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# Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishery Net Work



*WWF has a memorandum of understanding with the Southern Fishermen's Association.*

*WWF is working hand-in-hand with fishing communities to develop well-managed fisheries and create new economic incentives for a sustainable future.*



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## Sustainability Update

Southern Fishermen's Association has received the draft assessment report for sustainability certification from the Marine Stewardship Council fisheries assessors.

The panels of four assessors are recognised internationally as experts in their fields.

The overall report was positive with a range of conditions that the certifiers recommended to improve scores under the performance indicators. The next step is to review the conditions, formulate an agreed action plan and obtain a commitment from the various government agencies to support the fishery in its objectives.

A meeting of PIRSA Fisheries Managers, Lorraine Hitch from World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and SFA representatives reviewed the report and discussed the conditions.

WWF, a partner with the SFA in this process, is very keen to see things progress smoothly. It is important that the government management agency is supportive of their fishery meeting the conditions. A fully certified fishery is a sign of good governance and co-operation between all stakeholder groups.

## Why no action on Murray Cod?

On the subject of sustainability, what on earth is going on with one of our best known fish icons? The Minister says he doesn't know anything about industry concerns over proposed Cod management strategies even though it has been on the FMC agenda for over 2 years.

Over that same period the Commercial industry has continually been calling for a moratorium on Cod, as implemented from 1990 to 1994.

PIRSA Fishery policy is continuing to pander to the recreational bandwagon by recommending grossly inadequate management methods, flying in the face of all available scientific data which shows Cod is in BIG TROUBLE. There has been no recruitment to this fishery since 1996.

Lack of river flows, introduced species, environmental degradation, increased nutrient load, removal of snags etc. have all taken their toll on the habitat and in turn the species numbers have dropped over recent years. The removal of the commercial fisheries has not reversed the trend.

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*Murray Cod –  
is listed as  
“Vulnerable” and  
“a threatened species of  
national significance”.*

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With an estimated level of harvest in South Australia in excess of 20 tonnes, the recreational sector has to take it on the chin and support a moratorium on the angling of cod. In light of their “concerns” about other species, it would be hypocritical not to.

The Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) raised concerns about the management of Murray Cod during the public consultation period for the L&CF Management Plan. The department commented that:

*“It seems incongruous and potentially against threatened species legislation to have a threatened species listed as retained target species – non-commercial and retained by-product species – commercial.”*

The catch of cod by commercial fishers as a by-product has been less than 300kg over the past 5 years is not a significant take compared to the recreational figure (taken from National Recreational and Indigenous Fishing Survey 2000/01). This information is now 5 years out of date and currently there is no data available for survivability of released fish. However other data that is available for Cod supports industry’s concerns.

The commercial fishers of the Lakes and Coorong take their responsibility as stewards of the resource seriously and call all decision makers to support a no-take moratorium of Murray Cod for all sectors until it is clear that there are significant levels of juveniles present in the rivers and it can be removed from the Threatened Species list.

Who else has the intestinal fortitude to take up this issue?

## Wildcatch Trainee of the Year

Lakes and Coorong trainee fisherman, Josh Dittman has been awarded Career Employment Group “Wildcatch Trainee of the Year 2005”.

Josh’s host employers Glen and Tracy Hill, fishers and processors of Meningie, were thrilled to present him with his certificate and cheque at a dinner on 27<sup>th</sup> January. Josh’s family was proud of his achievement, with his mother and sister also present to share this occasion.

We have had a number of trainees over the past 8 years and Josh has been outstanding” said Tracy. “As well as producing a high standard of work, and a growing knowledge of the complexities of wildcatch fishing, he has a great work ethic and a good understanding of what our business needs to be successful.

Lenni Ligtenberg, field officer for Career Employment Group said that after reviewing feedback from the host employers as well as results achieved at the Australian Fisheries Academy for training modules, Josh was the selected as “being exceptional in his field, from the 26 trainees who commenced last year.”

With several months still to go until he completes his certificate Josh says he has learnt a lot of new skills and really enjoys his job. Congratulations Josh!




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*Tracy and Glen Hill  
congratulate Josh on his  
achievement.*

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## Changes to Cockle Management

Industry has been hearing of management “concerns for the sustainability of this species” over the past 18 months, their major concern being possible increased effort on cockles due to the emerging markets.

PIRSA Fisheries brought down the “big stick” three weeks prior to the commencement of harvesting for the 05-06 season by declaring the bucketing and grading employees as agents involved in the fishing activity. This was done under the guise of “ensuring fishers would not be in breach of the regulations”, even though the cocklers have been operating in a similar manner for over 20 years.

This measure was taken without any negotiations with industry or prior discussion at the Inland Fisheries Management Committee. The subject had been flagged as something that would have to be addressed at FMC, even though there has been no indication of a reduction in stock abundance, but the industry representatives refused to discuss any further reductions until a major issue had been resolved.

The removal of access by other sectors (including significant latent effort), that had been signed off by all affected commercial sectors in 1996 and had been in the hands of PIRSA Fisheries since that time. It was finally implemented in the 05-06 license renewal process.

In the interim Lakes and Coorong commercial fishers had participated in an industry initiated workshop which discussed the future direction of the cockle industry including effort, abundance, environmental issues and future management.

This was being written up into “The Future for Cockles in South Australia” paper with the intent of presenting it to PIRSA Fisheries and IFMC as a basis for constructive talks. The FMC was informed of this but the fishery managers decided to jump the gun.

A hastily arranged meeting late November between SFA, the Minister and PIRSA Fisheries representatives resulted in a reprieve until the end of June. The Director issued an exemption so that the status quo could be maintained for the current season. Industry was directed to negotiate with Fisheries about potential changes to management arrangements.

Industry has spoken with SARDI Scientists and PIRSA Managers until they are blue in the face, giving logical and reasonable explanations for all points of concern, however once safely ensconced in their “ivory tower” it is like these discussions never took place. This has prompted the SFA to document all discussions for future reference and industry comments are to be tabled at IFMC meetings and for inclusion in stock status reports.

The change in the Crown Law interpretation of the definition of an agent is disputed by the Southern Fishermen’s Association, however it is hoped that the negotiations with PIRSA will prove to be fruitful and legal action from fishers can be avoided.

Industry knows the issue is being fobbed off until after the election in March, but if the reprieve can result in positive outcomes for both the future of the stocks, fishers and the emerging cockle export industry - SFA looks forward to constructive discussions.




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*Research on the behaviour, abundance and distribution of cockles is currently being carried out by SARDI.*

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*“Fishers participated in an industry initiated workshop.”*

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## Lakes and Coorong Code of Conduct

In line with the Southern Fishermen's Association's strategic plan the management committee is currently reviewing the Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishery Code of Conduct.

The original document was contained within the Environmental Management Plan 1998/99. However with the recent MSC assessment it has become necessary to revise it as a stand alone document.

It is another in the collection of SFA Policy documents which includes Best Practices for by-catch minimisation, the EMP, Recommendations for Sustainable Mulloway Management and the up coming "The Future for Cockles in South Australia".

## New Fisheries Management Bill

The devil is in the detail and there is a **severe** lack of detail for many points. In particular the demerit points. But that is only one in a plethora of issues identified by SFA members at a recent SAFIC port meeting.

Industry wholeheartedly supports stronger penalties for wrongdoers especially repeat offenders and would dearly like to be included in formulating the demerit/penalty system. The offences **must** be clearly identified and the demerit points/penalties must be in line with a transparent risk assessment process.

As the Bill reads, fisheries officers may be able to demerit a fisher out of a fishing license if they choose to be pedantic, or have a particular beef with someone. The ability for abuse by individuals is wide open.

It is clear that instead of being a mechanism for a new era of genuine co-management, the document is truly an exercise reflecting the current climate of command and control type administration designed to keep commercial fishing in its place.

Before anyone goes charging off and adopting this Bill, the supporting legislation needs to be produced and clear guidelines for many of the clauses clarified. With the Bill as it stands, PIRSA Fisheries will have God-like powers.

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*Use this link to access the New Fisheries Management Bill*

[www.pir.sa.gov.au/pages/fisheries/comm\\_fishing/new\\_fisheries\\_legislation.htm:sectID=263&templD=1](http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/pages/fisheries/comm_fishing/new_fisheries_legislation.htm:sectID=263&templD=1)

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Also in development is a New Entrant Fisher guide and mentor program which is an initiative of the SFA in partnership with SAFIC. The association anticipates that it will be supported by PIRSA Fisheries, for distribution with license transfers and inquiries, as well as available from a website.



What about having to feed and accommodate a scientific observer at fishers cost? What about giving fisheries officers powers over and above police officers? What about the independence of a Chairperson? What will replace the FMC process?

There are many questions must be asked and answered before this Act is accepted and made law.

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*For further information please contact the Southern Fishermen's Association.*

**COMING SOON**  
[coorongfishery.com](http://coorongfishery.com)

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