

## RECREATIONAL FISHING IN AUSTRALIA - 2010 AND BEYOND

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### Name

ANSA - Australian National Sportfishing Association Ltd

### Email

"John Burgess" <[abtrap@yahoo.com.au](mailto:abtrap@yahoo.com.au)>

### Which best describes your interest/s in recreational fishing

- recreational fishing
- caring for the environment
- commercial fishing
- Recreational fishing industry, e.g. tourism, charter boat operator, fishing guide, tackle industry, boating industry, fishing media
- Indigenous interest
- Government

### Other, please specify

National sportfishing peak body.

I would like to be included in further consultations and receive updates on progress about development of Australian Government recreational fishing policy and strategies.

- Yes
- No

### Address

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## GOALS

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Do you agree that the goals of the discussion paper are very important to achieving a sustainable recreational fishing industry?

Strongly agree that goals are an important component of any business plan or development strategy. However, equally as important is for a plan to portray an overall vision of what it is trying to achieve. A vision which captures the imagination and inspires enthusiasm and buy-in from stakeholders can be the difference between a plan or strategy that is embraced and actioned or merely a document that sits on a shelf collecting dust. While the discussion paper does present a vision, it doesn't exactly elicit the desired response.

Goals must also be supported by specific and measurable actions if they are to be achieved. In turn, these actions require ongoing monitoring and review. While the discussion paper does identify a range of actions, ANSA is concerned that without prioritising, specifying an implementation plan and committing resources to these actions, they are unlikely to be achieved. Given the current funding for recfishing at all levels, it is questionable whether such a large number of actions are realistically achievable.

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that recreational fishing is acknowledged as an important activity that contributes to the health and well-being of Australian Society?

Strongly agree

### Comments

Recfishing in spite of its broad public popularity and participation receives a low level of acknowledgement for its contribution to the health and well being of society. It is ironic that recfishing is not officially recognised as a sport by the government. This needs to be addressed. Further research on the health and wellbeing benefits of recfishing is also required to enable the sector to adequately demonstrate its value to society in general and especially its detractors.

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that Recreational fishers are respected partners with government, Indigenous Australians and the broader community in the stewardship of Australia's aquatic environment?

Strongly Agree

### Comments

Respect needs to be earned and unfortunately there are minority elements within recfishing (as is the case across the entire social spectrum) that let down the sector as a whole. Pleasingly the great majority of recfishers do the right thing and there are many within the sector that put in the hard yards to promote the sport and actively contribute to the stewardship of the aquatic environment. Regrettably these individuals and organisations receive little recognition for their efforts. The media is often biased or looking for sensational issues to denigrate recfishing and the government and its agencies (Federal/State) often ignores the contribution coming from the recfishing sector.

There are many cases where stronger partnerships between government and recfishing stakeholders can lead to greater stewardship of the aquatic environment, such as co-management. Opportunities for cooperation, collaboration and partnerships between government and recfishers should be explored as part of the industry development strategy.

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that recreational fishers have access to a fair and reasonable share of Australia's fish resources?

Strongly Agree

#### **Comments**

It is equitable that recfishers have a fair and reasonable share of the nation's fish resources. However this sharing arrangement comes with a responsibility for shared management of our fishery. Just how this is best achieved is a major challenge. Resource sharing is a topic that has been debated for many years and perhaps offers the future solution.

It is important that any resource sharing decisions take into account the relative value of the fishery to each stakeholder sector. The recfishing sector has been disappointed in the past where the recreational value of certain species has been demonstrated to outweigh the commercial value, yet requests for greater allocation of the resource have fallen on deaf ears. The case for Striped Marlin in NSW to be declared a rec' only species is but one example.

Is it important that an information base is made available at national, state and regional levels on recreational fishing to meet the needs of government and the community?

Agree

#### **Comments**

There is a plethora of historic information and data available on recfishing. However the practical value of much of this information is debatable as is the use made of it. The major challenge for data gatherers is how do you place a reliable estimate on the volume of fish taken (captured/ released/ killed) by the recreational sector on a species basis.

Future surveys undertaken at a national, state and regional level are welcome, but must utilise common, robust methodologies so that meaningful analysis and comparisons can be undertaken. Socio-economic information and the value of the recfishing sector should be a priority of future information gathering exercises.

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that Stewardship of fish and their environment ensures quality and sustainable recreational fishing opportunities into the future?

Strongly Agree

#### **Comments**

While this goal is fully endorsed, the ongoing challenge for all stakeholders is how we do this to obtain the optimum outcome over the short and longer term. It is imperative that recreational fishers play a more active and constructive role in this endeavour and are equipped with the necessary resources in terms of finances and science to undertake the role effectively. A properly resourced national peak body is seen by the recfishing sector as essential for this to occur.

Is an important goal for the discussion paper that the recreational fishing industry is attractive, vibrant and adaptive, encouraging investment and participation?

Strongly agree

#### **Comments**

These qualities already exist within the broad recfishing framework but in themselves, singularly or collectively are not enough. Recfishers suffer from not having an effective and cohesive voice. Most activity that benefits the industry is undertaken by unpaid volunteers and the lack of unity amongst the major organised key players within the industry does not work in our best interests. This needs to be addressed so that contributions by the industry are appropriately valued and recognised.

Participation in recreational fishing should be encouraged and actively promoted at a state and national level. Strategies, programs and projects which encourage and promote investment in recfishing should be a high priority.

## KEY PRINCIPLES

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Do you agree that the key principles of the discussion paper are very important to achieving a sustainable recreational fishing industry?

Strongly Agree, however previous comments about the need for specific, measurable strategies and action plans are equally relevant when discussing key principles.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that recreational fishing is a legitimate activity that contributes to Australian's health and well being at individual, family and community levels?

Strongly Agree

### Comments

This principle is wholly endorsed but the conundrum is how to get this message across to the broad community and who pays for it. Further quantification of the health and wellbeing benefits of recfishing should be a priority action.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that healthy environments are fundamental to sustainable recreational fishing and fish resources?

Strongly Agree

### Comments

Sustainable fishing is intrinsically linked to healthy environments and sustainable fishery resources. While recent strategies for management and preservation of the environment and fish resources have concentrated on the creation of marine parks, this does not go far enough. Locking up areas is an overrated and over-used tool for management and conservation. The real threats to the aquatic environment are environmental degradation as a consequence of industry, agriculture and foreshore / catchment development. Governments of all persuasions need to have the political will and courage to meet these challenges while being mindful of the socio/economic implications involved.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that recreational fishers share in the stewardship of fish resources through partnerships in decision making processes affecting recreational fishing?

Strongly Agree

### Comments

This has been commented upon previously. The challenge is how to empower recfishers to effectively share in the stewardship role. Participation on MAC's is not enough. Recfishers need to be recognised as equal stakeholders in many fisheries and management arrangements which better reflect this equality should be established where appropriate. There is scope for recfishers to engage

more in community based research projects – the opposition to such community research by some state fisheries agencies needs to be addressed.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that the recreational fishing sector has the capacity to play a significant role in addressing current and future issues affecting the industry?

Strongly agree

#### **Comments**

This has been commented upon previously. The challenge is how to harness the energy and intellect within the recfishing sector which essentially is volunteer-based and devoid of funding and research resources. An adequately resourced national recfishing peak body is essential for the coordination of recreational stakeholders.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that management decisions affecting recreational fishing should be based on sound scientific ecological, social and economic information?

Strongly Agree

#### **Comments**

Management decisions must be based upon sound peer reviewed science across all disciplines. However, for the recfishing sector to be able to engage meaningfully in the management and planning process it needs to have access to independent scientific research on those issues where there is contrary scientific opinion that if accepted without challenge, may impact adversely on recreational fishers. Funding of robust and independent research by the recreational sector is a major obstacle and challenge.

The strategy should address ways of attracting investment in research for the recfishing sector. Opportunities for recfisher involvement in research should be identified and encouraged.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that recreational fishers and government should share the responsibility and costs of managing and enhancing recreational fishing?

Strongly Agree

#### **Comments**

The theory of this principle is commendable but the challenge is how to put this into practice. Cost sharing is a major challenge with little evidence available as to how this might be achieved by recfishers. Recfishers are a major economic driver of the national and state economies but receive very little back from the government. Some states have licensing systems in place but the funds derived from such licences are generally insufficient to meet the funding needs of the recreational sector at a state level let alone engagement at a national level. Some states give very little in the

way of financial support for recfishing. The imperative is for the Federal government to give something back to recfishers to facilitate effective management participation.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that fish resource allocation should be based on providing optimal benefits to the community?

Agree

#### **Comments**

This will require a delicate balance between the needs of both the commercial and recreational sector and other stakeholders, being mindful that the commercial sector has an important but diminishing role to play in the provision of fishing product for the Australian public and export markets. There is also a pressing need to ensure that our fisheries are preserved for future generations.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that Recreational fishers should be encouraged to use best practices in all aspects of their fishing activities?

Strongly agree

#### **Comments**

ANSA has its own longstanding code of ethics in terms of the best practices for recreational fishing and has played a pivotal role in the development of many national codes of practice for fish handling, conservation management and community etiquette. There is a pressing need for the community at large to be made aware of and to put into practice these best practices, which are contained in the National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sportfishing developed by Recfish Australia. A priority of the industry development strategy should be the broader promotion and promulgation of this Code and the encouragement of its formal adoption by all Australian jurisdictions.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that Recreational fishers and government should work in partnership to play a positive role in dealing with climate change?

Agree

#### **Comments**

Climate change is a concern and its longer-term impact upon the marine environment and our fisheries needs to be evaluated. However there are more pressing and immediate threats to the marine environment and our fisheries that have historically been ignored by government for all manner of reasons. The priority should be to address and resolve the known problems while being alert to and well prepared for what additional and new problems may flow from climate change impacts.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that Australian communities should benefit by improving the range and quality of recreational fishing opportunities?

Agree

#### **Comments**

There is scope to improve the range and quality of recreational fishing opportunities by managing our fisheries better, acknowledging the economic and social benefit that is generated by recfishing as a major economic driver and balancing this against industrial and agricultural activities that may not be as viable as thought. As an example professional advice already exists that the value of some species such as striped marlin are more valuable to the nation's economy as a recfishing species than as a commercial catch. There is also scope for the creation of more recfishing reserves and the augmentation of existing reef systems via the installation of artificial reefs.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that Responsible participation in recreational fishing provides valuable social and economic benefits and should be actively encouraged?

Agree

#### **Comments**

Previous comments are relevant.

Is an important key principle for the discussion paper that 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 well being?

Agree

#### **Comments**

Already there are numerous education and awareness programmes that have been successfully implemented at a state level by peak recreational fishing bodies often in conjunction with state fishery agencies. There is huge potential to develop this educational process further but the limitation is the availability of manpower resources to deliver such programmes and the lack of funding to pay for essential materials. Historically the education process has been delivered primarily by volunteers and the tackle industry has been a valuable sponsor. Government commitment to coordinate and fund (at least in part) such programs is essential for their continued delivery.

## FURTHER COMMENTS

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Overall, do you think that the discussion paper meets the needs of the recreational fishing industry?

Agree

### Comments

There is nothing particularly new in this paper but this comes as no surprise. The issues identified are still much the same as they were in 1994 but the challenges confronting all stakeholders have become more complex and difficult with the passing of time. Whether this paper can address these issues remains to be seen. One could speculate that in 20 years time the vexing issues will be the same unless all stakeholders and governments make a concerted effort to put more back into the management and preservation of our fisheries and the marine environment and the true value and significance of recfishing is acknowledged and appreciated.

Do you believe there are any important omissions from the discussion paper which should be included?

It is surprising and disappointing that nowhere within the paper is there any mention of need for a well-resourced government recognised peak recreational fishing body to act as the bridge between government and the grass roots recfisher. It is imperative that we have such a body and that it be representative and adequately resourced. Recfish Australia does receive a number of favourable mentions and acknowledgements throughout the paper but the paper is silent on its future role or how such a peak body might be funded.

As discussed in our opening comments, ANSA is concerned that resources allocated to the development of this discussion paper and industry development strategy could potentially be wasted if the recfishing sector does not embrace a shared vision, and the strategy is not supported by tangible actions and outcomes. A detailed implementation plan for proposed actions, including milestones and funding commitments, is essential.

There is also scope for inclusion of a specific reference to the education and encouragement of all recfishers to take an active role in the cleanup of all rubbish at their chosen fishing locations. The general state of our fishing habitat leaves a lot to be desired and is the focal point of much media criticism of recfishers and the rationale often advanced for restriction of access to wharves and jetties. A clean up campaign could be an integral element of the national fishing day mentioned on page 17 of the report and a core element of any education initiative. ANSA has actively participated in a number of cleanup activities such as "Clean up Australia Day" and the installation of T'Angler bins for collection of discarded line. One of our affiliated bodies, ALBAA ( Australian Land Based Anglers Association) has been instrumental in the implementation of the "Ledgcare clean up" project which has removed 3.96 tonnes of refuse and flotsam from NSW coastal rock platforms over the past 3 years. A national roll out of a similar programme would be positive initiative for recfishers and the fishing habitat. ANSA would welcome the opportunity to participate in such an initiative.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

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It is noted that strategy 4 "improved fishing safety" makes reference to a national roll out of Angel Rings. This is a longstanding project initiated and driven by ANSA and we are doing what we can to nationally roll out the Angel Ring project and its Fishing Safety Awareness stable mate but we are limited by manpower and financial resources. ANSA has formed a partnership alliance with Surf Lifesaving Australia to augment its own resources but much more is needed to elevate these proven life saving projects to their full potential. Federal government support for a national Angel Rings program would be very welcome.

ANSA is happy to discuss any aspects of this survey response in further detail.