

The Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW "Promoting Sustainable Fishing"



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Blue Groper Research Underway to Determine if The Bronte - Coogee Aquatic Reserve Will Increase in Size.

Representatives from the RFA of NSW, ANSA, Sydney Metropolitan Division of NSWFCFA and South Sydney AFA were invited to attend the recently held community forum to discuss increasing the size of the aquatic reserve.

The current aquatic reserve has a NSW Fisheries closure for catching of groper from North Clovelly to the Southern Headland of Gordon's Bay. Whilst recreational anglers have supported this, it seems research is being undertaken to see if the gropers need additional protection. Line fishing is allowed in the reserve. Anglers are just not allowed to fish for groper within this area. Bluey, our iconic gropers have and continue to provide hours of enjoyment for SCUBA and snorkeling enthusiast almost daily within this reserve.

Pressure from locals and the Councils has seen the DECC initiate a new project to start tagging blue groper with acoustic tags from Cape Banks to North Bondi. This will assess the connectivity between habitats. Both SCUBA and snorkeling groups are pushing for an increase in the protection of groper from Bondi to Cape Banks. The research project that will be undertaken was explained at the community forum and the rationale was accepted by all present. It is refreshing to see such detailed research being undertaken before an expansion is considered.



The Bronte-Coogee Aquatic Reserve covers 42 hectares from the southern end of Bronte Beach to the northern end of Coogee Beach, including the foreshore (below Mean High Water), sea bed and waters out to 100m. The research project will run from June 2009 until July 2010 and is designed to:

- Determine the habitat, home range requirements and residency time of eastern blue gropers.
- Determine the connectivity and distances between blue groper habitats both within and adjacent to the Reserve through development of a detailed habitat map for the sea bed areas of interest.
- And to inform and educate the local community on the values of the aquatic reserve, and the process associated with developing management arrangements.

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As stated previously part of the research project will involve the tagging of up to 30 eastern blue groper (both male and female) with internal transmitters. This will provide information on what areas they frequent, how long they spend in each location and how large each individual's home range is. In order that researchers and fishers can identify gropers that have been internally tagged for this study, these fish will also be tagged with a clearly visible external “spaghetti” tag.

Transmitter signals will be detected by an array of acoustic receivers deployed in and around the Reserve. The study area will focus on the existing blue groper fisheries closure within the Reserve to determine whether the closure is of adequate size to effectively protect the majority of groper within the Reserve.

At the end of the meeting it was widely accepted by all present, including recreational anglers that if the science is sound and added protection is needed, then the DECC would start a review of the reserve. It was also accepted that if the science dictates that additional protection is not needed, the DECC would embark on an educational strategy focusing on the existing reserve and its inhabitants.

The RFA will now work closely with the researchers and utilise its extensive contact network to spread the message. It will also assist the researchers in targeting the non-english speaking anglers who fish the area. The RFA has a comprehensive non-english speaking network in place that will be used to disseminate all of the information. An update on the research is due in 6 months time.

For more information on the research project, please contact Dr Tracey Macdonald at tracey.macdonald@dpi.nsw.gov.au or phone 02 49163826.

Also check out the following links:

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/09421bluegroperbcar.pdf>

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/parks/09423bluegroperposter>