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NSW Government sees red over blue groper deaths

Industry & Investment NSW Fisheries Officers have apprehended a man, allegedly caught red handed with an illegal haul of Eastern Blue Groper, the emblem fish of NSW, Primary Industries Minister Ian Macdonald said today.

The 39-year-old man from the Sydney suburb of Lansvale was apprehended at Wattamolla in the Royal National Park last week.

“This is an absolutely inexcusable example of illegal fishing, and I commend our fisheries officers for a sterling effort in apprehending this reckless offender,” Mr Macdonald said.

“Blue Groper has been a protected species for many years and can only be caught legally by rod and line or handline.

Mr Macdonald said NSW Fisheries Officers observed the man carrying a large backpack and hessian sack, west along the rocky shore area of Wattamolla.

“A search was carried out and the man was allegedly found to be in possession of 15 Eastern Blue Groper, ranging in size from 35.7cm to 65cm,” the Minister said.

“It will be alleged that all the fish were speared, and had wounds consistent with that of a spear.

“This is perhaps one of the most deplorable fisheries crimes I have ever seen and this offender can expect to face the full force of the law,” Mr Macdonald said.

Minister Macdonald said the man is facing a range of charges including possess fish illegally taken, and exceeding the bag limit, which each carry a maximum penalty of \$11,000 and three months in jail.

“The bag limit for Blue Groper is two per person, with only one longer than 60cm,” he said.

The NSW Government has previously declared the Eastern blue groper the state emblem fish of NSW.

“Blue groper is a hugely popular and well known species because of their friendly nature and underwater antics, and are a favourite fish of divers and snorkelers throughout the state,” Mr Macdonald said.

“This appalling case should serve as a warning to all fishers that bag limits are in place to help protect our fisheries resource.

“If we want to maintain healthy and sustainable fisheries for future generations, all fishers need to abide by the rules.”

“Our precious fisheries resource is finite and the Government is doing all it can to protect this valuable community owned asset,” Minister Macdonald said.

To report illegal fishing, contact your nearest fisheries office, or call the Fishers Watch phone line on 1800 043 536.