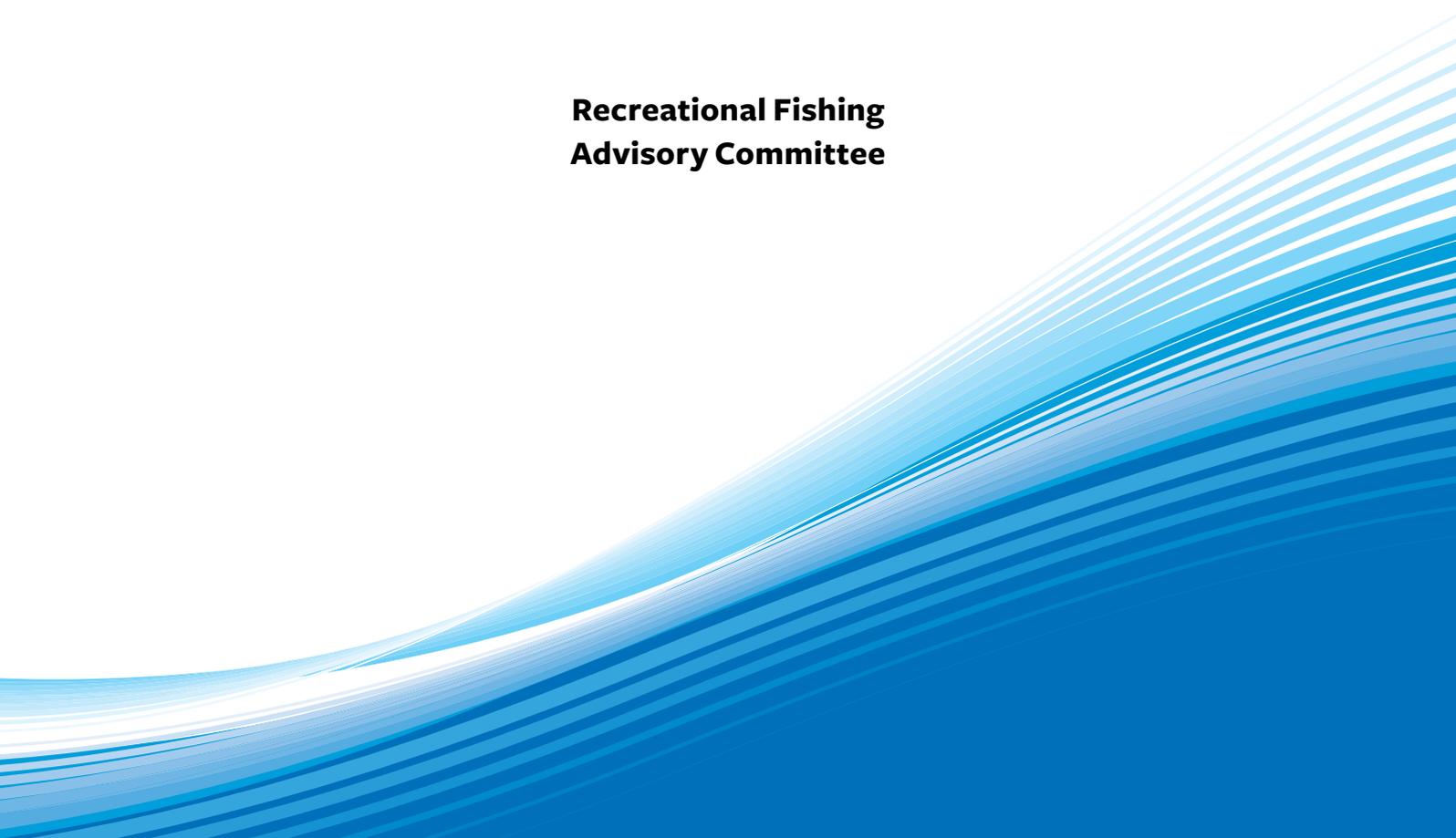


Recreational fishing in Australia - 2011 and beyond: a national industry development strategy

**Recreational Fishing
Advisory Committee**



Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee

Chris Natt (Chair) (to March 2010)
David Llewellyn (Chair) (from July 2010)
Ross Winstanley (Deputy Chair)
Ian Fitzgerald
Ann Garard
Lisa Hill
Doug Joyner
David Kramer
Phil Laycock
Len Olyott
Michael Sawyer
Bill Sawynok

In 2008 the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry announced the formation of the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee. This announcement was a central element of the Australian Government's three year (2008-09; 2009-10; 2010-11), \$2 million Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy.

As part of the Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy, the role of the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee is to provide advice to government on the development of the recreational fishing industry, including the provision of advice on:

- the relevance of the 1994 National Recreational Fishing Policy
- the development of the National Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy
- specific initiatives to encourage the promotion of sustainable fishing.

Cover photographs by (left to right, top to bottom):

- 1 Montebello Islands, photo by Lisa Hill
- 2 Catch and release of Murray Cod, photo by Ross Winstanley
- 3 Wagoe Beach, WA, photo by Lisa Hill
- 4 Tim Karlov with Albacore, photo by Andrew Jones
- 5 Moorpanyal, photo by Ross Winstanley
- 6 Lisa Hill with Saddle-Tailed Sea Perch, photo by Alistair Sharp

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Summary

The *2000 National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey* provided the first detailed depiction of the size of Australia's recreational fishing sector in terms of fisher numbers, catches and expenditure. The survey reported that over 3.4 million Australians engage in recreational fishing, spending \$2.2 billion annually and generating employment in fishing-related businesses as well as retail, tourism and other industries.

The survey found that recreational fishers make a substantial contribution to research and conservation projects through their efforts as volunteers and through fishing licence programs. The majority of the \$20 million in annual state recreational fishing licence revenue is spent on fisheries research, stock enhancement, habitat improvements, family fishing clinics, community education, compliance and monitoring and assessments.

In October 2008 the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke MP, initiated the first review of the 1994 National Recreational Fishing Policy and the development of a National Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy. He appointed a sector-based Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee which led the policy review and development process during 2009 and 2010.

During this period recreational fishers' relationships with the Australian Government were at a crossroad. On the one hand the government was showing interest in investing in the development of the sector nationally. Interactions between government agencies and the sector were intensifying in matters such as the control of recreational fishing for southern bluefin tuna and mako sharks and large-scale regional marine planning. On the other hand, direct representation of recreational fishers' interests in these matters at a national level faced two key threats: a breakdown in the relationship between the peak representative body Recfish Australia and the Australian Government; and the lack of a secure and adequate funding source for Recfish Australia's operations.

At the same time, recreational fishers, industry and governments continued to rely on the 2000 national survey data on recreational fishing in Australia. Governments had moved away from agreement to co-fund regular national surveys and attempts at finding an alternative approach to obtaining national recreational fishing statistics proved to be unsuccessful. In 2009, recreational fishers conceded that the only failing of the 1994 National Recreational Fishing Policy was in its poor implementation.

Recreational fishing in Australia – 2011 and beyond: a national industry development strategy (the Strategy) retains some important features of the former policy including contemporary statements of the recreational fishing sector's vision, key principles, goals and objectives. However, in keeping with the main criticism of the 1994 policy, the clear focus of this document is on coordinating the efforts and resources of recreational fishers, industry and governments on actions and outcomes that improve recreational fishing and promote a thriving industry. It is intended to be a guide to promote harmonisation across jurisdictions.

The implementation roles of the Strategy extend to:

- the state, territory and Australian governments and their agencies
- recreational fishers at the level of peak bodies, associations, clubs and individuals
- recreational fishing tackle, boating, tourism, media and other associated industry members
- researchers, investors and other stakeholders.

To implement components of the Strategy, the Australian Government supported several recreational fishing projects consistent with the goals of the Strategy (Appendix). The projects, targeting key concerns raised by the recreational fishing sector, are being managed by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences.

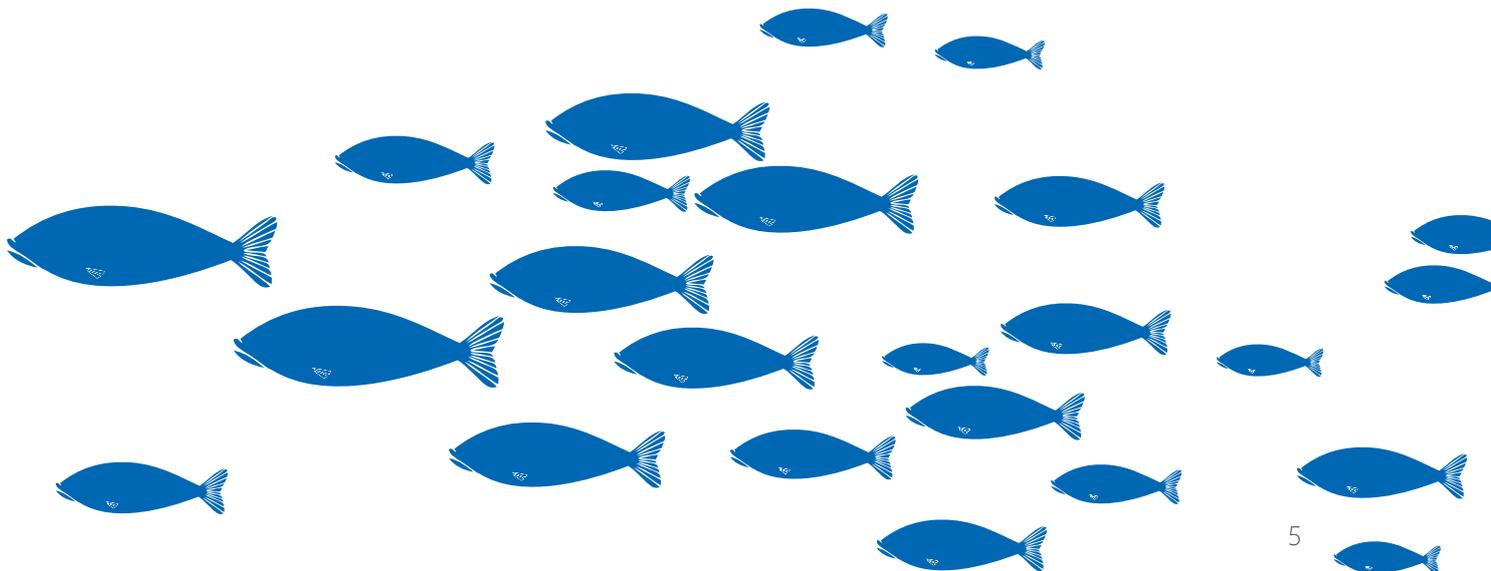
The Australian Government has also introduced a Recreational Fishing Roundtable to improve consultation between the recreational fishing sector and government. The roundtable will provide a regular forum to discuss and address issues concerning the recreational fishing sector.





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Photographer: James Larcombe (ABARES)



Introduction

Many changes and new challenges have emerged to confront recreational fishing since the first national recreational fishing policy was released in 1994. The late 1990s saw the principles of Ecologically Sustainable Development form the basis of a broad consensus among all fishers and governments. This provided a common focus on the sustainable growth of social, economic and cultural benefits from fish resources for present and future generations. Ensuring the sustainability of productive fish resources in healthy environments was central to all development. For recreational fishers, the practical application of this consensus was expressed in the 12 principles contained in Australia's first national code of practice for recreational and sport fishing, released in 1996

The *2000 National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey* provided the first detailed picture of the size of recreational fishing in terms of fisher numbers, catches and expenditure, and also confirmed the \$2.2 billion magnitude of the recreational fishing industry.

During the 2000s, long-term drought over much of the country and climate change affected recreational fishing. Changes in areas such as fresh water management and the proliferation of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) at local and regional scales reduced fishing access and opportunities. Some of these changes were offset through stock enhancement, artificial reef programs and shifts in resource allocation towards recreational fishing. Recreational fishers took on increased responsibilities through participation in various co-management arrangements and through voluntary fishing diary, tagging and clinic programs. In some states, recreational fishers began to enjoy a degree of control over how revenue from broad based recreational fishing licences is used to provide stock enhancements, facilities and services, educational material and other popular benefits.

Despite not being fully implemented, there was general agreement that the goals and principles set out in the 1994 policy continued to be relevant in 2011. There was also agreement that many significant advances had occurred, serving recreational fishers' interests well and raising the profile of recreational fishing in Australia.

Aims

The purpose of the Strategy is to guide and coordinate the actions of the recreational fishing sector—fishers and the industry—along with government, researchers and other stakeholders, in realising opportunities and meeting challenges that face recreational fishing in the next decade. In this context the term “industry” encompasses Australian producers, distributors and retailers/suppliers of goods such as fishing tackle and bait, boats and services such as charter and guide services, media and tourism.

The Strategy and implementation roles extend to:

- the state, territory and Australian governments and their agencies
- recreational fishers including peak bodies, associations, clubs and individuals
- recreational fishing tackle, boating, tourism, media and other industry members
- researchers, investors and other stakeholders.

The Strategy was developed following consultation with all state and national recreational fishing associations and representative bodies and with the state, territory and Australian governments. As a development strategy this document represents a consensus on directions that recreational fisheries development and management should follow in the coming years. For recreational fishers and the industry it should be seen as aspirational and inspirational, encouraging investment in the directions outlined. For governments it should be both reassuring and challenging. It is understood that the strategy is not intended to override or interfere with existing agreements between governments or with state/territory jurisdiction over recreational fishing. Indeed, the Strategy should complement and add value to state and territory policies.

Context of the National Industry Development Strategy

At a conference in 2008 organised by Recfish Australia, recreational fishers worked with government, industry and other stakeholders to review the 1994 policy and identify key issues likely to affect recreational fishing in the next decade. They reinforced longstanding and intensifying concerns about:

- funding of recreational fisheries programs, representation, research and development
- sustainability of recreational (and other) fishing
- habitat protection and environmental interactions with fisheries
- communication within the sector and with government and other interests.

Issues identified as major concerns include:

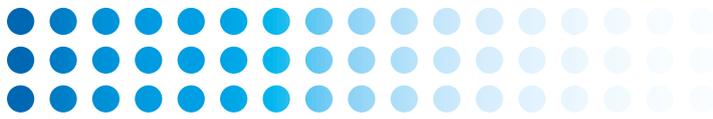
- access increasingly impacted by MPAs, shrinking freshwater resources, biodiversity protection measures • and increased fishing regulations
- ineffectual engagement in fisheries, MPA and other planning processes
- decisions informed by sound scientific, social and economic data
- climate change impacts and the environmental footprint of recreational fishing
- changing community attitudes towards recreational fishing in terms of ethical conduct and humane treatment of fish.

Recreational fishers acknowledged that addressing these challenges and engaging with the multitude of agencies and non-government organisations concerned with or about recreational fishing places huge demands on their representative bodies. They also recognised that the need for skilled professional representation was greater than ever, while the most pressing issue identified at the time of the 1994 policy—adequate funding—continued.

Taking these issues into account, the Strategy is built on a consensus of the directions that recreational fisheries should take nationally and some actions that can help progress in those directions. It provides a guide for investment and actions that might otherwise take a more ad hoc approach and lack clear strategic direction. While it is not appropriate for such a high level document to “dictate” roles and responsibilities, it should not be difficult for the sector and agencies in each jurisdiction to discern which of the proposed actions are applicable to them, alone or in concert with others.

These themes are examined in sections that follow. The six goals set out the desired endpoints that the Strategy seeks to achieve, consistent with the following 12 key principles or broad propositions regarding recreational fishing in Australia today.



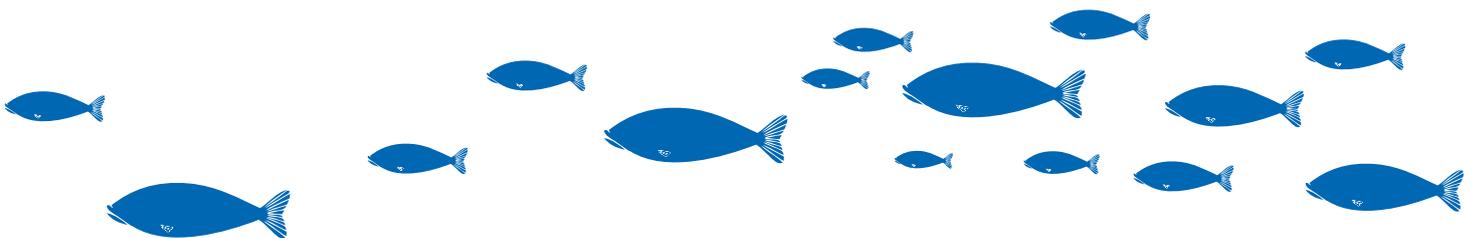


A vision for Australia's recreational fisheries

All Australians have the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of a sustainable, healthy and diverse recreational fishing experience.

Key principles for recreational fisheries

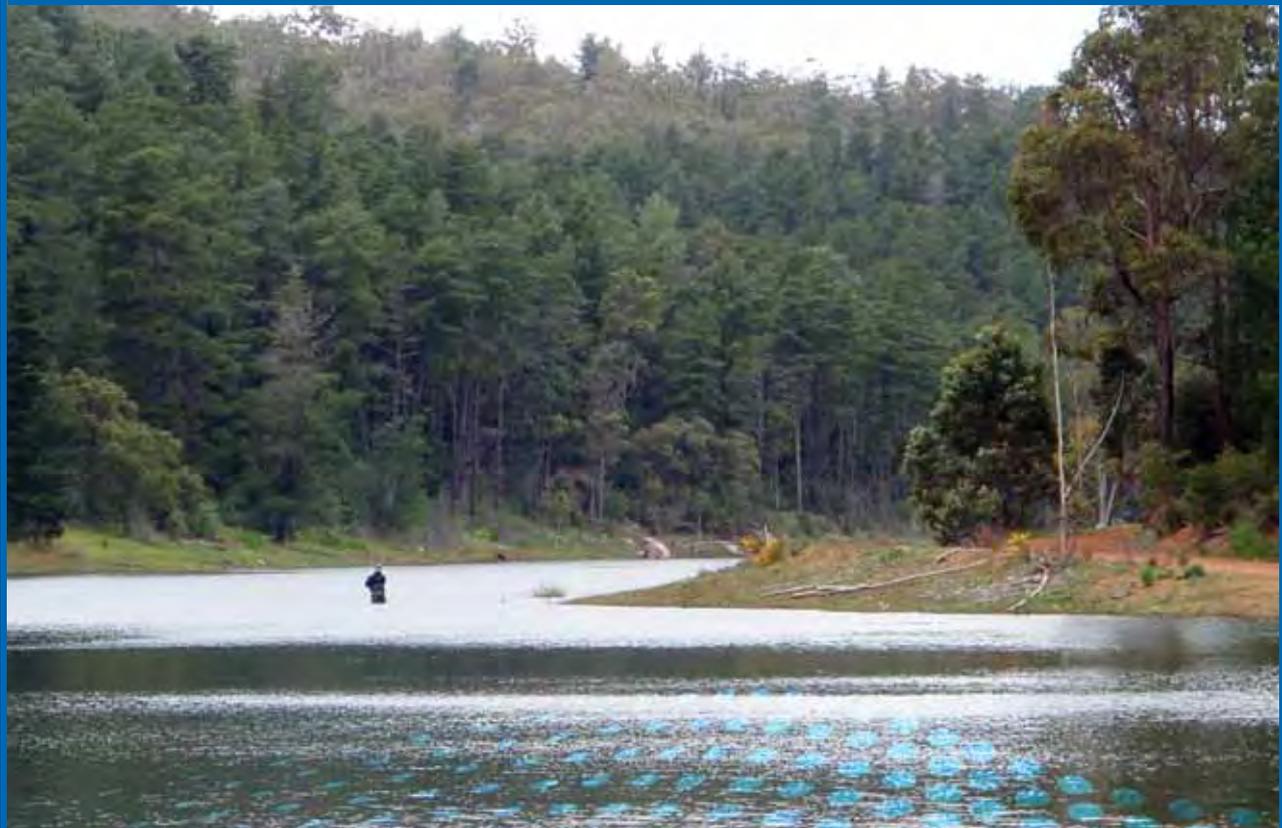
- 1 Recreational fishing is a legitimate activity that contributes to Australians' health and wellbeing at individual, family and community levels.
- 2 Healthy environments are fundamental to sustainable recreational fishing and fish resources.
- 3 Recreational fishers share in the stewardship of fish resources through partnerships in decision-making processes affecting recreational fishing.
- 4 The recreational fishing sector has the ability and desire to play a greater role in addressing issues affecting the industry.
- 5 Management decisions affecting recreational fishing should be based on sound scientific, ecological, social and economic information.
- 6 Recreational fishers and government should share the responsibility and costs of managing and enhancing recreational fishing.
- 7 Fish resource allocation should be based on providing an optimal range of social, economic and cultural benefits to the community.
- 8 Recreational fishers are encouraged to use best practices in all aspects of their fishing activities.
- 9 Recreational fishers and government should work in partnership to play a positive role in dealing with climate change.
- 10 Australian communities benefit by improving the range and quality of recreational fishing opportunities.
- 11 Responsible participation in recreational fishing provides valuable social and economic benefits and should be actively encouraged.
- 12 Recreational fishing can be a valuable addition to schools and other education programs on environmental studies, sustainable resource use, social responsibility and community health and wellbeing.



Goals

Consistent with the key principles, the following six goals form the basis for the Strategy and its supporting framework of strategies and actions.

- 1 Recreational fishing is acknowledged as an important activity that contributes to the health and wellbeing of Australian society.
- 2 Recreational fishers are respected partners in the stewardship of Australia's aquatic environment, along with government, Indigenous Australians, commercial fishers, conservation groups and the broader community.
- 3 Recreational fishers have access to a fair and reasonable share of Australia's fish resources.
- 4 An information base is available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community.
- 5 Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future.
- 6 The recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation.



Photographer: Lisa Hill



Benefiting the community

Goal 1: Recreational fishing is acknowledged as an important activity that contributes to the health and wellbeing of Australian society.

While the economic value of recreational fishing can be quantified and expressed in billions, its value to the nation in terms of social benefits is harder to define. This contributes to the lack of recognition by governments of the importance of supporting and encouraging participation in recreational fishing.

The health and wellbeing benefits from recreational fishing act at an individual, family and community level. For individuals, fishing offers relaxation, stress relief, contemplation, exercise and an avenue for building social contacts. At the family level, benefits of relationship building, passing on values and skills, and motivation for healthy outdoor activity together across generations can also be added. Fishing shares close links with allied outdoor leisure activities including camping, bushwalking and water sports.

Perhaps the greatest government recognition of social benefits of recreational fishing is the community benefits it brings and its potential to address a range of society's problems. In recent years, there has been increasing investment in programs aimed at:

- fishing clinics for single-parent families
- recuperation of breast cancer patients
- increased recreational opportunities for people with disabilities
- rehabilitation of socially isolated adults (e.g. non-English speaking elderly)
- intervention in drug, alcohol and youth violence related problems.

Most of these programs have been initiated and undertaken by the recreational fishing sector, with some government assistance.

Recreational fishing takes forms that range from meditative wilderness experiences to intensely strenuous and competitive activities. In all forms it provides the opportunity to catch fresh, healthy seafood. Within many schools, recreational fishing is being used as a medium to stimulate interest in mainstream subjects as well as an alternative outdoor educational activity.

Increased whole-of-government recognition and support is needed to help reach the full potential of these social benefits and to offset falling participation rates in some states. Increasing time, financial and family pressures add to the difficulties imposed by ever-growing distances to healthy waterways for families in many urban and rural regions. Governments' responsibilities in addressing these needs extend across community health, welfare, sport and recreation agencies as well as fisheries management agencies.

As in some overseas countries, recreational fishing works hard to protect its image as a legitimate and ethical activity. In Australia, recreational fishing is often misrepresented as a threat to sustainability and the environment. The recreational fishing sector perceives factors such as other human activities, urban development or climate change as greater threats to the environment. It is important that the recreational fishing sector is able to engage constructively to demonstrate its environmental credentials, while continuing to address areas where there is room for improvement.

Strategy 1

Understand and promote the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing to Australian society.

Strategy 2

Understand and promote the benefits of recreational fishing to disadvantaged groups in Australian society.

Strategy 3

Understand and promote the benefits of recreational fishing to children, the elderly and families.

Strategy 4

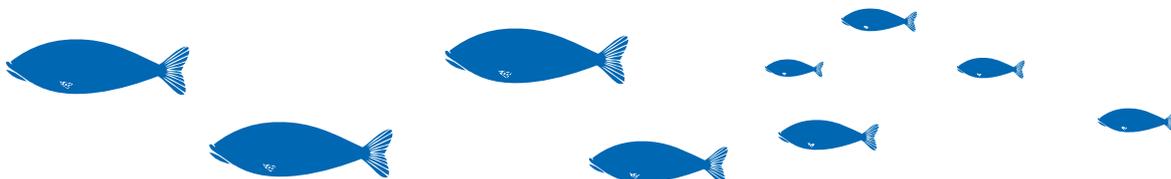
Engage with community health, sport and recreational bodies about the benefits of recreational fishing and eating fish.

Strategy 5

Engage communities to raise understanding and acknowledge recreational fishing as providing a valuable contribution to the health and wellbeing of Australian society.

Actions to address the above strategies

- 1 Collate existing studies on the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing and similar outdoor and sporting activities, including:
 - review current programs to demonstrate the benefits of recreational fishing in reducing drug taking and anti-social behaviour
 - review current programs to understand the benefits of recreational fishing for children, the elderly and families
 - review and demonstrate the educational benefits provided by fishing-in-schools programs.
- 2 Commission research to identify the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing.
- 3 Communicate and promote the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing in government and community programs.
 - develop products and program templates to promote participation in recreational fishing, incorporating health and wellbeing benefits in key messages
 - develop strategic alliances with health, sporting, tourism and other agencies to promote positive aspects of recreational fishing
 - expand fishing-in-schools programs to promote participation and responsible conduct in fishing.
- 4 Identify and target communications and partner with organisations for the extension of recreational fishing programs for women, children, elderly, families and disadvantaged groups.





Partners in caring for the environment

Goal 2: Recreational fishers are respected partners in the stewardship of Australia’s aquatic environment, along with government, Indigenous Australians, commercial fishers, conservation groups and the broader community.

A major challenge for recreational fishers today is influencing decision processes that affect recreational fishing, particularly those regarding fishing access and resource sharing. Ongoing engagement between recreational fishers, resource managers, Indigenous Australians, commercial fishers, community groups and the community is essential to meet this challenge. Traditionally, fishers have been set aside from these decision processes until the announcement of draft proposals. A more inclusive and transparent approach will help to alleviate past conflict and disillusionment with planning and management decision processes that affect recreational fishing. The basis for effective partnerships—trust and mutual respect—must be earned and continually validated.

Groups representing recreational fishers have a growing record of working with fisheries agencies to achieve necessary changes in fisheries management and resource sharing. The well developed co-management arrangements established by some fisheries agencies have greatly improved avenues for fisher engagement. In other natural resource fields, greater effort is required by fishers and their representative bodies and by planning and management agencies.

The recreational fishing sector recognises that building capacity of its representatives to engage fully in planning processes is an urgent priority. Essential parts of this capacity building include the appropriate selection and training of their advocates, collection and presentation of factual information and, where necessary, engagement of specialist professional assistance.

Attracting and increasing the involvement of young people and women in leadership roles is a particular challenge. Increasingly, building strategic alliances with other interest groups, including commercial fishers and conservation groups, is seen as vital to resolving differences and achieving balanced results in areas such as resource sharing. Development of strategic partnerships with tourism, public health and other industry and community bodies is a promising but largely under-developed field.

It has taken until recently for some recreational fisher representative bodies to realise the benefits of working closely together with the fishing tackle, boating, charter, guide, media and other associated industry groups. This maturity is also increasingly apparent in recreational fishers’ respectful acknowledgement of the role Indigenous Australians play in conserving fish resources and protecting the environment.

In initiating the Strategy, the Australian Government indicated its high level of interest and commitment to the future of the recreational fishing sector. This suggests the value of a national body to meet the needs of the government and the responsible federal minister for advice on progress with implementation of the strategy and other matters relating to recreational fishing. Models for such advisory bodies comprising the various industry and fisher interests can be found in some states. The functions of this national advisory committee would be quite separate from those of national representational and advocacy bodies that operate in the interests of their recreational fisher and industry constituents. The establishment of a national ministerial advisory committee should not diminish the rights and opportunities for those bodies to offer advice and consult with the minister and government.

Strategy 1

Improve opportunities for recreational fishers to engage in the management of fisheries and the environment.

Strategy 2

Ensure that recreational fishers are recognised and engaged as key stakeholders in policy development for national fisheries and environmental programs, e.g. Commonwealth fisheries, Marine Bioregional Planning and Caring for our Country.

Actions to address strategies 1 and 2

- 1 Demonstrate organisational structures that effectively engage recreational fishers in fisheries management, such as effective working examples of:
 - recreational fishers working with government to deal with fisheries management and environmental issues
 - joint habitat improvement projects with community groups
 - recreational fishers engaged in fisheries monitoring, research and assessment.
- 2 Establish an ongoing national advisory committee to advise the minister on delivery of the recreational fishing industry development strategy and on other matters relating to the recreational fishing sector.
- 3 Develop a national recreational fishing conservation council to promote eco-friendly activities with specific terms of reference to engage conservation groups.
- 4 Hold a regular national conference to discuss issues in recreational fishing including education, conservation, sustainability, climate change and access.
- 5 Facilitate fisher representatives' participation in training programs to promote understanding of fisheries and related planning and management processes.

Strategy 3

Invest in developing capabilities of industry leaders, advocates and representatives.

Actions to address strategy 3

- 1 Develop, promote and implement a future leaders' program template throughout Australia, e.g. young leaders' programs.
- 2 Provide scholarships for recreational fishers to participate in a national leadership program within the people development program of the FRDC.
- 3 Develop training programs and resources to improve advocacy skills of recreational fishers.
- 4 Develop and promote mentoring programs.

Strategy 4

Build partnerships between fishing industry, conservation, Indigenous and other stakeholder organisations.

Actions to address strategy 4

- 1 Investigate how other groups have partnered with stakeholder organisations to demonstrate successful formation of strategic alliances.
- 2 Encourage recreational fishing groups to become involved with shared-interest programs operated by conservation, Indigenous and other organisations, e.g. wetlands and mangrove protection.
 - identify partnerships and pathways to encourage interaction and collaboration between all groups.

Strategy 5

Be involved in and develop fisheries-specific environmental clean up programs.

Actions to address strategy 5

- 1 Promote behavioural changes that eliminate littering in waterways.
- 2 Increase the involvement of recreational fishers in Clean Up Australia campaigns.
- 3 Improve facilities and programs for collecting and recycling discarded fishing line.



Access and sharing

Goal 3: Recreational fishers have access to a fair and reasonable share of Australia's fish resources.

An issue of great concern to recreational fishers is access to fishing opportunities. This was highlighted in submissions to the development of this strategy and was the uppermost concern identified by fisher representatives at the Recfish Australia 2008 national conference. There are several dimensions to "access", including physical access to fishing locations, resource sharing arrangements and the restrictions applied through some fishing regulations and MPA regimes.

Fishers face incremental reductions in their access to saltwater fishing resulting from closure of access tracks, privatisation of port facilities, increased security exclusion zones and proclamation of marine sanctuaries and protected areas. Inland, fishers face increasing access and camping restrictions, exclusion from impoundments and waterways depleted by drought and competing urban, agriculture and industry interests. Across much of northern Australia, fishers wishing to access remote coastal areas need to seek permission of traditional land owners and pastoral land holders.

Recreational fishers are committed to the proper application of the precautionary principle and to the collection of appropriate credible data to better inform decision-making. They are wary of constraints that target recreational fishing when available evidence points to other factors (e.g. environmental damage) having greater impacts on fish resources, biodiversity and the environment. However, they have a track record of introducing or tightening fishing regulations in order to relieve pressure on fish stocks.

Recreational fishers see the increasing loss of access as evidence of the erosion of their right to fish. They advocate area-based marine conservation planning decisions based on open and transparent processes and comprehensive biological, social and economic data. Rather than blanket no-take fishing closures, they recommend risk assessment and risk management approaches that meet clear conservation objectives while allowing benign fishing activities to continue.

In some states recreational fishers have been involved in fish resource allocation processes with satisfactory outcomes. However, more commonly, recreational fishers see their rights diminishing in the allocation of fish resources between commercial and recreational fishing sectors. The issue is not just about the allocation of shares in terms of tonnages or percentages of allowable catches. It is also about managing competition between the sectors, minimising direct conflicts on the water and recognising the value of the businesses and regional economies that service recreational fishing. As with other access decisions, recreational fishers advocate resource allocations based on sound data, transparent and objective processes and the optimal benefit to the community from the use of the resource.

The statutory fishing rights assigned to commercial operators in many fisheries have previously attracted direct compensation when access is reduced significantly. Wherever possible, recreational fishers look for some form of offset through fishing enhancement initiatives such as artificial reefs, fish aggregating devices and fish stocking programs. They acknowledge the trend towards reallocation of some inshore, estuary and inland fisheries in favour of recreational fishing. They also acknowledge the obligations that accompany their rights to fish. Since 1995, these obligations have been codified and in 2008, Recfish Australia released the revised *National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing*. Recreational fishers are also contributing directly to fisheries monitoring and assessments through fishing licences and through participation in research diary, tagging and underwater fish-count programs.

Strategy 1

Advocate resource sharing arrangements that maximise social and economic benefits to the community.

Actions to address strategy 1

- 1 Improve data on social and economic benefits of recreational fishing.
- 2 Examine legislation to determine how recreational fishing is recognised to:
 - clarify the status of recreational fishing within legislation
 - explore the need and scope for improvements to legislation.
- 3 Explore models for resource sharing.
- 4 Promote the optimum social and economic community benefits of resource use in forums that allocate resources.

Strategy 2

Improve fishing opportunities by seeking offsetting benefits for loss of access to fish resources through environmental management actions.

Actions to address strategy 2

- 1 Agencies undertaking planning processes that impact on recreational fishers should provide improved fishing opportunities to recreational fishers where they lose access to fish resources.
- 2 Agencies and recreational fishers should work together to introduce offset measures to compensate for the loss of fishing opportunities through management actions, i.e. artificial reefs and/or allowing some forms of non-destructive fishing.



Photographer: Adam Leatherbarrow (ABARES)



A sound knowledge base

Goal 4: An information base is available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community.

Adequate and appropriate data is fundamental to fishing access and resource allocation processes. The *2000 National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey* highlighted the value of national fishing, social and economic data. It also showed the limitations of national survey approaches and the need for alternative approaches to help provide national recreational fishing data requirements in future. The slow progress in this area of national statistics during the 2000s reflects the unresolved complexity and costs involved in meeting disparate information needs of different sectors at different scales and for different purposes.

During the 2000s, several states and some fisher representative and industry bodies conducted regional, state-wide or national surveys to meet their own continuing needs. With many inshore and estuary fisheries being largely or wholly allocated to the recreational sector, fish stock assessments and management performance measures are becoming increasingly reliant on detailed and ongoing recreational catch and effort monitoring.

Fisher and community groups have demonstrated the value of information they can provide for essential assessment purposes. As a result, fisheries researchers are increasingly choosing to incorporate or depend upon data collected systematically by fishers. Collaborative research among state agencies is refining and comparing strengths and limitations of survey methodologies and developing tools for analysing large survey data sets.

The recreational fishing industry is taking an increasingly active role on fisheries and related management issues. Industry is also working with fisher representative bodies to address declining participation rates in some states, to promote the community benefits of recreational fishing and to advocate greater government investment to support recreational fishing. These activities generate significant needs for information on the social and economic benefits of recreational fishing as well as the impacts on fish stocks.

During the late 2000s, Recfish Australia, FRDC, Recfishing Research and the Australian Fisheries Management Forum agreed on the need for a national recreational fisheries data plan to meet the separate and collective recreational sector and government information needs. A 2009 FRDC funded study, *Development of a strategy to address national needs for recreational fishing data for fisheries management and development*, recommended steps towards a national data plan that could assist delivery of strategies and actions to achieve this goal. These strategies should address issues of coordination, data standards and interpretation.

Strategy 1

Promote the use of a national approach to statistics on recreational fishing where jurisdictions will benefit in combining resources, particularly in relation to social and economic data.

Actions to address strategy 1

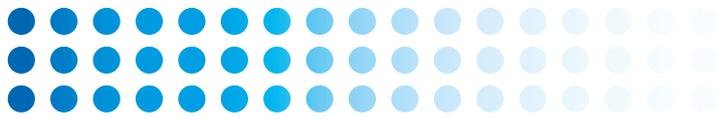
- 1 Develop an options paper of costed plans for collecting national economic and social data on recreational fishing.
choose and implement a plan.
- 2 Combine existing state and territory recreational catch and effort data into a national information system.
determine gaps in this information
collect information to fill the gaps.

Strategy 2

Develop a national sampling framework for use when undertaking surveys of recreational fishing and fisheries.

Action to address strategy 2

- 1 Review the options for a national sampling framework that can meet high-level information needs of the recreational fishing sector and governments.

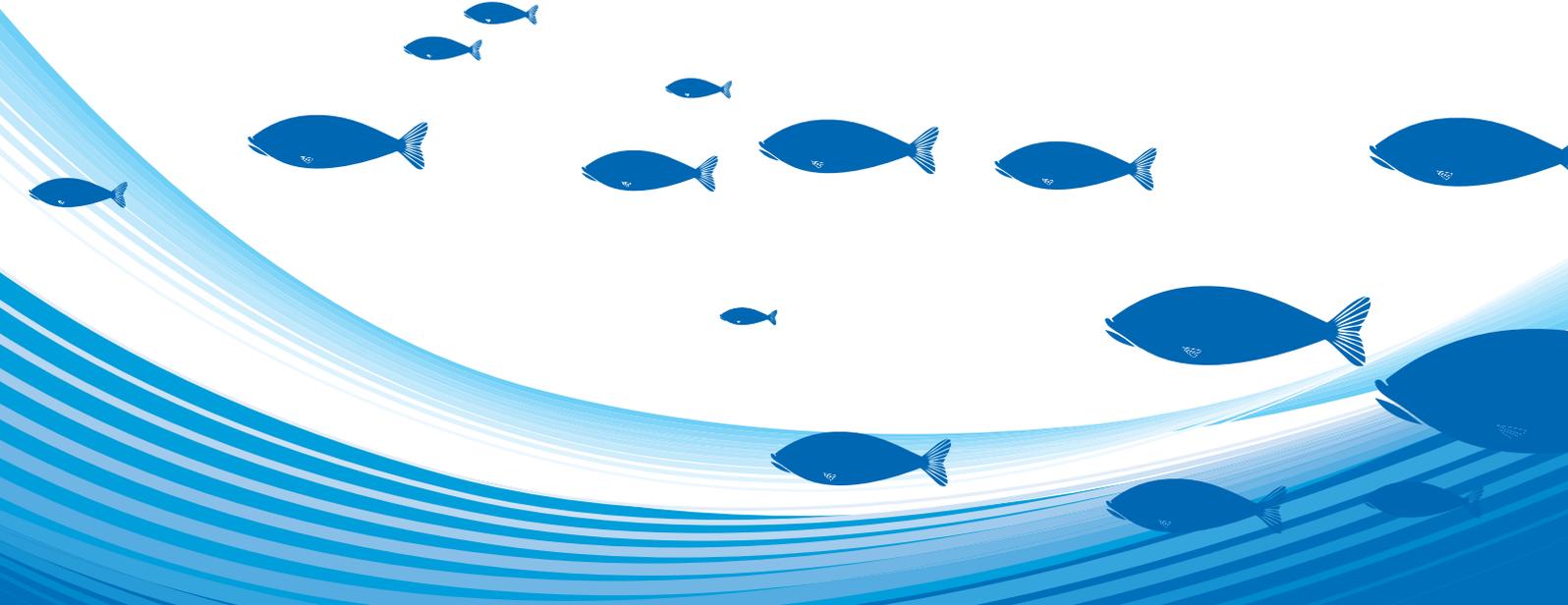


Fishers taking responsibility

Goal 5: Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future.

Recreational fishers have long appreciated the importance of protecting fish habitat and the wider environment as the basis of healthy fisheries. They have come a long way from merely advocating protection of fish habitats such as seagrass beds, mangroves and in-stream structures. Today, fishers play a lead role in important habitat rehabilitation and stock enhancement projects aimed specifically at improving fishing, as well as taking an active part in Landcare, clean-up and similar community-based programs. In addition, recreational fishers have been pivotal to the rehabilitation of threatened species such as Macquarie perch and trout cod. Through such activities, recreational fishers are working alongside other community groups and governments as stewards of these aquatic resources. In several states recreational fishers are actively supporting fish stock conservation, research and habitat improvement programs through investment of their fishing licence funds.

In recent years, recreational fishers have an improved understanding of their collective impact on fish stocks and it is not uncommon for fishers to advocate tighter regulatory controls of their own catches. They have embraced improved knowledge of unsustainable targeting (e.g. some shark species) and fishing practices (e.g. spearing blue groper), leading to substantial changes in their attitudes and behaviour. Along with governments, recreational fishers have established the concept of best practice in fishing and promoted responsible “limit your catch” and “fish for the future” messages. They have worked closely with fisheries researchers in studies of the best and most humane capture, handling and release techniques for maximising the survival of released fish. These are examples of the great changes that have occurred in the collective mind-set of recreational fishers, resulting in a growing sense of personal responsibility, environmental stewardship and respect for fish. These changes have produced an increasingly effective balance between regulated and voluntary actions, or stewardship.



The industry is working with fishers in developing and promoting the use of more environmentally friendly products such as biodegradable lines, sinkers and bait bags. Collaboration with fishing tournament and competition organisers has led to a national 5-star assessment standard based on the environmental, social and economic performance of fishing events. Through their industry accreditation standards, members of the Professional Fishing Instructors and Guides Association promote high performance levels in areas including eco-friendly and sustainable fishing practices, fishing knowledge and expertise and safety. Fishers are actively involved in volunteer “fish care” and schools-based fishing and environmental education programs in most states and increasingly, with industry, in fishing clinics for children, families and special needs groups in the community. Recognising the high level of risk associated with rock fishing, the Australian National Sport Fishing Association NSW has worked with recreational fishing bodies and authorities in several states on installing “Angel Rings” (life buoys) in rock fishing black spots and promoting safety messages in several languages.

However, there is little community appreciation of fishers’ contribution to fish and environmental stewardship. As a result, recreational fishers believe they continue to face negative community and media perceptions. There is much to be done in building on the environmental credentials of recreational fishing. This includes increasing fishers’ participation in environmental improvement, education and training programs as well as raising community awareness and appreciation of fishers’ true contribution.

Strategy 1

Encourage recreational fishers to be involved in research, community monitoring and habitat enhancement programs.

Actions to address strategy 1

- 1 Raise the awareness and involvement of recreational fishing organisations in catchment management and habitat enhancement programs.
- 2 Involve recreational fishers in research and monitoring.
- 3 Publicise participation and achievements of recreational fishers in these activities.



Strategy 2

Encourage recreational fishers to use best practices in all aspects of their fishing activities.

Actions to address strategy 2

- 1 Target communication of fishing best practice messages at recreational fishers and school children.
- 2 Promote and monitor the adoption of best practices and their outcomes by recreational fishers.
- 3 Communicate the message that fishers actively use best practice techniques.
- 4 Provide a national program to promote participation in recreational fishing incorporating best practices in key messages.
- 5 Continue promotion of the development and use of codes of practice in recreational fishing.
- 6 In conjunction with the tackle trade promote the use of environmentally friendly fishing tackle, e.g. alternatives to lead sinkers, biodegradable fishing line, biodegradable bait bags etc.
- 7 Promote best practice activities when running fishing competitions.
- 8 Develop a framework for natural resource stewardship programs for implementation by recreational fishing groups.
- 9 Promote the accreditation of fishing charter and guide operators through membership of industry groups with high fishing, environmental and safety standards.



Photographer: Ross Winstanley



A thriving industry

Goal 6: The recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation.

Despite the challenges facing recreational fishing—finite fish resources, access, environmental pressures and climate change—there is considerable scope for recreational fishing to enhance the lives of more Australians and to underpin a thriving industry.

The factors affecting participation rates have become clearer—family and work pressures, increased costs and distances involved, competing interests, lack of time and declining interest of fishing partners are some of the reasons. New fishers may face additional obstacles such as remoteness from fishing locations and the lack of equipment, skills and experienced instructors. Misinformation about fishing ethics, sustainability and safety may also deter people from taking up a healthy activity they would find fulfilling. New entrants to this country face particular challenges in coming to terms with acceptable fishing practices and fishing regulations. All of these obstacles can be broken down and addressed, making it easier for all individuals and families to take up, or resume, recreational fishing.

Unlike the responsibility for ensuring that fishing is sustainable, the initiative and incentives for promoting participation in fishing rest mainly with the recreational fishing sector. Throughout Australia, fisher groups, industry and fisheries agencies are working together to remove barriers and to create welcoming, instructive and accessible fishing opportunities. With industry and volunteer fisher support, school education programs foster environmental awareness, best practice fishing conduct and the practical ‘how to’ aspects of fishing. School programs also point to the vocational opportunities in the recreational fishing industry.

City and regional fishing and outdoor shows bring the latest advances in fishing and associated technology to fishers and demonstrate the breadth of the industry, including fishing tackle and electronics, boating, charter and guide services, camping, tourism, media and insurance.

Fishing clinics target remote regional communities, urban families, single parent families, underprivileged people, people with disabilities and youths with behavioural or substance abuse problems. The Australian National Sport Fishing Association leads the national roll-out of an education and facilities program aimed at improving safety awareness of the dangers of rock fishing.

Recreational fishing media are playing an important role in raising awareness of fishing opportunities, offering simple instructions and communicating research results and emerging issues. Recreational fishing guides, instructors and charter operators are providing a valuable educational service and fostering environmental stewardship among fishers.

Fishing groups are working with local councils and developers to build new fishing opportunities into landscaping and stormwater control works associated with new urban housing developments. In some drought-affected country areas, small-scale fisheries are being developed in ornamental lakes, flood retarding basins, golf course ponds and similar waters.

However, some of these initiatives are limited or are intermittent in their outreach. They may rely on small groups with limited funding and other resources or on the drive of individual fishers and teachers who are passionate about fishing and its benefits. There is great scope for expanding and establishing such programs on a more regular footing.

Strategy 1

Develop new and innovative fishing opportunities, particularly in urban and regional areas.

Actions to address strategy 1

- 1 Encourage the use of water storages and urban and regional ponds for the development of fishing opportunities, e.g. for families and disadvantaged groups.
- 2 Communicate the advantages of creating partnerships between business and local government when developing urban fishing opportunities.
- 3 Communicate to local government the advantages of creating fish habitats when developing urban landscapes and planning new developments.

Strategy 2

Promote recreational fishing as a family friendly activity.

Actions to address strategy 2

- 1 Implement a national program to promote family participation in recreational fishing, i.e.
 - align and co-ordinate existing state programs
 - establish a national recreational fishing day.
- 2 Promote the national uptake of fishing education programs, e.g. 'Get Hooked- It's fun to fish', and fishing safety messages.
- 3 Tailor communications and fishing programs to meet the special needs of our multicultural community.
- 4 Promote the simplification and consistency of fishing regulations within and between jurisdictions.

Strategy 3

Develop ways for recreational fishers to respond positively to climate change and promote reduction in carbon emissions from fishing activities.

Actions to address strategy 3

- 1 Determine the carbon footprint of recreational fishing activities and actions that can be taken to reduce it.
- 2 Develop research projects that examine the impact of climate change on recreational fishing and demonstrate how to adapt to or mitigate change.

Strategy 4

Improve safety in recreational fishing.

Actions to address strategy 4

- 1 Continue to promote safety in fishing, especially in those areas considered most dangerous.
- 2 Roll out a national 'Angel Rings' program to enhance safety of rock and other shore-based fishers.
- 3 Implement the recommendations from the Recreational Fishing and Safety in Australia report, April 2008.

Strategy 5

Promote the role and opportunities for women, children and families in recreational fishing.

Actions to address strategy 5

- 1 Provide opportunities for women, children and families to play a greater role in all aspects of fishing, e.g. 'Kids, come try fishing' days.
- 2 Promote positive images of women in recreational fishing.

Strategy 6

Promote the cultural heritage value of recreational fishing in Australia.

Actions to address strategy 6

- 1 Hold a national fishing day (see page 22, strategy 2, action 1).
- 2 Include information about the culture and heritage aspects of recreational fishing in education and awareness strategies.
- 3 Demonstrate how innovations have improved recreational fishing in Australia over time.
- 4 Encourage marine and freshwater discovery centres to include information on cultural and historical aspects of recreational fishing.
- 5 Develop an interactive web-based exhibition with information on the culture and heritage of recreational fishing.



Photographer: James Woodhams (ABARES)





Conclusion

Working together, recreational fishers and the industry have taken responsibility for many of the activities and programs that shape the future of recreational fishing in Australia. Along with fisheries agencies and researchers they are part of monitoring, assessment and management processes that underpin sustainable fishing and wider social and economic benefits enjoyed by the Australian community.

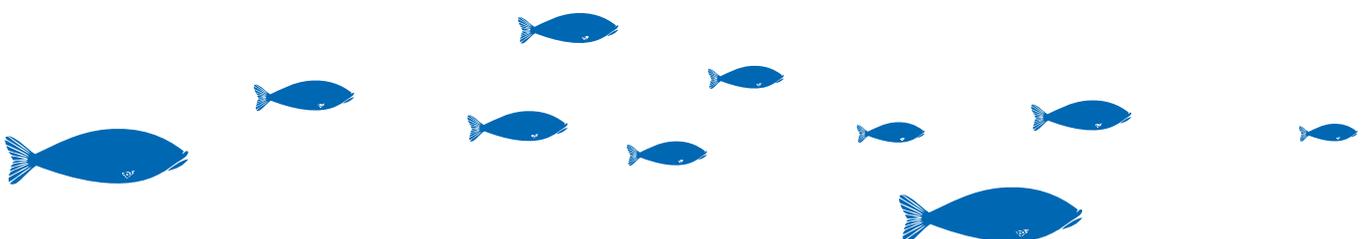
While recreational fishing continues to compete with many other activities for resources and community support, it is an important component of the continued economic prosperity, health and well being of Australian society. On the subject of resourcing, many consistent inputs to this strategy by fishers, industry and governments strongly emphasise two challenges to its effective implementation. The first and most critical is the need for a nationally-coordinated approach to the funding of recreational fisheries programs and of the representation of recreational fishers. The second is the need for strong leadership by an effective well-resourced national recreational fisher representation and advocacy body. These submissions indicate the success of this highly ambitious strategy rest on how these needs are met.

The lack of adequate funding continues to constrain development of the sector. In some states, recreational fishing licence revenue provides funding for representative bodies and programs aimed at enhancing recreational fishing and boosting participation. However, there is no consistent national approach to licensing or other basis for funding such bodies and programs.

Critical to this strategy, there is no secure mechanism for funding recreational fisher representation and advocacy or development programs at a national level. It is generally acknowledged that the responsibility for addressing the funding issue lays with the recreational fishing sector, not with government. It is also recognised that until these challenges are met, implementation of the strategy will be severely challenged.

In the meantime, the industry works with recreational fishers and governments in investing in development and promotional areas. Recreational fishers are committed to working with governments, industry and the community to ensure a healthy future for recreational fishing.

This set of recommendations to government provides a strategic national framework for harnessing recreational fishing sector and government resources for the betterment of recreational fishing in Australia. In keeping with many submissions, the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee's final recommendation is that the sector and governments should commit to a regular process for reviewing progress of actions contained in this strategy and to reporting the results to stakeholders.





Appendix

Recreational fishing industry development strategy projects

The Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC) was asked to provide advice to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry on the allocation of funding to projects which would give effect to major elements of a review of the 1994 National Recreational Fishing Policy.

RFAC recommended, and the Minister subsequently endorsed, funding for 10 activities which address a number of the critical issues identified in this report. These activities are identified below.

Recreational fishing industry development strategy projects

Project Title	Funding
1. A coordinated national data collection for recreational fishing in Australia	\$500 000
2. National education program	\$400 000
3. Identifying the health and well-being benefits of recreational fishing	\$100 000
4. Expanding the future leaders program	\$250 000
5. A national conference on recreational fishing	\$100 000
6. Development of a climate change implications paper for recreational fishers	\$100 000
7. A National Program for the Roll-Out of Angel Rings	\$100 000
8. Improved consultations between government and the recreational fishing sector	\$50 000
9. Developing a methodology for obtaining regular, statistically robust estimates of recreational and charter fishing catch of Southern Bluefin Tuna in Australian waters	\$100,000
10. Monitoring the recreational take of shark species in Australian waters	\$40 000
Total	\$1, 740,000

Note: Projects 1–7 are commissioned and managed by the FRDC. Projects 8–10 are commissioned and managed by DAFF and ABARES.

Project 1 - A coordinated national data collection for recreational fishing in Australia

The project will address goal 4 of this report:

An information base is available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community.

Project 2 – National education program

The project will address goals 5 and 6 of this report.

Goal 5: Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future.

By addressing strategies 1 and 2:

- 1 Encourage recreational fishers to be involved in research, community monitoring and habitat enhancement programs.
- 2 Encourage recreational fishers to use best practices in all aspects of their fishing activities.

Goal 6: The recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation.

By addressing strategies 2, 4, 5 and 6:

- 2 Promote recreational fishing as a family friendly activity.
- 4 Improve safety in recreational fishing.
- 5 Promote the role and opportunities for women, children and families in recreational fishing.
- 6 Promote the cultural heritage value of recreational fishing in Australia.

Project 3 – Identifying the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing

The project will address goal 1 of this report:

Recreational fishing is acknowledged as an important activity that contributes to the health and wellbeing of Australian society.

By addressing strategies 1, 2, 3 and 5 of this goal:

- 1 Understand and promote the health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing to Australian society.
- 2 Understand and promote the benefits of recreational fishing to disadvantaged groups in Australian society.
- 3 Understand and promote the benefits of recreational fishing to children, the elderly and families.
- 5 Engage communities to raise understanding and acknowledge recreational fishing as providing a valuable contribution to the health and wellbeing of Australian society.

Project 4 – Expanding the Future Leaders Program

The project will address goal 2 of this report:

Recreational fishers are respected partners in the stewardship of Australia's aquatic environment, along with government, Indigenous Australians and the broader community.

By addressing strategy 3 of this goal:

- 3 Invest in developing capabilities of industry leaders, advocates and representatives.

Project 5 – National Conference on Recreational Fishing - Setting Future Directions for Recreational Fishing

The project will address goal 2 of this report:

Recreational fishers are respected partners in stewardship of Australia's aquatic environment with government, Indigenous Australians and the broader community.

By addressing strategies 1 and 2 of this goal:

- 1 Improve opportunities for recreational fishers to engage in the management of fisheries and environment.
- 2 Ensure that recreational fishers are recognised and engaged as key stakeholders in policy development for national fisheries and environmental programs.

Project 6 – Development of a Discussion Paper on the Implications of Climate Change for Recreational Fishers

The project will address goal 6 of this report:

The recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation.

By addressing strategy 3:

Develop ways for recreational fishers to respond positively to climate change and promote reduction in carbon emissions from fishing activities.

Project 7 – A National Program for the Roll Out of Angel Rings

The project will address goal 6 of this report:

The recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation.

By addressing strategy 4 of this goal:

Improve safety in recreational fishing.

Project 8 – Improved consultations between government and the recreational fishing sector

The Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon. Dr Mike Kelly has advised that he will Chair quarterly meetings of the Recreational Fishing Roundtable. The meetings will provide a regular forum to discuss issues concerning the recreational fishing sector.

Project 9 – Developing a methodology for obtaining regular, statistically robust estimates of recreational and charter fishing catch of southern bluefin tuna in Australian waters.

The project will address goals 4 and 5 of this report:

An information base is available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community.

Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future.

Project 10 – Monitoring the recreational take of shark species in Australian waters.

The project will address goals 4 and 5 of this report:

An information base is available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community.

Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future.