

A Charter For Recreational Fishing In Australia



*What It Is, Why We Need It
& How We Make It Happen*



**AUSTRALIAN RECREATIONAL
FISHING FOUNDATION**



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Introduction

Australia boasts an abundance of river systems, estuaries, seas and oceans. As a nation, we have traditionally enjoyed a strong affinity with the water. Thus it is no surprise that recreational fishing is a lifestyle embraced by more than five million of our citizens. ¹

Fishing is part of life for Aussies of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds. It ranks as our largest participation sport/leisure activity. In short, fishing is part of our national psyche.

Given the size and importance of the recreational fishing sector, decision makers are now starting to realise that fishing makes significant economic, social and environmental contributions to our community. Recent estimates reveal that Australians spend more than \$10 billion annually on recreational fishing activities. Importantly, much of this money is spent in regional areas. ²

The huge popularity of fishing, and the wealth and wellbeing benefits it generates, now means that recreational fishing is starting to be recognised by governments at all levels as well as by the community at large.

This policy platform, the first of its kind developed for the recreational fishing community, aims to present a road map showing how we as a nation can develop and better utilize the broad range of economic, social and environmental benefits that will result from a diverse and sustainable recreational fishing sector. To do this, we need to firstly recognise, and then enhance, the role that recreational fishing plays in our society.

Why We Need A Recreational Fishing Charter

Australia needs a national Charter, or comprehensive policy plan, for recreational fishing so that the important role recreational fishing plays within our community is better understood by decision makers and the broader Australian community. To date there has been little, if any, understanding by government or the wider community of the socio-economic benefits of fishing. As a result, opportunities have been lost and misinformation has been rife.

This document aims to provide a framework to facilitate an effective government/private sector/community partnership covering key areas of engagement. There are four main areas where enhanced recognition of recreational fishing will generate positive economic, social and environmental benefits.

Reeling In The Dollars



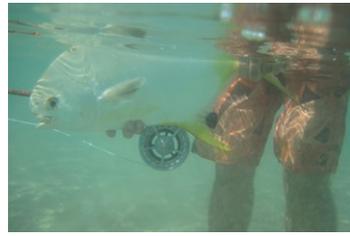
Recreational fishing has long thought to be a significant contributor to the nation's coffers. Conservative estimates put the value of the recreational fishing sector to be about \$10.6 billion, with an average spend by fishers of about \$2.8 billion annually. This involves money spent on fishing tackle, boats, travel and accommodation. The regional spend by fishers reveals the important role the fishing sector plays in supporting coastal towns. For example, a study in 2005 focusing on the NSW towns of Port Macquarie and Bermagui-Narooma demonstrated that angler expenditure varied from \$52 per day (for locals in Bermagui-Narooma) to \$210 per day for visitors to Port Macquarie. The report indicated Port Macquarie benefitted to the tune of \$22.8m annually from fishers (local and visiting) while a total of \$25 million was spent

by anglers living in and visiting the Bermagui-Narooma region. ³

On a more national perspective, fishing tourism plays a major role in various states and territories. Queensland and the Northern Territory enjoy high angler visitor numbers. Indeed, visiting the NT to go fishing ranks second to general tourism.

A survey of recreational fishing in the Northern Territory indicates the Daley River experienced a 4 fold increase in fishing tourism in the last decade. ⁴

More up to date studies will doubtlessly provide a clearer picture of the economic and social benefits of a vibrant recreational fishing sector. However, the evidence seems clear that recreational fishing is indeed a major contributor to the economic wellbeing of our nation, especially in regional areas.



1. Engaging with Government

Recreational fishers are the largest stakeholder group affected by government resource and environmental management policies, including fisheries and marine reserve policies. Recreational fishing also makes a significant contribution to tourism and regional development. An historic lack of recognition by government of the role recreational fishing plays across these various portfolios has been exacerbated by the fact that there is no ministerial representative dedicated to the recreational fishing community in any Australian government. As a result, governments have tended to lump recreational fishing in with primary industries portfolios, with the result being that our core interest areas – tourism, fisheries management, education, environment concerns, regional development initiatives and so on - are scattered and diffused across a number of government department portfolios.

The recreational fishing community is the largest stakeholder group affected by fisheries management and marine environment policies. The involvement of recreational fishers in the development and implementation of these policies must be enhanced to match the importance of the recreational fishing sector to these policy areas.

Australian recreational fishers are conservation minded and support science based conservation measures. One issue that continues to concern Australia's recreational fishers is the lack of science based decision making when governments are making decisions about access to Marine reserves. Australia is the only country in the world that bans recreational fishing from Marine National Parks without providing a science based reason as to why. Recreational fishers are calling for a comprehensive review of the science that underpins these decisions and access to Marine Reserves.

Recreational fishing has historically been under funded, or in some cases, not funded at all, by governments. This issue needs to be urgently addressed, given the significant role the sector plays as a stakeholder in many economic, social and environmental issues. Unfortunately, there have been many instances where governments have stopped or reduced the funding of national and state recreational fishing organisations. This has resulted in long-term negative implications for recreational fishing related policies and the broader community.

Recreational fishing organisations are seeking the opportunity to establish a sustainable business plan for the long-term funding of representation and policy development initiatives, based on a model of a public/private sector partnership.

Recreational fishing is Australia's largest participatory sport/leisure activity, yet the Australian Sports Commission does not officially recognize it.¹ This means that the recreational fishing sector misses out on promotional and development activities. Compared to other sports, the growth and future development of recreational fishing is stymied. As a result, governments overlook the recreational fishing sector when developing policies for sport and important active lifestyle programs.

Where We Fish

Australian recreational fishers tend to focus their activity around coastal areas, although major impoundments and river systems attract thousands of inland anglers and their families each year. Data reveals the following statistics about where Aussie fishers spend their time:

- Lakes & Dams 8%
- Rivers 11%
- Estuary systems 35%
- Near Coastal areas 41%
- Far Offshore 5%





The following initiatives are proposed to address these issues:

A Dedicated Minister for Recreational Fishing

Appointment of a Minister for recreational fishing in Federal and all state/territory governments. This role would sit atop an appropriate senior government portfolio.

A Recreational Fishing Council

Establishment of a Recreational Fishing Council, chaired by the Minister for Recreational Fishing, with representatives from other key government portfolios and from the recreational fishing community. The role of the Council will be to act as the point of engagement between the recreational fishing community and government to develop the framework for a Charter for Recreational Fishing, including reviewing and developing policies to ensure the importance of recreational fishing is recognized in the broader economy.

A Scientific Review of Access to Marine Reserves

The government to establish a comprehensive scientific review to inform how decisions are made about access of activities to marine reserves.

Recreational Fishing as a Sport

The Australian Sport Commission and Federal Government Departments to officially recognize recreational fishing as a sport.

Long-term Sustainable Funding

Investment by government and the private sector is required to ensure the following key activities are delivered:

- Appropriate representation by the recreational fishing community into policy processes.
- The development and implementation of a business plan for the long-term sustainable public/private sector funding for recreational fishing representation and policy development activities.

The Trend Towards Catch & Release

More and more anglers are using Catch & Release as part of their fishing experience.



Although catching fresh fish for food remains a popular motivation for the fishing lifestyle, increased education about the benefits of Catch & Release, plus media exposure and growing concerns about sustainability, has seen a rapid increase in the numbers of anglers carefully releasing fish.

Even species that have traditionally been recognised as prized table fish - such as bream, flathead, snapper and barramundi - are now regularly released by anglers who either impose personal bag and size limits or exclusively release all fish they catch.

Surveys and research carried out by state and territory fisheries agencies reveal that popular angling species easily survive the Catch & Release process,

leading to growing appreciation that this form of "no take" sportfishing is a legitimate management tool.

Studies by NSW Fisheries indicate that popular species like bream, flathead and trevally all have high survival rates when caught and released. Anecdotal evidence, combined with long-term national studies such as the gamefish tagging program, also indicates that larger fish including billfish, tunas and sharks are also excellent candidates for Catch & Release programs.

The study also revealed the importance of continuing education programs so anglers could incorporate best practice fishing and handling methods to ensure the highest possible survival rates.⁵



2. Enhancing Education Awareness

The significant benefits of recreational fishing in terms of health and lifestyle for the whole community are now emerging. Although there are some programs at local and state levels, these are usually not well funded and struggle to provide any sort of substantial benefits. It is proposed to develop a national education strategy to facilitate and co-ordinate educational activities at the national, state and local levels. Until such time as a sustainable business plan is implemented, funding is sought to establish and implement a national three-year strategy to be managed by a dedicated national co-ordination officer.

3. Research for Recreational Fishers

Recent major policy issues have exposed the dearth of robust science in the area of recreational fishing. Existing sources of funding from FRDC and private sources have not addressed these shortfalls, leaving recreational fishers forced to make policy decisions based on inadequate scientific knowledge.

It is proposed to develop a dedicated public/ private sector research trust fund that can work with existing research funding mechanisms to focus research on priority areas for recreational fishing policy development. The recreational fishing community will work with government to ensure government funds are partnered by investment from the private sector.

4. Enhancing and Protecting our Riverine and Marine Habitat

Australia's recreational fishers are active environmentalists. Every year thousands of recreational fishers undertake activities to protect and maintain our riverine and marine habitats. This work, most of which is voluntary, is often subject to fluctuations in funding.

It is proposed to establish a dedicated public/ private sector environmental trust fund that will work with existing funding mechanisms and on ground organisations to facilitate activities that enhance and protect riverine and marine habitats.

Spearfishing - Low Impact and Sustainable



Recreational fishing is wide and varied in the techniques used. One form of recreational fishing is Spearfishing. Dating back to indigenous times, spear fishing is now a sport that is increasing in popularity. Spear fishing is regulated by Codes of Conduct and Behaviour and organizations such as the Australian Underwater Federation and Underwater Skindivers and Fishers Association promote sustainable fishing through internal accreditation and training.



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