

Fishers for Fish Habitat Forum

18 -19 June 2009

Ballina Beach Resort, Ballina, NSW

Report for participants

Fishers for Fish Habitat is a NSW Department of Primary Industries developed program. It aims to increase awareness about the importance of fish habitat and inspire anglers to do what they can to protect and enhance these vital areas that our native freshwater fish need to survive and thrive, and in doing so help make more fish!

We can all be inspired by the recreational anglers throughout NSW who are doing things to improve fish habitat. They plant trees on riverbanks, protect mangroves and seagrass beds, clean up rubbish at local fishing spots, help out at fishing clinics and carp muster events and raise awareness about structures that restrict fish movement.

The **Fishers for Fish Habitat** program also aims to ensure the community is aware of the good works these individuals are doing to improve the environment for native fish species and the enjoyment of future generations.

Fishers for Fish Habitat is funded by the NSW Recreational Fishing Trusts and the Natural Resources Advisory Council through the Forging Partnerships Program.

Fishers for Fish Habitat is supported by the NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers, NSW Fishing Monthly and the Murray Darling Basin Authority.

The first **Fishers for Fish Habitat** Forum was held in Ballina on 18-19 June 2009. It was organised by Charlotte Jenkins, Liz Baker and Craig Copeland (Conservation Action Unit, NSW DPI (Fisheries), Wollongbar). Thanks go to Alison Brown and Charlie Carruthers for the assistance in the lead-up and during the Forum, to Dr Charles Gray and Andrew Goulstone for their presentations and to the venue staff at the Ballina Beach Resort.

Special thanks to Steve 'Starlo' Starling for his support of the Forum and to Shimano for providing items for the **Fishers for Fish Habitat** forum bags.



NSW DEPARTMENT OF
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES



Natural Resources Advisory Council
NEW SOUTH WALES



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What we did

The first **Fishers for Fish Habitat** Forum was held in Ballina, northern New South Wales, on 18-19 June 2009. It included presentations, posters, interactive discussions, a field site tour and a dinner with national fishing identity, Steve 'Starlo' Starling.

The presentations included:

- Bream, bass and blackfish: The status of the NSW recreational fishery by Dr. Charles Gray, Research Leader, Wild Fisheries, NSW DPI (see Attachment 1)
- Habitat makes fish happen! What native fish need to survive and thrive by Craig Copeland, Manager, Conservation Action Unit, NSW DPI (see Attachment 2)
- International news: Fisher-driven habitat initiatives overseas by Charlotte Jenkins, Conservation Action Unit, NSW DPI (see Attachment 3)
- Resistance V's Resilience: Climate change implications on fish in NSW by Andrew Goulstone, Manager, Fisheries Planning & Operations, NSW DPI (See Attachment 4)
- Where to from here? Options for keeping in touch by Charlotte Jenkins, Conservation Action Unit, NSW DPI (see Attachment 5)

There were also presentations from four of the fishers who featured as case studies in the *Recreational fishers make fish happen!* booklet:

- Rodney Tonkin from Orange;
- Kevin Clark from Kyogle;
- Ernie Hawkins from Howlong; and
- Cassie Price from Ballina.

NSW DPI staff from the Aquatic Habitat Rehabilitation program and the Aquatic Habitat Protection Unit also provided posters and gave brief overviews of their projects.

During the Forum, participants were given a survey on fish habitat issues and fishers' information needs. One person who completed the survey won the surprise prize – a 'Starlo' fishing rod and reel, generously donated by Shimano.

Interactive sessions provided an opportunity for participants to discuss fish habitat issues and communication preferences in smaller groups (approximately 6 per group). A representative from each group then presented key ideas to the wider audience. A summary of the survey and interactive session results are provided in Attachment 6.

To allow the Fishers for Fish Habitat team to evaluate the success of the Forum and support for a similar event in the future, participants were invited to complete evaluation surveys. A summary of these evaluations are provided in Attachment 7.

Who attended?

Nearly 70 people (excluding NSW DPI staff) from across NSW attended the Forum. There were also several recreational fishers from inter-state. Most people participated as individuals, however the groups or organisations which were represented included:

- Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing
- Ballina Fishermen's Cooperative
- NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers
- EcoFishers
- Fishcare volunteers
- Fishing clubs from Alstonville, Ballina, Lismore, Grafton, Narrabri, Hastings and the Clarence
- Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority
- Clarence Valley Council
- NSW Fishing Monthly
- Recreational Fishing Freshwater Trust Expenditure Committee
- Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust Expenditure Committee
- Southern Cross University and University of Queensland
- WetlandCare Australia
- VRFish
- RecFish Australia

What we learnt

One of the most important things we all learnt from the Forum was that there are many recreational fishers who are committed to improving the condition of fish habitat. While the messages about fish habitat need to be accepted by the broad community of recreational fishers and by the public in general, the message from the Forum is that we are not alone in our interest or our efforts.

The results of the survey and discussion questions are summarised below. More information is provided in the summaries (see Attachment 6).

Fish habitat as an issue

- Over 80 % of participants said restoring fish habitat is important to restoring fish numbers (Figure 1).

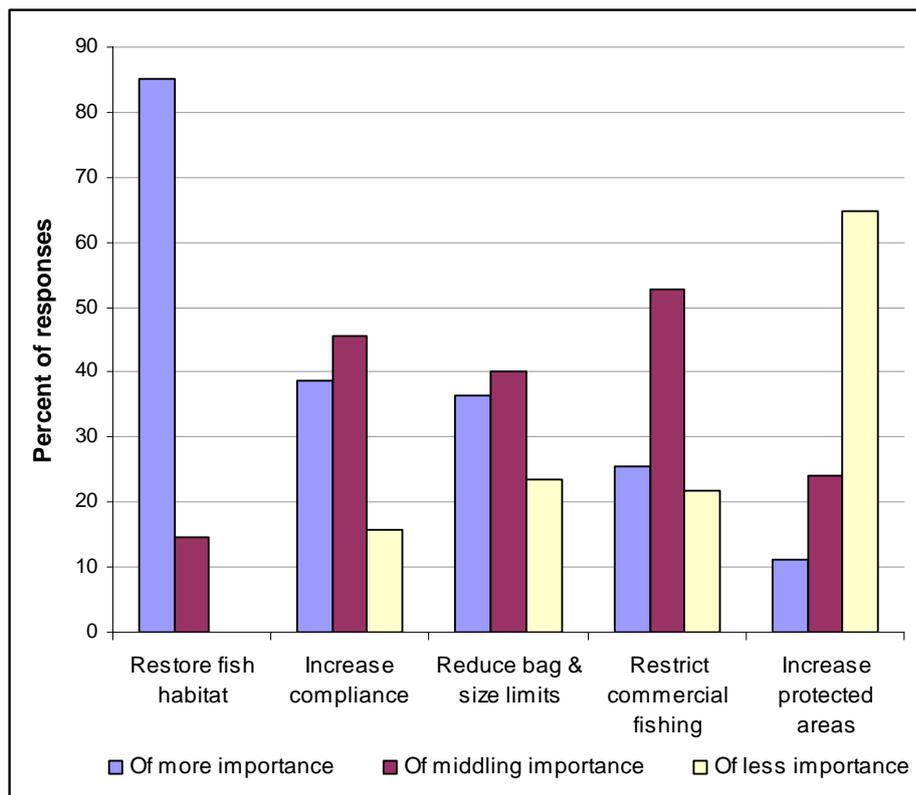


Figure 1. The responses to the question 'What is the most important thing that could be done to restore fish numbers?'

- The key fish habitat issues people felt needed to be addressed to improve recreational fishing included:
 - land development
 - water flows (water extraction, release, flood mitigation effects)
 - riparian degradation
 - in-water habitat degradation, particularly the loss of
 - ✦ snags
 - ✦ seagrass beds and mangroves
 - barriers to fish passage (weirs, floodgates)
 - water quality.

Involvement in fish habitat work

- Participants clearly felt that government should be mainly responsible for doing habitat work (Figure 2). Fishers (recreational and commercial) and landholders had the least responsibility.

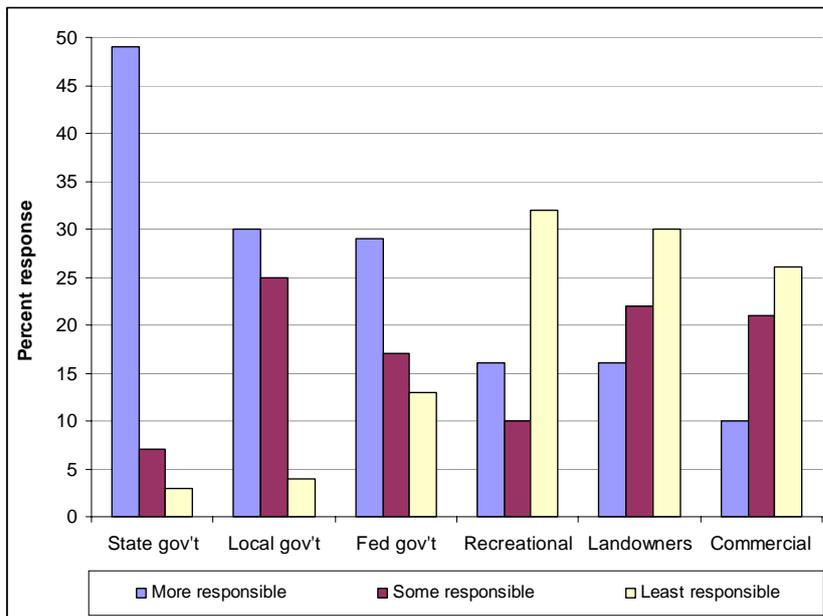


Figure 2. The responses to the question 'Who should be mainly responsible for doing habitat work?'

- Most participants (65 %) indicated there were barriers to recreational fishers getting involved in habitat projects. The factors listed as barriers included:
 - knowledge
 - time and resources
 - lack of funds and lack of knowledge about funding sources.

Participants identified several topics that they felt they needed more information about, including (see Attachment 7 for further detail):

- how healthy fish populations are at a local and regional level, including baseline information and trends
- what is impacting on local areas
- what fish need in terms of habitat to survive and thrive
- what is being done and by whom, including information about previous successful projects
- how funding is being allocated and where money is coming from.

Providing information about how fishers can be involved was also seen as important. Participants noted that people needed to know how these projects and their involvement in them could lead to improved fishing.

Improving the ways in which information is provided and available was also seen as important. Good data needs to be provided in simple and easy-to-read formats. Information needs to be available at bait shops, in newsletters and online and it would be helpful if there was a centralised source where information, regardless of where it's from, was available.

Sharing information

Given that knowledge about fish habitat, funding and projects was seen to be an issue, participants offered numerous suggestions about how best to get information to and from recreational fishers.

- Participants suggested a wide range of options for getting information out to recreational fishers in general. The most common suggestions were:
 - face-to-face opportunities, including using the fishers' word-of-mouth networks
 - with licence material
 - media (television, local radio, local newspapers)
 - talks to local fishing clubs and information for their newsletters
 - fishing magazines
 - on websites and via email and other on-line media
 - newsletters, brochures and pamphlets.
- Surveys were the most often suggested means of getting information *from* recreational fishers. Participants suggested that surveys could be included with licences, be available at bait and tackle shops, be conducted on-the-spot (eg at boat ramps) and/or be on-line. Face-to-face interaction and more involvement with local fishing clubs were also popular suggestions.

Keeping in touch

A mix of face-to-face and online options was suggested. On-line options included mailing lists and web-based activities, especially interactive sites. Most participants agreed that having a central contact person to go to for information was also important. Continued interaction, whether it is in person or online, with more and more fishers and between fishers and others interested in fish habitat was wanted.

The key messages

- *Keep it simple*
- *Keep it relevant*
- *Get the message out*
- *Let people know what's happening*
- *Acknowledge what's being done*
- *Get people together*

Forum 2010

Participants clearly supported the Forum as a useful way of learning more about fish habitat and the work that's being done by individuals, community organisations and government to improve it. There was strong support for a Forum in 2010.

Suggestions about content, location, timing and funding were made (see Attachment 7 for further detail).

Content

- Include a round-up of notable projects and initiatives since the 2009 Forum and their current status.
- Information on who to contact and how to get involved with habitat improvement projects in local areas.
- More information about recreational fishers' projects - the 'What-Who-How' of projects.
- More site visits.
- Include events and activities, such as an electro-fishing demonstration, carp muster or fishing event.
- More time for informal, non-structured interaction between participants.
- Develop one local priority project, getting people involved immediately.

Location

There was a split between a slight majority of people who recommended only one Forum per year, with the venue located in different places each year, and those who recommended multiple events, including a State Forum in conjunction with several regional forums each year. The availability of funding means that it is unlikely that NSW DPI will be able to fund more than one event per year; however, other organisations or recreational fishers themselves are encouraged to organise complementary forums.

Several specific sites were suggested for the 2010 Forum:

- a mid state location – not Sydney
- the Hunter
- central inland NSW
- South Coast
- Inverell

Timing

It was suggested that a weekend might attract more people.

Funding / support

Additional funding would help develop and host the Fishers for Fish Habitat Forum. Exploring funding contribution from the other major stakeholders (eg, manufacturers of fishing gear, boats, outboards and 4WDs) was one suggestion.

Report attachments

Please note: Forum presentations are available in full colour on the Department's website go to <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/habitat/rehabilitating/fishers>