

Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland

The Honourable Tim Mulherin

Tuesday, December 14, 2010

Have your say on the future management of snapper

14 December 2010

A six week interim closure to help reduce fishing pressure on Queensland's overfished snapper stock will be put in place along the Queensland east coast early next year making snapper, teraglin and pearl perch off limits.

Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Rural and Regional Queensland Tim Mulherin said the closure was an interim measure until new fishing rules could be finalised to ensure take of snapper was sustainable.

"The interim closure from 15 February to 31 March 2011 is immediate action to protect and rebuild snapper stocks," Mr Mulherin said.

"The interim closure applies to all sectors – commercial, recreational and charter.

"Snapper, teraglin and pearl perch should not be targeted during this time and if incidentally caught should be returned to the water immediately.

"In addition to the interim closure, the Queensland Government is reviewing fishing rules for the Rocky Reef Fin Fish Fishery.

"A Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) has been released for public comment which outlines a number of options for managing this fishery, and in particular the take of snapper."

Mr Mulherin said scientific research showed that Queensland's snapper stocks were currently overfished.

"Fisheries Queensland has carried out two assessments of the state's snapper stock in recent years – the first in 2006 and a second in 2009.

"These assessments indicate that the snapper stock is less than 35% of its unfished levels.

"It is internationally recognised that fish stocks at 40% or less of their unfished levels are classed as overfished. This means snapper is being harvested at unsustainable levels in Queensland.

"Two recent independent reviews of the data used in these stock assessments have also accepted that snapper is overfished. These reviews were conducted following concerns raised by the recreational fishing sector."

Mr Mulherin said proposals in the RIS included introducing a 400 tonne cap on the total

annual catch of snapper.

“To enable the snapper stock to recover, we need to make significant changes to the way this fishery is managed,” he said.

“The aim is to reduce fishing pressure on snapper by introducing a 400 tonne cap on the total annual catch.

“This will give the stock the best chance of rebuilding over a ten year period to levels which are sustainable.

“The estimated average annual catch for recreational, commercial and charter sectors are 415 tonnes, 190 tonnes and 40 tonnes respectively.

“The aim is to achieve sustainability at minimum economic and social cost, while ensuring fair access to the stock across the fishing sectors.

“This is part of Fisheries Queensland commitment to sustainable fisheries, so each sector, whether they are recreational, commercial or charter can continue to enjoy fishing.

“Stakeholders are being asked to comment on a number of options for implementing this total allowable catch across the recreational, charter and commercial fishing sectors.”

Mr Mulherin said some specific options put forward in the RIS included:

- The introduction of individual catch limits (quotas) on commercial fishers and charter operators,
- Improved education, catch recording and compliance by the recreational sector, paid for by a snapper permit for recreational fishers,
- Closures to make snapper, and possibly other co-caught species like pearl perch and teraglin, no take for certain periods for all or some sectors,
- Changes to bag limits for charter and recreational fishers, and
- Limiting the take of the commercial snapper quota to line fishing gear.

“A combination of different rules will need to be put in place for each sector to effectively manage the overall rebuilding of the snapper stock.

“I encourage each sector to have their say now about the different combinations to manage snapper effectively.”

The RIS consultation document and response form is now available for download at www.fisheries.qld.gov.au Copies of the RIS will be direct mailed to stakeholders over the next few weeks.

A series of port meetings for stakeholders will be held from Mackay to the New South Wales border with dates also available on the fisheries website.

To receive up-to-date information on the progress of the review, stakeholders are also encouraged to subscribe to the Help Protect Queensland Snapper e-newsletter at www.fisheries.qld.gov.au

The closing date for comment on this RIS is 5pm on February 28, 2011.

A series of information sessions will also be held from Mackay to the New South Wales border for stakeholders to provide feedback with dates available on the fisheries website or in the front of the RIS document.

Following the closing date, the Government will consider the responses received in finalising the new management arrangements for the fishery.

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