



AUSTRALIAN ANGLERS ASSOCIATION

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Recreational Fisheries Program, Department of Fisheries
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Submission:- Fisheries Management Paper 187

The Association welcomes Fisheries Management Paper No. 187 "Proposals for Community Discussion on the Future Management of Pink Snapper in Cockburn Sound and Surrounding Waters."

The protection of fish spawning aggregations is particularly important and we place a high priority on ensuring that breeding stocks are protected to ensure the continued success of this very important recreational fishery. The Association supported the extended closure in 2004.

A common concern among recreational anglers is the need for adequate protection of spawning aggregations of pink snapper in Cockburn Sound and nearby areas in a workable, equitable and enforceable manner, while still allowing access at other times and in other places.

The following comments are on some of the details in the proposals.

Boundaries. The boundaries defined as "Cockburn Sound and Warnbro Sound" leave out an area between the Causeway and the southern end of Garden Island, as shown in Figure 5. Another problem is caused by confusing names. Why should the part north of Point Peron be called "Warnbro Sound" and why leave out part of that area? The boundaries need to be clarified and simplified.

Possession while fishing. The proposed prohibition on the possession of Pink Snapper while actively fishing in Cockburn Sound should be extended to include the area of Warnbro Sound (whatever this is called and however this is defined). If not, the reason for this inconsistency should be explained.

Closure Times. We understand that the aggregations are most pronounced around the new moon and full moon periods, and are also strongly influenced by water temperatures.

Calendar based closure times may not be the best for the protection of the fish which is the priority in this exercise.

For example, the new moon in December 2005 is on 1 December, the very day the fishery would reopen under the proposal, which could place the aggregations under great pressure at a time they should still be protected.

Based on the data for catches in the various months, the Association believes the closure dates should be variable to cover the new and full moon phases in October, November and any new or full moon in the first week or so of early December.

If there are any concerns that this would result in the closures extending for slightly more than 2 calendar months, then we would ask for some scientific explanation on the benefits or advantages of protecting either the late September / early October new/full moon aggregation or the early (say first week of) December new/full moon aggregation.

Calendar based closure times are simple for administrative reasons and publicity, but there is a precedent for variable dates in other fisheries eg marron.

Slot limit outside closure times. Before to the implementation of the West Coast Review, a slot limit existed on pink snapper for several months of the year.

A slot limit would allow fishing for pink snapper to continue, but would limit the opportunity to take excessive advantage of schooling aggregations easily targeted by anglers. Pink snapper of considerable size are also taken between July and February in Cockburn Sound and we feel there is a need to limit the number of breeding fish removed from these aggregations and elsewhere to adequately protect recruitment and to ensure a quality fishing experience for future generations.

The Association suggests that a slot limit be reintroduced for pink snapper, with a personal bag limit of 2 fish and a boat limit of 4 fish over the proposed 600mm (fork length) for the entire West Coast region. This would further protect spawning aggregations and limit the catches of large breeding fish in the months before and after the closure, while allowing some of these larger fish to be kept.

Review of Results. The Association believes these proposals should apply for an initial period of three years, and then should be reviewed every three years after that to decide if catch or any other data shows the fish stocks require more or less or different protection, or if the arrangements should continue for a further three year period.

With the above changes and additions, the Association believes the proposals outlined in Management Paper 187 represent fair and balanced options to manage pink snapper in the metropolitan area. The Association supports the principles of the following proposals, with the changes as listed:-

Proposal 1: The boundaries for the metropolitan pink snapper spawning closure be defined as those waters of Cockburn Sound and Warnbro Sound, that is, the Association supports the inclusion of Warnbro Sound in the metropolitan snapper spawning closure.

Proposal 2 and 3: The Association supports closures during the months of October and November but would prefer the exact start and end dates to better match the full or new moon timing of aggregations during those months and cover the end of September and/or the first week of December if necessary.

Proposal 4: A maximum size limit of 600mm (fork length) apply to pink snapper between Two Rocks and Mandurah during the spawning season closure period.

Proposal 5: As covered above for proposals 2 and 3.

Proposal 6: During the spawning closure a prohibition exist on the possession of pink snapper while fishing in Cockburn Sound, however Warnbro Sound needs to be added for consistency.

The Association believes these proposals will, however, increase recreational anglers' concerns over the need to manage commercial catches for pink snapper in metropolitan waters to avoid a transfer of the opportunity to catch and keep these fish to the commercial fishermen who are not restricted by slot and bag limits.

For this and other reasons, it is important that Integrated Fisheries Management for Pink Snapper be implemented within the next year, or failing that, that some specific extra management controls be placed on the commercial pink snapper fishery to match the recreational restrictions and restraint.

Your sincerely



Terry Fuller, Secretary, Australian Anglers Association (WA Division) Inc.