



Northern
Territory
Government

RECREATIONAL FISHING

Changes to personal possession limits

Following public consultation and with wide community support, the Northern Territory Government will introduce the following changes to personal possession limits, effective 1 January 2010.

- a reduction of the current possession limit for black jewfish from five to two
- a reduction of the current possession limit for Spanish mackerel from five to two
- the introduction of a new possession limit of 30 cherabin and/or red claw yabbies
- the introduction of a boat limit of 10 freshwater pots per vessel (when two or more people are on board)
- a requirement for turtle excluder rings in freshwater pots
- the introduction of a new possession limit of three sharks of any species, including a prohibition on the take of sawfish (the sawfish prohibition would not apply to Indigenous people undertaking customary fishing).
- a prohibition on the recreational take of giant clams (this would not apply to Indigenous people undertaking customary fishing).

Why do we need to change the limits?

Recreational fishing is a big part of the Territory lifestyle. Fishing tourism is also an important contributor to the Territory's economy, with over 25 000 days fished by fishing tour operator clients each year.

The ongoing enjoyment of the Territory's first class fishing experiences depends upon the careful management of our valuable fish resources and aquatic habitats. Recreational catches also need to be shared among growing numbers of recreational fishers.

Since 1994-95 the catches of reef species such as black jewfish, golden snapper and cods taken by recreational fishers on charter boats has increased five-fold.

Failure to take early management action runs the risk of declining fishing quality, localised depletion or even fishery collapse, particularly in key high use areas.



Our specific concerns

Scientific information and anecdotal feedback from concerned stakeholders highlight the urgent need to better protect our fisheries and ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy quality fishing experiences. The new measures are in response to the following findings.

Reducing the limit of black jewfish and Spanish mackerel from 5 to 2

- The aggregating behaviour of both species makes them easy to target and prone to localised depletion, particularly in high use areas.
- Available scientific information indicates that both species may consist of sub populations with limited mixing, making these sub populations vulnerable to over fishing and localised depletion.
- There are a number of global and national examples of both species being over fished to the point of fishery collapse.
- Anecdotal information has been received of the collapse of a key black jewfish aggregation site in Darwin harbour and charter boats are having to travel further to maintain catch rates.
- While there is no current information on general recreational catches, catches of black jewfish taken by clients on charter boats have increased five-fold since 1994-95.

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Changes to personal possession limits

Introducing a new limit of 30 cherabin and/or red claw yabbies

Introducing a boat limit of 10 freshwater pots per vessel when two or more people are on board

- There are no catch controls for either cherabin or red claw in the Territory. Very large quantities of both species are harvested and on occasions during mass migrations.
- Red claw have been listed as vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources' threatened species list since 1994. They have low fecundity (between 300 to 1000 eggs per female per spawn) and populations are slow to recover after depletion.
- Cherabin are more abundant but more heavily harvested. Complaints of vastly excessive catches have been received by Fisheries, particularly from the Daly and Roper Rivers.
- While research information is limited, the localised targeted harvesting by recreational fishers and the general vulnerability of these species to overexploitation are strong motivators for a precautionary response.
- The measure will allow for an acceptable level of take while lowering the risk of excessive harvesting and depletion.

Introducing the requirement for turtle excluder rings in freshwater pots

- Turtles can be accidentally caught in freshwater pots and drown.
- The majority of pots available in retail stores have turtle exclusion devices in place.
- This measure would ensure home made pots also mitigate against the risk of accidental capture of turtles.

Introducing a new limit of three sharks of any species, including a prohibition on the take of sawfish

- Most shark species are slow growing and late maturing making them vulnerable to over-fishing.
- There are National and International Plans of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks, and the Territory has obligations to support sustainability measures.
- The majority of recreational fishers take few shark and would not be impacted by a possession limit.
- They are subject to pressure from illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities.
- Sawfish are not taken by the majority of recreational fishers and are listed as threatened under the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

Prohibiting the recreational take of giant clams

- There are global concerns regarding the vulnerability of clams to overexploitation and they are listed within the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).
- There have been reports of clam beds being significantly depleted by unlicensed hand harvesting in the Gulf of Carpentaria.
- The commercial take of clams is carefully regulated and a precautionary trigger point is in place for the commercial Northern Territory Aquarium Fishery.

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