

Strategic Plan 2003

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SOUTHERN FISHERMENS ASSOC. INC.

Wild Fisheries with a future Established 1854

A FUTURE PLAN FOR THE LAKES AND
COORONG COMMERCIAL FISHERY



Southern Fishermen's Association
Ethical, Sustainable Harvest

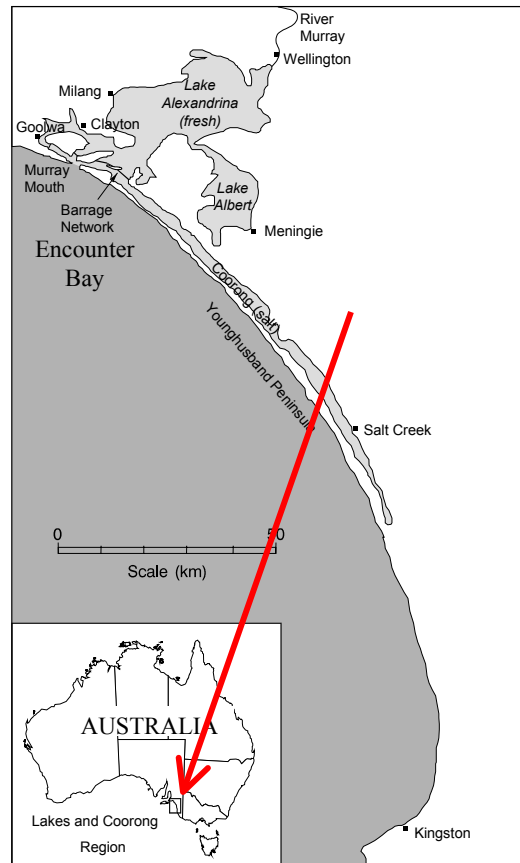
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Introduction

The Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishery is an inland and inshore waters community fishery, harvesting estuarine, saltwater and freshwater species. It has been commercially fished since 1846, with a number of generational fishing families (some going back 5 generations), still conducting their activities in the area. This gives fishers an intimate knowledge of the environment and an understanding of the history that has shaped the development of the fishery.

The area fished by the license holders stretches from Wellington on the River Murray, Lakes Alexandrina and Albert, the waters of the Coorong estuary, and the coastal waters from the Murray Mouth to Kingston SE. It has become a highly modified system, following the construction of barrage network from 1935 to 1940, when 89% of estuary turned into fresh water. The impacts of man's interference in the natural regime include reverse/summer flooding, riparian zone modification, introduced species, massive water usage and flow modification and pollution. Yet despite this 90% of value comes from 10% of the original estuary with the landed wharf value of the fishery approx. \$6.1m (Econsearch Report 1999-2000).

The fishery is partly contained in the Coorong National Park that also incorporates a wetland of international importance, protected under the RAMSAR treaty.



Key Stakeholders

- ❖ 37 fishers, their families and businesses
- ❖ Regional communities and economies
- ❖ Consumers of quality Coorong fish
- ❖ Indigenous Fishers
- ❖ Environmentalists
- ❖ General Public
- ❖ Recreational Fishers

Role of the Southern Fishermen's Association

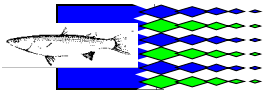
The SFA represents its members, who are individuals, families and businesses of the Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishery.

It is also recognised by PIRSA as the body it liaises with for policy and management decisions.

OBJECTS AND PURPOSES (as stated in the Constitution)

The objects of The Southern Fishermen's Association are:

1. To promote the development of the fishery by initiating and having an active role in Scientific, Economic and Social Research & Development.
2. To promote the environmentally sustainable fishing practices of the fishery using the Environmental Management Plan as the continuously improving framework.
3. To initiate and adopt other documents and proposals that enables the fishery to remain sustainable and profitable in perpetuity.
4. To promote Quality Assurance practices as adopted by the fishery
5. To ensure adherence to the South Australian Lakes and Coorong Code of Conduct.
6. To liase with community groups, government departments and any other body or activity where the fishery may have a vested or common interest.
7. To unite the commercial fishermen, families and associates of the fishery in a body for their common benefit
8. To provide access to resources for the training and development of fishers
9. To protect the legal and moral rights of commercial fishers.
10. To promote awareness of current and new legislative requirements
11. To take increasing management responsibility for the fishery including the environmental as well as the harvestable resources.



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Overview

The main species fished are mulloway, flounder, yellow-eye mullet, cockles, black bream, bony bream, redfin perch, callop, and European carp. The gear types used are slightly modified versions of traditional aboriginal gear types. Fishing methods utilise low mechanisation coupled with highly energy efficient netting and manual harvest types. This results in low by-catch, highly specific methods operated by well-trained operators with decades of experience with the ecosystem and its fish.

The modification of the ecosystem means there is a diverse range of habitats (freshwater, estuarine, marine and hyper saline areas.) The advantages of being a multi-species, multi-gear fishery is that there can be a rotational harvest system, which shifts effort from one species to another when one becomes financially non-viable to target, or spreads effort across several species when conditions are ideal.

This in addition to the owner-operator policy and the commitment to low impact fishing methods means the fishery has an ecosystem based focus and strong community links. The pro-active approach to their business has fishers participating in numerous activities and initiatives. SFA members have undertaken and participated in bird counts, rubbish cleanups, environmental data collection, consultation in river flow management, Salt Creek Drainage Scheme, addressed community and scientific groups, and much more. This involvement has resulted in the wider community applauding the merits on these activities by bestowing upon the SFA several environmental awards and most recently an SA Great award.

The fishers acknowledge that the Lakes and Coorong region is a community owned natural resource to which we have access rights. Given our continual presence and intimate knowledge of the Lakes and Coorong and the interdependence on the health of the system for our continued survival, the SFA takes the position that our role is to act as stewards of the resource on behalf of the community.

The release of the SFA Environmental Management Plan, a world first for a fishery, has put it the in the international spotlight. The commercial fishery has placed itself under intense scrutiny to pursue Marine Stewardship Council certification as a sustainable fishery. SFA members are working hard to meet and exceed the requirements of world best practice and the high expectations of the stakeholders.

They also recognise that the industry is an integral part of the local economy and has a positive impact upon the social fabric of the region. A large number of people are employed either directly or indirectly by the industry and it contributes millions of dollars a year to the South Australian economy. The commercial fishing industry acts on behalf of the fish consuming public, especially children, the elderly and infirmed. Recent industry surveys have shown that fish buyers and consumers are not only those who choose not to or unable to go fishing for themselves, but also a large percentage of recreational fishers.



Vision

The Lakes & Coorong Fishery will be recognised and acknowledged as a **world leading sustainable and dynamic** fishery which, through **responsible management, ethical harvest and innovative value-adding** of the natural resource, will be an industry **vital to the prosperity of the region.**

Mission

The Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishery, through the SFA, undertakes to **perpetuate, initiate and adopt management practices, processes and projects** that will **enable** it to **remain sustainable, viable and profitable in perpetuity.**

This will be achieved by:

- ❖ Achieving world recognised **sustainability certification,**
- ❖ Maximising **development opportunities** on behalf of the state and the fishery
- ❖ Adherence to the principals of **ecologically sustainable development**
- ❖ **Informing and educating** the public and interest groups
- ❖ **Developing leadership** skills
- ❖ Pursuing **partnerships** with government bodies and NGO's
- ❖ **Continuing Consultation** with all stakeholders,
- ❖ Actively and constructively **participating in co-management** of the fishery,
- ❖ **Conducting scientific, economic and social research,**
- ❖ Providing **support and benefits** to the individual fishers, their families and their businesses.

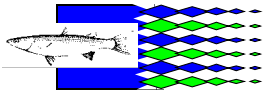
Commitment

SFA values honesty, transparency and accountability. It adheres to the principal of "Care for the environment, and share the benefits with others".

The Lakes and Coorong Commercial Fishers choose to work closely with local, state and national government bodies, non-government organisations, scientists, environmental and community groups to achieve positive outcomes.

The motto "**Wild Fisheries with a Future**" is an indication of the optimism and direction of the Southern Fishermen's Association.





Key Industry Issues

❖ Habitat and Species Integrity

- Improved environmental flows
- Improve fish passage
- Lobbying for improved Barrage operations for optimal outcomes
- Mitigation of ongoing degradation
- Reducing Pollution threats
- Setting research priorities and monitoring results
- Improving Catch and effort data collection and reporting
- Other statistical data collection and distribution
- Evaluate and minimise recreational by-catch mortality
- Extraction of exotic species
- Observation, reporting and monitoring of bio-pollution and diseases
- Develop exotics strategy
- Loss of biodiversity

❖ Industry and People development

- Explore eco-tourism opportunities
- Identify training opportunities
- Leadership development and succession planning
- Improving networking and communication
- Research initiatives and funding avenues
- Modernisation of business activities and fishing practices
- Obtain value for intellectual property
- Attendance at industry conferences
- Participation in and influence of peak body makeup and SFA management committee
- Develop skills and increase participation of women in the fishery

❖ Social Commitments

- Initiate further rubbish cleanups
- Responsibilities of fishers at boat ramps and landings
- Participate in future Bird Counts
- Assistance to boat traffic/public
- Improve and further develop Voluntary Data Collection
- Quantify personal community work and participation
- Pursue opportunities to inform and educate the public
- Education and induction of new fishers
- Emergency response
- Co-ordinate with other groups eg. Coastcare.
- Publicising these roles

❖ Food Safety and Quality

- Understanding and adopting new and existing state and federal food safety regulations and legislation
- Adherence to HACCP principles and implementation of plans
- Improve and enhance fishing methods and practices
- Costs of upgrading premises
- AQIS approval for export
- Product research and development
- Improved transport and distribution
- Utilisation of waste products
- Water quality monitoring of ocean beach
- Monitoring of purging systems
- Live Export project finalisation





❖ **Successful Management**

- Maintaining multi-species, multi-gear ability (to allow effort shifting to adapt to ecological variation)
- Maintaining current areas being fished (to spread effort over the maximum production area)
- Quality of product being harvested
- Lobbying for environmental flows and habitat improvement
- Affordable and targeted research
- Confidence in researchers/bodies by commercial industry
- Adopting new fishing methods/practices
- Encourage adherence to best practices and Codes of Conduct
- Progression and updating of Environmental Management Plan for continuous improvement

❖ **Policy and Administration**

- Pursue finalisation of Management Plan
- Establish Ministerial and agency accountability systems
- Contribute actively and successfully to the ecosystem policy and management systems/arena
- Review of Fisheries Act
- Revise and clarify Regulations
- Resource allocation
- Ecologically Sustainable Development requirements
- Impact of River Murray Act
- Improved Liaison and Communication with managers, Minister and key decision makers
- Native Title issues
- Reduce impact of changing goalposts
- Achieve positive outcomes from National Competition Policy

❖ **Viability of Industry**

- Define and achieve access security
- Address impediments to investment
- Source investment and funding opportunities
- Licence fees and equitable cost recovery process
- Evaluation of Cost vs. return
- Higher economic efficiency
- Value adding of product to increase value of catch
- Marine Stewardship Council Certification increasing opportunities
- Management changes to be necessary and justified through independent research
- Enhanced opportunities for the fishery commensurate with ecological cycles
- Closer liaison with researchers to produce positive outcomes

❖ **Public Perception and Stakeholder Conflict**

- Define and achieve equity in resource allocation
- Develop management principles for resource sharing
- Recognise opportunities for change and improvement and prepare action plans
- Maintain participation with all user groups
- Supply expertise to other fisheries and stakeholder groups
- Develop better and ecologically adaptive alternative harvest methods
- Develop marketing strategy
- Maintain and improve communication /education
- Review of current recreational access arrangement
- Sustainability of recreational fisheries



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Short Term Goals

1 year - 18 months

- ❖ **DEMONSTRATE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE FISHERY**
 - **Pursuance of MSC certification**
 - Independent, third party, peer reviewed science
 - Continuous Improvement through the Environmental Management Plan
 - Produce series of best practices documents and monitor adherence
 - Finalise Fishery Management Plan

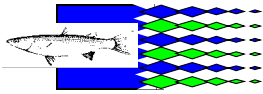
- ❖ **IMPROVE IMAGE AND INCREASE INDUSTRY PROFILE**
 - **Allocate a communications officer to implement a communications strategy to highlight**
 - ◆ Achievements of the SFA
 - ◆ Availability to the public of accessible, high quality, safe protein source by energy efficient and ecologically sound methods
 - ◆ Economic benefits of a thriving and growing industry in the region
 - ◆ Voluntary work done by members
 - Produce and distribute regular newsletter
 - Develop a website
 - Put articles into papers and key publications
 - **Educate and influence perception of public**
 - ◆ Attending Field days, events, shows etc.
 - ◆ Photographic Displays
 - ◆ Community events, Public speaking engagements
 - ◆ Utilise the Women's Industry Network
 - ◆ Produce documentary/video about the local industry

Medium Term Goals

1 – 3 years

- ❖ **RESTORE NATURAL RECRUITMENT OF FISH INTO FISHERY**
 - **Progress Improved Optimal Barrage Operations**
 - Lobby government to restore estuarine regime and river flows
 - Provide advice and expertise to SA Water
 - ◆ Create ideal breeding conditions for key species
 - ◆ Enhances bio-diversity of non-consumptive species
 - ◆ Helps maintain the health of the ecosystem
 - **Progress Fish Passage Project**
 - Increase value of commercial fishery
 - Improves fish passage and retain water use

- ❖ **INCREASED RETURN FOR FISHERS**
 - **Develop fishery marketing entity**
 - Regional branding
 - Control of product image and delivery
 - **Build value-adding centre for finfish and cockles**
 - retain profits
 - Innovative products
 - Develop export industry
 - Efficient transport
 - Utilise waste products eg heads & skeletons, crab eaten fish etc.
 - Progress cockle purging system



- ❖ **DETERMINE ECONOMIC VALUE OF THE FISHERY**
 - Employ economist to determine value of:
 - Environmental data
 - Community involvement eg donations, presentations
 - Involvement with schools eg. Enterprise days,
 - Cleanups, Bird counts
 - **Ownership of Catch and Effort Data**
 - Ability to utilise for independent research
 - Ownership of data for monetary value
 - Leverage the economic data to achieve funding for SFA Goals

- ❖ **BENEFIT PACKAGE TO FISHERS**
 - **Induction package for new fishers**
 - Rules & Regulations
 - EMP, Code of conduct and Best Practice
 - SFA Membership package: market information, data sheets, disaster strategy
 - Mentor Fisher
 - **Group Buying scheme**
 - Fishing gear
 - Office products
 - Insurance
 - Outboards

- ❖ **CONTRIBUTE ACTIVELY TO FISHERY MANAGEMENT**
 - **Stronger adoption of co-management approach**
 - Ability to tender for research
 - Build on relationships with key management partners resulting in improved outcomes in compliance, research, license fees, industry development
 - Private sector license fee collection
 - Increase contribution to development of government policy, legislation and regulation
 - Accurate Statistic collection, collation and distribution
 - ◆ Redesign statistical capture sheets to more accurately reflect gear and conditions fished to provide more accurate data for development of indicators

Long Term Goals

3 years +

- ❖ **CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**
 - Attract someone with appropriate expertise
 - Ensure funding is available through industry development
 - Pursue objectives of strategic plan
 - Obtain clerical assistance





Specific Outcomes

INDUSTRY AND REGIONAL GROWTH

Our specific objective is to contribute \$24 million to the South Australian economy annually, while exceeding ESD criteria and subject to the necessary financial and managerial support by relevant authorities.

In turn this will increase income into the local and regional economy, add diversity, encourage investment and produce at least 10 new fulltime jobs in the fishing industry.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT

Be acknowledged as the best managed sustainable multispecies fishery on earth. Be instrumental in achieving better environmental river flows to enhance recruitment of stocks and recovery of several non-consumptive native fish species. To participate in the development of the Coorong Mulloway Fishery between the Coorong and Lakes system for both commercial and recreational fishers.

PRODUCT BRANDING

Develop an instantly recognised regional brand, underpinned by SA branding programs such as SA Great. This brand will be linked with image of high quality, local, GM free and antibiotic free and safe products. Products will also be linked with green certification. This will be promoted both locally, interstate and overseas. The marketing will capitalise on niche markets that will pay a premium for "sustainable" and "wildfish" products. As a result SFA can help establish SA in the global marketplace.

FISHERY SUSTAINABILITY

To have a fishery that can be passed on to the next generation of commercial fishers in perpetuity. Thus ensuring that a coastal community fishing culture survives into the next millennium. This will create confidence for investors, peace of mind for fishers and families, increased value of investment in licenses and gear, increased recognition by government of the value of the fishery to the state. Fishing businesses will have the ability to re-invest into value-adding, environmental initiatives, community projects and other investment opportunities.

FAIR AND EQUITABLE SHARING BETWEEN ALL STAKEHOLDERS

To influence the culture within PIRSA fisheries, to ensure that "sharing the resource" does not mean closing of access to species or areas to the commercial industry. Due to the wording of the Fisheries Act (currently under review) and its interpretation, PIRSA currently sees its role as redistributing the resource and is advising Government accordingly. The government needs to recognise that the commercial industry is also acting on behalf of the consumer and collectively they are the major stakeholders.

BETTER PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Dispel the myths surrounding commercial fishing. Factual information will be distributed by the SFA based on current practices, accurate figures, historical statistics and relevant research papers. Publishing and broadcasting strategy will give the consumer and other stakeholders a clearer understanding of the issues and better and more educated choices can be made.



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KEY CONTACTS:

SOUTHERN FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

President: GARRY HERA-SINGH
Email: gicahera@lm.net.au
Tel 08 85751680

SAFIC

General Manager, Lorraine Rosenberg
Tel 08 82348622

WOMENS INDUSTRY NETWORK

Regional Representative: TRACY HILL
Tel 08 85751489
Email: hillifsh@lm.net.au

FISHERY CONSULTANT

BRYAN PIERCE
Fisheries Innovations Strategies
23 Greenbank Drive
WINDSOR GARDENS SA 5087

PIRSA – FISHERIES

Inland Waters Fishery Manager: SEAN SLOAN
Tel: 82260219
Fax: 82262320

MURRAYLANDS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT BOARD

David Altmann
Tel: 85321202

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