

Managing recreational fishers— changing the mindset

D.A. Hall

*Department of Primary Industries, Fisheries
GPO Box 1625
Adelaide SA 5000*

Fisheries agencies worldwide, and particularly in developed nations like Australia, spend substantial amounts of money on research, compliance, policy development and restocking programmes aimed at improving the management and quality of recreational fishing.

Much of this expenditure is wasted, however, through a lack of recognition by the angling public and the general community of the need for regulation of their activities and the importance of compliance with these regulations. A high level of involvement by the general community is needed to enable a level of self-regulation of fishing activities. This would seem a natural course to take, in one form or other, particularly given the low likelihood of offence detection across our vast nation.

Some community involvement programmes such as 'Neighbourhood Watch' and Landcare have been extremely successful in reducing local crime rates and improving the ecological sustainability of agricultural production respectively. I think that as fisheries managers we should look closely at the structure, support and history of these two programmes and develop a suitable community involvement programme that has the following broad aims:

1. Improving the level of compliance with fisheries management regulations through higher levels of community understanding, 'people' pressure and offence detection/reporting;
2. enabling more objective and accurate assessment of the management needs of the 'grass roots' recreational fishers in particular, as well as the general community;
3. enabling recreational fisher input into reducing the ecological and environmental impacts of agricultural, industrial and domestic developments of our fisheries resources; and
4. monitoring the effects of fishing on fish stocks at the local level.

If we look at existing fisheries extension programmes in Australia of the present time, one must really question the extent to which various State agencies are able to get community recognition and understanding of fisheries management issues through 'normal' extension strategies i.e. schools programmes, publications, media involvement, Boat Shows etc.

Western Australia has commenced a voluntary liaison officer programme with some success. I would be interested to learn whether any other States have

developed their own community involvement programmes for fisheries resources management.

In South Australia, we are severely limited in our extension resources—in fact for the last twelve months or so we have been without a dedicated fisheries extension officer/manager. I have recognised the need for a well defined fisheries extension programme and have managed to initiate two developments in this area to date:

1. Replacing the Department's 'SAFIC' magazine, which had a technical and commercial focus, with 'Southern Fisheries' which is directed more at the recreational sector. 20 000 copies are produced every quarter and are available free through registered fishing tackle stores and selected roadhouses. Although initial costs are high (\$2.40 per copy) cash flow projections indicate the likelihood of a full cost recovery through advertising and sponsorship by the eighth edition; after two editions we are on target; and
2. Combining with a local fishing media identity (Bruce Harris) to develop a 'Fishcare Certificate' course through his long running popular fishing schools. These are well attended and this approach should improve the awareness levels of a significant number of people. It is also hoped that 'graduates' will form the basis for a fisheries volunteer programme and for developing the proposed community 'Fishcare' programme in South Australia.

The main components of the fisheries extension process are as follows:

1. Communicating information and technology.

2. Fisher and community group involvement.
3. Non formal adult education and training.
4. Problem definition and feedback to research.
5. Facilitating the achievement of government goals for the recreational fishing sector.
6. Providing feedback to fishery management committees and government policy formulators/advisers.
7. Providing advice to individuals.

Enabling these extension activities to occur requires the following actions:

1. Empowering local fishing groups and communities.
2. Assisting fishing communities in accessing and interpreting information for decision making based on increased self-reliance.
3. Developing partnerships between government fisheries agencies and the community, fishing bodies and clubs etc.
4. Having community development, social equity and environmental issues recognised as part of government policy.
5. Linking science and research to the community and thereby capturing the benefit of new information.

Just as the community-based Landcare programme has been a useful measuring stick for the success of agricultural research, development and extension programmes across Australia, a community involvement programme is needed to enable this to be achieved in the fisheries arena. If we look at the Landcare programme for a moment, the relevance of the approach in terms of

sustainable fishing and environmental issues is obvious and the results are impressive.

I have deliberately avoided discussion on the important issue of funding but suggest that we again look closely at a funding structure incorporating State, Commonwealth and user contributions similar to Landcare.

A direct link between Fishcare groups and Landcare groups in terms of environmental matters that relate to land use in riparian zones could well be through recognition of the problem by Fishcare groups and scientists and, if the problem relates to agricultural practices, provision of funds to Landcare groups to remedy the problem. An example of this would be the impact of agricultural run-off and high nutrient loading on seagrass beds in Upper Spencer Gulf. Figure 1 demonstrates how Landcare groups could link with environmental aspects of the Fishcare programme and splits Fishcare into a recreational development programme and a fish habitat programme.

There are a number of issues specific to the sustainable development of recreational fishing that would be relevant to the recreational development programme. Examples include community involvement in compliance and research programmes, restocking activities and the construction of artificial reefs. These developments would focus on improving the variety and quality of fishing available to recreational fishers, particularly in waters adjacent to capital cities.

The fish habitat programme would deal specifically with fish habitat and pollution issues, including assisting with remedial action associated with industrial, domestic and agricultural pollution. This would not conflict with the objectives of the existing

Ocean Rescue 2000 programme or 'Coastwatch' groups but rather would complement these programmes with outcomes directed towards fish and fish habitat. The potential advantage of this approach over Coastwatch groups that are orientated specifically towards conservation and the environment is that recreational fishers are a high participant group of committed recreationists that may only become actively involved if they can see the programme in outcome terms that are specific to their recreation. This may produce a higher level of community involvement and more effective results than could be achieved by a programme that had purely a conservation and environmental ethic, and which sought to involve 'ordinary' members of the community.

In addition to conducting recreational fishing developments and environmental work, there is also a need to empower community fishing groups (who may initially be existing fishing clubs) to monitor the effects of fishing and make recommendations to peak management committees on fisheries policy issues.

As has occurred in North American waters in particular, there is a strong movement in South Australia for decision making with respect to our fisheries to revert back to smaller geographic areas.

People are insisting on control over that which affects the communities they live in.

Community advisers are needed to respond to these new interests by encouraging communication between groups, industries and government to enable critical input into fisheries management planning. The objective is to move fishery resource protection essentially from a reactive to a

proactive endeavour. In South Australia we have used regional fisheries officers to coordinate 'team meetings' with interested members of the community in a partnership approach with some early success.

It is hoped that autonomous community groups will eventually stem from this approach but a considerable effort is needed in terms of training, communication and administration of an extensive volunteer programme and funds and resources are a real limiting factor at present.

In summary then, I am proposing that senior management in each State sit down and work out in some detail how we can empower community and recreational fisher groups to enable more effective problem recognition and management of both our important recreational fisheries and the environment and habitat which supports them.

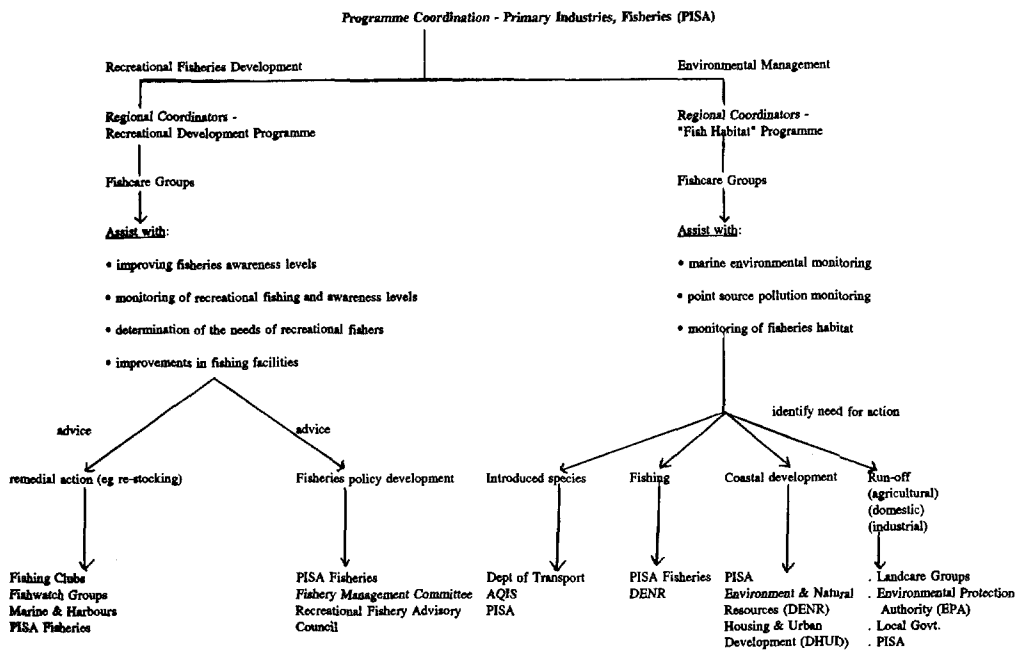


Figure 1. Proposed fishcare programme structure.