

**NSW
ACT**



FRDC
FISHERIES RESEARCH AND
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Social and Economic Survey of
Recreational Fishers 2018-2021

New South Wales and ACT



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National Social and Economic Survey of Recreational Fishers 2018-2021
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The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation plans, invests in and manages fisheries research and development throughout Australia. It is a statutory authority within the portfolio of the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, jointly funded by the Australian Government and the fishing industry.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

Introduction

Most Australians have gone fishing at some point in their life and for many, recreational fishing is something they do every year. In 2000, Australia's first national recreational fishing survey found that if you ask Australians when they last went fishing, almost one in five – 19.5%, had gone fishing within the last 12 months¹. This is almost double the global average, with 10.5% of the global population estimated to be recreational fishers².

Since 2000, the Australian population has grown, become more urban and more diverse. Between 2019 and 2021, a second national survey of recreational fishing in Australia was conducted to examine how participation in fishing is changing as Australia changes.

As well as finding out how participation in fishing is changing, the 2019-2021 National Social and Economic Survey of Recreational Fishers focused on improving our understanding of social and economic aspects of fishing, including:

- Which Australians are more or less likely to be recreational fishers?
- How much economic activity is generated by recreational fishing?
- Does going fishing support a person's health and wellbeing?
- Do Australians find fishing a socially acceptable activity?
- How many fishers invest time in supporting the health of the environment they fish in?

More than 20,000 fishers across Australia took part in the survey. This report gives a snapshot of findings about recreational fishing in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.

1 Henry and Lyle 2003

2 Arlinghaus et al. 2015

Recreational fishing in Australia

The *National Social and Economic Survey of Recreational Fishers* found that recreational fishing continues to be an important recreational activity. In fact, around one in five Australians goes fishing every year – similar to 20 years ago. Because Australia’s population has grown substantially in the last two decades, the number of people who go fishing every year has increased from around 3.4 million in 1999-2000 to 4.2 million in 2020. However, rates of participation in fishing depend on a range of factors including where a person lives, their age and their gender.

Australians spend an estimated 28 million days fishing each year with around 68% of fishers going fishing less than five days a year and 17% fishing between five and nine days a year. Of the 15% who go fishing 10 or more days a year, 4% are highly avid fishers who fish 20 or more days.

As of 2019-20, recreational fishing contributed just over \$11 billion to the Australian economy, and over 100,000 jobs nationally. This economic contribution occurs across Australia in both urban and rural areas - in the cities, activity generated by purchasing fishing equipment and supplies is a big driver of economic activity, while in rural areas, spending on accommodation and food are also important ways recreational fishers contribute to economic activity.

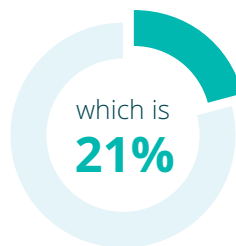
The survey was conducted over a period of time, starting before the Black Summer bushfires that affected many parts of Australia and continued through the COVID-19 pandemic. This timeframe provided an opportunity to understand how significant national and global events affect participation in fishing.

Recreational fishers surveyed numerous times during 2019 to 2021, reported fishing less often during the Black Summer bushfires, particularly those living in Victoria, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, where the bushfires were most widespread.

The first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns in the following year were also associated with a fall in how often people went fishing. The lowest level of fishing activity occurred in March and April 2020 when nation-wide restrictions on movement, and a recreational fishing ban in Victoria, were in place.

The data also showed that few people stopped fishing completely; while many fished fewer days than usual, it was rare for a fisher to stop fishing completely due to these events.

4.2 Million
recreational fishers
per year **in Australia**



of the Australian
population

Who goes fishing?

Across Australia, participation in fishing is higher amongst men (25.3%) than women (17.8%), and over the lifespan reaches its peak amongst those aged 35 to 44 (27.4%) and then declines with age, with 11.5% of those aged 75 and over going fishing. Fishing is a more common recreational activity amongst those living outside major cities (29.9%), with fewer people in major cities going fishing (18.0%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are much more likely to engage in fishing (38.1%) compared to those who are not Indigenous (21.0%), while those born in countries other than Australia are less likely to be fishers.

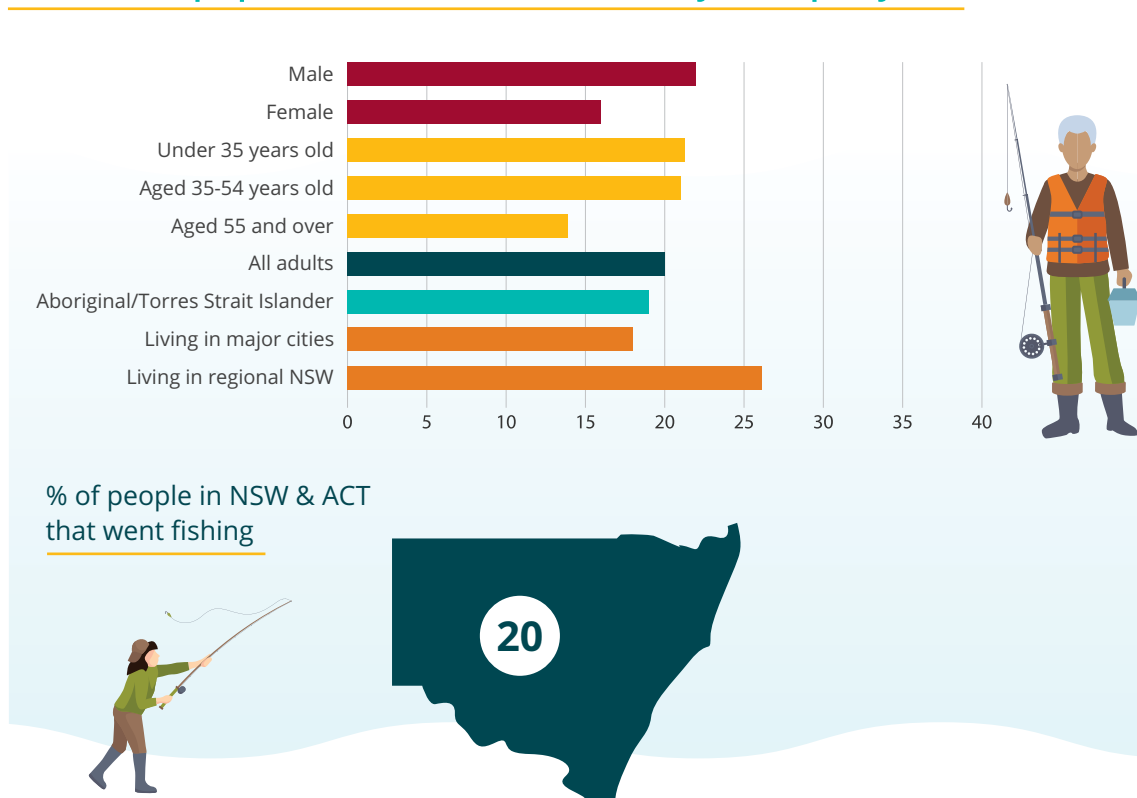
In NSW and the ACT, 19.6% of adults went fishing in 2018 – meaning approximately 1,293,700 adults living in NSW/ACT went fishing at least once in that year, which is lower than the Australian average of 21.4%. This was driven by lower participation amongst men and those aged 55 and older. Whereas NSW women went fishing at similar rates as women elsewhere in Australia, 22.4% of NSW/ACT men went

fishing compared to 25.3% across Australia. Amongst those aged 55 and older, 14.2% of NSW/ACT residents were fishers, compared to 17.0% across Australia.

At first glance, it might be assumed that lower rates of participation in fishing in NSW and the ACT may reflect the high proportion of the NSW/ACT population who live in large urban areas (Sydney, Canberra, Newcastle, etc). However, this wasn't the case, with participation in fishing being lower among those living in outer regional and remote parts of NSW/ACT when compared to similarly remote areas in other parts of Australia.

These findings highlight that, while the demographic make-up of recreational fishers in NSW/ACT is somewhat similar to that across Australia, there is lower participation in fishing by older people and men compared to other states, and this occurs not only amongst those living in cities, but also amongst those living in rural areas.

% of adult population who recreationally fish (per year)



How often do people go fishing and where do they fish?

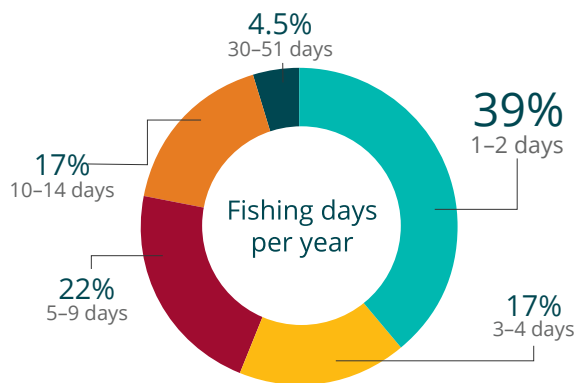
In 2018-19, Australia's 4.2 million fishers participated in 28.6 million 'fishing events'. A fishing event means going on a fishing trip for part or all of a day. Some of these fishing events involved a single fisher and other events involved many people fishing together. A large amount of this fishing effort was undertaken by avid fishers, who tend to go fishing many days every year. A smaller amount was contributed by the many fishers who go fishing only once or twice a year. Nationwide, 39.9% of fishers go fishing once or twice a year. However, this group makes up around 9.6% of fishing days. Meanwhile, only 5.0% of fishers go fishing 20 or more days a year – but contribute 21.5% of fishing days.

Many fishers go fishing in more than one type of place in a year: across Australia, 63.1% reported fishing in freshwater areas in the last year, 76.2% in estuaries and 85.0% in saltwater areas. Most fishers had gone fishing in more than one of these in the previous 12 months.

Of the 28.6 million fishing events that occurred in 2018-19, 29.0% involved recreational fishers who lived in NSW/ACT – a total of 9.935 million fishing events.

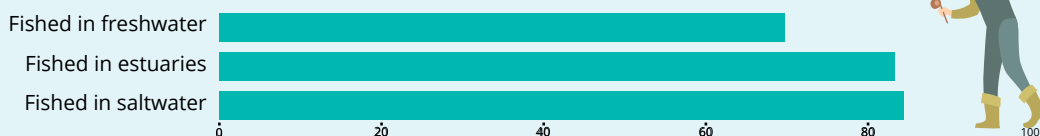
NSW fishers are more likely to fish in freshwater (69.8%) and estuary (83.3%) areas than other fishers (63.1% and 76.2% respectively across Australia), and similarly likely to fish in saltwater (84.4%).

Despite having slightly lower participation in fishing overall compared to other parts of Australia, NSW fishers are more likely to fish many days in a year, with 43.9% of NSW fishers going fishing 5 or more times in the last 12 months, compared to 32.0% of fishers across Australia. This suggests NSW has many avid recreational fishers.



“ NSW and ACT spend an estimated **10 million days** fishing each year ”

Fishing locations in last 12 months



A significant contributor to the economy

Recreational fishing in Australia in 2018-19 contributed an estimated \$11.5 billion to Australia's gross domestic product (GDP) and supported over 100,000 full-time equivalent jobs in Australia. These estimates include all economic activity related to recreational fishing in Australia, but do not include recreational fishing activity generated by international residents who visit Australia, or recreational fishing undertaken outside Australia by Australian residents. This is the first study to capture all economic activity occurring within Australia, as previous studies have typically examined a single State or Territory and have not always included economic activity generated by visitors to that state/territory who travelled there from other parts of Australia to fish, or economic activity generated by residents of that state/territory in other parts of Australia they have gone fishing in. As a result, the economic contributions estimated are larger than previous studies, due to capturing all these flows of activity between different states and territories.

In NSW/ACT, recreational fishing by both residents and visitors contributed an estimated \$4.07 billion to the NSW/ACT economy in 2019-20, and 33,995 full-time equivalent jobs. This included \$2.41 billion and 18,428 jobs in Greater Sydney, \$190 million and 1,502 job in the ACT, and \$1.47 billion and 14,065 jobs in regional NSW.

Much of this activity is not directly generated by fishing, but results from the flow-on effects fishing generates in other parts of the economy. In NSW/ACT, fishing was directly responsible for 12,378 jobs in 2019-20 – for example, jobs in charter fishing, sales of fishing equipment, tackle and bait, and in accommodation and retail businesses used

by recreational fishers when on fishing trips. This direct activity then generated further activity (21,617 jobs) by creating demand through spending of wages/salaries by those whose jobs were directly supported by recreational fishing, purchase of supplies, etc. Of the \$4.07 billion, \$1.07 was directly generated by recreational fishing, and \$3 billion by the further indirect activity generated in other parts of the economy.

Recreational fishing is one activity that helps spread city dollars into rural areas. In NSW, 43.5% of the \$1.47 billion of economic activity fishing contributes in regional areas was generated by fishers who live in capital cities (Sydney, Melbourne, Perth etc). This reflects the spending that occurs when people who live in cities visit regional areas to go fishing, and highlights the importance of fishing as a way of generating economic activity in regional areas.

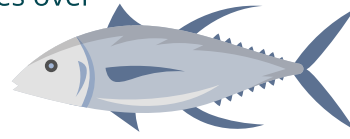
A lot of the economic contribution recreational fishing makes to NSW/ACT happens as a result of fishing by people who live in the region. However, a significant amount occurs due to spending by people who live in other parts of Australia and who either visit NSW to go fishing, or who buy fishing equipment or supplies from NSW vendors. Of the \$2.41 billion recreational fishing contributes to Sydney, 43.4% is a result of spending by recreational fishers who live in NSW, while 16.9% results from spending by Victorians, 18.0% from Queensland residents, and 21.7% from spending by people who live in South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania or the Northern Territory.



Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

A measure of production. Specifically, the total value of all the final goods and services produced within a country.

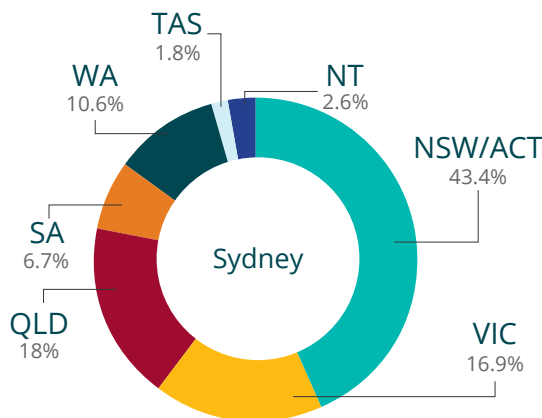
“ Recreational fishing in NSW and ACT contributes over **33,000 jobs** and over **\$4 billion per year** to the Australian economy ”



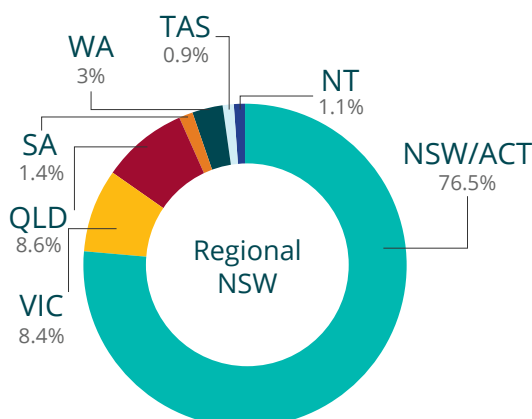
However, the \$1.47 billion recreational fishing contributes to regional NSW is much more dependent on NSW residents: 76.5% is generated as a result of spending by people who live in NSW/ACT, and less than one quarter by people who live in other parts of Australia.

The economic contribution recreational fishing makes to NSW thus relies heavily on continued demand from people living in other states for fishing supplies and equipment that are produced and sold from NSW businesses; and on continued visitation to NSW by those from other states. In particular, Sydney is a centre from which many people purchase fishing equipment and supplies online.

Economic activity in Sydney generated by recreational fishing came from fishers who live in...



Economic activity in regional NSW generated by recreational fishing came from fishers who live in...



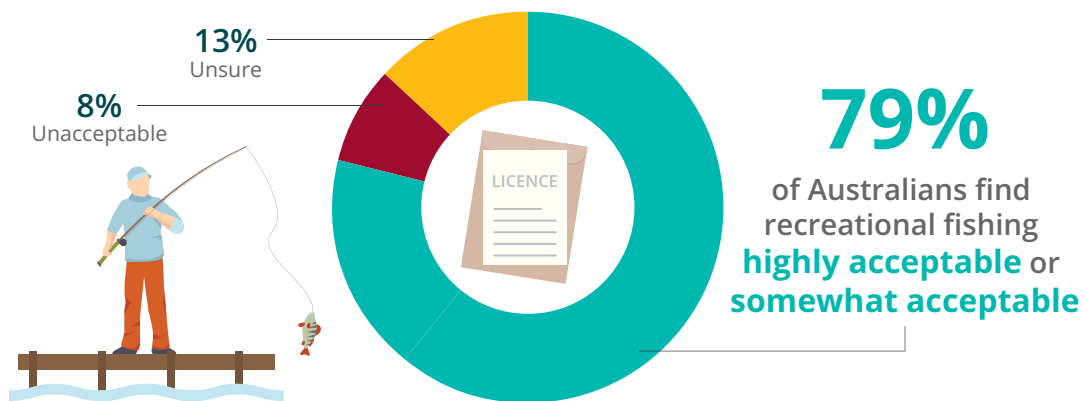


Social licence

Having a 'social licence to operate' is increasingly recognised as critical to the long-term future of many activities. Recreational fishing is no exception. Across Australia, 61.0% of Australians felt recreational fishing was a very acceptable activity, and another 18.1% found it moderately acceptable. Only 8.2% felt recreational fishing was unacceptable, while 12.7% were unsure.

In NSW/ACT, views were very similar to the national average. This in part reflects the relatively large proportion of Australia's population located in NSW/ACT. Overall, 79.0% of NSW/ACT residents feel recreational fishing is a moderately or highly acceptable activity. This falls slightly to 76.4% amongst NSW/ACT residents who live in major cities (Sydney, Canberra, Newcastle), and rises amongst those living in regional areas, to 87.2%. When examined by gender, 79.8% of men and 78.2% of women in NSW/ACT found recreational fishing moderately or very acceptable. Of those who had gone fishing in the last 12 months, 96.0% felt fishing was acceptable, compared to 73.8% of those who last went fishing more than 12 months ago.

Level of acceptability

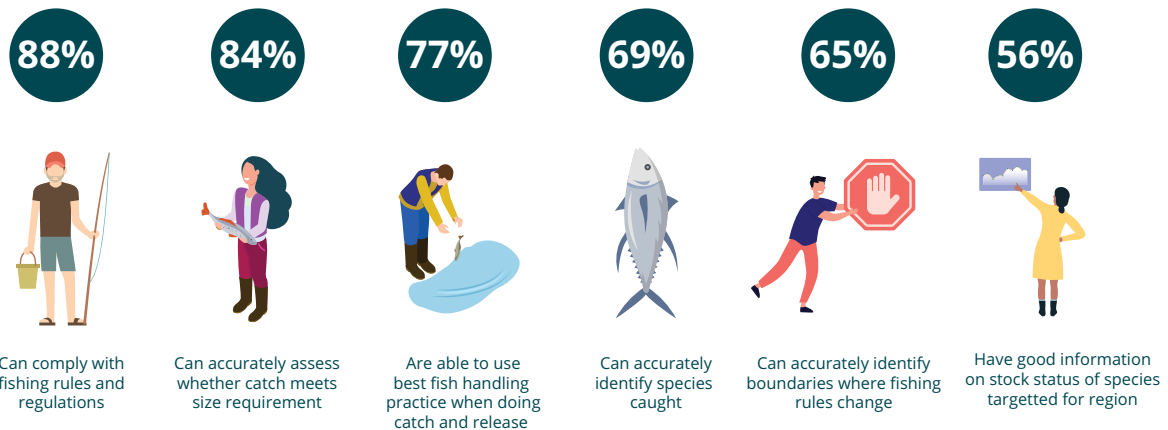


Environmental stewardship

Environmental stewardship is important in all areas of life, and recreational fishing is no exception. Being a good steward of the environment is important for many reasons. First and foremost, for recreational fishing to be sustainable into the future, it is critical that aquatic habitats are in good health. Recreational fishers can contribute to this in many ways, from ensuring their own fishing practices are sustainable, to supporting activities like monitoring environmental health and habitat restoration activities.

In NSW/ACT, almost all fishers feel able to comply with recreational fishing rules and regulations, can assess whether their catch meets size requirements, and feel able to use best practice fish handling practices. However, one third or more lack confidence in being able to accurately identify the species they are catching, identify boundaries where fishing rules change, or to access information on stock status of species they are targeting. This is very similar to the Australian average.

Percentage of fishers who feel confident that they:

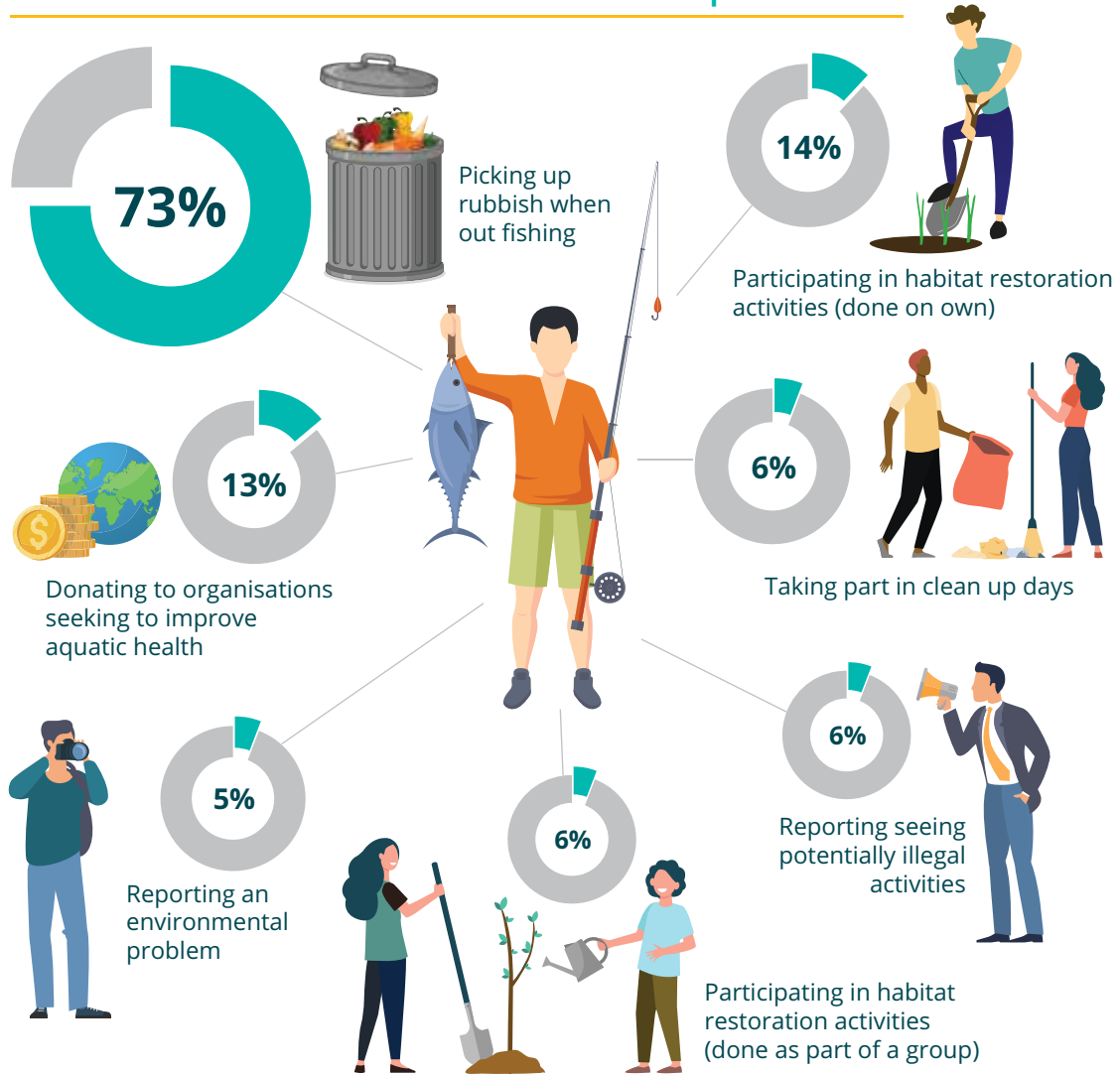


Many recreational fishers engage in different forms of environmental stewardship. The most common is picking up rubbish found when fishing and disposing of it responsibly, something done by more than 70% of recreational fishers nationwide and in NSW/ACT in the previous year. Almost 30% spent time reading, listening to or watching guidance on best practice fish handling in the last 12 months, and one in five had spoken to other fishers in the last year to encourage them to fish responsibly.

Encouraging continued growth in engagement in these types of actions, as well as others such as participating in clean up days, reporting environmental problems, and undertaking habitat rehabilitation and protection activities, can help continue building stewardship action amongst recreational fishers.



Recreational fisher identified stewardship activities¹



1 Some fishers do more than one of these activities





Find out more about the
National Recreational
Fishing Survey

