

## 11. COMMUNITY INPUTS INTO FISHERIES RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

### Approach of the Queensland Department of Primary Industries

by Peter Finglas

*Industry Manager (North Queensland), Fisheries Resource Management  
Department of Primary Industries, Queensland, Australia.*

#### Summary

With the heightened awareness of the importance of linkages between the fisheries habitat and fisheries productivity, there is a greater need to involve the community in the decision-making process. Including the community into this process has advantages for both fisheries managers and the community. It serves to reduce conflict and foster a partnership approach to making tough environmental decisions. With the community being an integral part of the process, they become more informed about the terms and conditions of fisheries approvals. There is a better probability of successful fisheries management because the community is empowered with the information and the motivation to be the watchdog of the resource.

#### Introduction

The Department of Primary Industries, Queensland, is a rural economic development agency bringing together Government and industry in partnership to increase the profitability of primary industries-based enterprises on a sustainable basis.

Fisheries are of economic, social, ecological and traditional importance to all Queenslanders. These resources are of special significance to those with an interest in commercial fishing, aquaculture, recreation and tourism and to traditional users. Fisheries resources are available to all, and the responsibility for their management and good stewardship is a public service shared by government, the resource user and the general community.

The Department of Primary Industries, Queensland, and specifically its Fisheries Group, has been charged with providing this management in the areas of:

- <sup>1</sup> Assessing fisheries resources.
- <sup>1</sup> Fish stocking and other forms of enhancement.
- <sup>1</sup> Aquaculture development.
- <sup>1</sup> Protecting the habitat.
- <sup>1</sup> Community education.
- Enforcing compliance with rules for sustainable and fair use.
- <sup>1</sup> Boating safety.
- <sup>1</sup> Shark control.

In this regard, the Fisheries Group conducts research, education and extension, develops policy and legislation, assists development and adoption of new technology, promotes sustainable, profitable and

competitive fisheries, promotes community use of fisheries resources and enforces fisheries laws. The Group also has overall responsibility for aquaculture industry management, planning, research, extension and fish health services. Priority areas include commercial fisheries productivity, recreational fisheries development, development of the aquaculture industry and protection and management of marine and freshwater fisheries habitats

### **Legislative Framework**

The Queensland Fisheries Act 1994 is the legal statute that provides for the management, use, development and protection of fisheries resources and the fisheries habitat, and the management of aquaculture activities within the state of Queensland.

The objectives of this Act are:

- a) ensuring that fisheries resources are used in an ecologically sustainable way;
- b) achieving the optimum community, economic and other benefits from fisheries resources; and
- c) ensuring that access to fisheries resources is fair.

The objectives of the Act are achieved mainly by:

- a) establishing the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority (QFMA) to manage and protect fisheries resources with the chief executive of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI);
- b) giving the appropriate powers to enable the QFMA and the DPI to perform their respective functions;
- c) providing for the management and protection of fish habitats;
- d) providing for the management of commercial, recreational and indigenous fishing;
- e) providing for the prevention, control and eradication of disease in fish;
- f) providing for the management of aquaculture.

### **Protection of the Fisheries Habitat**

The fisheries habitat is managed under provisions for the protection of marine plants, the gazettal of Fish Habitat Areas and the restoration of damaged or destroyed habitats of importance to fisheries productivity. The legislation provides for approvals to allow works to be undertaken within intertidal areas, provided the impacts of such works are minimal, they are for fisheries purposes and/or community benefit, and appropriate mitigation measures are carried out to counter any approved loss of fisheries habitat. The Department of Primary Industries is guided by a number of policies to ensure equitable and consistent decisions in terms of issuing permits which impact on the fish habitat. An important part of this process is to include the community in the decision making.

#### *Marine Plants*

Marine plants are protected in Queensland, and this protection applies irrespective of the tenure of the land on which the **plants** occur, or the degree of or purpose of the disturbance. Marine plants are defined under the Fisheries Act to include the following:

- a) a plant (a tidal plant) that usually grows on or is adjacent to tidal land, whether living, dead, standing or fallen;
- b) material of a tidal plant, or other plant material on tidal land;
- c) a plant, or material of a plant, prescribed under a regulation or management plan to be a marine plant.

The objectives of the policy which guide the issue of marine plant disturbance permits are:

- a) to ensure that marine plant resources are used in an ecologically sustainable way;
- b) to ensure the minimisation of adverse impacts of human activities on marine plant resources;
- c) to achieve the optimum community, economic and other benefits obtainable from marine plant resources;
- d) to ensure equitable access to marine plant resources;
- e) to provide all stakeholders (e.g. community, government agencies, legal profession, private landholders, fishing industry, developers, consultants, conservation groups and educators) with a clear statement on the Department's position with regard to the assessment of applications and issue of permits to remove, destroy or otherwise damage marine plants and;
- f) to provide for a decision-making process to achieve (a) to (e).

#### *Fish Habitat Areas*

Fish Habitat Areas form an important component of the ongoing protection and management of fisheries resources and wetland habitats in Queensland. The Areas are declared with the specific intent of insuring the continuation of productive recreational, commercial and traditional fisheries in the region.

A Fish Habitat Area may be declared in both marine and freshwater environments to protect important juvenile and adult fish habitats. These habitats include sand bars, shallow water areas, undercut banks, snags, rocky outcrops, pools, seagrass beds, mangrove stands, etc.

Declaration of a Fish Habitat Area complements the existing and more general fisheries habitat management (e.g. protection of all marine plants) by:

- a) providing additional statutory protection to critical freshwater and unvegetated marine habitats,
- b) publicising the fisheries values of the area, and
- c) providing guidelines on fish habitat management to other management groups and members of the community proposing works within or adjacent to the Declared Area.

#### *The Declaration Process*

The declaration of a Fish Habitat Area generally follows the process outlined below:

1. Nomination of an area as a candidate for declaration as a Fish Habitat Area (often community driven).
2. Review of nomination and assessment of its priority for further investigation.

3. Site investigation/field habitat surveys, literature searches and reviews, assessment of fish catch records and preliminary discussions with the community (e.g. commercial, recreational fishers, indigenous groups, local authorities and other interested groups) to determine if the nominated area meets Fish Habitat Area declaration criteria.
4. Preparation of an Area of Interest Plan and draft of known management issues.
5. Initial consultation with interested parties and relevant agencies.
6. Revision of information gathered during the initial consultation phase, preparation of a draft Fish Habitat Area Plan and a draft management strategy with recommendations at an appropriate management level.
7. Second round of consultation with interested parties and relevant agencies.
8. Revision of information gathered during the second round of consultation.
9. Preparation of a Declaration Plan of Fish Habitat Area Boundaries and a submission of proposal for declaration.
10. Provision of Plan and submission to the Department of Primary Industries legal section.
11. Provision of Plan and submission to the Minister for Primary Industries.
12. Provision of Plan and submission to the Governor in Council for Declaration under the *Fisheries Regulations*.

It is expected that the declaration process from Step 4 to the final declaration should take a period of approximately 12 months to complete. However, this will depend on the complexity of issues associated with the individual area.

In general terms, Fish Habitat Area status is declared over areas that contain fish habitat that are critical for fisheries productivity and sustainable fishing in the short and the long term and to maintain the ecological character and integrity of undisturbed fisheries habitats. This management level does not impact on the normal day-to-day uses of the area by the community (e.g. boating and fishing), but does severely restrict development-related disturbances. Additional management may occur through a location-specific management plan, once the Fish Habitat Area has been declared. A decision regarding the most appropriate management category is usually made following the first round of community consultation, at which time all the relevant issues should be available for consideration.

The Community : Where Do They Fit into the Process?

The issuing of permits under the *Fisheries Act* to remove marine plants or to conduct works in a Fish Habitat Area equates to giving a right to impact on a community resource, that is, the fisheries productivity of an area. It is vitally important that an assessment process is followed to ensure that these impacts are acceptable and that decisions are made fairly and equitably across the state. An integral part of this process is to ensure that the community is part of the decision-making process.

Local Fisheries Officers should become involved early in the development planning process to ensure that acceptable fisheries outcomes can be negotiated. At this time, plans are reasonably flexible and fisheries can provide advice to minimise productivity impacts. It is also important to include inputs from the community early on in the process to ensure that decisions are based on all available knowledge and that community members are genuinely part of the process.

*Elements of Successful Community Input.*

- Community input should be facilitated by the local Fisheries Staff as these people have built up a level of trust and respect with the community that only time and close working contact can establish.
- Consultation with the community is recognition that the Department may not possess all the available information on which to base decisions. Anecdotal information can be valuable in itself or provide a picture of trends over time.
- All information obtained from the community should be treated with respect and considered during the decision-making process.
- The lines of communication should be open and honest. For the community to provide advice and opinion they must know all of the details and not just selected non-controversial information.

*Benefits from Successful Community Input.*

The benefits of involving the community include:

- A better level of community acceptance of decisions which affect a shared resource.
- Better economic, sociological, political and environmental information on which to base decisions.
- Education of the community on the decision-making process, the objectives of the Department and the fisheries impact issues of the area.
- Closer links between the Department and the community, and a better understanding of the aims and objectives of the Department.
- Encouragement to community policing when the terms and conditions of the development approvals are known.

**Fishcare Volunteers Programme, “Conservation Through Information”**

The Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol (a section of the Department of Primary Industries) has traditionally performed the compliance role, particularly enforcement and education in relation to Fisheries Regulations throughout Queensland. In recent times, a greater community awareness of conservation issues has emerged. The need for an increased education role by the patrol to address habitat and resource conservation has evolved.

The Fishcare Volunteer Programme consists of community volunteers performing a practical role in the field with the following benefits:

- Promote a community-based education programme relating to Fisheries Regulations.
- Enhance the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrols education programme.
- Improve communication between fisheries managers and recreational anglers
- Raise recreational community awareness of the need for a conservation ethic in relation to the utilisation of fisheries resources.
- Increase community awareness of the need for management arrangements such as bag and size limits.

- Assist fishers improve their angling skills.
- Monitor the habitat.
- Monitor recreational catches

### **Conclusion**

Including community input into the decision-making process has advantages for both fisheries managers and the community. It serves to reduce conflict and fosters a partnership approach to making tough environmental decisions. Because there is an awareness of the complicated issues involved in managing fisheries resource impacts by the community there is also a sense of being part of the solution. Solutions often reflect fisheries management objectives by leading to a better-informed community prepared to defend management decisions which they have contributed to.

### **References**

- Beumer, J., Carseldine, L., and Zeller, B.** (1997) Declared Fish Habitat Areas in Queensland. DPI
- Couchman, D., Mayer, D., and Beumer, J.** (1996) Departmental Procedures for Permit Application Assessment and Approvals for Marine Plants. DPI
- Department of Primary Industries, Queensland.** (1996) Fishing and Aquaculture Industries, Priorities Towards 2000. DPI
- Department of Primary Industries, Queensland.** (1997) Fish Habitat Area, Declaration Process and Management Options. DPI.