



Australian Government

**Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development and Communications**

Community Feedback – Fisheries public consultations Christmas Island

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Introduction

Background

As discussed with the community, Western Australian (WA) fishing rules are already in place on Christmas Island (CI), but these rules were not specifically designed for the unique CI region.

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development (the Department) and the WA Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's (DPIRD's) Fisheries Management Division (WA Fisheries) have worked together over the last decade to develop proposed rules specific to the CI region, which are based on research and community consultation. The draft fishing rules seek to balance the need to protect the fishery with community expectations. This work has involved a number of public consultations.

Marine habitat and associated fish stocks at CI are limited due to the isolated nature of the Island and are highly vulnerable to over-fishing¹. Taking this into consideration, and that fish is a primary source of protein for the community, it is important that fish stocks continue to be available for the community now and into the future.

Studies undertaken by WA Fisheries began in 2007 and have included underwater visual surveys, baited remote underwater video surveys, environmental surveys, biological sampling and catch composition, satellite receivers, and eDNA (environmental DNA obtained from samples). This information is used to make informed management decisions. As further information is collected, and if evidence demonstrates there is a change in fish stocks, rules can be amended. More information is available on the Department's [website](#).

Overview of public consultations

On 6 August, 2019, the Department released the *Exposure Draft: Christmas Island Applied Laws Amendment (Fish Resource Management) Ordinance 2019* for public comment. The Department advised the community that public comment should be received by 23 August 2019. On 22 August 2019 it was announced that the public comment period would be extended until 1 September 2019.

Seven submissions were received from CI by the closing date.

Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories, the Honorable Nola Marino, visited CI between 27 and 30 August 2019. Assistant Minister Marino asked the Administrator of CI, Mrs Natasha Griggs, and the Department's Territories Division Executive Director, Mr Alex Foulds, to undertake an additional round of community consultation, which occurred from 8 to 12 November 2019.

The purpose of this additional round of consultation was to ensure the views of as many people as possible were part of the consultation process and the design of the fishing rules.

¹ [Review of the exploitation of marine resources of the Australian Indian Ocean Territories: the implications of biogeographic isolation for tropical island fisheries, M.Hourston, Government of Western Australia, Department of Fisheries](#)

Purpose of this report

The purpose of this report is to summarise community feedback received during the consultations held on CI in November 2019.

The Department continues to consider the feedback from the community, and the Department's response to the issues raised will be provided in due course.

Methodology of consultation

As mentioned, it was the intention to ensure the views of as many people as possible were part of this consultation process. The community had an opportunity to discuss the findings of work undertaken to date, the scientific evidence, and how community feedback had been taken into account in the proposed rules.

Individuals or small groups were invited to make an appointment through the Office of the Administrator.

Meetings

Meetings were chaired by Mrs Griggs, and supported by Mr Foulds, with other Departmental officers, and staff from WA Fisheries. Across the three days, the team met with in excess of 105 people across a range of forums including individual and open community meetings.

Community Views

Sustainability of fishery

A number of respondents indicated general support for measures to ensure the sustainability of the fishery.

Local rules

A number of respondents indicated general support for the introduction of local rules rather than non-specific WA rules.

Export limits

Opinions from respondents varied on any rules to manage the amount of fish to be taken off island. Some respondents advised they'd like to see no fish taken off island. Some respondents advised that recreational fishers should be allowed to take 10kgs of fish off island, and charter fishers 20 kg. Some respondents questioned whether the species of fish to be taken off-island can be varied.

Bag limits

Some respondents advised they felt bag limits were excessive. Concerns were raised about “smash and grab” fishers who take large quantities of fish with no consequence. Questions were raised about why bag limits were needed and what methodology was used to determine bag limits. Some respondents advised there should be recognition that it is not possible to fish the entirety of CI and, therefore, bag limits should be increased.

Enforcement

Questions were raised about enforcement and consequences of people breaking the rules. A proposal was put forward for local self-regulation rather than legislation.

Spearfishing

Opinions from respondents varied with some supporting a ban on spearfishing in Flying Fish Cove and a ban on spearfishing bat fish. Queries were raised about the area in the Cove where spearfishing might be banned. One respondent supported spearfishing as a tourism opportunity.

No fish zones

Several respondents suggested a need for no fishing zones to limit fishing impact on divers and tourists.

Protected species

Several respondents questioned what methodology had been used to determine protected species.

Consultation

Several respondents raised questions about prior consultations including whether there would be a response to submissions from August 2019.

Next steps

The feedback from the community summarised in this document is being considered. There will be a further opportunity for community consultation on any proposed changes to the approach. The Department is committed to working with the community and keeping people informed as the process progresses.