and the fishing media to pull together some ideas about how we can secure the future of recreational fishing and counter more effectively the threats to our sport, lifestyle and in some cases, our livelihoods.

I have endeavoured to get a flavour of the situation on the ground from every State and Territory and to collect useful and valuable examples of good practice from around the world, including Europe and the USA. My recommendations are my own and they seek to draw on the very best from these jurisdictions and suggest how they might be applied in the Australian context.

I hope they provide a helpful basis for a new way forward.

Martin Salter
April 2011

Introduction

The report begins with a description of the brief agreed jointly by the Australian Fishing Trade Association and RecFish Australia working with the Boating and Fishing Council of Australia (BFCA), who have commissioned and funded this work. It then sets out some of the things necessary for the effective organisation and creation of a sustainable recreational fishing sector and the aquatic resources on which it depends. This is followed by some scene setting, looking at where we are now and some of the key issues we face. The recommendations on economic benefit, marine parks and the environment, funding and organisational structures and a specific recreational fishing policy prospectus have all been informed by an examination of the current situation, by discussion and consultation and by drawing on experiences from elsewhere.

A broad summary in response to the brief is set out below. The report ends with some ideas and recommendations about where recreational fishing can go from here.

The Brief

The brief was to look at the five areas summarised in bold:

1. Formulate a range of policy demands...the basis of a recreational fishing manifesto that can be put to politicians so we can start to pro-actively set agendas rather than simply reacting to the demands of others.

2. Develop a public narrative on the benefits of recreational fishing.... there are no clear figures on the economic benefits of recreational fishing, which massively weakens our case. A new national process to address this is strongly recommended. The report quotes the questionable findings from past surveys and some of the latest state figures and seeks to extrapolate nationally.

3. Repositioning on environmental issues...looking to establish a network of conservation officers, highlighting existing habitat initiatives, building new partnerships with sensible environmental groups where there are common interests, and seeking a fresh approach to Marine Parks using the new UN guidelines and experience from elsewhere.

4. Better communication and engagement and improved accountability...of all the funding options, the report concludes that the licence fee structure delivers the best opportunity to create properly resourced and professionally staffed mass membership peak bodies and independent Recreational Fishery Trust Funds controlled by the anglers themselves.

5. Lessons and best practice from elsewhere... drawing in particular on the experiences from the US, UK, Holland, Norway and New Zealand.

What do we need to secure a better future for recreational fishing?

Healthy fisheries

Healthy fisheries managed sustainably, pristine water quality, abundant habitat to aid successful fish recruitment and a population overwhelmingly committed to both enjoying and protecting the resource are some of the most important factors in ensuring a strong future for recreational fishing.

Stronger public and political support

We need to build greater resilience in the recreational fishing sector in Australia to counter some of the threats to our sport.

Reliable funding and professional advocacy

The largest participatory sport in the country should have the ability to articulate and press its case in a powerful and professional manner. We need to build robust structures with reliable and appropriate funding streams. .

Clear policies and a vision

We need to move away from simply reacting to situations and proposals and begin to start carving out a clear policy programme and a vision for our sport

Anglers engaged in the future of their sport

We need to be engaged in ways that are meaningful and effective. To do this we need a healthy network of clubs and associations, strong peak bodies at state and federal level and meaningful partnerships with groups that share our interests.

Structural Overhaul

Solving the funding issues and establishing effective structures to deliver members services, representation and advocacy, and, on occasion, engage in public campaigning on behalf of the recreational fishing sector is key to enabling the recreational fishing sector to start punching its true weight and having real influence.

Three Funding Options

There are three main funding options that can provide revenue for fisheries work and the running of peak bodies:

- 1. Consolidated revenue. - i.e. directly from government budgets**
- 2. Private income through members' subscription or voluntary or compulsory levies on the boating and tackle trade**
- 3. Ring fenced licence fees for recreational fisheries trust funds**

If we accept the user pays/ user benefits argument there can be no serious objection to the concept of recreational fishers paying for a licence to fish. After all, who else is the prime beneficiary of the creation of recreational fishing havens, fish habitat restoration programmes or regular fish stockings? Experience from Holland, New Zealand, USA and the UK has shown the value of having a separate ring fenced budget for fisheries work. The licence system works all the better if the revenue can't be diverted elsewhere and is retained in a dedicated trust fund.

A Way Forward

Proposal on New Structures and Funding

Proposed outline of suggested structures and funding models

a. Promote Licence Funded Recreational Fishing Trusts in all States

Set a target of seeing a recreational fishing licence introduced in all six states within three years. (The opt out for the Territories could be to seek a pro rata contribution from their funding agencies for any central services delivered elsewhere via the enhanced licence fee income)

Recreational Fishing Trusts to be established in law with clear systems of governance, responsibility and ring fenced funding to prevent the siphoning off of resources into otherwise centrally funded services.

Of the approximately 3.1 million recreational fishers only a third currently live in areas without some form of recreational fishing licence

Mass Membership and Enhanced Funding

Peak state bodies to adopt democratic and accountable constitutions with elected office holders.

The peak state bodies to be funded primarily via a small designated proportion of the recreational licence income.

All licence payers to be granted automatic voting membership of their peak state body, creating instant mass membership organisations along Dutch and New Zealand lines.

Recreational licence fee to move over three years towards a more realistic figure of around \$50, or a dollar a week, and then to rise annually by the CPI.

If the million anglers in SA and QLD were to pay the current average of \$30 pa tomorrow at an eligibility rate of around 50% an extra \$15m would be generated for recreational fishing projects and representation on top of the approximately \$25 m plus already raised from the four licensed states. If the licence then rose in stages by another \$20 dollars very soon recreational fishing revenues could hit \$65 to \$70 million annually.

Total budgets of this order could deliver huge benefits in terms of habitat restoration, commercial buy-outs, recreational fishing havens, marine stewardship projects, artificial reefs, fish aggregation devices, new access routes to dams, youth participation projects, volunteer training, education and engagement, new boat ramps, cleaning stations and freshwater re-stocking programmes.

Transparency and Accountability

Licence revenues to be ring fenced into a Recreational Fisheries Trust Fund (RFTF) with project expenditure directly controlled by the grant disbursement committees.

The grant disbursement committees (i.e. ACoRF in NSW) to have term limits on office holders and appointment via one third open franchise to voting members, a third to the minister, a third to clubs and associations.

b. Providing funding for peak federal body

All states to nominate representatives to the Board of the new national peak body for recreational fishing in Australia

Agreed proportion of recreational licence income, say around 5% to 8%, to fund the running of the respective peak state bodies with pro-rata portion of this income to be paid on to fund a slim but strong peak federal body. Ideally this could be dollar matched by federal government from consolidated revenues over the three year transition period to allow for early incorporation.

RecFish Australia to be overhauled, renamed and re-constituted to enable a fresh start to be made.

c. Establish a parallel campaigning and lobbying organisation 'Keep Australia Fishing'

To lobby for anglers' rights and take legal action where appropriate on behalf of recreational fishing interests against those whose actions damage the aquatic environment or who otherwise seek to harm or inappropriately restrict opportunities for Australians to enjoy recreational fishing.

To be modelled on the KeepAmericaFishing organisation as the professional campaigning and lobbying arm of the recreational fishing sector and on the UK's polluter prosecuting body Fish Legal.

To be controlled and funded by the tackle and boating trades, the recreational fishing media, corporate sponsorship and individual subscriptions.

To promote recreational fishing through publicity and participation programmes and to campaign on major angling and fisheries issues.

To work in partnership with the state and federal peak representative bodies.

How would it work ?

Within three years this model could be injecting an additional \$40million annually into recreational fishing in Australia. The majority of which would flow into Recreational Fishing Trusts controlled largely by the anglers themselves. However, a proportion would help fund professional representation and advocacy at both state and federal levels independent of ministerial control.

Furthermore the establishment of the KeepAustraliaFishing (KAF) campaign, based on the highly successful American model, would deliver a powerful and independent campaigning and lobbying vehicle utilising the resources and professionalism of the industry. KAF could also actively promote an Anglers' Rights agenda, take high profile action against polluters and be invaluable in helping deliver participation programmes and publicity aimed at encouraging people to take up fishing.

Wider liaison with the boating and tourism sectors could continue to take place through the Boating and Fishing Council of Australia operating as an industry liaison

Conclusions and Recommendations

Economic Narrative

The lack of an economic narrative in particular is a major failing and requires addressing urgently.

Although the 3 million recreational fishers number looks reasonably accurate, the existing national expenditure, economic benefit and dependent jobs figures vary considerably.

Aside from a national figure and a breakdown by states it would be extremely helpful to know the economic value of particular recreational fisheries. This would assist in campaigns to have particular high value species designated as recreational only.

RECOMMENDATION 1

That the Commonwealth government, through FRDC and Recfishing research, be pressed to fund a five yearly comprehensive survey of participation rates in aquatic based wildlife activities, including recreational fishing, diving, whale and dolphin watching and wildfowling, along the lines of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. This survey to also determine economic, social and other benefits together with a reliable estimate of employment generated.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Further research should also be carried out to determine the economic value of specific recreational fisheries such as striped marlin, kingfish, sailfish, permit, queenfish, giant trevally, barramundi and other sporting species to assist the case for some further recreational only designations.

A Charter for Recreational Fishing in Australia

RECOMMENDATION 3

That an appropriate vehicle be identified to enable the commercial, voluntary, national, regional and specialist parts of the recreational fishing sector to come together to develop a vision for the sport and an Australian Charter for Recreational Fishing.

A Fresh Approach to Marine parks and the Environment

In addition to challenging the basis of many of the existing Sanctuary Zones within the Australian Marine Parks, there is both scope and precedent for arguing that the presence of recreational fishers aids enforcement and compliance and can provide an invaluable source of data and information which the lock outs currently prevent. We will not unscramble the current network of Marine Parks but we should be aiming to re-shape what occurs within them and to review the criteria for their introduction and implementation using best practice from elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATION 4

That the recreational fishing sector enter into partnerships with like-minded organisations, groups and prominent individuals to prepare a co-ordinated policy position on Marine Parks and their contribution to sustainable and effective fisheries management. This work to be informed by the emerging UN guidelines and experience from elsewhere and with the intention of re-building community support for scientifically justified marine protection measures and working with government to overhaul their current operation, management and structure.

RECOMMENDATION 5

That a code of conduct be established in respect of recreational fishing in remaining sanctuary zones or highly protected marine areas which would provide useful data and information, limit fishing methods, and, where appropriate, require total catch and release. If necessary consideration could be given to bringing in a special permit or advance notification to ensure tighter management and reduced impact.

RECOMMENDATION 6

That restrictions on trolling for pelagic species be lifted in Marine Park areas open to other boating activities.

An Environmental Agenda for Recreational Fishers

The recreational fishing sector needs to re-position itself within the broader environmental agenda to highlight some of the existing good work that is already being led by anglers, particularly in respect of freshwater habitat restoration. It should devote more energy and resources to further such work including education programmes in schools and in the community. There is a need to actively promote our broader contribution to the environment and to make common cause with organisations such as WWF and even Greenpeace as we did over the recent campaign against commercial over fishing of the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery and should be doing over land management practices, water quality and habitat degradation. There is no future in having recreational fishers in one corner and environmentalists in the other, for without a healthy aquatic environment and a sustainably managed fishery there will be no recreational fishing in the long term.

RECOMMENDATION 7

As part of the Charter process the recreational fishing sector should adopt a clear statement of environmental objectives, begin promoting habitat restoration projects, seek tougher controls on pollution and poor land management practices and seek to build partnerships with conservation and environmental groups on matters of common concern.

Funding and Structures

Australian anglers need a strong national voice and effective representation, independent of political patronage and commercial influences, at both State and Federal levels

Adequate and secure funding streams are crucial to building effective and resilient organisations to deliver advocacy and representation. Funding peak bodies entirely from consolidated revenues is fundamentally flawed. Peak bodies can't work effectively if they are in thrall to a minister and ministers are reluctant to fund bodies that give them a hard time. The tackle and boating organisations have important roles to play in addition to safeguarding their commercial interests but they cannot also be peak bodies for the ordinary angler.

User pays is becoming an increasingly important concept and underpins the structures for delivering recreational fishing opportunities in countries as far apart as New Zealand and the USA. With increasing pressure on government budgets a protected and dedicated funding source is vital.

RECOMMENDATION 8

That discussions begin with all relevant bodies in the recreational fishing sector in Australia to draw up proposals on new representative and funding models to be put to government and that as a matter of priority AFTA and the BFCA begin work to establish a new Australia wide campaigning organisation 'KeepAustraliaFishing.