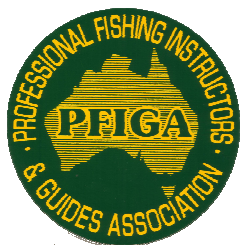


# **Understanding the Value of Environmental Accreditation to the Recreational Fishing Community**

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and  
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**Australian Government**  
**Fisheries Research and  
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## Non technical summary

Melanie Young and Malcolm Poole, attended the Ecotourism Australia Conference, held from 9 to 11 November 2009, in order to satisfy objectives relating to assessment of the Ecotourism Australia Accreditation and the potential benefits to the professional fishing sector<sup>1</sup>. We also aimed to identify linkages to current accreditation, self analysis schemes and Codes of Practice within the recreational fishing industry and opportunities for personal and professional development for members of the recreational fishing industry and networking opportunities within the ecotourism industry.

It was evident from the onset that there was little understanding from other attendees as to why the fishing industry of Australia was represented at this particular event. Some attendees expressed confusion and opposition to the suggestion that fishing of any description could have possible links to both or either, the tourism industry or the term ecotourism. A small percentage of attendees extended their support to the proactive attitude of the fishing industry by partaking in the event.

As a result of the strong opposition by a percentage of the group, the decision was made to investigate the reasoning behind the opposing movement whilst educating the attendees in the sustainability and conservation efforts current and historical by the fishing industry.

Discussion was initiated with attendees in relation to their perception as tourism operators, environmental educators, scientists and the like, as to factual or opinionative reasoning that formed their perception. A large percentage of the aforementioned, reasoned that they had not been exposed to the promotion of fishing activities whilst practicing or contributing within the Tourism sector. A percentage believed that recreational fishing was damaging to the natural environment quoting extraction as a main cause of degradation of aquatic ecosystems but were unwilling to engage in factual debate or cite evidence that supported their arguments.

Representation of the 4WD drive community was readily accepted by the ecotourism community and acknowledged as both a contributor to ecotourism and nature based tourism in Australia.

On the second day of the conference, a presenter from the Transport & Tourism Forum (TTF) informed the audience that international visitors to Australia who participated in a nature based activity spent \$2.4 billion in the June quarter 2009. When asked "What percentage of that figure is attributed to fishing?" His response was that fishing of any description was not considered by the TTF as nature based tourism. The TTF considers bushwalking, whale watching, snorkelling, scuba diving, visiting a national/state park, zoo, aquarium or botanical garden as nature based tourism.

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<sup>1</sup> Professional denotes in this report "all those involved in a fee-for-service style recreational fishing adventure or experience including; guides, instructors and educators, charter and fishing tour operators"

Comment was made by a large percentage of attendees subsequent to the TTF presentation, that they believed the guided fishing sector should be included in these figures. I believe this decrease in opposition was a direct result of the positive, informative arguments posed by Mr Poole and myself, throughout the conference to attendees. The initial opposition could be considered a result of both lack of knowledge of the attendees and a lack of engagement by the recreational fishing sector.

***It is recommended that the recreational fishing industry start to engage with such groups and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to improve and gather more details about the recreational fishing industry and those that participate in fishing nationally.***

Through their positive self promotion, networking and proactive attitude to practicing conservation where possible, the 4WD community has achieved what the guided fishing sector has yet to.

International presenters strongly stated that the term and mindset of ecotourism must be replaced with sustainable tourism. It was stated that sustainable tourism must take into account sustainability of all significant factors, including environmental, social and economic benefits. This was a reoccurring theme by international presenters but not necessarily discussed, acknowledged or embraced by attendees. I believe this movement internationally is significant to all sectors of the fishing industry in Australia but especially recreational fishing. The acknowledgement of sustainable tourism internationally presents a segway into discussion relevant to combating complete shutouts of access to fishing in areas that might prove detrimental to the social and economic sustainability without factual evidence of threatened fish stocks or degradation to aquatic ecosystems in some cases.

Lisha Mulqueeny from GBRMPA presented in relation to the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. She stated that there had been 841 permits to date given to tourism operators to operate in the marine park. During question time at the conclusion of her presentation, I posed the question, what percentage, of these permits were provided to professional fisherman. The response was that less than 3% were for fishing tourism operators. When asked why that was the case, her answer was to her knowledge no one else has asked for them. Without factual evidence to indicate this was not the case, I was left with the opinion that the reoccurring theme presenting itself was the lack of engagement or knowledge by the guided fishing sector in matters relating to self promotion and opportunities available to the sector regarding marine parks.

GBRMPA has aligned with Ecotourism Australia and currently holds in high regard tourism operators applying for permits who are currently accredited by Ecotourism Australia. It is stated in the GBRMPA protocol that they will consider equivalent accreditations. Upon reviewing the accreditation process with Kym Cheatham, CEO Ecotourism Australia, it became clear that the elective offered for fishing, was brief, yet unrealistic, as it offered criteria that posed concerns for the guided fishing sector's capability to achieve full compliance at the advanced accreditation level.

As tourism operators, the guided fishing sector is required by a large percentage of clientele to offer services such as the consumption of their catch. This practice is not compliant with the criteria set by the advanced accreditation of Ecotourism Australia and

results in the offending operator's accreditation being revoked or denied approval at the initial processing of the application. Although the basic level of accreditation is available and could be met by the sector (no requirement to not kill fish), the basic level of accreditation does not deviate from criteria that must be currently met by professional guides or fee-for-service operators wishing to join the Professional Fishing Instructors and Guides Association of Australia.

The cost of Ecotourism Australia accreditation is also prohibitive. A compromise was offered on behalf of the PFIGA to Ecotourism Australia whereby the PFIGA might offer volume in applications for accreditation in order to offset the costs and still benefit from marketing and networking opportunities by having the Ecotourism accreditation.

This was accepted as a possibility open for further discussion and negotiation by Ecotourism Australia. They are not currently in a position to include sportfishing or tournaments in their accreditation.

### **Outcomes achieved to date**

Outcomes achieved to date are as follows:

1. Recognition from the Ecotourism and Tourism sector of the recreational fishing industry's proactive attitude and actions relating to sustainability and conservation practices and efforts
2. Identification of lack of effective engagement by professional fishing guides with the tourism industry
3. Identification of information gap in the greater public arena relating to conservation and sustainability projects led by the fishing industry
4. Identification of the acceptance of the 4WD community in the tourism and ecotourism industry and their effective strategies
5. Identification of the guided fishing sector's activities being included in tourism reporting and collection of data practices
6. Strong networks built with key stakeholders within the tourism industry of Australia
7. Recognition of the inadequate utilisation of opportunities for the guided fishing sector relevant to funding, marketing and access
8. Identification of an international movement and trends focused on sustainable tourism rather than ecotourism
9. Identification that PFIGA accredited members would benefit from gap analysis on current accreditation against Ecotourism Australia and National Accommodation, Recreation and Tourism (NARTA) accreditation with the view to implement gaps identified into PFIGA accreditation resulting in the PFIGA accreditation being potentially accepted by the Marine Park Association and potentially the National Parks Association.
10. Identification of the potential for the provision of recreational fishing clinics encompassing the principles of ecotourism focused on low socioeconomic areas by non profit recreational fishing organisations to encourage intrastate

tourism, recreational fishing, sustainability practices, employment in the fishing industry and improve public perception of the recreational fishing community.

## **Acknowledgments**

The project and the associated report was made possible by funding from Fisheries Research and Development Corporation through a successful Tactical Research Fund application, support by Recfish Australia, Recfishing Research, the Professional Fishing Instructors and Guides Association, the Recreational Fishing Alliance of New South Wales, and Young Guns Fishing Adventures.

Special acknowledgment is made to Len Olyott, Chief Executive Officer of Recfish Australia, and Frank Prokop, Executive Officer of Recfishwest for providing us with their time, support and the drive to explore such opportunities that will benefit the recreational fishing industry in the future.

## Background

Several discussions have occurred between PFIGA, RFANSW and Recfish Australia, as well as a number of the state recreational fishing bodies, around the Global Eco and Eco Tourism Australia Conference subjects and the themed workshops offered.

This was an attempt to establish an initial understanding of the values and synergies between recreational fishing and ecotourism type activities, as well as what may be on offer for such recreational fishing operators by following or being accepted as part of an accredited tourism operation.

By having a representative from the Professional Fishing Instructors and Guides Association it will provide them with the opportunity to understand and engage with other groups that have passed through any eco tourism type accreditation schemes.

This will add further value to membership of PFIGA whereby members can achieve accreditation through a streamlined process. The end result for recreational fishers is identification of environmentally responsible fishing tour guides and the knowledge that they are making a sustainable choice.

The PFIGA Business Plan notes relevant objectives:

- Guiding recreational fishing into a sustainable future through education and leadership.
- Investigation into eco tourism and tourism accreditations where complimentary to current PFIGA accreditation, to ensure best practice of operators and accurate education/instruction of clients serviced in environmental issues and sustainability.
- Investigation into current consultation practices and potential partnerships between industry professionals (PFIGA) and conservation bodies or associations such as the Marine Park Association and the National Parks Association.
- Research and implementation of projects relating to the social and economic benefits of recreational fishing being enhanced by a consistent, best practice approach by the Professional Fishing sector.
- Business development and marketing opportunities for accredited guides and instructors within the tourism sector

The Recfishing Research Business Plan lists several objectives for further investment around tourism, industry development and climate change:

- Measuring the economic value of recreation fishing and fish stocking, especially to regional, rural communities and tourism;
- Improving the adaptive capacity of the recreational fishing sector in the face of environmental (e.g. climate change, diminishing resources) and social change.



- Impacts of environmental and climate change on recreational fishing and fisheries.
- Measuring the number of people employed in the recreational fishing industry.
- Increasing sector capacity to undertake research particularly in relation to social and economic research.

## **Need**

Recognition of recreational fishing as an environmentally sustainable and healthy outdoor activity has been an ongoing challenge for the Australian recreational fishing community.

In an attempt to encourage environmentally sustainable fishing practices the National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing and the National Environmental Accreditation of Tournament Fishing were created by the national recreational fishing peak body, Recfish Australia.

There is a significant need for sports and tournament fishing event operators to be recognised as being proactive in both the tourism and eco tourism sectors. Although the NEATFish self evaluation process has been accepted by areas of the sports and tournament fishing sector there is potential for the self evaluation process to be improved to become a more effective, stringent accreditation and audit process.

In the original application it was stated “the link between tourism and recreational fishing has often been suggested but never fully explored at a national level and the Eco Tourism conference represents a significant opportunity for the recreational fishing sector, especially the professional fishing guides and instructors to network with other tourism operators and to identify significant partnerships and opportunities.”

The Ecotourism Conference specifically catered for tourism professionals and tour operators. Conference themes were specifically tailored to meet the needs of those offering tourism experiences rather than those enjoying tourism opportunities. As a result, there was much greater benefit for professional fishing guides and fee-for-service fishing tour operators than for recreational fishers per se.

There is a need for professional fishing instructors and guides to be at the forefront of the recreational fishing industry as champions of sustainable fishing methods and sustainable fishing practices. The education role of guides and charter operators has to date, not been fully recognised or utilised by either fisheries managers or the industry itself and there is within the sector, varying degrees of compliance. The accreditation offered by PFIGA ensures that members have met a high standard of operating practices that are environmentally sustainable. Nevertheless, the value of such accreditation and recognition by the fishing public remains to be tested.

In the original application, it was noted that there may be a need to investigate forming one or more national peak bodies to encompass fee-for-service fishing

providers. Such bodies currently exist with the PFIGA as the national body for fee-for-service fishing activity providers (such as guides and instructors) and the Charter Boat Association of Australia (primarily boat based with a marine focus), that also currently encompass fee-for-service fishing. Formation of yet another peak body is likely to be less successful than reviewing, stabilising, enhancing and supporting the current peak bodies.

Prior to the PFIGA joining Recfish Australia (in mid 2009), there was little interaction between the peak bodies at a national level although successful partnerships have been working at the state level for some time. There is great potential for the PFIGA to get involved in education and extension campaigns and take a greater role in the sustainable development of recreational fishing.

### **Objectives**

1. Deliver an objective assessment of the value of existing ecotourism accreditation schemes to Australian fishing operators and guides;
2. Scope any linkages between these schemes and recreational fishing initiatives, such as the National Code of Practice for Recreational Sport Fishing and NEATFish;
3. Outline potential pathways for the uptake and adoption of ecotourism accreditation schemes by fishing tour operators and guides, fishing tournament organisers and the recreational fishing community (if appropriate);
4. Provide selected members of the recreational fishing community with an opportunity to develop their personal and professional skills;
5. Develop stronger networks and linkages between the recreational fishing community and the ecotourism industry.

## Methods

The methods used to implement this project and formulate the resulting project report include the following:

- i. attendance at the Eco Tourism Australia Conference (9-11 November 2009);
- ii. Networking and consultation with delegates at said conference regarding practices used that could be implemented within the recreational fishing industry;
- iii. Discussion held with conference delegates to ascertain current attitudes and knowledge regarding sustainability initiatives or practices within the fishing industry of Australia.
- iv. Participation in conference presentations by local and international delegates with a proactive approach during the resulting question times.
- v. Research performed on current precedents, studies, reports and documentation available relevant to international and local practices by fishing industries and linkages to eco accreditations/practices.
- vi. Gap analysis performed on accreditation or self evaluation process and procedures for Eco Tourism Australia, Australian Tourism, PFIGA, and NEATFish.

## Results/Discussion

Consistent with the objectives of the project the results are as follows:

### ***Object 1***

- **Deliver an objective assessment of the value of existing ecotourism accreditation schemes to Australian fishing** to ensure Fishery enhancement programs are conducted in an environmentally sustainable manner and is socially and economically beneficial to communities adjacent to where it occurs.
- Understand the role that recreational fishing plays in tourism;

### **Tour operators and guides**

EcoTourism Australia states "The definition of ecotourism adopted by Ecotourism Australia is:

"Ecotourism is ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation".

The EcoGuide Australia Certification Program is a voluntary, industry-driven and managed certification program for Nature and Ecotour Guides.

The aim of the program is to promote professionalism, and practice guiding standards, within the nature and ecotourism sectors. It sets out to achieve this by establishing a set of consistent and specific standards and by recognising and rewarding those individuals committed to working to this standard. These standards have been developed through extensive consultation with the nature and ecotourism industry (at both operator and guide level) and other major stakeholders.

EcoTourism Australia currently only lists 16 tour operators Australia wide, boasting the fishing elective of their accreditation. Of these 16, only 7 have achieved the Advanced EcoTourism accreditation. Only 10 of the 16 feature the EcoTourism Australia logo on their website. A number of members promote the use of bait, consumption of catch and feature photos on their sites that do not show evidence of appropriate catch and release practices being used.

Upon reviewing the EcoTourism Australia accreditation process whilst at the conference with Kym Cheatham, CEO Ecotourism Australia, it became clear that the elective offered for fishing, was brief, yet unrealistic, as it offered criteria that posed concerns for the ability of the guided fishing sector to achieve full compliance at the advanced accreditation level.

The two criteria that must be met by fishing guide or instructor to achieve advanced level certification are the following:

- Catch and release only must be practiced at all times; and
- Lures only must be used at all times.

As tourism operators, the guided fishing sector is required by a large percentage of clients to offer services such as the consumption of their catch. In some cases, particularly with unskilled clients, lures are difficult to use. Natural bait needs to be an option at least, in some circumstances, so the client receives the service required when providing a fee-for-service fishing activity.

These practices are not compliant with the criteria set by the advanced accreditation of Ecotourism Australia and results in the offending operator's accreditation being revoked or denied approval at the initial processing of the application.

Although the basic level of accreditation is available and could be met by the professional sector as the aforementioned criteria are not stipulated, the basic level of accreditation does not deviate from criteria that must be currently met by the professional guides or fee-for-service operators that wish to join the Professional Fishing Instructors and Guides Association of Australia.

When this was brought to the attention of EcoTourism Australia and the question posed as to whether it would be possible to review the current advanced criteria to be achievable, it was clearly stated that this was not a possibility.

Upon review of the current operators noted as having achieved the advanced or basic level of accreditation there seemed to be discrepancies with these operators complying with the EcoTourism criteria as evidenced in advertising on either the Eco

Tourism website in the operator profiles or alternatively, on the operator's own website.

For example, the following quote was taken from the EcoTourism website profile page for a member listed as having advanced accreditation:

"Fishing catch and release lure fishing in both salt and fresh water rivers, ocean (keeping enough for dinner only)."

On this particular member's business website, the following quote was also noted:

"We offer 'buffet style' cuisine providing you with a variety of freshly prepared meals, including freshly caught fish, Kimberley oysters and mud crabs which are prepared by our talented onboard chef. A choice of meal options are presented to cater for all preferences with an emphasis on locally sourced fresh produce.

Some signature dishes include:

- Grilled Barramundi, (freshly caught by you!) encrusted with lime, coriander and our chefs special seasoning"

When the question was raised as to the potential of tournament or sports fishing eco accreditation, Ms Cheatham stated "we are not in a position to do that now and won't be for some time."

It is apparent that the EcoTourism Australia accreditation is not yet at a stage that would benefit the recreational, professional or sports sectors of the fishing industry. At least not until greater engagement with the recreational sector occurs or better understanding of recreational fishing practices is achieved by EcoTourism Australia.

Greenwashing is a superficial nod to the environment that marketers and businesses that historically were not interested in sustainable concerns, are doing in order to improve their public relation standings with the consumer or public.

There is a risk that the recreational fishing industry may be vulnerable to suggestions of greenwashing if the EcoTourism accreditation (as it currently stands) was taken up due to the discrepancies in their accreditation and audit process previously outlined.

***Our recommendation is that the PFIGA adjust their accreditation application process and procedures to reflect all eco friendly, sustainability values and practices that are necessary and reasonably practical for operators to achieve full compliance equivalent to EcoTourism Australia accreditation. The PFIGA will need to apply for funding to invest significant resources to achieve this.***

**Scope any linkages between these schemes and recreational fishing initiatives, such as the National Code of Practice for Recreational Sport Fishing and NEATFish;**

EcoTourism Australia accreditation of sports and tournament fishing competitions or codes of practice is not feasible at this point in time.

After performing a gap analysis on the aforementioned with a comparison to the EcoTourism Australia accreditation, linkages were minor and/or insignificant.

NEATFish accreditation could be improved to include a physical/site audit process of some sort which would be consistent with EcoTourism Australia accreditation. It is possible that PFIGA representatives that will be acting in the capacity of auditors in relation to the PFIGA accreditation could be utilised for this function.

An investigation into the monetary value of sports fishing to the Australian tourism industry needs to be performed on a national level. It was stated by Steve Morgan of the ABT and AFC Tournaments, that an enquiry was held in 2005 by the Forster Tourist Information Centre into revenue raised for Forster by participants Bream sports fishing competition. Data were collected by way of a mail-out survey completed by all competition attendees. The result was that each competitor entered in the event was worth \$1,000 in revenue to the area. As there were 120 entrants for this particular event, they concluded that approximately \$120,000 was generated over three days inclusive of the two competition days and one practice day.

Fishing tournaments in Australia are also now attracting international entrants and spectators from many countries worldwide. There is much room to expand operations in this area once more is known about the key drivers effecting the success or lack thereof in current tournaments. In addition to investigation into the economic benefits of fishing tournaments.

***It is recommended that a comprehensive investigation into benefits of the NEATFish accreditation since its inception needs to be performed to measure the value of the current program and identify areas of improvement required.***

**Outline potential pathways for the uptake and adaption of Eco Tourism accreditation schemes by fishing tour operators and guides, fishing tournament organisers and the recreational fishing community (if appropriate).**

Although there does not appear to be a suitable ecotourism accreditation currently available in Australia to suit the needs of recreational, professional or sports fishing, conceptually EcoTourism Australia provides many pathways for the adaptation of ecotourism principles to the recreational fishing industry.

One of the speakers at this event talked of experiential and sustainable tourism and how there is a large market looking to partake in an experience that encompasses local culture and being able to give back to the local community.

He talked of operators incorporating an “opt out” fee that can be used as a donation to be made to the local community.

### **Experiential Travel Case Study**

In 1990, Bruce Poon Tip launched Gap Adventures with the belief that other travellers would share his desire to experience authentic adventures in an authentic and sustainable manner.

Gap Adventures has grown from a one-man show to an award winning company of over 700 employees. A world leader in adventure travel, Gap Adventures offers more than 1,000 small group experiences, safaris and expeditions on all seven continents to more than 100,000 travellers a year. The company's worldwide adventures focus on cultural interaction, wildlife encounters, and active travel.

A quote taken from the Gap Adventures website:-

“Our role as a company is to ensure that we're giving back, more to the communities and the natural surroundings that we help you to visit than what is being taken away in our travels. Preserving cultural heritage and conserving and replenishing the natural environment, while improving the lives of local people, is the essence of our way of travelling and is integrated into every decision and action we take at Gap Adventures”

Gap Adventures provides programs such as:

#### *Supporting the Protection of Children from Exploitation in Cambodia*

Gap Adventures has partnered with Childsafe Cambodia in effort to combat child sex tourism and exploitation. Our tour leaders attend training workshops with Childsafe that cover the main problems street children face in Cambodia and provide recommendations of ways they can help protect children during their trip.

#### *Giving Back to the Community*

While much of the focus is on ensuring travellers are provided an enriching experience, the same goes for the communities we visit and the cities we work in. Sustainability is at the core of our type of travel both near and far. One of our long-standing community-based initiatives 'at home'.

#### *Annual Christmas in the Community*

Each year, Gap Adventures hosts a Christmas in the Community party at the Scadding Court Community Centre in Toronto. Over 300 youth from low-income families, ages 6 to 12, are provided with a turkey dinner, a gift and participate in arts and crafts activities run by Gap Adventures staff, friends and family.

#### *Earth Month, Not Just a Day*

Every April, Gap Adventures organizes community initiatives in celebration of Earth Month at our headquarters in Toronto, our local offices around the globe, and on many of our tours. From cleaning up our local neighbourhoods, to planting trees and flower gardens at local community centers and green spaces, we are lending a hand to promote the importance of caring for your local environments both at home and abroad.

An “opt out” donation may be useful for PFIGA with the funds being provided to a local charity or area of need that relates to adding value to their local community.

As a start to initiate the implementation of such a program, Young Guns Fishing Adventures, as of 2010, will be donating \$2, for every student that participates in the school excursion program, to Nepean Youth Accommodation Services. With a current capacity of between 60 to 420 students per business day, it is forecast that this will generate as a minimum approximately \$300 per week for NYAS.

NYAS is a community based, non-government organisation providing crisis, medium and long-term accommodation and support services to homeless young people and young families in the Nepean Region.

An “opt out” fee will be incorporated into our service charges that can be used to provide funding to local environmental conservation efforts.

There is also the potential for there to be a requirement that those accredited with NEATFish, also offer an “opt out” fee with proceeds being donated back to the local communities and conservation efforts.

Although, sports fishing tournaments and fishing tourism operators generate revenue for local communities by encouraging tourists and guests to the local area, these benefits are not necessarily visible to the local communities. Accommodation, food and beverage providers benefit but the greater community does not necessarily benefit directly. A small donation would be visible to the community as a whole and enhance community relationships with event and tourism operators.

As noted by Cowx (1999) “Recreational fisherman, despite being encouraged to do so, rarely help themselves to understand the problems associated with their sport/leisure activity. They fail to monitor their catches so they have no baseline data against which to argue for a decline or change in quality of the fishing. Consequently, there is an absence of sound catch information to elucidate the impact of major water resource development schemes.”

Although, implementation of a program whereby recreational anglers were responsible for the provision of catch data would be difficult to achieve, a log book situation required as a part of PFIGA accreditation, recording pertinent details would be effective. This is an achievable outcome that could only benefit the fishing industry.

***It is my recommendation that a log book program for accredited fishing instructors and guides be investigated and implemented as soon as possible.***



**Provide selected members of the recreational fishing community with an opportunity to develop their personal and professional skills.**

It was evident that the delegates at the EcoTourism Conference were unaware of the existence of the Professional Fishing Instructors & Guides Association and oblivious to the guided fishing sector being a key stakeholder in the tourism industry of Australia.

***It is recommended that a comprehensive survey of all fishing instructors or guides Australia wide be performed to ascertain total numbers of operators in Australia and their current practices. Consistency and best practice within the professional fishing sector is paramount to sustainable recreational fishing.***

Marketing and education of the consumer in the significance of using an accredited fishing instructor or guide needs to be a priority. The PFIGA needs to be used as an extension opportunity to educate recreational anglers in sustainable, environmentally friendly and safe fishing practices. Personal endorsement by a professional to the paying customer in any industry is proven to far surpass marketing campaigns of any other nature.

The PFIGA are well positioned to undertake the survey as well as coordinate extension and education campaigns.

Through consultation with delegates and the presentation of information from key stakeholders, we learnt of many ways that the fishing industry could be improving their conservation and sustainability efforts. By partaking in this event and being exposed to this information I, as Secretary of the PFIGA, have already begun educating our members, clients and staff of my fishing instruction business in various areas relating to water pollution, reduction of carbon emissions and climate change.

**Develop stronger networks and linkages between the recreational fishing community and the Eco Tourism industry.**

The networking opportunities have enabled both attendees on behalf of the fishing industry to gain many valuable networks throughout the tourism and ecotourism sectors of Australia. In addition to this, many strong relationships were built with representatives from the media (local and international), the National Parks Association, 4WD community, indigenous groups, Marine Parks Association and other tourism providers.

This conference was extremely beneficial for the purpose of networking, being at the forefront of current information and strategies regarding climate change.

***It is recommended that where ever possible the recreational fishing industry do attend future tourism conferences which would further build the overall awareness and networking capacities of our industry.***

Poor availability or use of information is often an important constraint to participation in recreational activities.

Insufficient knowledge of information sources can prevent

an individual from participating in an activity, even though they might otherwise want to.

Socialization into fishing activities, often by a family or close community members, can be an important element in the recruitment of angling participants, especially for children (Dargitz 1988).

Tourism is defined as the activity of travel for pleasure not as the activity of travel for pleasure for a fee. Many children and families in low socio-economic areas do not engage in tourism for a number of reasons but mostly due to low income. This can also be said for the decline in recreational fishing participation rates in these areas. There is potential for non profit organisations to provide intrastate experiential tourism opportunities incorporating recreational fishing, eco friendly education and practices by way of funded one day clinics, free of charge to participants, targeting low socio-economic areas and established refuges for homeless families and children.

A program of this nature run by organisations such as Recfish Australia nationally will serve many purposes. To provide children and families with an opportunity, that would otherwise have insufficient knowledge or be of the expectation that an eco tourism or fishing experience was unaffordable to them, is a valuable opportunity to show a positive example of the benefits of recreational fishing and raise the profile of the recreational fishing community within the general public. Media exposure of such a program would see recreational fishing more widely accepted as an eco tourism option within the wider community. This would also contribute to raising the participation rates of recreational fishing, eco friendly fishing practices, and commercial fishing tourism operators incorporating eco tourism strategies.

Members of the public in urban areas are often not aware of inland fishing options and are under the belief that they would need to travel long distances to coastal areas for fishing opportunities. Clinics held in urban inland areas will increase wider use and public knowledge of fishing opportunities in urban areas. Having personal experience with utilising urban areas for fishing clinics, it is common to have many passers by stop and comment they were not aware fish would be located there. This will also encourage clinic participants to return to areas visited as travel costs are less likely to be unattainable.

Between 1996 and 2006, there was a decline in occupational growth in the Australian Agriculture, forestry and fishing sector of -13,793. The use of volunteer Education Officers, marcoms, resources such as guest speakers provided by government departments in the fisheries sector for these clinics, is potentially a valuable tool to showcase employment opportunities in this sector to low socio economic areas that are not aware of them. The provision of education in fishing will also encourage employment in these areas for participants who are not necessarily in a position to obtain a white collar position whereby, an increase of employment rates in the commercial tourism sector and other areas within the fishing industry, such as the retail sector, would seem likely.

Free services such as the suggested clinics focused on low socio economic areas rather than historically predominantly being held in areas where participants can afford to engage in the activities provided by commercial tourism operators, will

ensure competition neutrality and encourage growth in the commercial fishing tourism industry with more operators choosing to focus on beginners and people entering the sport without having to compete with free clinics, rather than predominantly niche high end operations which is currently an issue.

***Our recommendation is that an intrastate eco tourism free from charge fishing program, such as the aforementioned, be investigated and initiated by Recfish Australia. Funding to invest significant resources to achieve this will need to occur.***

## Benefits and adoption

Throughout the Ecotourism Australia conference there were many valuable opportunities to gain insight into potential or current initiatives regarding environmentally friendly and sustainability practices both locally and internationally that could be implemented in the fishing industry of Australia. All sectors of the fishing industry can benefit from the knowledge gained by the two attendees of this event.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has a carbon emissions calculator that should be highlighted to all sectors of the fishing industry and its use encouraged.

***It is recommended that a survey be conducted into minimal impact options for recreational fishing relevant to equipment or products available to anglers with the findings being relayed to the public in an education campaign.***

One example is SARCA anchors, proven to be environmentally friendly and a leader in this area. They are an Australian-made anchor and do not contain lead. The SARCA products have been enthusiastically adopted by Coastguard, police and fisheries patrol vessels in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, as well as by charter operators and other commercial boaters. Products like these, that are beneficial to our sustainability efforts, need to be highlighted to the recreational fishing community.

International speakers at the event focused on sustainability as a whole. Their presentations highlighted the need for sustainability in all areas including environmental, social and economic impacts. There is an international movement encouraging and embracing sustainability on all fronts that needs to be examined more closely by the Australian fishing industry for opportunities to develop discussion points surrounding the social and economic benefits of recreational fishing.

It was noted by international speakers that there is a rising need for experiential tourism. Tourists are looking for a well rounded experience rather than structured activity that has been the norm. There is a need for fee-for-service fishing providers of all sizes to provide added value to their service encompassing nature tours, local historical knowledge, activities that give back to the local community. The fee-for-service fishing industry would benefit greatly from an information service whether through conference or communications material educating them about these sorts of business strategies.

## Further Development

Further development has been outlined in the various recommendations provided in this report including the following:

- The recreational fishing industry needs to develop a number of standard methodologies, actions and surveys allowing the gathering a range of recreational fishing related statistical data at a national and state levels.
- The PFIGA adjust their accreditation application process and procedures to reflect all eco friendly, sustainability values and practices that are necessary and reasonably practical for operators to achieve full compliance equivalent to an EcoTourism Australia advanced accreditation.
- NEATFish accreditation could be improved to include a physical/site audit process of some sort which would be consistent with EcoTourism Australia accreditation. It is possible that PFIGA representatives that will be acting in the capacity of auditors in relation to the PFIGA accreditation could be utilised for this function.
- A comprehensive investigation into benefits of the NEATFish accreditation since its inception needs to be performed to measure the value of the current program and identify areas of improvement required.
- That the NEATFish accreditation program provide guidance for organisations to partake in an “opt out” donation scenario with the funds being provided to a local charity or area of need that relates to adding value to their local community.
- The PFIGA require their members to partake in an “opt out” donation scenario with the funds being provided to a local charity or area of need that relates to adding value to their local community.
- A log book program for accredited fishing instructors and guides be investigated and implemented as soon as possible.
- A comprehensive survey of all fishing instructors or guides Australia wide needs to be performed to ascertain total numbers of operators in Australia and their current practices.
- Marketing and education of the consumer in the significance of using an accredited fishing instructor or guide needs to be a priority. The PFIGA needs to be used as an extension opportunity to educate recreational anglers in sustainable, environmentally friendly and safe fishing practices. Personal endorsement by a professional to the paying customer in any industry is proven to far surpass marketing campaigns of any other nature.
- Attendance from the fishing industry at future conferences similar or the same to the Eco Tourism Australia conference.
- That a survey be conducted into minimal impact options for recreational fishing relevant to equipment or products available to anglers with the findings being relayed to the public in an education campaign.

## **Planned outcomes**

The planned outcome is a project report which details:

1. The main issues discussed at the conference – with a focus on climate change and sustainability, building partnerships and tourism in protected areas.
2. Review of the benefit (financial or otherwise) of ecotourism accreditation to the fishing guides sector based on discussions with EcoTourism Australia and accredited tour operators and guides, fishing tournament organisers and the broader recreational fishing community (if appropriate);
3. Review the value of recent accreditation schemes developed by the recreational fishing industry i.e. National Code of Practice and NEATFish.

This report will provide a useful synopsis of the value of environmental accreditation for the recreational fishing community.

This report will also identify significant areas that accreditation programs should focus on to deal with the challenges of climate change, building partnerships and the ability to operate successfully in protected areas.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, attendance at the EcoTourism Australia conference was extremely beneficial to the recreational fishing industry of Australia.

## **References**

Cowx, I.G 1999 “Are recreational fisheries sustainable in multiple aquatic resource user situations?” in Evaluating the Benefits of Recreational Fisheries. Fisheries Centre Research Reports Vol. 7 No. 2.

Dargitz, R.E. 1988. Angling Activity of Urban Youth: Factors Associated With Fishing in a Metropolitan Context. Journal of Leisure Research, 20(3): 192-207.

## **Appendix 1: Intellectual Property**

None

## **Appendix 2: Staff**

Melanie Young	Principal Investigator and Report Author
Malcolm Poole	Co-investigator and Co-Author
Len Olyott	Report Review