

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

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The report about sportfishing fishing in America discussed on page 22 presents some amazing figures which plainly show the importance of fishing to the American culture and economy.

The study revealed that the number of recreational fishers in America had increased by approximately 11% since 2006 to approximately 46 million people, and they generated approximately \$48 billion in the purchase of fishing equipment, contributing more than \$115 billion to the nation's economy through direct and indirect economic impact. Recreational fishing in America was also found to contribute to more than 828,00 jobs. Having this information opens doors and creates opportunities.

Any politician is going to sit up and take notice of an industry or sector that contributes \$115 billion dollars to the economy. And that's why it's also so important that we are able to demonstrate the value of recreational fishing in Australia.

This is harder than it sounds, largely because the available statistics on participation, expenditure and the overall value of the recreational fishing sector are really out of date, and collecting this sort of information can be expensive. The last time anyone took a national snapshot of recreational fishing in Australia was in 2001 (12 years ago).

Back in those days no one had ever heard of a squidgie, and if you flicked a popper whilst chasing whiting people would've thought you had lost your mind! In short: things have changed a lot over the last decade, and we need new data to reflect the current state of fishing in Australia. There is one main problem associated with trying to calculate the economic value of recreational fishing in Australia: how do you do it? The commercial fishing industry use the value of the fish that they take to market (called 'Gross Value of Product') to calculate the value of their industry.

Unfortunately this doesn't work too well for the rec fishing sector, because we often target species (e.g. bonefish, giant trevally and others) which aren't worth much in the marketplace, and sometimes don't keep our fish at all, yet we will happily spend thousands of dollars chasing them!

So what about if we add up all of the expenses associated with fishing trips undertaken by a subsample of recreational fishers, and use this to calculate the value of recreational fishing in Australia?



Then we run into the problem of how to handle costs associated with trips not exclusively taken for fishing; for example, holidays where a family travels to a location, and may fish for a small fraction of the time they are away.

Also, this approach values the contribution of tourists who spend money to travel to a fishing location more than residents, even if the local fishes and/or catches more. In fact, researchers and managers have been struggling with working out the best way to calculate the value of recreational fishing for a number of years. There are a few surveys that have been done in different locations, but they have often used different methods, and no one has been able to develop a clear picture of the value of our beloved pastime. Until now.

A project funded by the Federal Government's Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry through the Recreational Fishing Industry Development Strategy is looking

into the best way to calculate the value of recreational fishing in Australia. Recreational fishers, Fisheries Managers and researchers from around Australia are coming together in March this year to try and agree on the best way to do it.

Project leader, Ewan Colquhoun, explains "once we have reached agreement on the best way to value recreational fishing in Australia it will be easier for us to monitor how things change from year to year. It will be easier to see impacts – both positive and negative- associated with changes including implementation of marine parks, creation of artificial reefs etc. It will also help in making a case for the need for better infrastructure, more research and development, and other services to cater to the needs of recreational fishers in Australia"

Recfishing Research will provide updates as this project progresses. Simply "like" Recfishing Research on Facebook to be kept up to date on this and other projects relevant to recreational fishing in Australia.

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