

Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW Inc.

Policy Statements 2006



The Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW
“Promoting Sustainable Fishing”

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RFA of NSW Recreational Fishing Policy

The RFA Mission is:

To be recognised as the peak recreational fishing body in NSW. In pursuit of that mission RFA has two goals;

- **RFA to deliver leadership to the recreational fishing industry.**
- **Contribute to the sustainability of our fisheries resources.**

Recreational fishing involves some 1,000,000 participants around NSW each year and is considered to contribute \$1 billion to the economy annually and employs around 30,000 persons.

Political parties and politicians need to recognize the economic and social values of the recreational fishing industry that have been historically understated and poorly understood.

In this context RFA has prepared a list of desirable outcomes for inclusions in a recreational fishing policy of political parties at a state level.

A dominant consideration for RFA is a fisheries management environment which will maintain fish stocks as a sustained resource rather than a declining one. Sustainability indicators for many fisheries continue to show a decline in stocks.

As part of RFA policy we recognise the rights of commercial and indigenous fishers and the need for them to coexist with recreational fishers.

Fishing Outcomes.

- Formal recognition of recreational fishing as an industry that contributes to the state economy.
- Formal recognition of fishing as a sport.
- Recreational fishers to be represented on all State Fisheries Management Advisory Committees and other state agency advisory bodies where recreational fishers are stakeholders.
- Establish funding for state sporting events conducted by state fishing organizations
- Recreational fishing to be allowed in all National or Marine Parks where there has been a history of recreational fishing.
- No loss of access to fishing grounds through the establishment of Marine Protected Areas.
- Aquaculture development should not adversely impact on access to areas by other users and any assigning of areas to aquaculture must be done in consultation with relevant recreational fishing organizations.
- No nett loss of fisheries habitats or wetlands.
- All billfish to be declared non-commercial species.
- Ensure the use of by-catch reduction devices in State managed fisheries and upgrade their efficiency.
- Any further expansion of the commercial fishery, both for human consumption or feedstock to be closely monitored (via appropriate scientific research) and supervised to ensure that there is not any unacceptable level of exploitation of this resource.
- Finfish trawling in waters less than 100m deep is unacceptable.

RFA believes that political parties must have a recreational fishing policy within a wider fishing industry policy. Recreational fishers can then assess this policy and determine the level of support.

RFA of NSW Commercial Fishing Policy

Commercial fishing has been recognised in scientific studies both globally and locally as causing damage to non-target species and damage to critical habitat. This is important to the commercial and trawl industry as well as impacting on the life cycle of many other species.

In accordance with RFA Policy the fishery must be managed on a sustainable basis. It is necessary for this Commercial Fishing Policy to be seen to be achievable and realistic whilst recognising that change cannot occur overnight and that the established practices are lawful and are perceived within the commercial fishing industry to be sustainable.

The key elements of the policy are;

- That management of the industry takes into consideration the need for benefit to the broader community and the fishing industry.
- That by-catch reduction devices (BRD's) be made compulsory in all Trawl Fisheries.
- That estuary and bay Beam trawling is phased out totally by no later than 2009 with a 20 % reduction of the original total effort per annum.
- That the by-catch of non-target species be eliminated by 2009
- That extensive studies and mapping be undertaken to identify critical habitat including sea-grass and shoal areas within 5 nautical miles of the NSW Coast and that once identified these critical areas be declared "No Trawling Zones".
- As an interim measure, gear restrictions should be imposed by July 2006 to restrict the size of gear in all water less than 10 metres deep at low tide.
- The Environmental Protection Act should be amended to include the dumping of trawl discards that washes ashore as industrial waste and subject to cost recovery for clean-up operations.
- The impact of trawling on benthic flora and fauna and the seabed is eliminated by 2009.
- That license fees within the East Coast Trawl Fisheries be adjusted to ensure they pay the full cost of management, enforcement, monitoring, research and restructure in the industry.
- That industry and researchers work towards development of techniques that prevent trawl damage to benthic and non-target species.

The Commercial Industry is an important part of NSW's economy and if managed properly, will be of significant benefit to the broader community and improve cost efficiency for the industry.

RFA NSW recognises that there are many Australians who do not fish and have a right to eat fish products. It is important that present and future generations have an opportunity to continue to enjoy the benefits of that resource.

RFA of NSW Fish Handling Policy

The RFA Fish Handling Policy is a code of practice that is to be followed by all recreational fishers where fish are intended to be released as a result of size limits, bag limits, protected species, closed seasons, restricted access, stronger conservation ethics and voluntary convictions.

Fish should be caught, handled and released in a manner that will ensure that they are returned to the water in as healthy a condition as possible.

- Do not play a fish out to exhaustion before landing.
- Do not bring a fish in too “green” as this will increase the risk of damage from the fish thrashing about after being taken from the water.
- Do not place the fish on a hot, dry surface for hook removal - use a wet towel on which to rest the fish and wet hands before handling.
- Leaving a fish in the water during release is the best way to increase the fish's chance of survival after release.
- Direct sunlight can damage fish eyes – be careful of exposing by shading fish on capture by positioning body over fish for example.
- Use barbless hooks or hooks with the barb flattened. If using bait use hook types such as non offset circle hooks that maximise the probability of the hook being lodged in the jaw and minimise hook damage.
- Use a hook out or long nosed pliers for quick removal of hooks taking care not to damage the fish further.
- Work rapidly but without haste to ensure the fish is out of the water for the least time possible.
- Large fish should have their body fully supported at all times to avoid damage to internal organs which may result from the fish being held upright by the jaw. The best method is to place a hand under the stomach while still in the water and take the weight off the hook. Very big fish should not be removed from the water.
- Landing nets, especially knotless nets, are acceptable to assist with the landing of a fish however gaffs should not be used.
- Fish should be released by careful placement back into the water – some fish may need to be swum around to ensure revival. Do not just throw fish overboard
- Options such as weighted lines and release traps should be considered where predators are present or where reef fish have been brought up from deep water.
- Use appropriate tackle and bring the fish in quickly to reduce exhaustion. Using tackle that is too light and playing the fish to exhaustion depletes the fish's energy reserves and can cause mortality.
- Plan ahead and be prepared to release a fish before it is hooked.
- Avoid removing the fishes slime which protects it from bacterial infections.
- Use good judgement if you decide to take a fish. Never gaff a fish until you are sure it is of legal size
- Avoid gut-hooking fish. Fishing with live baits increases the risk of gut hooking a fish destined for release. Using artificial lures and baits reduces that risk.
- Large gamefish such as billfish, tuna and sharks should be brought quickly alongside the boat. Do not attempt to boat these large fishes. Do not take an exhausted fish out of the water. Fish that are in good shape should be released quickly by removing the hook or cutting the leader as close to the hook as possible. If the fish is totally exhausted, revive it by towing it slowly forward, making sure the head is totally submerged.

RFA of NSW firmly believes that it is the responsibility of every angler to strive for 100% survival of fish that are to be released. A released fish has a chance to spawn again and even be caught again.

RFA of NSW Stocking Policy

RFA of NSW acknowledges scientific studies both globally and locally that indicate as wild fisheries worldwide become depleted, both public and private fisheries agencies are turning increasingly to stock enhancement programs using captivity-bred fish. Overfishing, habitat degradation, barriers to migration, altered flow rates, pollution, competition with exotic species, deforestation, watershed erosion and sedimentation have all combined to reduce wild fish populations.

Despite their widespread use, many doubts have been raised about the effectiveness of supplementation programs. Problems associated with stock enhancement programs may result from genetic factors. Loss of genetic diversity is a major risk factor. It can reduce the ability of a population to survive environmental change, new diseases, parasites, competitors or predators.

The main issues that result in genetic problems in captivity-bred populations are:

- The use of low numbers of parental stock.
- Inbreeding as a result of mating closely related individuals.
- Raising fish in an artificial environment.
- Using parental stock with low or unrepresentative genetic variation.
- Domination of breeding by a small number of breeding stock.
- Breeding with unequal numbers of parents and swamping of wild populations by genetically homogeneous hatchery fish.

RFA of NSW believes that adopting a code of practice that incorporates the following will reduce the risk associated with restocking:

- Limit inbreeding.
- Maintain an effective population size.
- Prevent large fluctuations in brood stock numbers from year to year.
- Capture and maintain wild genetic variation.
- Limit wild gene pool swamping from genetically homogeneous fingerlings.
- Reduce the effects of artificial selection.
- Reduce the probability of outbreeding depression.

As most public and private fisheries agencies struggle for dwindling resources it remains important to maximise the positive contributions that stock enhancement programs can make. These contributions can be greatly enhanced with the use of sound genetic protocols. Indeed, through clever manipulation of genetic principles we cannot only minimise the deleterious effects of captive breeding programs we can also maximise adaptive potential that populations need for survival in the future.

RFA of NSW Freshwater Policy

RFA of NSW Freshwater Policy revolves around the protection of native freshwater fish habitat and to work with NSW Fisheries, acclimatization societies, fishing clubs and any other group or government agency to achieve this aim.

Freshwater outcomes:

- To work with NSW Fisheries, acclimatization societies, fishing clubs, and any other group or government agency in, where required, stocking viable freshwater streams, rivers and impoundment's with fish suitable to that area.
- To co-operate with NSW Fisheries, acclimatization societies, fishing clubs and any other group or government agency in the control of undesirable exotic fish and aquatic weeds.
- To assist in the promotion of controlling undesirable plants such as willows, blackberry, broom, gorse etc from the freshwater fishing environment.
- To help educate freshwater anglers to respect the freshwater fishing habitat by not littering, and if necessary removing other peoples litter from the scene. Which is the right thing to do, not doing so can jeopardize access for all anglers. This should be a global objective of all waters.
- In educating freshwater anglers to respect other people's rights in seeking landowner permission regarding access. Ignorance is not an excuse and it is up to the angler to know or find out. Abusing landowner's rights and not seeking approval for access can jeopardize access to those who use the correct procedure.
- To work with NSW Fisheries, acclimatization societies, clubs, other groups and Government agencies in acquiring more permanent access to viable freshwater fishing locations.
- To work with NSW Fisheries, acclimatization societies, fishing clubs, other groups and government departments in improving fish passage and acceptable environmental flows on our streams and waterways.
- To cooperate with state and local government, and chambers of commerce in considering the impact that socio-economics of freshwater fishing has on regions.
- To consider the promotion of the development of acceptable controlled camping facilities in National Parks, reserves etc., if and where it is felt that it would be of benefit to anglers and the well being of the area.

RFA of NSW Aquaculture Policy

RFA of NSW acknowledges that aquaculture is a growing industry throughout Australia and it is strongly supported by the State Governments.

Aquaculture products are diverse and include pearl shell, oysters, abalone and other molluscs, marine and freshwater crustaceans and finfish for consumption and stocking purposes. Less known products of aquaculture include micro algae, zooplankton, aquarium fish and plants and other organisms used for the production of chemicals and dyes. Crocodiles are considered to be a product of aquaculture.

All aquaculture involves the intensive management of large numbers of the target species, usually in an enclosed monoculture environment.

Marine aquaculture typically is based in sheltered inshore or estuarine waters with areas of river/seabed "leased" to the operation. Freshwater ventures usually are contained within man made ponds/lakes established on private land. These ventures capture run-off or take water from nearby streams and return "used" water to below the intake point. Proposals to cycle water from artesian sources have been successfully evaluated and afford an excellent opportunity for further development of this natural resource.

The main benefit to recreational fishers from aquaculture is a lessening of the pressure upon those wild fish stocks providing quantities of product for market.

The major issues of concern for recreational fishers are:

- Disease
- Translocation
- Access

Clearly each and every operation needs to be managed differently. There are principals however, when applied broadly, which can address these concerns.

The adoption of a code of conduct that directly address RFA's concerns by all industry players is recommended. Additionally, RFA NSW Inc. needs to both maintain and stress its opposition to any loss of access to recreational fishers.

RFA of NSW supports aquaculture developments on the following conditions:

- Aquaculture development of more than 1 hectare is to be considered an environmentally relevant activity within the guidelines of the Environment Protection Act 1994.
- Current Legislation relating to aquaculture be amended to comprehensively cover all aquatic and marine species including molluscs.
- A system of random inspections by an independent authority be introduced to ensure aquaculture facilities are complying with all the conditions of their Aquaculture License.
- New developments be required to recycle water and include on-site water treatment to remove contaminant (including nutrient and sediment) loads for any discharge.
- Development that is not within the coastal zone, does not interfere with ephemeral or permanent wetlands and other critical habitats and avoids Acid Sulphate Soils.
- Water quality in existing developments is managed on the basis of "Zero Impact Discharge".

- Aquaculture development has no adverse impact on any waterway receiving discharge from any facility.
- The aquaculture industry ensures that aquaculture of species and distinct genetic identities in catchments where they do not occur naturally should be subject to the same decision making protocols as a proposed translocation into open waters.
- Aquaculture farms be required to maintain natural buffer zones of at least 500 metres from all natural watercourses.
- The importation of “Green” seafood product for domestic human consumption or feedstock is to be closely monitored to ensure strict compliance with established quarantine and world health practices.
- Aquaculture developments to have a disease risk control and management plan that complies with government policy as a condition of all licences.
- Aquaculture developments lodge an environmental bond to be held in trust for the duration of operation and remediation of the site.

RFA of NSW requires that the aquaculture industries universally adopt a code of conduct that includes and directly addresses the concerns of recreational fishers, including those of disease, translocation and access in a positive, direct and meaningful way.

RFA of NSW Underwater Policy

The RFA Underwater Policy is a code of practice to be followed by all underwater enthusiasts, encompassing SCUBA, Freediving, Spearfishers and all observers. RFA of NSW firmly believes that NSW Fisheries management of underwater environment should not discriminate between user groups such as SCUBA, spearfishing or fishing devotees, rather if fragile ecosystems or threatened species are identified a complete closure is preferred.

- Become involved in local environmental activities and issues and always be a role model for other divers and the public
- Respect the rights of other water users and always obey the instructions of statutory officials. Dive carefully in fragile aquatic ecosystems such as coral reefs
- Understand and respect underwater life.
- Take all your rubbish home with you..
- Report any actions or events that you feel may be detrimental to the sport or the environment.
- Make yourself familiar as to what species are "protected" in NSW and classified as "threatened" (i.e. vulnerable or endangered) according to the provisions of the NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994 and the Fisheries Management Amendment Act 1997.
- Do not harm or disturb any protected or threatened species or their habitat.
- Assist NSW Fisheries in the monitoring of protected and threatened species by reporting any sightings. Information of assistance to NSW Fisheries includes:

Specie, sex and number sighted.

Locality (be as specific as possible)

Date and time.

Sea and Weather Conditions.

Water depth, visibility and temperature.

Size and behaviour.

- Try to educate those who may not otherwise be aware of the regulations.
- Undertake a commitment to develop the sport through juniors, ladies, intermediate, senior, veteran, and masters and also at the elite level of national and international competition.
- Our goals are also to ensure that the Safety of the public and our members is of paramount importance to us all.
- Consider the safety of yourself and other people at all times.
- Know and at all times obey fisheries regulations including:

size limits for certain species

bag limits for certain species

bans on the taking of protected species

ban on the sale of fish by amateur fishermen

closure of certain areas to spearfishing

RFA of NSW Baitfish Policy

Baitfish are the start of the fish food chain. All sea-based predators, fish and birds, rely on an adequate supply of baitfish. Clearly, any depletion of baitfish will have repercussions all the way to the top of the food chain. Inadequate supplies of baitfish will ultimately adversely affect human activities. For this reason the Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW has developed this policy to protect baitfish from exploitation to the degree of stock depletion.

For the purpose of this policy document, baitfish is the general term which includes, white pilchards, blue pilchards, yellowtail, blue mackerel (slimy mackerel), whitebait, anchovies, blue bait, garfish and almost any other fish used as bait.

The estuarine habitats, including seagrass beds, provide important breeding grounds for many baitfish. For this reason, protection of estuarine habitat must be included in the protection of baitfish. The prevention of Acid Sulphate runoff must be given very high priority because acid sulphate contamination not only kills fish but it also destroys the eggs of fish. Baitfish are probably among the most vulnerable because many species spend most of their lives in estuaries. Estuary management strategies must take into consideration the importance of baitfish to the ecology and all sectors of the fishery.

Acceptable use of baitfish

- Recreational fishers must be aware that baitfish stocks are finite and care should be taken to avoid wasteful use..
- The use of baitfish for bait or berley is acceptable since the baitfish are ultimately fed back into the food chain of fish.
- Unused live baitfish should be returned to the water at the end of a fishing session.
- Use of baitfish for human consumption.

Unacceptable use of baitfish

- The use of baitfish for fertiliser, pet food and other activities which generate huge demands is to be discouraged.
- The commercial netting of baitfish for these activities should be strictly controlled as this netting and use removes the baitfish from the natural food chain.
- Aquaculture practices which require ecologically unsound use of baitfish, eg 10 to 14 Kg of slimy mackerel to produce 1 Kg of Atlantic Salmon, are wasteful of the resource and should be opposed.
- Because baitfish are essential for the continued viability of Australian fish populations, export of baitfish should be rigidly restricted.

Management of baitfish grounds and baitfish stocks

- Monitoring of baitfish stocks should be a high priority operation of Fisheries research teams. This should include monitoring size of stocks and the incidence of any disease.
- NSW Fisheries should be prompt in imposing temporary closures on bait grounds that are targeted by commercial operators when there is an obvious depletion of the baitfish stock on those grounds.
- Fishing for baitfish by international operators in Australian waters should be strictly limited.
- Some inshore bait grounds, especially some of those close to large population centres should be declared "line only" fishing areas.

RFA believes all fishers, recreational and commercial, must recognise the vital importance of baitfish stocks and work together to ensure these stocks remain healthy and prolific.

RFA of NSW Access Policy

Access to the state's waters for recreational fishing has always been considered a right by anglers. Successive governments have sought to erode those rights and to place recreational fishing as a privilege to be enjoyed with the consent of government. The introduction of the recreational fishing licence in NSW brings angler access into sharper focus. The Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW considers that the licence provides NSW anglers with the right to fish in NSW waters, and the right to access all non-private waters in this state for the purpose of recreational fishing.

Exclusion of Anglers

- Exclusion of anglers from any waters within NSW must be based on genuine and accessible scientific studies that produce incontrovertible evidence that recreational fishing is depleting fish stocks that are the subject of such recreational fishing in those waters. Such studies are to be available for independent scrutiny and assessment by the RFA or its nominees.
- **Beaches**
Access to beaches should be permitted to licensed anglers in 4wd vehicles. Current Local Government beach access fees for licensed anglers should be abolished unless it can be demonstrated that the funds raised are used solely for maintenance of access/egress points, fish cleaning facilities and other angling related projects.
Preparation of a code of practice for beach 4wd operators should be undertaken.
- **National Parks**
Access for licensed anglers to waterways in all national parks should be permitted without additional fees.
Closure of areas on the grounds of safety (Booderee National Park) or grounds other than fish-related is unacceptable. Any closures within national parks (state or commonwealth) should be bound by the 'Exclusion of Anglers' clause above.
- **Marine Parks, Marine Protected Areas and Aquatic Reserves**
Open access to all waters covered by such parks and reserves. Exclusion of anglers from any waters within those parks and reserves (including Sanctuary Zones) must be based on the 'Exclusion of Anglers' clause above.
- **Private Property**
Anglers must respect the rights of private property owners when accessing waters.
- **Impoundments**
There should be unfettered access to licensed anglers in all impoundments in NSW, regardless of the purpose of such impoundments (irrigation, water supply etc.). Exclusion of recreational angling within such impoundments must be based on the 'Exclusion of Anglers' clause above.