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Fish Now, Fish Forever

Ms Sharon Starick
Chair, Ministers Recreational Fishing Advisory Council
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5 July 2021

Dear Sharon,

RE: Management of the South East Snapper fishery

On 18 March 2021, Minister Basham wrote to you advising of management changes in the SE Snapper fishery and seeking advice on whether the seasonal ban on Snapper capture for recreational fishers should be lifted in-line with his decision to effect the same for the commercial fishing sector. To date, this matter has not been addressed by the MRFAC.

RecFish SA rejects the opinion that all stakeholders were “surprised” that the February – June recreational allocation of Snapper was caught in four and half weeks. For the past decade we have argued that the total allocation for the recreational sector of 18% is inconsistent with best available information which suggests that traditional catch was in the vicinity of 37 – 42%. Further, we have been reliably informed of the misuse of the App used for reporting Snapper catch which has resulted in a large overestimate of the actual numbers of fish captured by the recreational sector.

The Ministers decision to remove the Snapper spawning season closure for the commercial fishing sector from 1 July 2021, without consultation with any other sectoral user group prior to the decision, is not supported by RecFish SA. Most concerningly, he received the advice to lift the closure from the commercial fishing sectors’, Red Tape Reduction Working Group (RTRWG), whose Terms of Reference relate to identifying unnecessary administrative and regulatory impediments to industry development without compromising the objects of the *Fisheries Management Act*. It is difficult to see how the removal of annual seasonal fishing closure can be considered merely a “red tape” issue due to the serious implications for the sustainability of the species and equity for multiple user groups.

The seasonal closure for Snapper has been in place for many years as a means of protecting stocks during their migratory spawning runs but existing science indicates that there is minimal spawning of Snapper in the SE of SA. However, SARDI Aquatic Sciences have conducted minimal research in this area and there remains considerable uncertainty about the spawning status of Snapper in the SE. Further, anecdotal evidence suggests that spawning activity may be greater than thought, with ripe and running fish regularly captured and an abundance of juvenile fish being caught in the region, including the Coorong. Under these circumstances, we believe it is necessary to strictly uphold the Precautionary Principle and conduct further research before adopting management changes which may prove disastrous.

The matters of inequity in the fishery which have been created because of lifting the seasonal closure for the commercial fishing sector are obvious and will have serious implications for fishing access. The inshore schools which are most accessed by recreational fishers will be highly impacted by commercial fishing effort in the period before the recreational season opens on 1 February. The lifting of the closure will also allow commercial Southern Zone Rock Lobster fishers to retain Snapper caught as bycatch in lobster pots during the period of main fishing activity between October and Christmas thus, placing greater pressure on populations traditionally accessed by recreational fisher.

The options available to the Minister to redress the sustainability and equity issues created by the recommendations of the RTRWG may include; revoking commercial access during the seasonal spawning closure pending further research which confirms that stock sustainability is not impacted and; implementing a shoreline area closure for the commercial sector in the South- East fishery zone to protect recreational access.

RecFish SA is committed to ensuring that our vital Snapper fishery is managed appropriately for all users and looks forward to working cooperatively and productively in resolving this important matter.

Your sincerely,



Mick Wilson

Chair, RecFish SA

cc MRFAC secretariat@sa.gov.au