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Marine industries applaud expert review of marine parks

Peak bodies representing recreational fishing, the boating industry and the fishing trade industry today voiced their strong support for a report recently published by environmental expert, Prof Robert Kearney.

The report, commissioned and paid for by the New South Wales Recreational Fishing Trust Fund reviewed "The Torn Blue Fringe" published by the National Parks Association (a NSW conservation organisation) which calls for more marine parks in New South Wales and greater restrictions on recreational fishing.

It seems that Australian fishing families are the soft target and governments are reluctant to tackle the real environmental threats of pollution, habitat destruction and unconstrained urban growth.

Len Olyott, CEO of Recfish Australia, a qualified fisheries scientist, believes that the public is being duped into believing the spin about marine parks and sanctuary zones. "The Torn Blue Fringe tells the public that New South Wales fisheries are badly managed and unsustainable. This is simply not true, Australia's fisheries are some of the most conservatively managed in the world and continue to be sustainable. The truth is that we have 65 million hectares already in marine protected areas, how much more do we really need?"

The NPA issued a statement prior to the release of Prof Kearney's review which called into question his credentials as an objective reviewer. Despite claims that their report has been peer reviewed; there are no independent review documents on their website.

The NPA have also accused fishing representative groups of "scare-mongering" and distorting the facts. While there is no denying the fact that recreational fishing is still allowed in marine parks, up to 30 % of these areas are generally closed to recreational fishing. To date, limited monitoring of existing marine parks in Australia has not been able to prove the effectiveness of sanctuary zones in increasing biodiversity conservation.

With between 40 and 50% of boat owners purchasing a boat to go fishing, there are grave concerns that further closures will see a downturn in boat sales. "In these tough times, people need the freedom to get away and go fishing. If people stop buying boats, it's not just the boating industry that suffers;" said Roy Privett, General Manager of the Boating Industry Association of New South Wales. His concerns are echoed by Australian Fishing Trade Association (AFTA) Executive Officer, Doug Joyner who had this to say, "The recreational fishing industry generates millions of dollars and provides thousands of jobs. If fishing becomes too hard, people simply stop going and many of the smaller operations will shut up shop. No government can afford this senseless loss of jobs."

According to Prof Kearney, the review fails to identify the specific threats posed by recreational fishing and does not address real impacts such as pollution and introduced species; "Pollution is clearly a great threat and its impacts are obvious and, apparently, getting worse. It will not be addressed by more fishing closures masqueraded as marine protected areas."

Recreational fishers are not opposed to conservation measures but want to see the scientific evidence that recreational fishing is the biggest threat to conservation and that sanctuary zones that only exclude fishers are the answer.

Prof Kearney's review can be downloaded from here: <http://www.rfansw.com.au>

Recfish Australia's Policy on Marine Protected Areas: <http://www.recfish.com.au/policies/>

An independent review of the impacts of Marine Protected Areas: <http://www.afta.net.au/mp.php>

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