



**VALUING COASTAL FISHERIES**  
 Social and Economic Evaluation of NSW  
 Coastal Professional Wild-Catch Fisheries  
**Far-North Coast of NSW**



The far north coast study area includes the main fishing ports of Tweed, Brunswick Heads, Ballina and Evans Head. The area includes a number of significant fisheries, especially ocean prawn trawl, Spanner crab and Mud crab as well as a range of inshore and estuarine fisheries. The area has supported a number of active Fisherman’s Co-operatives since the 1940s, including at Brunswick Heads, Ballina and Evans Head. The Valuing Coastal Fisheries project investigated the role of professional fishing in Far North Coast communities according to seven dimensions of community wellbeing.

**Dimensions of wellbeing**

Seven ‘dimensions of wellbeing’ were identified through the Valuing Coastal Fisheries project as being relevant to the professional wild-catch industry. These are all elements of overall community wellbeing that the industry contributes to in a number of ways. The project explored the nature of these contributions through interviews, an economic questionnaire of fishers and three social questionnaires. These included a random phone survey of the general public (35% of whom identified as recreational fishers), a phone survey of fish retailers and wholesalers (including co-ops) and an internet questionnaire of tourism and hospitality businesses.

**A resilient local economy**

The wild-catch industry in the Far North Coast generates more than \$23.6 million in revenue and over 223 full time local jobs. This includes \$11.87m, and 95 jobs, from the industry and the businesses that service it and a similar amount from the secondary processing, wholesale and retail sector.

Eating out is the most popular activity undertaken by domestic visitors to the Far North Coast area and the fishing industry provides an important and valued product to local tourism and hospitality markets. Our project indicated that the vast majority (89%) of NSW residents expect to eat locally caught seafood when on holidays.

Residents of the Far North Coast recognise the economic importance of the wild-catch industry to their region – 91% think it provides important employment opportunities, 87% believe it is an important industry for NSW. 86% of people believe that professional fishing plays an important part in tourism in their region through, for example, the supply of local seafood.

**Community health and safety**

Consumers on the Far North Coast have a strong preference for local product (46% prefer seafood sourced from their own town or region). Consumers from this area are some of the most likely in the state (behind the Clarence) to always (26%) or often (45%) purchase local seafood. Most (67%) purchase seafood once a fortnight or more, with a preference for fish followed by prawns. 77% of people from this region prefer local product as they believe it is better for their health.

The fishers we interviewed indicated they regularly participated in search and rescue operations, including towing broken down vessels.



**Education and knowledge generation**

Approximately a third of the fishers we interviewed indicated they were currently or had been previously involved in formal research programs undertaken by DPI or university researchers. In the Far North Coast area a number of fishers are actively engaged in research conducted by Southern Cross University. Others conduct seminars, guest lectures or tours for students at the university and local schools. Support took a range of different forms, from chartering vessels for research activities through to being more active participants in data collection. One local recreational fishing group is making use of the environmental knowledge of current and ex-professional fishers in the Ballina area, as part of a campaign to rehabilitate an important wetland system on the Richmond River.

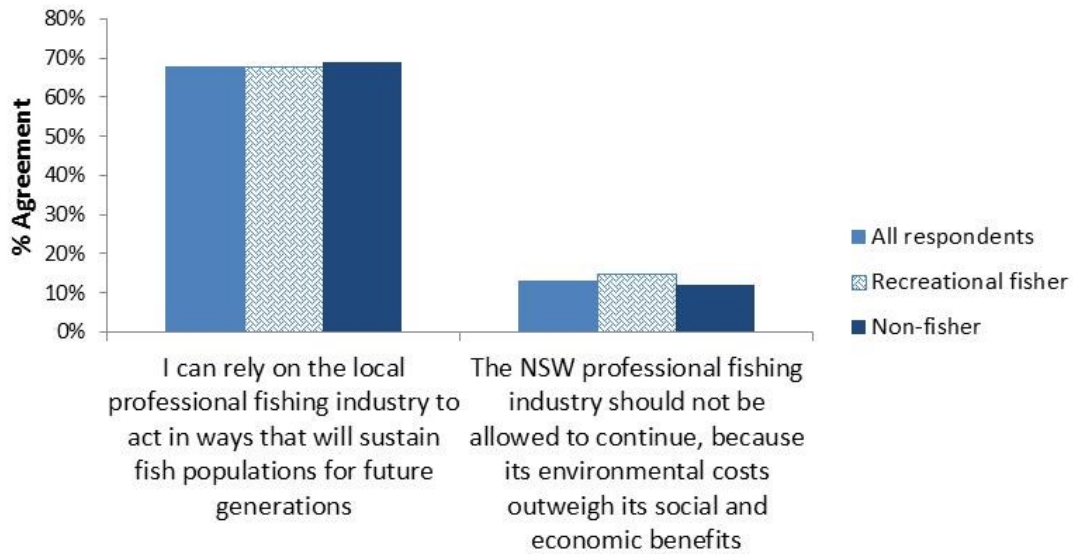
*I do a fair bit of work with Southern Cross Uni. Help them with water quality monitoring and all that sort of stuff. Sometimes every day for six months... Just (as) a volunteer. I got a bushman’s pocket knife last time. Fisher (180515\_1e) Far North Coast*

# VALUING COASTAL FISHERIES

## Social and Economic Evaluation of NSW Coastal Professional Wild-Catch Fisheries

### A healthy environment

The wild-catch professional fishing industry on the Far North Coast operates under a range of regulatory and voluntary controls aimed at minimising its environmental impact. The majority of the Far North Coast community support the continuation of their local industry and believe the industry can be relied on to act in a sustainable manner.



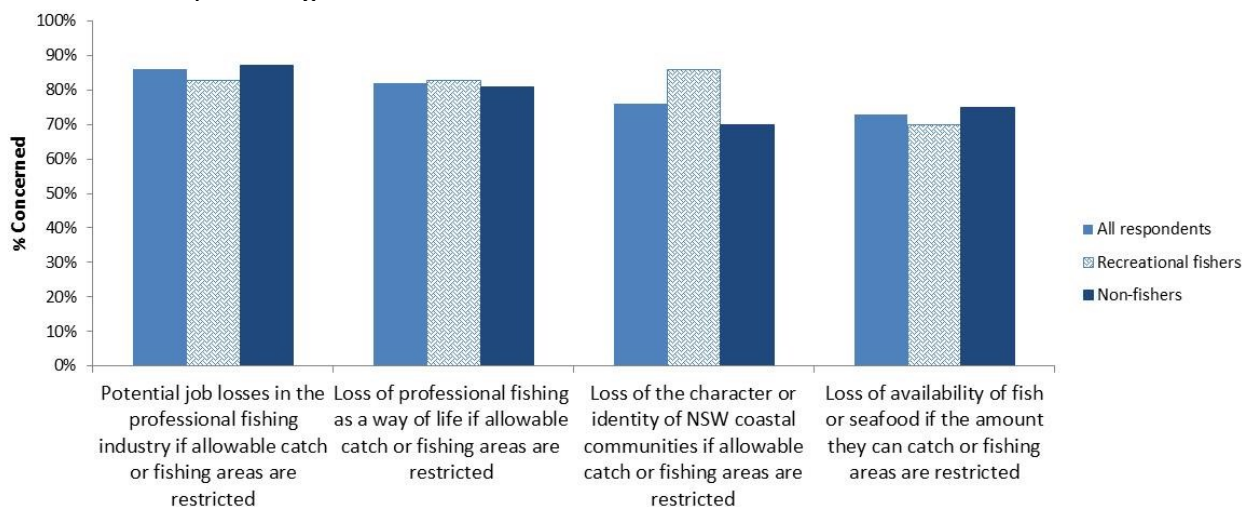
### Integrated, culturally diverse and vibrant communities

The fishing industry plays an active role in local communities. Eighty percent of the fish merchant businesses surveyed provided sponsorship and donations – especially ice – to local sporting and community groups. Seafood forms an important component of cultural celebrations and recreation in the Far North Coast, especially over the summer period – 72% of residents purchased seafood the preceding Christmas, and 71% during the summer holiday period (excluding Christmas/New Year). In Ballina the wild-catch industry of the Far North Coast is celebrated through the annual Prawn Fest.

*We provide ice, and we give them vouchers for their raffles and their fetes. We provide prawn trays and... I think we donate about \$8,000 to the marine rescue... We sponsor the lifesaver jet boat by keeping it fuelled up... We do trays, seafood trays for their raffles.*  
**Co-op manager (180215\_2a) Far North Coast**

### Cultural heritage and community identity

The fishing industry is an important part of the history of the Far North Coast, especially for the smaller fishing villages of Evans Head and Brunswick Heads. Residents of the area expressed high levels of concern over the loss of community identity (76% concerned) and the loss of a 'way of life' for fishers (82% concerned) if fishing were to be further restricted.



### Leisure and recreation

Over a third (37%) of residents of the Far North Coast surveyed were recreational fishers. They indicated a strong preference for locally sourced bait – 79% preferred local bait even if it was more expensive. The reason for these preferences included a belief that it was better for the community (92%), 85% thought it was better for the local environment and 64% believed it was more effective in catching fish.