

South Coast Bioregion

REGIONAL MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Recreational fishing participation for the south coast of Western Australia, between Augusta and the WA/SA border, is estimated at around 20% of recreational anglers (Bahartha and Sumner 2002), or some 120,000 anglers per year generating 2 million fishing days.

Charter activity is also important, with 20 fishing tour licences and 2 ecotour licences issued for the south coast bioregion.

Key recreational fishing areas include the major estuaries of Walpole/Nornalup, Wilson Inlet, the Albany harbours, Bremer Bay, Hopetoun, and Stokes Inlet.

Major target species in estuaries include black bream (*Acanthopagrus butcheri*), King George whiting (*Sillaginodes punctata*) and trevally (Carangidae), while shore fishing focuses on Western Australian salmon (*Arripis truttaceus*), herring (*Arripis georgianus*), whiting (Sillaginidae) and trevally. Boat fishing is concentrated near major population centres with the major target species being pink snapper (*Pagrus auratus*), queen snapper (*Nemadactylus valenciennesi*), blue groper (*Achoerodus gouldii*), shark, red snapper (*Centroberyx* spp.) and samson fish (*Seriola hippos*).

Management issues include resource-sharing conflicts between the recreational line fishery and the commercial estuarine fishery, particularly in Wilson and Stokes Inlets.

Since 1996 a number of commercial fishing licences have been bought out in fisheries important to the recreational sector, including significant numbers of herring trap net endorsements and estuarine fishing licences.

A review of recreational fishing on the south coast and development of a recreational fishing management strategy is expected to commence in 2002/03.

REGIONAL COMPLIANCE AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION OVERVIEW

Fisheries Officers working out of offices located at Esperance and Albany deal with a number of recreational fisheries within the region, including abalone, rock lobster, marine boat- and shore-based angling and estuarine netting fisheries. Officers utilise one 6.5 m patrol vessel to conduct inshore at-sea inspections, and several smaller craft to service estuarine fishers. Work in recreational fisheries principally involves checking that anglers and shellfish collectors are adhering to size and bag limits

As well as personal contacts with anglers, covert observation also plays an important role in ensuring high levels of compliance. While most recreational fishers are aware of the rules governing a fishery, and do their best to obey them, high penalties for breaking rules mean that some unscrupulous fishers are very careful to hide their illegal activities. Officers therefore regularly observe fishers from a discreet distance, particularly in the high-value abalone fishery.

Activities during 2000/01

During 2000/01, Fisheries Officers delivered 4,536 hours of

compliance work to recreational fisheries in the south coast bioregion (South Coast Recreational Compliance Table 1), concentrating mainly on checking shore- and boat-based anglers and shellfish collectors. The areas of highest risk of non-compliance with the management arrangements were considered to be abalone, cockles, marine finfish and estuarine netting.

Members of the public and commercial fishers are able to report instances of observed illegal activity through the Fishwatch system, a statewide 24-hour telephone hotline. There were 34 reports of illegal fishing activity to the Fishwatch hotline in 2000/01 in the south coast bioregion. Areas of greatest public complaint, as reported to Fishwatch, related to abalone poaching, exceeding bag limits, and illegal sale of marine finfish.

In 2000/01, the VFLO program involved 17 volunteers in the Albany and Denmark areas and 7 in Esperance, accounting for 798 contacts during the year. Community education activities conducted in the bioregion also included attendance and presentations by Fisheries Officers and VFLOs at regional shows and festivals, primary and high schools and community group meetings.

As a result of compliance activities, 15 letters of warning and 9 infringement notices were issued and 8 prosecutions initiated in the south coast bioregion. Prosecutions occur for more serious offences, and in 2000/01 most of these arose from illegal take of abalone and illegal net fishing.

SOUTH COAST RECREATIONAL COMPLIANCE TABLE 1

Summary of compliance and educative contacts and infringement types in recreational fisheries within the south coast bioregion during the 2000/01 financial year.

CONTACT WITH THE RECREATIONAL FISHING COMMUNITY	NUMBER
Hours delivered in bioregion	4,536
Fisher field contacts by Fisheries Officers (6 months)*	1,325
District Office contacts by Fisheries Officers (6 months)*	516
Fisher field contacts by VFLOs	798
Fishwatch reports **	34
OFFENCES DETECTED	NUMBER
Infringement warnings	15
Infringement notices	9
Prosecutions	8

* These figures represent regional activities conducted between 1 January and 30 June 2001, following the introduction of a new, more comprehensive system for collection of regional activity data. Since this represents an incomplete year of data, collected while Fisheries Officers were still undergoing training in the system, figures should be treated with caution.

** This represents the total number of Fishwatch reports, both commercial and recreational, since the service provider reporting mechanism cannot currently differentiate between sectors.

With increasing restrictions being placed on the metropolitan abalone fishery, there is a growing awareness of the open season and availability of abalone on the south coast. The number of people taking abalone in this region increased during 2000/01, and this is likely to escalate in coming years.

User group conflict between the recreational and commercial sectors is a continuing problem, particularly with the estuarine, beach seine and salmon fisheries. Similarly, recreational users are concerned with the development of aquaculture sites within the region and the impact this has on their use of waters and land surrounding lease sites.

Initiatives in 2001/02

It is anticipated that the new weekend closures in the commercial South Coast Estuarine Fishery, to be introduced in July 2002, will help mitigate perceptions among recreational users that this particular fishery is impacting on their catches within the local waterways.

The planned south coast review and south coast recreational fishing survey are expected to provide important data on fishing frequency and target species, as well as participants' attitudes towards conservation and the Department's compliance and education activities.

The appointment of a Community Education Officer for the southern region, scheduled for 2002, will provide a more structured and coordinated regional approach to the community education and VFLO programs. While Fisheries Officers in the districts will still have an important role to play in the VFLO program, the overall strategies for the program will be formulated by the Community Education Officer, with input from the Fisheries Officers and the VFLOs themselves.

REGIONAL RESEARCH OVERVIEW

An extensive scientific knowledge of key recreational target species in the south coast estuarine sector has been developed from research undertaken by the Department of Fisheries since the 1970s (e.g. Lenanton and Hodgkin 1985, Lenanton and Potter 1987). In addition, a number of collaborative research projects have been undertaken during the 1980s and 1990s by the Department of Fisheries with

Murdoch University postgraduate students, particularly on recreationally important species in Wilson and Walpole/Nornalup Inlets (e.g. Potter et al. 1993, Potter and Hyndes 1994).

These studies, supported by and utilising the commercial fisheries database, have provided a good basic knowledge of the key species black bream, cobbler (*Cnidoglanis macrocephalus*) and King George whiting. Relevant abundance information and stock status for these recreational/commercial stocks are reported on pp. 106–110.

For the south coast beach fishery the major target species of salmon and herring are similarly known from historical and recent FRDC-funded research projects. These data, combined with long-run commercial fisheries databases for overall measures of abundance, breeding stocks etc, provide a strong basis for recreational fishing management of this key sector. Specific data to assess the impact of recreational fishing on these key stocks was provided by a survey of shore-based fishers to estimate the recreational catch of herring and salmon, completed in 1995 (Ayvazian et al. 1997). Other species targeted by beach fishers included garfish (*Hyporhamphus melanochir*), skipjack (*Pseudocaranx dentex*), western sand whiting (*Sillago schomburgkii*), southern school whiting (*Sillago bassensis*) and King George whiting. Further survey work to estimate the impact of recreational fishing on key species in the south coast estuaries will be undertaken in 2002/03.

The significant gap in biological and fishery data in this region relates to the offshore boat angling species (e.g. trevally, queen and red snapper, blue groper and samson fish), the exception being the more abundant shark species (gummy shark, *Mustelus antarcticus*, and dusky whaler, *Carcharhinus obscurus*) which have been extensively researched under FRDC-funded projects (see p. 120). Recreational catch data for these species will be extracted from the National Recreational Fishing Survey database when it becomes available.

Research for managing all three of the south coast bioregion's recreational sectors (estuarine, beach and boat) will rely heavily on the long-run commercial fisheries databases coupled with recreational creel survey data and the national recreational database.