

REGIONAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT STATEMENT

Agency

Primary Industries and Regions South Australia (PIRSA) - Fisheries and Aquaculture Division

1. Title of the initiative

Implementing the outcomes of a review of recreational fishing management arrangements with respect to size, bag and boat limits and King George Whiting in South Australia.

2. Issue to be addressed

There are approximately 277,000 recreational fishers in South Australia.¹ The recreational fishing sector is an important contributor to the State's economy as well as being a major recreational pursuit of South Australians, and interstate and international visitors. It is essential fish stocks targeted by the recreational fishing sector are sustainable in the long-term and shared in an equitable way if the sector is to continue to provide social and economic benefits to the State.

A Draft Management Plan for Recreational Fishing in South Australia was prepared by PIRSA and released for public consultation. The introduction of a management plan for the recreational fishing sector will guide provide clear objectives and strategies for the fishery over the next ten years.

To support the draft management plan, a *Review of Size, Bag and Boat Limits in South Australia's Recreational Fishing Sector, Marine and Freshwater* (Size, Bag and Boat Limit Review) was also released for consultation. In preparing this review, advice was sought from fisheries scientists, fisheries managers, Fisheries Officers, RecFish SA, recreational fishers and the Conservation Council of SA.

Recreational daily bag and boat limits are important management tools used to protect and maintain fish stocks as they limit the aggregate harvest of the recreational fishing sector. Personal bag limits (the number of fish of each species one person can harvest in one

day) have been applied to key recreationally important species in South Australia since the mid-1970s. Boat limits, which limit the harvest per boat trip (usually 3 times the bag limit), were introduced in 1994. Size limits, applied to both commercial and recreational sectors, have been in place for many more years. Where possible, size limits are chosen to allow fish at least one spawning period in which to reproduce before become susceptible to the fishery.

King George Whiting is an iconic species in South Australia, and is one of the most targeted species by recreational and commercial fishers. Recent scientific research has classified King George Whiting stocks in the Spencer Gulf and Gulf St Vincent/Kangaroo Island as 'transitional-depleting'. A transitional-depleting stock is a deteriorating stock, where biomass is not yet recruitment overfished, but fishing pressure is too high and moving the stock in the direction of becoming recruitment overfished. Accordingly, management strategies are required to prevent further declines in the status of these fish stocks.

A separate management paper, the *Management Options for King George Whiting in South Australia* (KGW Management Paper) was prepared to propose a series of management options to return stocks in key regions to a 'sustainable' status.

In South Australia, access shares to aquatic resources are formally allocated to the recreational, commercial and Aboriginal traditional fishing sectors, consistent with the provisions of the *Fisheries Management Act 2007* and the Government's Allocation Policy. Initial resource shares have been allocated in fishery management plans consistent with

¹ Giri, K and Hall, K, *South Australian Recreational Fishing Survey 2013/14*, July 2015, Fisheries Victoria Internal Report

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catch shares, informed by the 2007/08 recreational fishing survey and commercial catch information at that time, to recognise existing resource users. Nominal allocations have been made to the Aboriginal traditional sector to allow for resolution of native title claims. These allocations are designed to give all sectors certainty of continued access to the resource.

In addition to sustainability drivers, management arrangements proposed in the recreational review are also designed to return fishing sectors to their allocated proportion of the resource, consistent with the requirements of the *Fisheries Management Act 2007*.

3. Region(s) impacted by the proposal

Recreational fishing occurs across the State's coastal waters and accordingly, the changes proposed to size, bag and boat limits may impact all coastal regions. Whilst King George Whiting is caught in many regions across the State, the proposed changes are predominantly aimed at improving stock status in Spencer Gulf and Gulf St Vincent /Kangaroo Island.

4. Stakeholders Affected by the proposed initiative

- Recreational fishers
- Charter Boat Fishery
- RecFish SA
- Commercial fishers with access to take King George Whiting, predominantly the Marine Scalefish Fishery
- Tourism industry
- Seafood consumers

5. Stakeholders Consulted

- South Australian community, particularly those with an interest in recreational fishing
- Recreational fishing sector
- Commercial fishing industry
- Relevant government agencies

The following stakeholders were informed of the commencement of the consultation process and invited to provide feedback:

- Australian Fisheries Management Authority
- Conservation Council of SA
- Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources
- Local Government Association
- Marine Fishers Association
- RecFish SA
- Saint Vincent Gulf Prawn Boat Owners' Association
- Seafood Processors and Exporters Council
- South Australian Rock Lobster Advisory Council
- South Australian Sardine Industry Association
- SA Native Title Services
- South Australian Northern Zone Rock Lobster Fishermen's Association
- SA Tourism Commission
- South-East Professional Fishermen's Association
- Southern Fishermen's Association
- Spencer Gulf and West Coast Prawn Fishermen's Association
- Surveyed Charter Boat Owners and Operators Association
- Wild Catch Fisheries SA

6. Consultation

The draft management plan and Size, Bag and Boat Limit Review were developed through a steering committee which included Government, recreational fishing representatives and an independent social scientist. Prior to the release of the documents a targeted stakeholder workshop on the proposed fisheries management changes was held. The purpose of this workshop was to 'ground-truth' and consider early feedback on the proposals with industry representatives before they were released for community

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consideration. Participants included representatives from RecFish SA, Conservation Council of SA, recreational fishing groups and recreational fishing 'opinion leaders'.

PIRSA undertook a three month public consultation process commencing on 30 January 2016 and ending on 29 April 2016. A public notice to inform interested persons of the three documents released for consultation appeared in *The Advertiser* on 11 February 2016. In addition, public notices also appeared in the following regional publications:

- *Port Lincoln Times*;
- *Whyalla News*;
- *South Eastern Times*;
- *Yorke Peninsula Country*;
- *Murray Pioneer*;
- *The Islander*;
- *Victor Harbor Times*; and
- *West Coast Sentinel*.

PIRSA hosted 12 public meetings across South Australia on the following dates:

- Port Lincoln, 16 February 2016
- Ceduna, 17 February 2016
- Whyalla, 18 February 2016
- Wallaroo, 23 February 2016
- Glenelg, 24 February 2016
- Renmark, 25 February 2016
- Millicent, 1 March 2016
- Victor Harbor, 2 March 2016
- Kangaroo Island, 3 March 2016
- Port Augusta, 5 April 2016
- Yorketown, 6 April 2016
- Port Noarlunga, 13 April 2016.

To assist the commercial sector understand and provide feedback on the proposals, information sessions were also held in Port Lincoln, Yorketown and Adelaide during March and April 2016.

A public hearing was conducted by PIRSA on 11 May 2016 to enable interested

persons to appear to be heard and inspect the written submissions.

7. Summary of Impacts and Analysis

The proposal is consistent with the legislated ecologically sustainable development objectives of the *Fisheries Management Act 2007*. PIRSA has attempted to strike a balance between ecological, economic and social considerations, informed by the best available data, scientific advice and the feedback received through the consultation process.

7.1 Environmental Factors

The implementation of new management arrangements by PIRSA is critical in ensuring the sustainability of recreational fishing in South Australia. No negative environmental impacts are likely to occur as a result of implementing the proposal.

A number of recommendations to reduce size, bag and boat limits have been made due to concerns regarding the sustainability of stocks of key species including Garfish, Snapper, Australian Herring and King George Whiting.

A precautionary approach to management has generally been adopted for the species in which limits are proposed to be implemented for the first time.

If proposed changes to size, bag and boat limits are not made, negative environmental impacts may occur across the fishery, in both regional and metropolitan areas, if future levels of fishing pressure are unsustainable.

The proposed reduction to the state-wide daily bag and boat limits for King George Whiting aims to reduce the overall state-wide recreational catch of this species improve the sustainability of the recreational harvest and manage it within the recreational sector's allocated share.

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Additional restrictions on the take of large fish aim to reduce the impact of fishing on the spawning biomass and promote stock recovery.

The proposed increase to the legal minimum size limit of King George Whiting aims to allow more juvenile fish to 'run the gauntlet' from the upper gulfs to reach the key spawning areas in deeper water near lower Yorke Peninsula in the southern gulfs, and reproductively contribute to the population.

The proposed spawning spatial closure will prevent recreational and commercial fishers from taking this species around southern Spencer Gulf, southern Gulf St Vincent and northern Kangaroo Island during May. It aims to reduce fishing pressure on the spawning biomass in known marine areas and protect it from fishing during a part of the spawning period, to improve recruitment and production to promote stock recovery.

The spawning spatial closure would be reviewed following the outcomes of a three-year scientific research project undertaken by SARDI Aquatic Sciences commencing in July 2016 to improve understanding of key King George Whiting spawning areas in the southern gulf systems of South Australia.

If changes are not made to the management arrangements for King George Whiting at this time, it is highly likely the status of regional King George Whiting stocks will continue to decline. Further stock declines would cause long term ecological, economic and social impacts on recreational and commercial fishers and their associated industries, including tourism, and would require more severe restrictions to be implemented through fisheries legislation in future years to address unsustainable fishing activities.

7.2 Economic Factors

Positive economic impacts are likely to occur through ensuring the long-term sustainability of species targeted by recreational fishers in South Australia, particularly in regional areas.

A number of the proposed changes to size, bag and boat limits have been amended to address issues raised by stakeholders during the public consultation process. In some cases, the proposed changes will impact individual fishers, in that they will restrict the size or number of fish they are permitted to take. No significant negative economic impacts have been identified as a result of the Size, Bag and Boat Limit Review that would impact regions, communities or the broader recreational fishery.

If the proposed changes are not made to size, bag and boat limits then the potential ecological, economic and social impacts across the fishery, particularly in regional areas, are likely to be larger if the sector is not sustainable or shared in an equitable way in the long-term.

The proposed arrangements for King George Whiting aim to maintain quality recreational fishing opportunities and ensure the continued supply of commercially harvested, premium SA seafood, to ensure seafood and recreational fishing-related tourism and associated business activities are able to continue in South Australia.

Stakeholder concerns were raised about the potential negative economic impacts of restrictions on King George Whiting fishing activities in coastal regions around the state. Feedback received from the KGW Management Paper indicated the fishery had regional characteristics, such as weather, seasonality of fishing opportunities and size of fish, which

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needed to be considered when implementing new management arrangements. This feedback has been carefully considered in developing the proposed arrangements to avoid disproportionate impacts on any particular region.

PIRSA has aimed to minimise potential economic impacts by proposing a suite of management arrangements that take into account the community concerns with some of the options discussed during the review. This includes continuing to allow the harvest of large fish at a reduced level, and maintaining fishing opportunities in April to account for the important Easter and April school holiday periods.

While the reduced bag and boat limits on large fish (>40 cm) are unlikely to disadvantage fishers in the South East, impacts are likely to occur in the lower Yorke Peninsula where higher numbers of larger, sexually mature fish are often targeted by recreational, charter and commercial fishers; this impact will be less than if an upper size limit was implemented.

The proposed spawning spatial closure will prevent recreational, charter and commercial fishers from taking King George Whiting in areas of southern Spencer Gulf, southern Gulf St Vincent and northern Kangaroo Island during May. A state-wide seasonal closure and spatial closures were both considered as management options to protect fish during their critical reproductive spawning period from March to May, or during the peak month of April. Concerns were raised regarding the potential social and economic impacts of a restriction on King George Whiting fishing in this region during the school holiday period and Easter long weekend, which usually occur in April. PIRSA has therefore modified the

proposal to apply a spawning spatial closure to the key biologically important area for the fishery during May instead. This is expected to have a similar level of ecological benefit with reduced social and economic impacts.

In previous processes when PIRSA have implemented spawning spatial closures for Snapper in five locations in the Gulfs, the economic impact to local tourism and business has been low. This is because tourists will still visit areas for other reasons, and if fishing will target other species in the area regardless of the restrictions to the access of individual species.

Negative economic impacts are likely to result from further declines in the status of key King George Whiting stocks if changes are not made to the management arrangements at this time.

7.3 Social Factors

The benefits of the proposed changes include positive social impacts through the long-term sustainability of recreational fishing in South Australia. In addition to sustainability, these proposals also aim to share access to fish species more equitably across the recreational fishing sector. A key principle of the review was to promote the principle of a 'fair day's fishing' and limit recreational fishers to a reasonable amount of fish to catch and process/consume during a day's fishing.

The proposed limits have been designed to be simple, reasonable and enforceable.

Stakeholder comments identified that the proposed increase to the minimum legal size limit would impact recreational fishers in the upper gulfs where juvenile fish are targeted. While this is acknowledged, available information indicates that King George Whiting below 32 cm do not

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constitute a significant part of the recreational catch in the upper gulfs.

Recreational and commercial fishers on the West Coast raised concerns that if consistent management arrangements were not implemented across the state, shifting fishing effort into their region from other areas may have negative sustainability and social implications on local fish stocks and fishing opportunities. The proposed state-wide implementation of reduced bag and boat limits aims to minimise this risk.

7.4 Equity Factors

The proposed increase to the legal minimum size of King George Whiting and the spawning spatial closure will apply to both the recreational and commercial fishing sectors.

The proposed changes to recreational bag and boat limits aim to apply equitably within the recreational fishing sector. In addition to managing South Australia's fisheries resources in an ecologically sustainable way, they aim to ensure recreational fishing is an activity which can be shared equitably and enjoyed by South Australians for current and future generations.

Implementing the proposed outcomes of the recreational fishing review and King George Whiting review aim to maintain the allocations of the key species consistent with the *Fisheries Management Act 2007* and the Government's Allocation Policy.

8. Mitigation

Generally the stakeholder submissions to the review demonstrated support for and understanding of the need for changes to be made to the existing arrangements.

Most of the changes identified in the Size, Bag and Boat Limit Review received a high level of support. A number of the proposals have been

amended to address issues raised by stakeholders during the public consultation process. For example, although it has biological merit, a maximum size limit on Whaler Sharks has not been proposed given concerns about fisher safety if required to measure large sharks.

Stakeholders generally showed concern for the sustainability status of King George Whiting populations and supported the need for management action. Feedback received from the KGW Management Paper indicated the fishery had regional characteristics, such as weather, seasonality of fishing opportunities and size of fish, which needed to be considered when implementing new management arrangements. This feedback has been carefully considered in developing the proposed arrangements to avoid disproportionate impacts on any particular region.

Other mitigation strategies are identified in the 'Summary of Impacts and Analysis' above.

9. Coordination

The following Government agencies were consulted in relation to this issue:

- Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure;
- Department of State Development;
- Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources;
- Attorney-General's Department – Crown Solicitor's Office;
- South Australian Tourism Commission;
- Australian Government Department of the Environment;
- Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources; and
- Australian Fisheries Management Authority.

10. Local Government

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The Local Government Association was informed and invited to provide feedback on the proposals. Feedback was received from two local councils: District Council of Tumbly Bay and District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula. Local council representatives attended a number of the public meetings.

11. Preferred Options

The proposed changes to size limits and recreational bag and boat limits are largely consistent with the arrangements initially proposed in the Size, Bag and Boat Review. As a result of the public consultation process, a number of the proposals were modified, including for the following species:

- Australian Herring
- Wrasse
- Whaler Sharks
- Bloodworms
- Scallop

The KGW Management Paper identified that a number of management options are available to manage the King George Whiting fishery, each

with positives and negatives which were outlined in the paper and further investigated during the extensive public consultation process. While each management option has impacts due to the additional constraints imposed, without suitable management actions the result will likely be further decline in the stocks that support the fishery.

The proposed changes aim to strike a balance between providing adequate protection for King George Whiting stocks and equitably sharing the resource between fishing sectors, while minimising impacts on fishers, seafood consumers and associated regional communities.

12. Agency Contact Details

Fisheries and Aquaculture Division

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