

RECREATIONAL FISHING DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2012 – 2022



VISION

To provide a diverse range of high quality recreational fishing experiences based upon healthy fish stocks and aquatic ecosystems that optimises lifestyle and economic value to the NT.

PROFILE OF RECREATIONAL FISHING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Recreational fishing is an important part of the Northern Territory lifestyle, a major tourism drawcard and a significant contributor to its economy, with wide recognition as a large and growing industry. Recreational fishing survey and fishing tour operator data indicate that more than 35 000 Territory residents and 54 000 visitors fished in the Territory during 2010. It is estimated that at least \$80 million was spent on recreational fishing and fishing tours within the Northern Territory during 2010.

Seventy per cent of recreational fishing in the Territory occurs in its regional areas, where it is often the primary economic and development driver. King Ash Bay on the McArthur River, the Daly River, the Roper River and Dundee Beach are examples of communities where recreational fishing underpins development. Fishing tourism is also providing impetus for regional development, including on Aboriginal land, such as the Tiwi Islands, Arnhem Land and Groote Eylandt. There is considerable scope for further controlled fishing activity in these areas as wilderness fishing experiences are a significant attraction for many anglers.

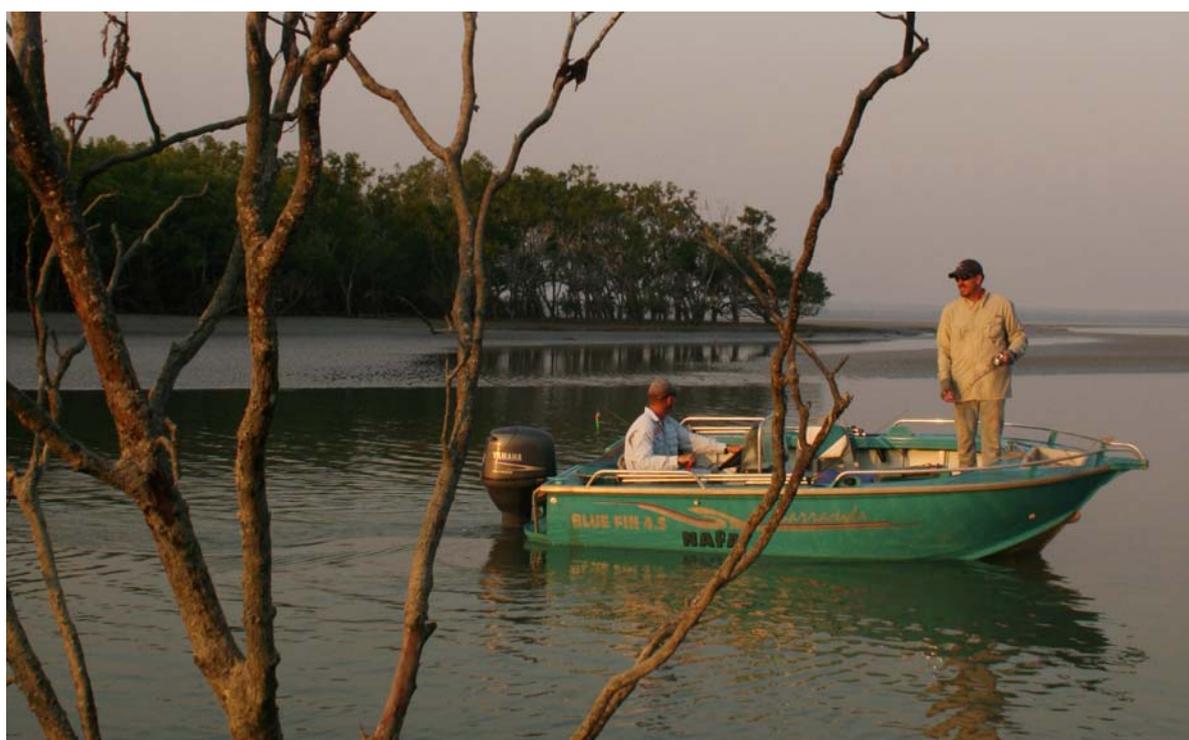
The Territory's recreational fishery is world class, with healthy wild fish stocks, pristine aquatic environments and a vast number of popular species abundant. The future challenge is to maintain a high quality fishery while allowing for increased participation and optimising the social and economic values recreational fishing generates. Territory Governments have worked with recreational fishers and implemented various management initiatives to ensure the quality and long-term sustainability of the fishery. A strong culture of conservative catch and release is engrained within the Territory's angling community. Reductive changes to Northern Territory fishing regulations are mostly driven by forward thinking anglers who are focused on maintaining and enhancing the quality of the fishing experience, while allowing for future growth and providing optimum lifestyle and economic benefit. This is the key focus of this development plan.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The management of the Northern Territory's recreational fisheries will be based on

- enhancing the overall quality of the recreational fishing experience, not just the quantity of catches
- the environmental, social, cultural and economic principles of ecologically sustainable development
- the principle of intergenerational equity. That is, that our children and their children will also be able to enjoy high quality fishing experiences
- a flexible approach, that is adaptive to changing circumstances and new information
- public and stakeholder engagement to reflect and foster community stewardship of fishery resources
- recognition for tailored arrangements in specific areas, to suit different circumstances as necessary, such as increasing fishing pressure and divergent fishing values. A one size fits all model may not deliver the best outcomes
- the best available information and a precautionary approach will be adopted if critical information is unavailable
- the principle of shared responsibility for the best use of natural resources, conservative approaches to aquatic harvesting and the fostering of fisher self compliance
- fishing regulations that are sensible, clear and easily understood to ensure community acceptance, understanding and compliance.



OBJECTIVES

1. The social, lifestyle and economic values and benefits of recreational fishing in the Northern Territory, including future development opportunities, will be clearly recognised and given proper consideration in government and community planning processes.
2. Within the principles of ecologically sustainable development, the utilisation of Northern Territory fish stocks will be based on providing optimal benefits to the Territory's community and economy.
3. The Northern Territory's fish stocks and aquatic habitats will be managed to maintain a quality recreational fishing experience for current and future generations.
4. To enhance the effective management of recreational fishing in the Northern Territory, effective, ongoing programs will be designed and maintained to monitor and assess the status of fish stocks and the impacts and benefits of recreational fishing.
5. The quality and diversity of recreational fishing opportunities will be increased through enhanced and secure access to fishing areas, allowing greater dispersal of fishing effort.
6. There will be increased individual, community and government responsibility and stewardship to promote sustainable, safe and appropriate recreational fishing practices.



KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES FACING RECREATIONAL FISHING IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

Recognition, acknowledgement and understanding of the value and importance of recreational fishing in the Northern Territory

It is important that the contribution made by recreational fishing to the Territory's lifestyle and economy is researched, promoted and well understood. While it is clear that the industry is experiencing considerable growth, there is a serious lack of data, particularly economic data, to demonstrate the true significance of its financial contribution. Such data will be extremely important to underpin future management, funding, fishery resource and industry development decisions. It will also be essential to enable informed decisions regarding marine protected areas and other developments (including development in other industries) that could adversely impact recreational fishing.

Ensuring long-term resource sustainability including recognition of environmental, social, economic and cultural factors

With the increasing number of recreational fishers in the Northern Territory and advancement in fishing technology, it is likely that some fish stocks in more populated areas are being fished at or near their sustainable limits. Continuing increases in fishing pressure may lead to low quality fisheries based on small-sized recruits, and fish stocks declining or even collapsing if proactive management is not adopted. This may impact on fishing quality and lifestyle values and also regional tourism centres and local economies.

The sustainability of these fisheries will depend on the health of the environment, the conservation of habitats and effective control of the total catch. Management arrangements should take into account the biological characteristics of relevant species, their localised abundance and the level of fishing pressure exerted on them. Recreational fishing controls should discourage heavy targeting of vulnerable fish and encourage the reasonable harvest of more abundant and resilient species.

It should be recognised that increasing numbers of recreational fishers elevate the demands on fisheries research and compliance programs. Commercial catch data alone may no longer be sufficient to accurately indicate the health of fish stocks and greater monitoring of recreational catches and activity is required.

There is also a need for broad community understanding that fishery management measures will need to be tailored to the requirements of each user group, to ensure overall catches are maintained within sustainable levels.

Resource access and allocation

Recreational fishing activity in the Northern Territory is increasing together with its contribution to the Territory lifestyle and economy. The high numbers of fishers becoming active in popular areas is a significant management challenge. In a number of high-use areas (mainly in near-coastal locations near population and tourist centres) there is increasing interaction between commercial and recreational fishers. Decisions to reallocate fishery resources from the commercial sector to the recreational sector have reduced competition in some areas. In other areas, increases in fishing activity have raised concerns within aboriginal communities.

Decisions on resource sharing issues need to be made in an informed and timely manner to ensure optimal social and economic benefits to the community are realised.



Community stewardship, ethics, behaviour and safety, especially boating safety

The Northern Territory has a vast coastline and a high proportion of fishing visitors, which combine to make education and enforcement of regulations difficult. As fishing pressure increases, recreational fishers will have an increasingly important role to play in limiting their catch and reducing the mortality of released fish. There is a growing need to improve anglers' knowledge and understanding of fisheries management and encourage the adoption of sustainable fishing practices. A structured communication strategy is essential to increase levels of individual responsibility and promote local community and visitor support for a sustainable, quality and safe fishing experience.

Effective policing is also required to ensure compliance and enhance community education. However, increased policing of the vast and largely remote Territory coastline is required and demands will continue to grow as recreational fishing effort increases and spreads. This will require more innovative and cost-effective measures in the future.

While the remoteness of many parts of the Territory enhances its appeal as a fishing destination, it also presents safety risks, and the ongoing promotion of boating safety needs particular attention.

Ensuring physical access and enhancing infrastructure

Long distances, limited road access, restricted launching and other fishing facilities, together with terrestrial access restrictions throughout much of the Territory; all help to intensify the recreational fishing focus on a small number of readily accessible fresh and salt water locations. This results in significant pressure on localised fish stocks and heightened conflict between users in more popular areas, particularly those with different fishing values and preferences. A trend in recent years towards larger, faster boats with better navigation equipment has helped spread localised effort but any practical opportunities to better disperse fishery impacts need to be examined. Differing fishing methods and values should also be recognised in the provision of fishing opportunities, such as the need for family-friendly experiences and people without boats. Although abundant, the Territory's fishery resources are subject to real threats of localised depletion, and efforts are required to avoid this by improving access opportunities where possible, coupled with sustainable fishing practices and conservative future management.

Input from the broader recreational fishing community on management and development issues

The Northern Territory Government and other organisations like the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory (AFANT) and fishing clubs have been successful in promoting best practice and other important information for the benefit of recreational fishers. However, it has been difficult to attract significant levels of feedback from anglers on key issues or proposed management changes. It is recognised that recreational fishers have different views and values and that there is a need to be able to identify and understand what these are in order to meet current and future requirements. More practical methods of enhancing community participation in fisheries decision-making will be required.



Limited recreational fishing data to support management decisions

Although the Northern Territory Government has undertaken surveys to gather recreational fishing effort, expenditure and other data, ensuring regular, ongoing monitoring of expanding recreational fisheries remains a significant challenge. There is limited data available on the status of many recreationally significant fish stocks in Territory waters. Inadequate information heightens the need for precautionary fishery management measures, but this may not always deliver optimal outcomes. Additional effort and resources will be required to ensure the regular collection of adequate management data in future, and recreational fishers will need to play a more active role in this process.

Non-compliance with fisheries regulations

There is a long-standing perception among many fishers of a high rate of non-compliance in our fisheries and that compliance and enforcement resources are not adequate. There is a need to clearly determine whether there is a significant non-compliance problem and, if so, whether it is intentional or due to a lack of awareness of fishery regulations. There is also a need to determine the relative benefits of more education based compliance effort compared to the deterrent value of increased enforcement activity.



Key Strategic Issues	Strategies	Action Plan
<p>understanding of the economic value and social importance of recreational fishing</p>	<p>Support the development of appropriate opportunities for commercial activities based on recreational fishing.</p> <p>Help develop partnerships between the fishing community, relevant government agencies, indigenous groups and industries in the regions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify regional opportunities for the development of recreational fishing related businesses. • Develop a coordinated industry support program to provide encouragement and support for enterprises (particularly indigenous enterprises) to develop fishing and access opportunities. • Establish partnerships with tourism bodies to promote fishing opportunities. • Develop quality assurance, training programs and codes for FTOs and other fishing related businesses. • Identify marketing opportunities with indigenous and other land holders to promote wilderness fishing opportunities. • Identify and promote potential career opportunities in recreational fishing industries, such as fishing tour operations.
	<p>Improve community awareness of the social and other benefits associated with recreational fishing, such as participation by younger people as an alternative activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the inclusion of relevant research in national research, development and education priorities.
	<p>Secure adequate funding for research and compliance programs necessary for the effective management and development of recreational fisheries.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure a government commitment to provide appropriate ongoing resources commensurate with increasing recreational fishing, or alternatively, explore separate funding sources.

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	<p>Ensure that impacts on recreational fishing from external activities and development are recognised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure proper recognition of recreational fishing concerns and values in environmental assessments and marine park planning. • Ensure proper consideration of fish sustainability and fishing opportunities when dealing with relevant development proposals. • Ensure representation by the recreational fishing sector in relevant Northern Territory advisory committees and processes.
	<p>Identify potential for improving recreational fishing opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine potential for artificial reefs to enhance fish habitats.
<p>Ensuring long term resource sustainability including recognition of environmental, social, economic and cultural factors</p>	<p>Ensure that recreational fishing controls protect stock sustainability, by taking into account species' abundance, biological characteristics and levels of fishing pressure.</p> <p>Ensure fisheries management measures are proactive and anticipative of increasing recreational fishing activity and impacts.</p> <p>Ensure fish are protected at vulnerable stages of their life cycle, such as juvenile fish and spawning aggregations.</p> <p>Improve fish handling and release techniques to minimise mortality of released fish.</p> <p>Targeted management of fishing hot spots.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the possible need and introduction of further size limits. • Ensure regulations encourage fishing across a range of species and discourage targeting aggregations of vulnerable fish. • Identify important fish habitats, nursery areas and spawning aggregation sites that may require additional specific management measures. • Enhanced awareness programs on sustainable fishing practices and best practice handling and release techniques • Consider regional/local approaches for areas such as the McArthur River and King Ash Bay. • Identify areas requiring specific management controls.

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	Ensure an appropriate legislative basis to support sustainable management of recreational fisheries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation by recreational fishers in the review and development of new fisheries legislation. • Review of regulations to support contemporary recreational fisheries management needs. • Consider possible merit of a specific management plan for recreational fishing.
	Enhance community understanding of the difference between recreational fishing and traditional/customary fishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve levels of community awareness of the traditional rights of indigenous fishers.
Resource access and allocation	Recognition of growth in recreational fishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of current and future significant recreational fishing areas. • Promotion of recreational fishery priority areas or areas managed primarily for those values.
	Measure and compare the relevant community values of competing sectors' use of specific fish stocks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support inclusion of these assessments in national research and development priorities.
	Establish and promote government policies on fishery resource reallocation and sharing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish agreed processes to resolve resource sharing issues.
Community stewardship, ethics, behaviour and safety, especially boating safety	Identify significant radio coverage and rescue capability shortfalls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure government's commitment to bring the VHF radio network into a state of proper utility and ongoing maintenance. • Ensure appropriate marking of agreed navigation hazards. • Investigate the possible need of a voluntary sea rescue service.

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Community stewardship, ethics, behaviour and safety, especially boating safety	Ensure public awareness of boating regulations and safe boating practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a boating safety awareness program with specific publications and television advertising. • Consolidation of government and community reporting lines such as River Watch, Fishwatch and Marine Wildwatch.
	Increase the involvement of recreational fishers in the monitoring of fisheries to enhance their sense of stewardship.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify practical means of including fishers in voluntary data collection programs.
	Ensure fishery controls reflect the contemporary values and attitudes of recreational fishers and promote responsible fishing practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and promote a voluntary code of conduct for recreational fishing in the Northern Territory. • Develop a code of conduct for fishing competitions.
	Promote understanding of the reasons for various fishing controls to maximise voluntary compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure regulations remain easily understood and meet management objectives. • Develop a community education program, including in schools. • Ensure an appropriate penalty regime.
	Identify possible roles for fishing clubs to enhance community stewardship of fishery resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with fishing clubs and associations to identify potential ongoing involvement.
	Explore the viability of a voluntary fisheries liaison officer (VFLO) program to educate fishers and collect data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider potential viability of a VFLO program that would also collect recreational fishing data.
	Review the possible need for a code of conduct or specific regulation of annual fishing competitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with host clubs and organisations. • Encourage tournament organisers to secure national accreditation.

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<p>Ensuring physical access and enhancing infrastructure</p>	<p>Foster controlled access agreements between recognised Northern Territory fishing groups and land holders, with a priority on coastal access opportunities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise risk by legislation, define management responsibilities and codes of conduct. • Develop a prioritised plan to secure and maintain access to new and existing locations with measures to gauge success. • Include responsibilities of fishing visitors on pastoral and other land in the proposed code of conduct.
	<p>Ensure that an appropriate repairs, maintenance and upgrade program is maintained for existing fishing infrastructure and facilities.</p> <p>Identify requirements for new facilities based on future growth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that adequate ongoing funding is provided, an agreed schedule of works is honoured and that public awareness is maintained. • Consider the possible need of further land based fishing platforms.
	<p>Identify future planning needs for high use areas, for example Corroboree Billabong, King Ash Bay, the Daly River and Tomato Island on the Roper River.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure prioritised community input to infrastructure planning.
	<p>Identify opportunities for access agreements with traditional land owners.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with Aboriginal land holders/councils to develop managed access agreements.
<p>Secure input from the broader recreational fishing community on management and development issues</p>	<p>Ensure opportunity for broader public input into fisheries planning and management processes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure greater awareness among recreational fishers of management planning and progress of formal processes (eg Recreational Fishing Access Working Group, Fishery Management Advisory Committees) • Explore the wider use of 'on-line' updates.

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	Develop a broader consultation and engagement process for management and development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify alternative means of securing broader community input on recreational fishing issues.
	<p>Enhance public awareness of management needs and directions.</p> <p>Increased participation from recreational fishers in data collection programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop processes to improve community awareness of research results and emerging issues. • Establish a register of anglers interested in participating in research programs.
Ensure the ongoing provision of recreational fishing data to support management decisions	<p>Establish a dedicated recreational fishing research unit within Fisheries to monitor participation, catch, effort and expenditure across the Northern Territory's recreational fisheries.</p> <p>Improve resolution of data to ensure sustainable management of key fisheries and increase Fisheries research and data collection on key recreational species.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a dedicated recreational fishing data unit to undertake comprehensive five-yearly surveys, ongoing monitoring of key areas and targeted surveys where appropriate. • Establish a process to ensure appropriate priority setting for fisheries research.
	Make greater use of recreational fishers in data collection and monitoring, through tagging programs, logbooks and other agreed means.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the use of web-based or similar tools for voluntary reporting used elsewhere.
Reduce rates of non-compliance with fisheries regulations	Monitor and improve rates of non-compliance among recreational fishers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Police Section to monitor and report on levels of recreational fishing compliance. • Targeted awareness programs on key compliance issues.
	Ensure that appropriate compliance resources are directed on a priority risk basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider basing enforcement personnel in priority areas during peak activity periods.
	Identify cost effective ways to improve compliance capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify possibility of broadening the role of marine rangers to include greater compliance activities.

Key Strategic Issues	Strategies	Action Plan
	<p>Develop a risk-based model to help ensure appropriate resourcing of fisheries compliance services.</p> <p>Secure Government's commitment to provide adequate, ongoing resources for fisheries compliance that meet changing trends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement a risk assessment process for recreationally important species, in accordance with national compliance approaches.