

BANNING JUST COMMERCIAL FISHING IS A FARCE

The WA Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC) is calling the ban on commercial fishing in the metropolitan area a farce and says if the Minister of Fisheries Jon Ford is serious about sustainability of our icon species he will introduce a ban on all fishing in the metropolitan area, as he has at the Abrolhos Islands.

The Minister claims his package will save iconic fish for the future and that unless action is taken now key demersal fish stocks will collapse within 4 to 5 years and these fish will disappear from our waters. His remedy to address this is to ban commercial fisheries in the metropolitan area now but take no equivalent action on the recreational fishing sector apart from some vague intention to consider the matter further in July next year. This is a farce.

The Minister announced the proposed commercial fishing ban today in conjunction with research that reveals the recreation catch of our icon species is equivalent to the commercial catch and that stocks could collapse by 2012 if something is not done to arrest the decline.

"We are debating the survival of dhufish and snapper stocks in this state, if banning commercial fishing is going to help in the metropolitan area, then why not recreational fishing?" asks the WAFIC CEO Graeme Stewart.

Consider the facts

- This research shows the dramatic fact that the recreational catch is equivalent to the commercial catch.
- There are 85,000 recreational boats in WA, 60% registered in the metropolitan area. (And people are crying out for more moorings)
- The commercial wetline fishery has just undergone a major review, which will see the total west coast commercial catch reduced by 40% to ensure sustainability.
- The commercial catch of demersal fish like dhufish and snapper in the metropolitan area represents only 15% of the total commercial demersal West Coast catch.

"The research has revealed an inconvenient truth that the recreational catch now matches the commercial sector, due to the dramatic increase in the number of boats and the sophisticated technology now widely available to the recreational fisher.

"There is no action been taken to reduce the recreational catch, other than at the Abrolhos, and the launching of a discussion paper on tinkering with recreational bag and possession limits.

"The commercial sector does not blame the recreational fishermen, we all want sustainable managed fisheries, we blame bad management, and now

that we have a major problem, and the cause, we simply cannot fathom why you would not make adjustments in consultation with both sectors – the one that catches for their family and the one that supplies the majority of the community who prefer to buy their fish.

“The banning of the small group of professional fishermen who are eligible to fish in the metropolitan area and who have already had severe reductions imposed on them through the Wetline Review, may look like something is being “done”, but the truth is this is just part of a public relations exercise to cover-up the crisis, the lack of research and proper management of the recreational sector. It should be pointed out that this ban extends to shark fishermen, who have also just undergone dramatic cuts to their fishery.

“This cynical decision by Minister Ford is compounded, firstly, by fact that the Government has a policy called Integrated Fisheries Management which is designed to deal with managing fisheries equitably between all stakeholders and bring process and certainty to the industry, which has been ignored; and secondly, the total disregard for professional fishermen, who we understand, will get a letter from the Minister today saying you can no longer fish in the metropolitan area.

The Minister is establishing a record of ad hoc decisions to close commercial fisheries in favour of recreational sector because he thinks it is politically popular. We believe the community is a lot smarter than this. Sustainable fishing is paramount, but how the resource is shared between recreational sector and the professional fishermen who supply 80% of seafood consumers who buy their fish needs, to be resolved through IFM. The ad hoc closure of a series of small fisheries like in the Metro area and Geographe Bay gives the illusion of good fisheries management and it is ineffective.

For those who are familiar with the Hans Christian Anderson fable The Emperor’s New Clothes we would like to draw a parallel with the parable...our Minister expects people to believe he has done something meaningful to ensure the sustainability of our icon species by banning the sacrificial professional fisherman, but like the Emperor’s clothes, it is a naked attempt to make the community think the problem is fixed.

Issued by
Jo-Ann Ledger
Ledger Marketing
9383 3901
0419 042 518

On behalf of
Graeme Stewart
CEO WAFIC
9492 8888

Professional fishermen:

Nick Soulos West Coast Shark Professional fisherman
Bob Stone West Coast shark and Wetline fishermen

0427 217 538
9581 6715

Background next page...

BACKGROUND

The Wetline Review was finalised earlier this year. The Department of Fisheries will commence the introduction of the formal management system by the end of the year, bringing it in line with our other major fisheries like rock lobster, prawns and abalone.

Under the new Wetline Management regime the commercial catch of fin fish on the west coast will be cut by around 40%, reducing the overall catch in the wetline fishery from 1,200 tonnes to 750 tonnes by reducing the number of days fished and by reducing the number of fishing boat licence holders to around 60. It is estimated that around 80 fishing boat licences, which, were dependent on fishing wetline stock, will no longer be eligible to participate in the fishery.

In the metro area there will be 20 fishermen out of the 60 who will not be able to fish, in addition there will be shark fishermen excluded from this zone.

West Coast Demersal Gillnet & Demersal Longline Fishery:

This fishery underwent substantial reductions in 2006 to ensure long term sustainability of shark species. The sustainability package included:

- Fitting of Vessel Monitoring Systems on all vessels, a two month closure, substantially reduced days available to fish, restrictions on fishing gear.
- In the metropolitan area the catch consists predominantly of dusky, sandbar and whiskery sharks. Scalefish, such as dhufish, queen snapper are also a small, but important component of the overall take.
- 26 licences on the West Coast held by about 17 licence holders.
- Fishery extends from North West Cape to Binningup (33degrees) but most fishing occurs between Bunbury and Dongara.
- Important supply to Perth markets (not over east).
- The fishery is applying for MSC pre-assessment.

Growth in the recreational boating sector

Last month Planning and Infrastructure Minister Alannah MacTiernan released the draft Perth Recreational Boating Facilities Study, which shows not only are boat numbers increasing but their average size is also growing creating increasing demand for permanent moorings. There are more than 85, 000 registered recreational vessels in WA with over half of them based in the metro area.

The study can be viewed at:

http://www.dpi.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/mar_cf_PRBFS_Summary.pdf and shows the predicted growth of boats in the metro area.

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