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New Rules Unfair to Recreational Fishers/Net Fishing Remains Open Slather

The new rules for managing Queensland's coastal fin fish and sand crabs are unfair and unreasonable. This is the opinion of many anglers and their representative organisation, Sunfish Queensland. Recreational fishing has again borne the brunt of restriction to ensure that fish stocks are sustainable. Commercial net fishing remains "open slather" with NO restrictions on catches. In accepting angler bag limits, Sunfish sought reasonable catch limits on commercial netters. This submission was NOT accepted by Government.

The stocks that support popular recreational fishing activities in coastal Queensland include whiting, bream, flathead, tailor, barramundi, dart, small mackerels, and mullet as well as many other species such as sand crabs.

Very few new restrictions have been placed on existing commercial fishing catches or net fishing operations. In fact netters have been given major benefits such as special net fishing endorsements for catching sharks and for using huge tunnel or barrier nets in Moreton Bay and in Hervey Bay/Sandy Straits. Their only new catch restriction is on sharks.

In contrast strict bag limits have been introduced on all fish taken by recreational fishers with limits as low as one or two fish for some species.

Major concerns of the recreational fishing sector over the new rules are:

1. Effectively stopping the "school jew" fishery by putting a size limit of 75cm on jew/mulloway. This will stop anglers from continuing to catch school jew in the rivers and estuaries in south Queensland where they are particularly popular. Sunfish argued strongly but unsuccessfully for the continuation of the school jew fishery, but was overruled.
2. Restricting catches of summer whiting to 30. Sunfish Queensland made a strong submission for a bag limit of 50 for all whiting. This is the basic bread and butter fish caught throughout Queensland by anglers who often travel large distances. The Fishery Department's Management Advisory Committee for this fishery unanimously supported a bag of 50 for all whiting and the Department has ignored this advice, and no reason has been given.
3. Garfish sustainability. Garfish are vulnerable to excessive fishing due to their limited ability to produce eggs. A very restrictive bag limit has been placed on recreational fishers but commercial netters have no restrictions on garfish netting activities especially in sensitive seagrass areas. Under this new arrangement the future sustainability of garfish is in jeopardy.

4. Commercial bait nets. Sunfish Queensland submitted that commercial bait nets (some up to 600m) should only be used to catch bait. The Management Advisory Committee agreed to a compromise arrangement whereby these nets could not be used to take bream, whiting, flathead or barramundi in certain marine park zones. This recommendation has also been ignored so that the small mesh bait nets can be used to target all species.

5. Prohibiting the use of four inverted dillies to catch sand crabs. Many recreational fishers who own small boats use inverted dillies in the early morning to catch a small feed of fresh sand crabs. This activity has a very low impact and should not be stopped.

The fish taken in this review inhabit the most popular family fishing areas, and yet again recreational anglers have seen their lifestyle eroded while a small and mostly uneconomic commercial fishery is given precedence. This is not fair and equitable treatment and comes as anglers see more and more of their fishing areas closed in Marine Parks.

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