

# Recreational Fisheries

## General Overview

The Recreational Fisheries Program is responsible for the management of Western Australia's recreational fisheries and the delivery of program outcomes identified through strategic, business and operational planning.

The program's key strategic objective is to maintain or improve the quality, diversity and value of recreational fishing and ecotourism based on fish and fish habitats in Western Australia through partnerships with the community.

Other major program objectives include:

- The conservation of fish stocks and their habitats of importance to recreational users.
- Improved individual responsibility and community support for sustainable recreational fishing.
- Improved quality and diversity of opportunities for recreational fishing and activities associated with fish and the aquatic environment.

Community advice on planning and operational priorities is provided through the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RFAC) and a network of 12 Regional Recreational Fishing Advisory Committees.

Additional advice on specific management issues is provided through community-based working groups and public submissions collated during planning processes.

Revenue raised from licence fees is credited directly to the Recreational Fishing Fund to support recreational fisheries management, research and community education activities. Licence fees contributed approximately 26% of the total operating costs for the Recreational Fisheries Program, with the remainder from the Government Consolidated Fund (66%) and external grants for specific projects (8%).

## THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Western Australia's recreational fisheries are a major community asset, and contribute in excess of \$500 million a year to the State's economy.

Since 1987 the participation in recreational fishing of all kinds has more than doubled from 284,000 people to between 500,000 and 600,000 people a year, or from 27% to 34% of the population over 4 years old. The estimated fishing effort has also risen from an estimated

3 million fishing days to over 11 million fishing days, with the mean number of trips/fisher/year in the same period rising from 9.5 to 18.

In the State's licensed recreational fisheries a total of 56,899 people obtained licences in 1998/99, as follows:

Marron	21,449 licences
Rock lobster	32,721 licences
Abalone	15,175 licences
Netting	13,710 licences
South-west freshwater angling	12,088 licences

Of these, 8,386 people took out all categories of licence available. (All licence figures are given as at 30 June 1999.)

Recreational fishing contributes to the quality of life of thousands of Western Australians and provides the basis for an important domestic market for the fishing tackle, bait, boating and vehicle manufacturing industries.

Another area of significant growth is the fishing and aquatic ecotourism industry. In 1990 a Fisheries WA review identified 40 fishing charter operators in Western Australia. By 1997 this number had risen to 135, and a call for expressions of interest for fishing and aquatic tour operator licences in December 1998 attracted over 450 applications.

Major threats to the sustainability of Western Australia's recreational fisheries come from population growth, coastal development, improved fishing and fish storage technology, a low participation cost, and the opening of access to areas previously protected from significant levels of exploitation by their remoteness.

These factors are placing unprecedented pressure on many fish stocks at all stages in their life cycle. This is compounded by human-induced environmental change, including the eutrophication of rivers and estuaries and the destruction of fish habitats through industrial activities.

Opportunities for maintaining and developing recreational fishing as an important community activity and regional tourism drawcard occur through growing community support for fishing as a quality experience, rather than focusing on taking large quantities of fish.

Other opportunities are provided by the multi-species, regional nature of recreational fishing activities, a demand by fishers to be involved in all aspects of resource management, and fishery enhancement opportunities provided through the developing aquaculture industry.



## WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S RECREATIONAL FISHERIES

Western Australia's 12,000 km coastline, 200 nautical mile fishing zone and inland regions support nine major recreational fisheries.

These are distributed between the four broad marine biogeographic regions of the Kimberley/Pilbara, Gascoyne, West Coast and South Coast, and two major inland fishing regions.

From a biological perspective the boundaries of these regions are largely consistent with (or represent sub-sections of) the major coastal and climatic zones of Western Australia, and consequently the distribution of fish species and stocks.

In addition, these regions also coincide with discrete tourism regions of the State, and visitor fishing activity tends to focus within these areas during identifiable seasons.

The major recreational fisheries comprise four marine and estuary multi-species finfish fisheries, a temperate and a tropical freshwater finfish fishery, and licensed single-species fisheries for western rock lobster, abalone and marron.

Recreational fishing activity occurs in four main zones: creeks and estuaries, shore-based fishing, inshore marine fishing in waters generally within the inshore reef system or three nautical miles of the coast, and an offshore fishery which targets demersal fish and pelagics such as billfish and tunas.

In the north the creek systems, mangroves and rivers provide shore and small boat fishing for a variety of marine and freshwater species including barramundi, sooty grunter, mangrove jack, mud crabs and cods.

Southern estuary fisheries mainly consist of shore and small dinghy angling for species such as black bream, tailor, flathead, flounder, cobbler and whiting, and wading and drop-netting for blue swimmer crabs. Fishing activity is concentrated during the summer and early autumn months. Prawns also provide a highly seasonal and variable fishery in the Swan-Canning and Peel-Harvey estuaries.

The inshore marine fishery operates mainly out of boats smaller than five metres, and is most concentrated near major population centres, marinas and launch facilities and in areas such as Jurien Bay or Shark Bay where the inshore reef system or islands and promontories provide some protection from the oceanic swell and weather.

The offshore boat fishery operates mainly within the 50 m depth contour, targeting demersal species such as dhufish, baldchin groper, pink snapper, emperors, cods and sea-perches.

In areas such as Perth, Exmouth and Broome seasonal fishing for billfish and tunas is becoming an increasingly important part of the recreational and charter fishery.

Recreational catch and target species in each region vary significantly, as does the fishing pressure.

## RECREATIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

A key outcome of the strategic planning process jointly carried out by Fisheries WA's Recreational Fisheries Program and the Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee is the development of four regional marine recreational fisheries management strategies, based on the State's major biogeographic regions (Recreational Fisheries Figure 1).

These five-year strategies aim to ensure that the quality of recreational fishing available in WA is maintained or enhanced in the face of growing population pressures, and will complement management already in place for the licensed recreational fisheries and commercial fisheries.

Key elements in each strategy include the clear identification of those fish species, stocks and areas of most importance for recreational fishing, and the development of a set of 'fishing quality' indicators against which each plan can be reviewed.

Each regional strategy is being developed by a community-based working group comprising fishing, conservation and tourism interests and will include recommendations for a detailed research and management program specific to that region.

In 1998/99 the Gascoyne Working Group released the first of these regional strategies as a draft for public comment. Following review of submissions, the working group will prepare final recommendations for the Minister for Fisheries in December 1999.

A second working group has been established to develop a draft strategy for the West Coast region and it is expected a discussion paper will be released in early 2000.

Planning for the Pilbara/Kimberley region will commence in early 2000, and for the South Coast in late 2000.

A major review of charter fishing and associated ecotourism was undertaken by an industry-based working group established by the Minister for Fisheries. The final report from the Tour Operators Fishing Working Group, 'Future management arrangements of the aquatic charter industry', was released in November 1998. New management arrangements for fishing and aquatic ecotour operators are expected to be implemented in early 2000.



**Recreational Fisheries Figure 1** Map showing the State's four marine recreational fishing regions.

## RECREATIONAL FISHERIES RESEARCH

Recreational fisheries research focused on establishing baseline catch and effort information on the marine finfish and blue swimmer crab fisheries, improving knowledge of the biology of key recreational finfish species, and developing stock assessment models.

In 1998/99 nine major research projects were funded. These included a program of regional angler surveys to establish baseline data on recreational catch and effort in the State's four fishing regions, ongoing monitoring in the rock lobster, abalone and marron fisheries, an evaluation of the freshwater trout stocking program, completion of biological and stock assessment work on Australian herring, a stock assessment and monitoring program on Shark Bay inner gulf pink snapper stocks, and an evaluation of the survival of black bream stocked into low-salinity inland waters.

In future years, in addition to reporting the status of the licensed recreational fisheries, this document will report the outcomes of research carried out in the four recreational fishing regions. The recreational fishery of inner Shark Bay (Gascoyne region) is reported this year.

## Recreational Western Rock Lobster Fishery

### MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The recreational rock lobster fishery is concentrated in inshore regions, in depths of less than 20 m, with most fishing activity around the Perth metropolitan area and Geraldton. Fishing controls include gear restrictions, bag and size limits and protection of breeding females. In addition, a restricted fishing season operates between 15 November and 30 June and a recreational rock lobster licence is required.

### COMPLIANCE AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION OVERVIEW

There have been no major compliance breaches in the recreational sector for the 1998/99 season. Proactive patrols by Fisheries Officers have achieved positive results, with high-visibility catch inspections acting as a deterrent. Officers have received complaints regarding pots missing, lines of gear being pulled, and non-compliance during the hours of darkness. Under-size catch remains an issue, as does tail clipping. However, the overall level of compliance for the season has been good.

Ongoing education services have been delivered, including the use of Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officers to provide community advice and collect research data.

## RESEARCH OVERVIEW

General research for managing the rock lobster stock is undertaken through the Commercial Fisheries Program and reported in that section.

For the recreational component of this fishery, an annual survey of participants is used to estimate the recreational catch and to produce the following status report.

### Fishery Status Report

#### Main Features

##### Catch current season (1997/98):

807 tonnes (estimated)

##### Participation rate for year 1997/98:

28,776 people purchased licences to fish for lobsters, but only an estimated 23,993 utilised their licence

##### Catch projection next year (1998/99):

900-1,000 tonnes (estimated)

##### Previous catch projection (1997/98):

450-550 tonnes

### Boundaries and Access

The recreational western rock lobster fishery has no specific boundaries; however, fishing is concentrated in inshore regions in depths of less than 20 m. The Perth metropolitan region and Geraldton experience the greatest fishing activity. A recreational rock lobster licence is required to take lobsters, and in the 1997/98 season 28,776 licences were sold. The 1997/98 season operated between 15 November and 30 June inclusive, except at the Abrolhos Islands where the waters were closed to diving for rock lobsters, but open for potting, between 15 March and 30 June.

### Catch

#### Main fishing method

Pots and diving.

#### Landings

Estimated at 807 tonnes, with 565 tonnes by potting and 242 tonnes by diving.

#### Fishing effort

The average pot and diving fishers (excluding all those who held a licence but failed to use it) used their licences on 34 and 14 days respectively during the 1997/98 fishing season.

#### Catch rate

The average pot and diving catches were 1.5 and 2 lobsters/person/fishing day.