

YOU ARE BEING AND HAVE BEEN SCREWED

Recreational fishers – the forgotten industry stakeholder

The persistent cry from the commercial sector for years is about how hard done by they are & the need for the Government to prop up their declining fishery when over the same period recreational fishers have been progressively restricted in their catch.

Every time there is a fishery or marine park review you can be sure recreational fishers will lose more & more access & fishing opportunities.

If anything happens to affect commercial catches there is usually some compensation or relaxation of the legislation to compensate. Sometimes this also applies to support industries such as bait, tackle & marine dealers but NEVER to the recreational fisher.

The last 5 years has seen some of the biggest restrictions placed on anglers for the past century through size/bag limits, closures & gear.

The only clear initiative to benefit anglers came with the restriction of trawling for winter whiting. All other packages of restriction for the fishing industry came with mandatory recreational reductions & some soft commercial reductions. Even winter whiting now have a recreational bag limit.

Throughout the history of fisheries legislation, anglers have had bag limits imposed to reallocate catch to the commercial or some other non fishing sector.

This is now equalising but anomalies still exist that allow open ended catches such as -
Snapper & pearl perch – no commercial catch restriction
Bream, whiting, Flathead, garfish– no commercial catch restriction
Barramundi – no commercial catch restriction
Prawns – no commercial restriction
Many other species eg kingfish, fingermark etc – no commercial catch restriction

Total Allowable Catches (TAC'S & ITQ's) do apply to some commercially important species but these were based on previous log book figures which have not been reached since accountable reporting was introduced on these species eg mackerel, tailor & reef species.

Clubs have for many years imposed responsible larger lengths to those required by law & sizes on fish that have no size as well as their own competition bag limits. All they got was a big thank you from everyone as the returned smaller legal fish were released to be available to be netted & sold.

The following is a list of some of the areas where commercial fishers have been given special allowances-

General

- 1. Priority over all other fishers & water users – included in the Fisheries Act**
- 2. " Profitable primary industry" approach by DPI & F & seen to support commercials only.**
- 3. Relaxation in license arrangements – transfers, leasing, property rights etc.**
- 4. License fees that do not fully cover "user pays"- subsidised by Government**
- 5. Relaxation of laws to allow larger bycatch amounts**

6. No catch caps (TAC) for many fish regulated to recreational fishers – snapper ,Barra, prawns, bream, whiting, etc.

7.Special DPI & F meetings with commercial industry – inshore net & trawl

8. Millions of public \$\$\$ spent on commercial fishery – buyback, compensation, research etc.

9. Disproportionate numbers on MAC's – a representative for each relevant commercial activities – netting, marketing etc.

10. Permitted to drive on beaches closed to the public – Bribie, Fraser, Stradbroke, Moreton Is

11.Exemption from government fees for beach access - NP areas

12.Special boat registrations – for commercial fishing vessels only

13. No boat registration for private use – can use commercial vessel anytime for recreation

14. No fees towards enforcement or boat ramps – as applies to recreational fishers through boat registrations etc..

And the list continues

Coral reef

15.Allowed smaller fillet size without skin – coral trout , red throat etc.

16. Allowed to fillet & freeze fish at sea – different to recs & charter

17.Relaxation on travel times – reporting methods changed

Rocky Reef

18. Unrestricted catches of recreational regulated fish – snapper ,pearl perch, kingfish etc.

Trawl

19.Relaxation on bycatch limits – from prawns, scallops & bugs only to virtually all species

Crab

20.Size reduction to accommodate sand crab practices – special underside measurement legalised

Inshore

21. Proposed relaxation in bycatch limits – other species eg small mackerels

22. Unrestricted catches of recreational regulated fish- barra, whiting, flathead etc

23. Use of commercial bait nets in Marine Park yellow zones where anglers are restricted in their rod use

Harvest

24.Unrestricted worm catches

This list is by no means complete but identifies some areas where commercial restrictions have been lifted or exist to encourage the commercial industry. Even with these allowances the commercial sector want more restrictions lifted to try to make the remaining fishers viable. This access to a limited wild resource seems to be occurring at the expense of the recreational fishers.

You will be hard pressed to find any legislation passed by Fisheries or this Government in the past 5 years that actually enhances or encourages greater participation in recreational fishing.

David Bateman Deputy Chairman Sunfish Queensland