



Australian National Sportfishing Association Ltd

ACN 063 293 514

COMMITTED TO CONSERVATION AND INTEGRITY IN SPORTFISHING SINCE
1967

14 April 2014

"Southern Bluefin Tuna Order"
NSW Department of Primary Industries
LMB 3020
Nowra NSW 2541
Email: fisheries.threatenedspecies@dpi.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/ Madam,

Re: Public Exhibition - Ministerial Order authorising recreational fishing for Southern Bluefin Tuna and Associated Species Impact Statement

On behalf of the Board and Members of ANSA I would like to take this opportunity to comment on the Department's proposal to make an Order authorising amended controls on the recreational take of Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) in NSW waters and adjacent Commonwealth waters managed by NSW under OCS agreements.

By way of introduction ANSA is one of the largest and oldest recreational fishing peak bodies within Australia. ANSA has been operational since 1967 and has a national membership base of some 5000 individual members and families and an extensive network of ANSA affiliated clubs in all states and territories. As our name implies our main focus is "sportfishing" with a very positive conservation ethos and a sustainable fishing practice code. ANSA is a foundation member of the Australian Recreational and Sportfishing Industry Confederation (Recfish Australia) and the Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation (ARFF) and holds board positions on both of these bodies. ANSA is a longstanding member of the International Game Fishing Association (IGFA) and has representation on that international body. ANSA is also a longstanding member of the Commonwealth Recreational Fishing Ministerial Roundtable and is working with the current Australian Government to establish an Australian Recreational Fishing Council and engages in regular dialogue with senior officials of DAFF, AFMA and FRDC in relation the management of our national fishery resources.

ANSA has fully digested the contents of the Cardno Ecology Lab SBT Species Impact Statement (SIS) and has circulated the SIS across its national member network for review and comment. The overwhelming reaction of ANSA members to the recommendations embodied in the SIS report is one of concern and disbelief given that the tenor of the report, based on available historical data, states interalia "the total recreational catch of SBT represents a very small proportion of the total global commercial catch and therefore it is highly unlikely that historical recreational fishing in Australia, or NSW has contributed significantly to the current status of SBT standing stock". Our members concerns are elevated by the fact that NSW historically has the lowest level of recreational fisher interaction with SBT when compared to SA, Vic and Tas where SBT are seasonally prevalent and the recreational take is more substantive.

ANSA Board
PO Box 328
Matraville
NSW 2036

Enquiries to: John Burgess
Telephone: 02 93113200
Mobile: 0408609586
Email: abtrap@yahoo.com.au

ANSA members do concede that there is need for a more realistic basis for the management of SBT take by recreational fishers in waters under NSW jurisdiction either alone or under treaty with the Commonwealth. It is somewhat ironic that although SBT was declared an endangered species in NSW in 2004 due to concern by the Fisheries Scientific Committee that the species would become extinct in NSW unless dramatic - no take - management controls were imposed on commercial and recreational fishers, the reality is that recreational fishers have by virtue of NSW Ministerial Order been allowed to continue to fish for SBT subject to prevailing NSW bag and size limits which currently allow for a possible daily take of 7 SBT under the blanket bag and size limits applicable for Albacore and tuna species such as Big Eye, Yellowfin and Longtail.

It is not surprising that in April 2004, the then NSW Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Ian Macdonald wrote to Dr Patricia Dixon Chairperson of the Fisheries Scientific Committee stating that " it would appear incongruous for a species to be listed as threatened with extinction by FSC while it supports a significant international fishery with allowable catches of thousands of tonnes - additionally the NSW Government has no mechanism for exerting any meaningful control over the management or catch of the species. Consequently the recovery planning process that must follow listing will have little hope of providing any useful framework for increasing a population of fish that migrates widely throughout southern temperate waters".

What is pleasing is that since 2004, despite the generous recreational take limits for SBT, the species has not been fished to extinction but has recovered substantially in all southern temperate waters including NSW. This is a view endorsed by senior management of DAFF and AFMA who very recently agreed to a 500 tonne increase in the Total Allowable Catch for SBT based on its assessment of the status of SBT stocks . The Cardno SIS itself states that over 2011, some 518 SBT were tagged in NSW - more than the previous 37 years combined. The past 4 years has seen a positive recovery of SBT passing through NSW managed waters and it is the view of DAFF and AFMA that 2014 will be another good year for SBT in NSW.

One has to question what level of consultation, if any, has taken place between the Department , Cardno and the various Commonwealth agencies responsible for the management of our national fishery resources in terms of perceived threats to SBT and the current status of SBT stocks. It is somewhat ironic given that the Commonwealth government did in 2010 list SBT as threatened under the Conservation Dependent category which did not prevent or restrict recreational or commercial fishing but sets legal requirements for SBT to remain under a management plan that seeks to ensure species survival and long term recovery. Similarly what level of consultation , if any, took place with Fisheries Departments in other states where SBT are seasonally prevalent.

Against this background one has to wonder why there is a need for the introduction of such restrictive new management regulations that will see a recreational fishing -
Daily limit of 1 SBT.
Daily Boat limit of 2 SBT.
Charter Boat limit of 6 SBT

As previously stated ANSA is supportive of a downward revision of daily take limits for SBT by recreational fishers but not to the extent now recommended. ANSA would be in agreement with a recreational daily bag limit of 2 SBT (with no size restrictions) with no daily

boat limit - inclusive of the charter boat sector which based on the Cardno data has negligible interaction with SBT in NSW as it is generally not geared up for this type of very limited seasonal recreational fishing. ANSA is also supportive of SBT being removed from the blanket bag limit regulations for tuna species generally which are the subject of the recent review of NSW size and bag limits generally.

It is a matter of fact that in all other states where SBT are seasonally prevalent the daily recreational bag limit is 2 SBT and there are no boat limits other than in SA where the take of 6 SBT is allowed. It is both logical and practical that a uniform daily bag limit of 2 be applicable for all states where SBT are taken by recreational fishers. This is a view endorsed by DAFF and AFMA.

It is of genuine concern to ANSA members that should a daily bag limit of 1 SBT and or boat limits of 2 and 6 be imposed on recreational fishers there may be a resurgence of upsizing by some less environmentally conscious recreational fishers with consequential unwelcome and unacceptable increase in species mortality. Similar concerns arise at the prospect of size limits being imposed. Victoria did at one stage have a SBT size limit which proved administratively impossible to police and did lead to incidents of upsizing and wasteful mortality - the size limit regulations were duly withdrawn. ANSA members also have concerns about the potential socio economic impacts that the SIS recommended bag and boat limits could have upon regional coastal communities that rely heavily upon visiting recreational fishers as an economic driver.

The Cardno SIS does highlight a major deficiency in terms of available and reliable data on recreational fisher interaction with SBT across most states. This does need to be addressed sooner rather than later and one has to question the veracity of the SIS recommendations which are not backed up by credible current data or science and instead are tempered substantially by the precautionary principle and the expectation that recreational fishers will increase their effort to pursue and take SBT with consequential flow on mortality implications. In the unlikely event that this scenario was to occur then it would be incumbent upon the Department to undertake a reassessment of management protocols having due regard to capture/stocking data and science prevailing at that time. A more concerning threat to the survival of SBT in NSW is a threatened resumption of large scale commercial fishing for small pelagic species in our Commonwealth southern waters. It is perhaps more than just coincidence that the major decline in SBT stocks in NSW, Vic and Tas more than a decade ago aligned with the collapse of the small pelagic fishery in our southern waters. The recovery of small pelagic stocks has seemingly complemented the recovery of SBT stocks in Australian waters.

ANSA does believe that most serious fishers who target SNBT would be willing to play a constructive role in the collection and collation of recreational fisher interaction with SBT. Going forward it is only a matter of time before recreational and commercial fishers will need to embrace a resource sharing regime but there are serious challenges in bringing this about. Perhaps a leaf could be taken from the Tasmanian IMAS post release survival project and the introduction of log books for the collation by recreational fishers of data on SBT including estimated size/ weight /condition/kept or released/ tagged/ capture location and date.

Conclusion:

ANSA commends the Department of Primary Industries for bringing the long overdue SBT SIS to completion. The challenges and difficulties encountered by Cardno in collating current and reliable data on recreational fisher interaction with SBT are acknowledged. ANSA does

not agree entirely with the conclusions reached in the SIS or the recommendations made but does concede there is a need for a tightening of SBT recreational fishing regulations.

Accordingly ANSA is supportive of specific and reduced recreational fisher daily bag limits for SBT on the following basis :

Daily Bag Limit : 2 SBT.

Daily Boat Limit: Not applicable.

Charter Boat Limit : Not applicable.

Size Limit: Not Applicable.

Spatial/ Seasonal Restrictions : Not Applicable.

Removal of SBT from the current blanket bag limits for Albacore, Yellowfin, Big Eye and Long tail Tuna species.

Commitment to a -

- Post Release survival project for recreational caught SBT in NSW.
- Establishment of a code of practice for recreational fisher interaction with SBT- in consultation with recreational fishers.
- Introduction of recreational fisher log books for monitoring NSW recreational fisher interaction with SBT

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Burgess', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

John Burgess

Executive Officer/ Director- ANSA National Ltd

Vice President - ANSA NSW Inc