

WCPFA SNAPPER SUBMISSION

AUGUST 2019

This submission is in response to the Consultation Paper : **Management scenarios for snapper in South Australia**, released by PIRSA August 2019.

Historically Snapper catches on the West Coast have been moderate yet consistent, up until the 2016 MSF assessment the West Coast was assessed as a separate stock to the east of the state and had an undefined status, after a snapper movement study (FRDC Project No 2012/020) was completed a determination was made that some snapper migrate to the West Coast to supplement the West Coast stock.

(Furthermore, an earlier otolith chemistry study indicated that it was likely that some fish from the strong 1991 year class from NSG also left the gulf and supplemented the snapper population of the west coast of Eyre Peninsula (Fowler et al. 2005).) This extract from the conclusion of the study is about the only reasoning behind incorporating the West Coast with the Spencer Gulf stock, it is agreed that a percentage of snapper migrate from spawning areas and tagging has shown that they can travel large distances, recent NSW tagging programs have recorded snapper travelling 370 km in 3 years, yet tagging has also shown that most recaptures are a relative short distance from tagging point.

The snapper movement study also recommended that further development be conducted of migration from spawning areas and their movement over years after recruitment.

The WCPFA feels that a total snapper ban on the West Coast and all state coastal waters would have a negative effect on further research and understanding of the West Coast snapper stock, a total ban will possibly see fishers leave the industry or move to other fisheries removing the opportunity for a industry / government research collaboration that will cause a depletion in fishery knowledge and the loss of real time data.

The stock structures of the 2 gulfs and south east / western Victoria are well understood yet the West Coast stock has had limited research invested into it, the WCPFA understands that due to limited funds not every fishery can be extensively researched, the WCPFA are willing to work with fishery managers and scientist to achieve a better understanding of the West Coast stock.

Unlike the Gulfs that are completely internal / state waters the West Coast MSF is subject to a 3 mile from the shore and internal waters baseline limit, the area outside of this state waters limit is vast and supports large areas of snapper habitat that is not available to the commercial MSF fishers, commonwealth permit holder's can land 50 kg by-catch of snapper per trip under a OCS agreement and recreational fishers can also fish outside state waters, due to the vast and in some cases inhospitable areas that support snapper stocks on the West Coast that are not fished would support the fact that West Coast snapper stocks are not over fished.

The open coastline of the West Coast supports healthy offshore reef systems that support fish species that are targeted by the MSF commercial fishery, snapper are often caught as an incidental catch while targeting these reef species and a total ban on landing snapper catches would see snapper discarded, this will be undesirable to fishers due to the possibility of barotrauma to discarded snapper causing a moral issue with fishers.

The WCPFA request that some form of snapper fishing is allowed on the West Coast under a research program (MSF Management plan section 10.1) this could include but not limited to-

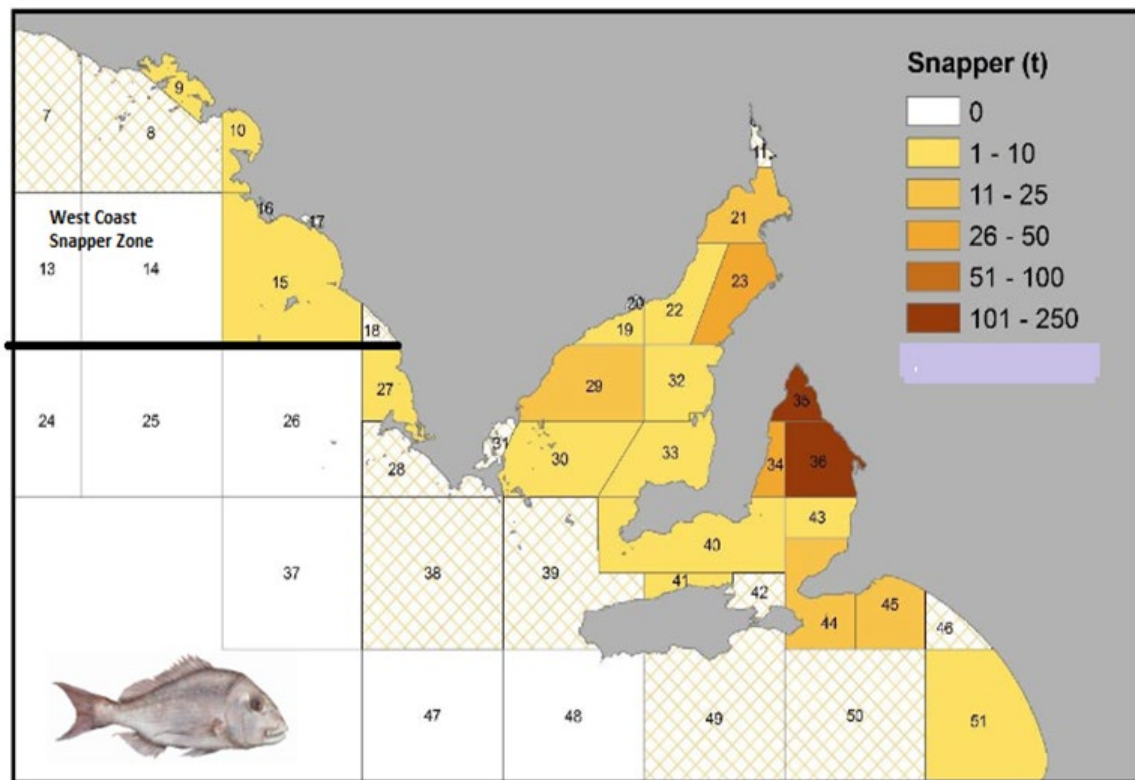
- A TAC that is open to all fishers West of the 34* line with catch history from March to September
- Expression of interest to receive a share of the TAC
- A per/kg levy on any TAC allocation - to pay for compliance / administration
- A per/kg levy paid on sale of fish by registered purchaser- as above
- Any unwanted TAC allocation returned to TAC pool for redistribution
- All snapper catches tagged (fish or eskis) and GPS co ordinates recorded to match tags
- Tag and release program during closed season to give best chance or migration
- Fish sold through block chain technology that is being used overseas as a low cost form of tracking fish to counteract illegal sales

KGW and Snapper catches (t)

	kgw	snapper
1983/84	668	466
1984/85	596	469
1985/86	654	454
1986/87	644	404
1987/88	589	333
1988/89	620	421
1989/90	634	423
1990/91	692	457
1991/92	750	437
1992/93	700	385
1993/94	665	317
1994/95	615	223
1995/96	534	306
1996/97	586	303
1997/98	552	391
1998/99	594	447
1999/00	517	577
2000/01	453	578
2001/02	389	647
2002/03	398	532
2003/04	356	411
2004/05	345	504
2005/06	333	533
2006/07	354	644
2007/08	330	743
2008/09	339	786
2009/10	343	917
2010/11	340	975
2011/12	307	878
2012/13	307	549
2013/14	265	549
2014/15	310	586

Snapper (*Chrysophrys auratus*)

2015



The table on the left are state snapper catches over 30 years, with the average catch on the West coast of around 20 ton per year, this equates to ~4% of the state snapper harvest.

Conclusion

The West Coast fishers have the most to lose with unsustainable fish stocks and we feel that due to the political and economic climate we need to be more pro active in fish stock research that can be achieved in a cost effective way through fisher participation with there knowledge and infrastructure made available to researchers.

Observations reported by fishers that indicate a West Coast stock are all age ranges of fish from large adult fish to juvenile fish <1 year old and professional fish spotter pilots reporting large snapper aggregates west of Fowlers Bay, the 2018 FRDC snapper assessment shows snapper catches around the W.A. border and around Fowlers bay ([Snapper 2018](#)) this could indicate that there is a western snapper stock and a total ban on snapper fishing could lose the opportunity to research this possibility.

SARDI Snapper Assessment 2016

West Coast

This region is considered part of the SG/WC Stock based on evidence of connectivity from an early otolith chemistry study (Fowler et al. 2005b). It is considered that when strong year classes recruited to NSG, some fish emigrated from SG to the WC (Fowler 2016). There are no recent age structures for this region because of the difficulty in accessing fishery catches to obtain biological samples. As such, the only fishery performance indicators that can be considered are commercial fishery statistics.

The above statement combined with the lack of recreational and commonwealth by-catch / discard data gives more weight for the West Coast MSF commercial fishers to supply the only reliable form of snapper fishery information and the total shut down for 3 years will lose the opportunity to improve knowledge of the West Coast snapper stock.