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SAVE STRIPED MARLIN CAMPAIGN

The Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust provided \$87,000 for an independent consultant to undertake an economic study to estimate the value of the striped marlin fishery to the recreational and commercial sectors, and to examine the possible impact of various management scenarios.

This report was finally released in December 2004 after been sat on for a period. (And now we know why!)

The report consists of 124 pages of in-depth analysis with a clearly defined result.

The study found that the value placed on striped marlin by recreational fishers was almost eight times that placed on the species by commercial fishers and the economic contribution of the recreational catch of striped marlin heavily outweighed that of the commercial sector.

The gross value of the recreational catch of striped marlin for NSW in 2003 was estimated to exceed that of the commercial sector by approximately \$52.32 million. Of this, the Hunter and Sydney regions contributed more than 52.2%, the south coast 29%, Illawarra 10.5% and the north coast 8.4%.

The economic contribution of the recreational striped marlin catch in total output to the NSW economy exceeded the commercial catch by an estimated \$112.44 million. Of the estimated 941 jobs generated by striped marlin fishing in NSW in 2002-3, 907 were generated by the recreational sector, and 34 by the commercial sector.

All the potential changes to the management of commercial fishing for striped marlin investigated in the study had positive economic benefits for NSW. The report concluded that the current striped marlin management arrangements are imposing a net cost on the NSW community each year.

The study showed that making striped marlin a recreational-only species through a complete ban on commercial fishing for the species off the NSW coastline provided the best economic benefits for NSW. This alternative provided greater economic benefits than an area closure.

To protect the game fishery in Western Australia the government banned the landing of striped marlin in 1995. The Game Fishing Association of Australia has been negotiating with the Commonwealth for more than 12 months seeking a closure to long lining along the west coast of Australia to protect game fishing.

The Bureau of Rural Sciences report "Striped Marlin: biology and fisheries" published this year expressed concern at the potential for localised depletions of this species, and confirmed that long liners were targeting striped marlin off the east coast. The latest Bureau of Rural Sciences Fishery Status Report 2002 –2003 list the stock status for striped marlin as "uncertain". It is clear from this report that the striped marlin taken by targeted fishing are being landed in contravention of the NSW Fisheries General Regulation Clause 8 Defence which provides for striped marlin only to be landed as a by-catch of tuna fishing.

Historically Commonwealth licensed tuna fishers have been allowed to take bait in State waters (inside 3 miles for commercial fishing). This dispensation was originally provided in recognition of the reliance of tuna polers on live bait.

The longline fishery for tuna, and later broadbill swordfish off the east coast developed using frozen bait. With the decline in inshore yellowfin tuna catches, and the development of a domestic and export markets for striped marlin, the longline fishery increasingly turned to live bait sourced in inshore waters to target Striped marlin using shallow-set longlines.

The exploitation of the live-bait provisions retained for tuna pole and line fishers by marlin targeting longliners has exacerbated conflict with the recreational sector.

Currently the Black and Blue Marlin are protected from commercial fishing by both NSW and Commonwealth legislation. For Striped marlin to become a recreational-only species it would need to be fully protected from commercial fishing.

This would best be achieved by including Striped marlin with Black and Blue Marlin under Section 15A of the Commonwealth Fisheries Management Act 1991. This would prohibit the landing of Striped marlin by Commonwealth fishers at any time, even as by-catch. This would effectively deter targeting of marlin by longliners.

The recreational sector needs to be very clear about how we want our fishery managed, and where we want it to be in the future. We need to recognise that the fishery will change over time and that any improvements need to be quantified. As NSW manages recreational fishing out to 200 nautical miles, we should be cognisant of the statutory objectives of the NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994. The relevant objects of the Act are:

- (e) to promote quality recreational fishing opportunities, and
- (f) to appropriately share fisheries resources between the users of those resources, and
- (g) to provide social and economic benefits for the wider community of New South Wales.

To promote quality recreational fishing opportunities we must be able to measure the quality of fishing. Fortunately NSW Fisheries have been doing this for game fishing for more than a decade through the Game Fish Monitoring Program.

Striped marlin are the mainstay of the game fishery off NSW. After depleting the yellowfin tuna stocks, longliners have increasingly targeted striped marlin. Continued commercial fishing for striped marlin will jeopardise the valuable game fishery off the east coast of Australia. Longlining for striped marlin also results in the destruction of black and blue marlin which are currently protected from commercial fishing.

Game fishers value marlin and have worked hard to rebuild fish stocks. More than 95% of marlin caught by game fishers are tagged and released to increase our scientific knowledge of these magnificent fish. The recreational fishery for this species is worth more than \$115 million dollars per year to the NSW economy. Without protection from commercial fishing striped marlin will be fished out and these benefits will be lost.

Attached is a petition which we urge both the Hon. Senator Ian Macdonald, Minister for Fisheries Canberra and Hon. Ian Macdonald MLC, NSW Minister for Primary Industries to immediately protect striped marlin from all commercial fishing and make striped marlin a recreational-only species in all waters of Australia and to remove the defence against prosecution that allows striped marlin to be landed commercially in NSW, and to prohibit longliners from taking live bait in NSW waters.

We urge all recreational fishers to support each other and sign the petition. We would further urge you to seek the support from others to sign.

Sportfish Australia