

STATE OF THE
FISHERIES REPORT
1998/1999

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Executive Director's Overview

The *State of the Fisheries* document is designed as an essential supplement to the Annual Report to Parliament and provides a more detailed level of information to support the agency's non-financial performance measures. By summarising management changes, compliance activities and research data such as landings, effort, catch rates, stock assessment and breeding stock levels, this document provides a valuable reference point for Western Australian fisheries of major importance to the commercial, recreational and aquaculture sectors. Information relevant to Fisheries WA's Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program and activities undertaken on behalf of the Commonwealth is also provided.

The report indicates that overall the major fish stocks which support fisheries in Western Australia continue to be in a reasonably healthy condition, and remedial action is occurring where stocks are under stress.

While the data provided on the status of our fish resources indicate that historical controls on fishing have been effective, ever-increasing fishing pressure, particularly on coastal fish stocks, requires that Fisheries WA must maintain its extensive research and

monitoring projects reported here to ensure that appropriate and timely management changes can be made. Similarly, field management projects by Fisheries WA regional staff reported here are essential to ensure that fishers understand and comply with the regulations to conserve fish stocks and minimise the environmental effects of fishing.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication and professionalism demonstrated by all Divisions of the agency in ensuring that these important data are collected and utilised to maintain our fisheries. Both commercial and recreational fishers are also to be commended for their high degree of support for the Fisheries WA fisheries management programs which conserve the State's fisheries.



Peter P. Rogers
Executive Director

Editor's Overview

State of the Fisheries reports in detail on the activities and impacts of the commercial and recreational fishing sectors which utilise the wild fish stocks in Western Australia. In addition, the status of the developing aquaculture industries is recorded to enable the public of Western Australia to follow the development of this important sector. Activities of the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program and the Australian Fishing Zone management group are also reported to complete the coverage of the agency's responsibilities.

For fisheries resources management programs to be successful, a high degree of cooperation is necessary between the users of the State's fish resources and the agency's Divisions of Fisheries Research and Fisheries Management Services. The level of cooperation and collaboration between fishers and agency staff is excellent, and continues to be a major factor in keeping the harvest from our fish stocks at sustainable levels. Of particular value is the contribution of all the commercial vessels in providing monthly records of catches and fishing effort, and the completion of daily research logbooks and other voluntary records by about 500 skippers. These data are of great value in monitoring both the commercial fisheries and a variety of recreationally important fish stocks. Similarly, the agency's programs are strongly supported by the Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officers, who provide recreational fishing education support as well as data for monitoring recreational stocks. Individual recreational fishers and recreational fishing clubs also voluntarily contribute significant data to the recreational fisheries monitoring projects.

Data from all of these sources, together with fishery-independent research and monitoring projects, provide the basis for fisheries management in Western Australia.

In using this volume, readers should note that the major part of the information contained in this report relates to the last full year of production from the relevant fishery sectors. Owing to the time required for the process of data gathering, validation and analysis, this period is the 1997/98 financial year or the 1998 calendar year. In contrast, the information relevant to resource management activities relates to the most recent year (1998/99) and provides an indication of actions flowing from the assessments of the state of the stocks in the previous year.

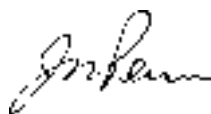
The major purpose of this report is to provide detailed information on the status of individual fisheries across the State which underpins the Performance Indicators (PIs) for the agency presented in the Annual Report to

Parliament. These PIs relate particularly to sustainability of the State's fish stocks and include measures of breeding stock levels and catch projections for all major commercial stocks. These data are summarised in Appendix 1 (repeated from Appendix 9 in the Annual Report of Fisheries WA) which sets out in tabular form the situation of the State's most important fisheries and their performance during the last reporting year. The more detailed data contained in the individual fishery status reports provide information on historical trends in catches and fishing activities. This information allows the reader to better assess the performance of the fisheries or industries covered, and provides a summary of information used to audit the agency's PIs.

It should be noted that the confidentiality provisions of the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* preclude the publication of catch and associated data for fisheries with fewer than five operators. For this reason, three fisheries previously covered by this document, the Exmouth Gulf Beach Seine Fishery, the Mid-West Coast Purse Seine Fishery and the South Coast Inshore Trawl Managed Fishery, are not publicly reported this year. These fisheries however continue to be monitored by the agency.

This volume is published each year as a companion to the Fisheries WA Annual Report to Parliament. Having been published annually since 1994/95, this series is now providing an ongoing record of the performance of the fisheries and fishing industries of Western Australia.

Preparation and validation of the extensive array of information contained within this report is a significant task to which many Fisheries WA staff contribute through each year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues in the Fisheries Management Services and Fisheries Research Divisions for their extensive contributions. Special thanks are also due to my editorial team members, Mrs Kelly Jacoby for her enthusiasm and dedication to the difficult process of compiling and formatting this volume, and Ms Fran Head for her expert assistance in the editorial process.



Dr J.W. Penn
Director Fisheries Research