

# Fisheries resource allocation—a recreational perspective—I

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I would like to comment on several specific issues and problems which frequently arise when we talk about how best to allocate or share fishery resources.

The first point is in relation to funding. The Final Report of the national ESD (Ecologically Sustainable Development) Working Group on Fisheries estimated that in 1990-91 about \$114 million was spent on fisheries research and management, representing about 10% of the gross value of commercial production. Table 1, reproduced from the Fisheries ESD Report, gives details of fishery value and expenditure for each State/Territory and the Commonwealth. The expenditure in Table 1 seems like a significant amount until you find out that it includes some spending on recreational fisheries and other programmes not directly related to commercial fisheries. It is much smaller again if you take out expenditure on commercial crustacean and mollusc fisheries (e.g. rock lobsters, prawns, scallops, oysters).

On the recreational side, P.A. Management Consultants estimated that in 1984 just over \$2 billion was spent by recreational fishers in pursuit of their sport. I know this figure has been criticised by some as being too 'rubbery', but it is the

only one we have, and we think it is conservative. If we project this figure forward assuming a modest but consistent increase in numbers of recreational fishers, then annual spending on recreational fishing is now probably closer to \$4 billion than the original estimate of \$2 billion. Remember that we are looking only at expenditure here as a measure of the value of recreational fishing.

During the development in the early 1990s of a national policy for recreational fishing in Australia it was estimated that State and Commonwealth governments collectively spent about \$23 million per year on recreational fisheries research and management. This represents less than 1% of our estimate of recent total annual expenditure by recreational fishers. The national recreational fishing policy document also identified the need for an additional amount of about \$21 million to be spent to bring recreational fisheries research and management up to acceptable levels.

There is also a need to have a look at the funding situation fishery by fishery. A good illustration of this is the east coast tuna fishery, where the domestic commercial longline component is valued at approximately \$9 million whereas annual expendi-

ture by sports anglers is estimated at about \$205 million. Management and research has until now focussed mainly on benefits to the commercial fishery, and I believe there is a need to have a look there to see if something can be done to step up the amount of management and research done on the recreational side of the east coast tuna fishery.

The main reason I have raised the issue of funding is to emphasise that if we want to achieve all of the goals for recreational fishing that have been discussed in this Workshop and will continue to be discussed in the future, then someone has got to come up with some extra money.

The next point I would like to discuss is what we mean when we talk about sharing or allocating access to fish stocks. The Brundtland Report to the World Commission on the Environment and Development defined Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) as those actions which 'meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. I've heard this goal expressed in several other forms during this morning's Workshop proceedings.

Fisheries resources are common property. This means they belong to all members of the community, and yet no individual has exclusive rights to either the whole or part. Governments are responsible for effectively managing these resources on behalf of current and future generations. Proper allocation of access to these resources, together with other biological, social and economic goals, is a fundamental requirement for responsible use and management of fish stocks.

The issuing of a licence to catch fish does not give ownership of the fish to the licensee, only the right to go fishing for particular species or stocks using particular fishing methods. Allocation of fisheries resources between competing users does not necessarily mean 100% one way or the other. Already we have many examples where fish resources have been more appropriately shared through the use of management tools such as bag limits, restricted fishing areas, licence buy-backs, and the declaration of fish sanctuaries and areas of protected habitat.

Some of the circumstances which may make it necessary or desirable to consider allocating fishery resources include:

*Stock depletion*—which could be caused by overfishing by commercial or recreational fishers, or by loss of habitat, or by water pollution, or by many other things.

*Competition for fish stocks*—for example in waters adjacent to large population centres, where constant conflict between commercial and recreational fishers may require resolution.

*Economic considerations*—for example where the economic value of a recreational fishery is considerably higher than the economic value of a commercial fishery based on the same fish stock. Such circumstances don't necessarily mean that a change in allocation will automatically occur, but they do act as a flag that says maybe we should look at the situation to see if there is any need for changes to existing allocations.

Finally, I want to look at some examples of what has already happened in the area of fisheries resource allocation. A very simple one is in Moreton Bay, southern Queensland, where commercial trawlers

are not allowed to operate between 6.00 pm each Friday and 6.00 pm the following Sunday, leaving the Bay available primarily to recreational fishers on weekends. In my opinion that is a form of resource allocation, because time periods have been designated during which recreational anglers can have access to fish stocks without interference from commercial trawlers going back and forth.

Another interesting case is at Red Cliffs Peninsula (also in the Moreton Bay area), where the local council has proposed the closure of nearshore reefs to commercial gill netting. This fishery is comparatively small, and so a quarter of a million dollars has been made available to assist commercial fishers to move their fishing activities away from the nearshore reefs. The Council's reasoning for this proposal was that the nearshore reefs, being close to beaches and boat launching ramps, would be of greatest benefit to the community if they were primarily available to anglers and other recreational user groups.

Allocation of fish stocks in the South Australian section of the Murray River has been progressively towards the recreational fishing sector as the commercial fishery declines through retirement and subsequent withdrawal of licences.

Another form of resource allocation can be seen in the abalone fisheries of Western Australia. As I understand it, commercial abalone divers have rights to fish during the week while recreational fishers have rights to take abalone on the weekends. However, in order to control the overall catch, recreational fishers can only take abalone during a two hour period each day, and there is also a bag limit.

In the Northern Territory, barramundi resources were in effect allocated when the Government closed the Mary and East Alligator River systems to commercial fishing, restricted access to the Daly River system, and at the same time imposed a bag limit on recreational catches to protect valuable stocks.

When the 200 nm Australian Fishing Zone was declared in 1979, the Commonwealth Government bowed to pressure from the recreational fishing sector and excluded foreign commercial vessels from longlining in waters off the North Queensland coast commonly known as the 'Cairns Area'. It was argued that the benefits to the Australian public of having a recreational game fishery for marlin and other species in this area were far greater than those derived from allowing foreign access to these resources. Mainly through the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), this area has subsequently expanded to include waters off Townsville, and longlining has also been prohibited in an area off Frazer Island, off parts of the NSW coast, and out to 50 nm around the Australian coastline.

Overseas there are many examples of fish stock allocation, such as the red drum fishery in Texas and the Atlantic salmon fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador. In the latter fishery the Canadian Government has expended \$39.1 million to buy out 3000 salmon fishing licences.

These are illustrations of issues and problems associated with allocation of fisheries resources, and ways of dealing with them. No doubt there are many more issues and options, and I hope we can develop some of these further in the discussion sessions of this Workshop.

**Table 1.** Gross value of fishery production (GVP) and expenditure on fisheries management and research in Australia in 1990–91.

Agency	GVP (\$m)		Expenditure (\$m)		Expenditure as % of GVP			
	Total	Fin Fish	Management	Research	Total	Management	Research	Total
NSW	82.6	21.2	10.0	6.5	16.5	12.1	7.9	20.0
VIC	67.4	21.7	10.6	2.8	13.4	15.7	4.1	19.9
QLD	167.1	66.2	11.7	4.2	15.9	7.0	2.5	9.5
WA	365.6	29.4	7.7	3.7	11.4	2.1	1.0	3.1
SA	93.7	16.8	4.6	3.4	8.0	4.9	3.6	8.5
TAS	114.0	41.4	1.6	2.5	4.1	1.4	2.2	3.6
NT	7.4	6.1	1.4	0.7	2.1	18.9	9.5	28.4
AFS*	238.8	109.5	18.3	11.0	29.3	7.7	4.6	12.3
CSIRO	—	—	—	11.5	11.5	—	—	—
OTHER	—	—	—	1.6	1.6	—	—	—
<b>NATIONAL</b>	<b>1136.6</b>	<b>312.3</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>47.9</b>	<b>113.8</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>10.0</b>

\* AFS = Australian Fisheries Service, predecessor of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) as manager of Commonwealth fisheries