

POSITION STATEMENT



27 November 2019

Snapper Management in SA: Rehabilitating habitat is just as important as season closures

Dr Michael Sierp - Senior Manager SA and Craig Copeland - CEO

OzFish Unlimited

Contact: MichaelSierp@ozfish.org.au

The potential collapse of South Australia's premier large sportfish the Snapper (*Chrysophrys auratus*) is pending (DEW 2018; Steer et al 2018). In response a 3-year closed season has been implemented on recreational, charter and commercial Snapper fisheries from November the 1st 2019. A similar decline has occurred in the Western Australian Pink Snapper fishery resulting in management actions in the Gascoyne area (WA Fisheries 2018). There are arguments over who is responsible for the decline in S.A. fish stocks, but one element, potentially just as important, is relatively missing from the current discussion: Habitat loss. The habitat of Gulf St Vincent and Spencer Gulf has been highly degraded over the last 100 years and at an increasing rate in some areas. Those areas are critical to the Snapper fishery.

Habitat disturbance is the key impactor determining the maximum carrying capacity of fisheries where they use reef and seagrass beds for protection, breeding and food particularly during early life stages. Unfortunately, S.A. has lost thousands of hectares of seagrass and significant amounts of native oyster reefs due to human impacts in S.A. In good condition these habitats would have previously supported immense tonnages of fish production annually, including Snapper. The exact economics are debated but in agreement is that the economic loss related to seagrass is worth millions of dollars in lost revenue by today's standards (MacArthur and Boland 2006; Blandon and zu Ermgassen 2014). It is also logical that even with a 100% ban on fishing, the potentially achievable current maximum biomass of the fisheries in S.A. could only be much less than historic maximum levels because the carrying capacity has been reduced through habitat loss.

OzFish and its members agree that changes to modify the level of fishing pressure are required immediately to re-establish the S.A. Snapper fishery to a sustainable level however, OzFish wants to do more than just restore it to a sustainable level. OzFish aims to make it more productive than it has been in decades through its successful project applications (OzFish 2008). Restoration of habitat is part of the discussion and to be serious about managing this fishery, then working with community volunteers who are keen to contribute to a better fishing future is just as important as closures. Rehabilitation of fisheries habitat by community volunteers has no negative implications. It value adds to numerous commercial and recreational fisheries, provides economic and social benefits to SA and increases marine biodiversity. Everyone wins.



REFERENCES

Blandon, A, and P.S.E. zu Ermgassen (2014) Quantitative estimate of commercial fish enhancement by seagrass habitat in southern Australia. *Estuarine and Shelf Science* 141 , 1-8

DEW (2018) Technical information for the 2018 fish stocks (proportion of stocks sustainable) trend and condition report card. Department for Environment and Water April, 2018 DEW Technical note 2018/38
https://data.environment.sa.gov.au/Content/Publications/RC507_fish%20stocks_tech.pdf

McArthur, L.C and J.W. Boland (2006) The economic contribution of seagrass to secondary production in South Australia. *Ecological Modelling*. Volume 196, Issues 1–2, 10 July 2006, Pages 163-172

OzFish (2018) Annual Report https://ozfish.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Ozfish_Annual_Report_2017-2018_FA_V4_LR.pdf

Steer, M.A., Fowler, A.J., McGarvey, R., Feenstra, J., Westlake, E.L., Matthews, D., Drew, M., Rogers, P.J. and Earl, J. (2018). Assessment of the South Australian Marine Scalefish Fishery in 2016. Report to PIRSA Fisheries and Aquaculture (PDF 7.9 MB). South Australian Research and Development Institute (Aquatic Sciences), Adelaide. SARDI Publication No. F2017/000427-1. SARDI Research Report Series No. 974. 250pp.

WA Fisheries (2018) Northern Bernier Island pink snapper closure <http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/Fishing-and-Aquaculture/Recreational-Fishing/Recreational-Fishing-Rules/Gascoyne-Coast-Bioregion/Pages/Seasonal-Closures.aspx>