



RESEARCH ANGLER PROGRAM

Newsletter No.24
December 2012



Welcome to the RAP Newsletter, providing feedback on the data you are collecting and keeping you informed about what is happening at the Research Division of the Department of Fisheries.

Curious happenings in Cockburn Sound

The Cockburn Sound crab fishery re-opened in 2009/10 after a 3-year closure to allow the stock to rebuild. Since then our researchers have been busy monitoring the status of the spawning stock and they have found that the management actions taken to rebuild this stock have worked. It therefore came as somewhat of a surprise when the 2011/12 commercial catch of blue swimmer crabs in Cockburn Sound was substantially lower than expected.

The low catch was largely due to the high proportion of undersized crabs in Cockburn Sound. Research surveys indicated that juvenile recruitment was high in 2011 but this cohort did not moult during December 2011/January 2012 as they normally would have. So most of the crab stock remained slightly under the legal size throughout the fishing season.

The reason for the slow growth of crabs in Cockburn Sound is a bit of a mystery. It is possible that there were simply too many crabs in Cockburn Sound for the available resources, and the crabs could not produce enough energy to moult. The lack of moulting during the 2011/12 season was only observed in Cockburn Sound. The proportion of legal sized crabs in the Swan River, Warnbro Sound and the Peel Harvey were all at normal or higher levels.

It is hoped that the high numbers of sublegal crabs in the fishery which did not moult in the 2011/12 summer will moult in December/January 2012/13 and there will be plenty of legal sized crabs to catch in Cockburn Sound this summer.



Blue Swimmer Crabs (*Portunus pelagicus*).

Fisher of the month

The RAP fisher of the month prizes are selected at random by drawing one log sheet from those returned each month.

Congratulations go to:

- | | |
|--------|------------------------------------|
| May | Steve Downs (West Coast Bioregion) |
| June | Ben Derecki (West Coast Bioregion) |
| July | Daniel Bedo (West Coast Bioregion) |
| August | Luke Dooley (West Coast Bioregion) |

Each winner will receive a Fisheries cap and water bottle.

2011 logbook results

Over 11,500 fish were caught by our log-bookers in 2011. There were also more than 1,600 fishing trips recorded during the year, with 80% of fishing trips made in the West Coast Bioregion. Over 200 species were caught – including bony fish, cartilaginous fish (sharks and rays), cephalopods (squid and octopus), gastropods (abalone) and crustaceans (crabs and lobster). Australian herring being the most commonly caught species.

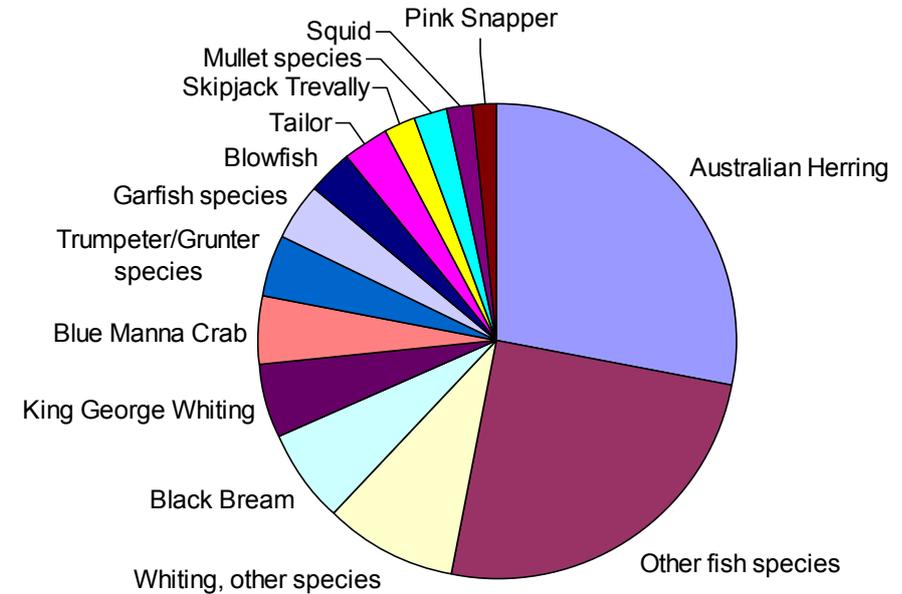
34% of all fish caught were returned to the water. The main reason people stated for returning fish was 'they preferred to'. May was the best month for catching fish, accounting for 13% of the year's catch.

In 2011, species were caught in the West Coast Bioregion that normally only occur in northern Australia. These range extensions were associated with a record strength Leeuwin Current in summer 2010/11. This caused the southward transport of northern fish species. Two examples recorded in log books for the first time in 2011 were the orange spotted toadfish (*Torquigener pallimaculatus*) – rarely seen south of Shark Bay – and the radiant rockcod (*Epinephelus radiatus*) – normally found on the north-west shelf.

Redmap launches in December

You might be one of the many WA recreational fishers or divers who, in the summer of 2010/11, reported unusual occurrences of warmer water species off Perth and the South-west. These were linked to a 'marine heat wave' that saw red bass, damselfish and parrotfish recorded at Rottnest, marlin and cobia caught off Busselton and Spanish mackerel, mahi mahi, whale sharks and manta rays reported as far south as Albany.

These sightings are valuable data for Redmap. This is a national project aimed at getting 'citizen scientists' throughout Australia to collect information on our changing oceans by reporting sightings and uploading photos of unusual marine life at their local fishing, diving or swimming spots. To get involved simply log onto www.redmap.org.au to register and share your sightings with other fishos, divers and beach combers. Redmap wants reports of unusual sightings of any marine life, not just fish, but also turtles, marine mammals, crabs, crayfish, and seaweeds. The organisation is hoping to recruit many of the more than three million Australians who go fishing, diving or boating around the 60,000 km of our coastline.



Species recorded during 2011 in recreational angler log books (Other fish species includes 188 different fish species)

This is a great example of log-bookers directly assisting researchers in monitoring how ecosystems are changing in response to environmental conditions.

Those of you who have sent in log sheets for the past three years should have already received your personalised fishing statistic report. Hopefully you found this interesting and it shows your catch rates improving!

We would also like to thank Jeff Empson, who completed an incredible nine

logbooks in less than two years! Sadly for us at Fisheries, Jeff moved to South Australia earlier this year and can therefore no longer participate in the program.

Please tell your family and friends who fish about the log book program. The more participants we have, the better our knowledge and understanding of recreational fishing activity in WA. For more information:

W: www.fish.wa.gov.au (and search under 'volunteers')



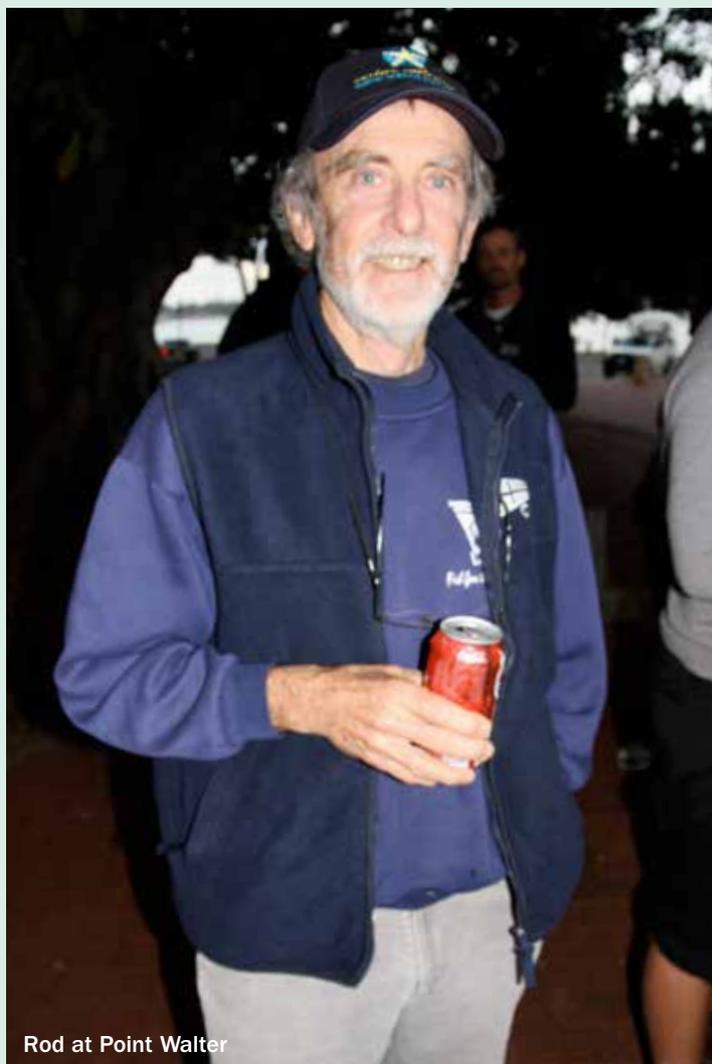
redmap 
SPOT. LOG. MAP.

Rod Lenanton

After an amazing career with the Department of Fisheries, where he has worked for more than 45 years, Senior Principal Research Scientist, Rod Lenanton, has decided to retire. Rod joined the Department of Fisheries in 1962 through a cadetship. He has worked on many different fish species and fisheries; including western rock lobster, Shark Bay prawns, the Exmouth Gulf turtle fishery, Shark Bay whiting, snapper, Australian salmon and herring.

Rod was the inaugural leader of the finfish research group. Over the years his role changed from full-time hands-on scientist to managing the expanding finfish research group and mentoring young scientists. Rod has represented the Department at State and national level. He was actively involved in developing and maintaining crucial links between the Department and Western Australia's universities, especially UWA and Murdoch University. Rod has always been a strong advocate of dedicated research into recreational fishing in WA, and played a key role in the first published recreational fishing survey in Australia. He was the 2011 winner of the *K.R. Allen Award*, presented by the Australian Society for Fish Biology for his significant contribution to fish and fisheries research and management.

As an expert recreational fisher and a highly respected fishery scientist, his retirement will leave a big gap in the Department. However, he will still be around, working with us on a casual basis and continuing to volunteer with tailor angling at Point Walter – a project he helped to start and which is now one of Australia's longest running finfish recruitment projects. Our very best wishes go to Rod on his 'semi-retirement'.



Rod at Point Walter

New south coast demersal fish project – please donate your frames

In January 2013 the Department of Fisheries, in collaboration with Murdoch University, will commence a three year research project to determine the status of inshore demersal fish stocks (i.e. bottom dwelling fish that live at 20-250 metres depth) along the south coast of WA.

Priority species for this project are snapper (*Pagrus auratus*), Bight redfish (*Centroberyx gerrardi*) and blue morwong (*Nemadactylus valenciennesi*). These will be used by the Department as 'indicator species' to monitor and assess the status of inshore demersal fish stocks on the south coast.

Demersal fish tend to be relatively vulnerable to fishing due to their biological characteristics (long-lived, slow growing, slow to reproduce, etc). Recent research suggests Bight redfish can live for at least 80 years.

The skeletons ('frames') of these indicator species are essential in assessing their stock status and to ensure there are fish for the future along the south coast. We rely on your support of our Send Us Your Skeletons program. For details on how you can become part of this valuable initiative:

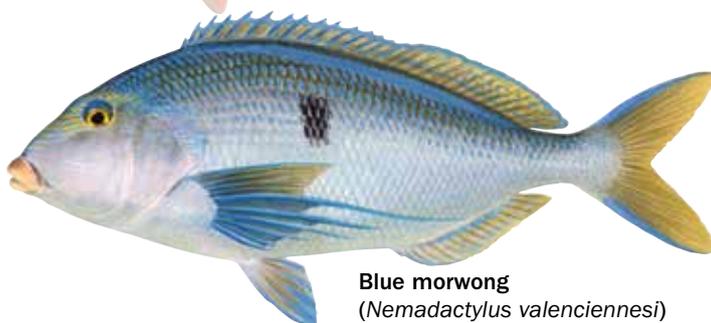
W: www.fish.wa.gov.au/frames



Snapper
(*Pagrus auratus*)



Bight redfish
(*Centroberyx gerrardi*)



Blue morwong
(*Nemadactylus valenciennesi*)

Winners in the 'frame game'

Lancelin Angling and Aquatic Club member Glen Weymouth was thrilled to win a charter fishing trip to the Montebello Islands after donating a fish frame to our Send Us Your Skeletons program.

Fishers who donated frames were entered into a prize draw, with Montebello Island Safaris (www.montebello.com.au) generously providing the major prize – a fishing charter trip for two people. This will also feature as the main prize for 2012/13.

Glen, a 33-year-old electrician, won the trip for donating a dhufish frame. "I'm going to take my dad on the trip. He's well known in the Perth recreational fishing community as 'Bandit' on account of having only one arm and being a bit of a character. He's delighted too."

Other fishers also won prizes including fishing rods, lure packs, eskies and filleting knives.

We'd like to thank all the sponsors who donated prizes: Mills Charters, Port Bouvard Charters, BCF Midland, White Salt Restaurant, Bluewater Tackle World, Fishing WA, Pristine Fishing, Shakespeare, UglyStik, Recfishwest and McArthy Saltwater Baits.



L-R; Graham 'Bandit' Weymouth, Department of Fisheries Ambassador Glen Jakovich, Montebello Island Safaris' Liz and Jim Bungey, and prize winner Glen Weymouth.

Fishers who donate frames of the required species before June 30 2013, will go into the main draw, plus other draws throughout the year.

For more information:

W: www.fish.wa.gov.au/frames

T: 9203 0111

Merry
Christmas
and happy
fishing!



Thank you for your ongoing support

The research angler program is managed by the nearshore and estuarine finfish research team

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Fish for the future