

# 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 16% of recreational anglers (Bahartha and Sumner 2003), or some 96,000 anglers per year generating 330,000 fishing days.

Charter activity is also important, with 20 fishing tour licences and 3 ecotour licences valid for the south coast bioregion in 2003.

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 fisheries management on the south coast and development of a recreational fishing management strategy will be undertaken in 2003/04.

## REGIONAL COMPLIANCE AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION OVERVIEW

Fisheries Officers working from District Offices located at Esperance and Albany deal with a number of recreational fisheries within the region, including abalone, rock lobster, boat- and shore-based angling and estuarine net fisheries. Compliance patrols in recreational fisheries principally involve checks to ensure that fishers are adhering to size and bag limits and complying with the attendance and closed waters restrictions that apply in the recreational net fishery. These patrols can be land-based, or Fisheries Officers may utilise a 6 m patrol vessel or several smaller craft to conduct inspections at sea or in the estuaries and river systems.

The compliance and education program in this bioregion is supported by the Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officers who conduct interactive education programs within the school system and present static displays at various community events throughout the region. The VFLOs have access to a display trailer and the necessary equipment to conduct fishing clinics and the 'Learning Circles for Fishers' program, a conservation-based community education initiative.

### Activities during 2001/02

During 2001/02, Fisheries Officers delivered 3,583 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, net fishers 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. During 2001/02, Fisheries Officers recorded 2,742 field contacts and 1,048 office contacts with recreational fishers.

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 14 reports of illegal fishing activity to the Fishwatch hotline in 2001/02 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 2001/02, the VFLO program involved 24 volunteers in the Albany and Denmark areas and 7 in Esperance, accounting for 2,698 contacts during the year. Community education activities conducted in the bioregion included attendance and presentations by Fisheries Officers and VFLOs at regional shows and festivals, primary and high schools and community group meetings, and fishing competitions.

As a result of compliance activities, 16 infringement warnings and 8 infringement notices were issued, with 9 prosecutions initiated in the south coast bioregion. Prosecutions occur for more serious offences, and in 2001/02 most of these arose from illegal take of abalone and illegal net fishing.

With increasing restrictions being placed on the high-profile 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 continued to increase during 2001/02. This trend is likely to continue in coming years, with consequent increases in the demand for compliance services.

## SOUTH COAST RECREATIONAL COMPLIANCE TABLE I

Summary of compliance and educative contacts and infringement types in recreational fisheries within the south coast bioregion during the 2001/02 financial year.

CONTACT WITH THE RECREATIONAL FISHING COMMUNITY	NUMBER
Hours delivered in bioregion	3,583
Fisher field contacts by Fisheries Officers	2,742
District Office contacts by Fisheries Officers	1,048
Fisher field contacts by VFLOs	2,698
Fishwatch reports *	14
OFFENCES DETECTED	
Infringement warnings	16
Infringement notices	8
Prosecutions	9

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

### Initiatives in 2002/03

The south coast recreational fishing survey process commenced in December 2002, with researchers gathering data on recreational fishing activities at key regional locations. This will provide important data on fishing frequency and target species, as well as participants' attitudes towards conservation and the Department's compliance and education activities. This information will in turn feed into the south coast review commencing later in 2003.

The new weekend closures in the commercial South Coast Estuarine (Interim) Managed Fishery, introduced in July 2002, have helped to mitigate perceptions among recreational users that this particular fishery is impacting on their catches within the local waterways.

Projected changes to recreational fishing regulations, due to be implemented in October 2003, will impact on south coastal compliance activities in the areas of recreational abalone restrictions and statewide fish possession and filleting rules.

The appointment of a Community Education Officer for the southern region has provided a more structured and coordinated regional approach to the community education and VFLO programs, and may assist in expanding the 'Fishers with Disabilities' program outside the metropolitan area.

## 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 Nornalup/Walpole 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. 119–122.

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*), yellowfin 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 is currently under way.

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. 132). 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.

