

THE NATIONAL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR RECREATIONAL AND SPORT FISHING 2001

Australians just love fishing. Five million Australians regularly fish for recreation and sport. This means one in every four Australians enjoy fishing and one of every two Australian households owns fishing tackle. Fishing is one of the most popular recreational and sporting activities in Australia. People of all ages and from all walks of life enjoy fishing.

However, the enormous popularity that recreational fishing enjoys also contributes to the decline of fish stocks and can contribute to the destruction of vital fish habitat. Recfish Australia was formed in 1983 to represent the long term interests of recreational and sport fishing at a national level. Recognition of the need for more sustainable fishing practices and an agreed national standard for recreational fishing led to the development of a national code of practice in 1996. Five years on this need is still there and in keeping with the times, Recfish Australia has now updated and re-released the National Code of Practice.

The National Code of Practice is a voluntary agreement among Recfish Australia's 11 national and state/territory fishing member associations which prepared and endorsed its 13 points. These associations represent a diverse range of recreational and sports fishing practices, including inland and saltwater fishing, diving, rock fishing and game fishing.

The Code addresses four main areas of fishing responsibility. These include looking after our fisheries, protecting the environment, treating fish humanely and respecting the rights of others. The four objectives are a framework for the 13 more specific principles explained in this brochure.

Recfish Australia's mission is to represent the interests of recreational and sport fishers at a national level to ensure quality fishing. We seek your support in promoting this code and applying its principles in all your fishing activities.

Looking after our fisheries by:

1. TAKING NO MORE THAN OUR IMMEDIATE NEEDS

A vital way we can participate in conserving fish stocks is to limit our catch by taking only our immediate personal needs. Overfishing has a detrimental effect on fish stocks and in extreme cases, entire fish species. Looking after our fisheries means:

- using commonsense and constraint when fishing, for example, return unwanted, endangered or threatened species to the water.
- carefully returning unwanted live bait to the waters they were taken from. Live bait is an important part of the food chain so it is important to leave some to support the fish we wish to catch in the future.

2. UNDERSTANDING AND OBSERVING ALL FISHING REGULATIONS AND REPORTING ILLEGAL FISHING ACTIVITIES

State and Territory Fishery departments make regulations to manage the fisheries for now and the future. To protect fish stocks and fish habitat, report illegal fishing activities to the relevant authorities. It is important that the fishing community does not ignore activities that threaten the fisheries and damage the reputation of responsible fishers. Looking after our fisheries means:

- keeping up to date with regulations and observing them because they are based on the best available scientific evidence
- acquainting yourself with State and Territory bag, size and possession limits
- becoming familiar with existing tackle restrictions and checking the dates of local seasonal closures
- helping to explain fishery regulations and the reasons for them to others, especially children
- reporting black marketing of fish by recreational anglers
- reporting poaching, theft and illegal netting to the relevant authorities
- not presuming to act as officers of the law.

**** For current details of State or Territory bag, size and possession limits contact your State or Territory Fishing Agency. ****

3. SUPPORTING AND ENCOURAGING ACTIVITIES THAT RESTORE AND ENHANCE FISHERIES AND FISH HABITAT

We are all dependent on healthy ecosystems. Habitat destruction and modification, resulting largely from human activities, presents a huge threat to the maintenance of fish stocks and the availability of other species such as shell fish, rock lobsters and crabs. Restoring and enhancing fisheries and fish habitat means:

- recognising the fragility and environmental diversity of streamside vegetation, estuaries, seagrass, mangroves, and reefs. These areas provide food, shelter and important breeding and nursery areas for many fish species
- participating in research, rehabilitation and monitoring programs such as Coastcare, Waterwatch, Rivercare, Landcare and tagging programs
- educating others, especially children, in sustainable fishing practices
- becoming familiar with the life cycles and breeding seasons of aquatic species and other fauna
- becoming involved in programs that restore coastal and streamside vegetation such as Rivercare and Fishcare
- keeping a safe distance from aquatic wildlife and avoiding undue noise when birds are roosting or nesting
- never using non indigenous fish as live bait or introducing exotic fish into natural waters

Protecting the Environment by:

4. PREVENTING POLLUTION AND PROTECTING WILDLIFE BY REMOVING RUBBISH

Pollution affects the health of the environment and spoils our experience of the outdoors. Natural areas continue to suffer major problems due to the side effects of human activities. We can help! Preventing pollution means:

- taking fishing line, polystyrene foam packaging, bottles, six pack holders, bait bags, cups and packaging, etc. away from fishing sites. All items must be disposed of correctly to avoid potentially entrapping birds and other creatures
- not leaving bait to foul rocks, river banks or beaches
- not washing rubbish, chemicals or other waste into stormwater systems. Most stormwater drains run directly into waterways
- participating in programs such as “Clean up Australia” and “Oceancare Day”.

5. USING ESTABLISHED ROADS AND TRACKS

Off-road driving or “bush-bashing” can be a major cause of erosion and vegetation loss; likewise trampling across dune systems, reef beds and other fragile areas. Using established roads and tracks means:

- using walking tracks and avoiding driving on beaches. The protection of sand dunes, coastal, and streamside vegetation will help minimise beach and streamside erosion
- avoiding straying from established roads and tracks
- treating all natural areas with care.

6. TAKING CARE WHEN BOATING AND ANCHORING TO AVOID DAMAGING SENSITIVE AREAS

Boating increases the range of fishing possibilities but unskilled and thoughtless use of boats can lead to environmental damage. Taking care when boating means:

- showing care when anchoring, particularly around reef or seagrass areas
- avoiding disturbance to wildlife by excessive noise or harassment
- keeping a constant vigil when boating to avoid hitting wildlife
- refuelling on land wherever possible and not discharging wastes, oil or sewage into the water
- being aware of your boating speed to minimise erosion of riverbanks from excessive wave action
- avoiding modification of or disturbance to fish habitat while diving.

7. REPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE AND POLLUTION TO THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES

The protection of the environment is everyone’s responsibility. By reporting pollution problems to the relevant authorities, we help ensure that our waters become pollutant free and discourage practices that destroy fish habitat. Reporting environmental damage means:

- reporting any fuel and oil spills

- reporting all stranded or dead aquatic animals and protected species
- reporting any signs of discharge of polluted waste waters and runoff containing fertilisers and pesticides
- reporting any vegetation or stream damage, e.g. sedimentation, declining water quality, algae, etc.
- reporting sightings of suspected aquatic pest organisms such as carp, salvinia weed, or caulerpia.

8. AVOIDING INTERACTIONS WITH THREATENED SPECIES AND THEIR CRITICAL HABITATS

While fishing and accessing fishing grounds it is easy to inadvertently disturb the habitats of protected species or disturb the species themselves. Habitat destruction and modification are the major threat to the continued survival of threatened species. Avoiding threatened species means:

- being aware of and avoiding disturbance to threatened species that inhabit areas you intend to fish
- observing and obeying signage or guidelines in areas where threatened species live
- obeying guidelines for activity in the vicinity of marine mammals
- reporting any inappropriate behaviour we witness which may affect threatened species
- reporting sightings of threatened species in distress
- quickly and correctly returning to the water any inadvertently caught threatened species.

Treating fish humanely by:

9. QUICKLY AND CORRECTLY RETURNING UNWANTED OR ILLEGAL CATCH TO THE WATER

Incorrect handling damages fish and reduces their chances of survival after release. A fish out of water cannot live for more than three or four minutes because of brain damage caused by lack of oxygen. An exhausted fish played too long, may not recover. Correctly returning fish means:

- retrieving fish as quickly as possible
- ensuring that fish are not left to flop and flail around
- using wet hands and a minimum of handling to ensure that released fish have a good chance of survival
- reviving tired or semi conscious fish. Hold the fish gently and move it forward to force water through its gills. When it has revived, and is able to swim normally, set it free.

10. USING ONLY LEGAL TACKLE, ATTENDING OUR GEAR AND VALUING OUR CATCH

Good treatment and handling of fish is not just about maintaining table fish quality. It is also a mark of respect that fishers have for fish. Treating fish humanely and avoiding waste means:

- using only tackle that is appropriate for the size and type of fish
- attending gear to ensure that fish are retrieved as soon as they are caught
- dispatching fish immediately with a firm tap on the head with a suitable blunt object or by pithing
- icing fish down and storing them away from sunlight, preferably in a moist bag or cooler.

Respecting the rights of others by:

11. PRACTICING COURTESY TOWARDS ALL THOSE WHO USE INLAND AND COASTAL WATERS

Lakes, creeks, rivers, and coasts are used for a variety of purposes. By recognising the rights of others to use the waters for their recreation and livelihood, recreational fishers help ensure that all are equally able to enjoy their activities. Respecting the rights of others means:

- being courteous to those whose communities we enter when fishing. Remember this is their home.
- realising that friendly rivalry can exist between recreational fishers without the need for anyone to dominate
- preparing your boat and trailer before launching at boat ramps to avoid annoying delays.

12. OBTAINING PERMISSION FROM LANDHOLDERS AND TRADITIONAL OWNERS BEFORE ENTERING LAND

Having access to land held in trust to landholders and traditional owners is a privilege, not a right. Respecting the rights of others means:

- gaining permission before entering land and clearly indicating where you are going
- recognising the cultural and spiritual attachment indigenous people feel for their land and water
- obtaining permission before lighting fires
- avoiding interference with land, stock or crops in any way
- leaving all gates as they were found
- leaving the gun and dog at home to avoid harming or harassing livestock or wildlife.

13. CARING FOR OUR OWN SAFETY AND THE SAFETY OF OTHERS WHEN FISHING

Playing it safe while fishing is good commonsense. Never risk a life while trying to catch a fish. Caring about safety means:

- observing and understanding all boating regulations, including the carrying of the required safety equipment
- keeping a safe distance from shore-based anglers, jetties, swimmers and other boats
- being aware of the dangers of rock fishing and seeking local knowledge of tides and wave conditions

- gaining local knowledge of common beach dangers including rip currents, large waves, shore platforms, deep water, offshore reefs and tidal currents
- exercising caution and planning for contingencies when fishing inland waters and mountain lakes and streams. Submerged logs, sudden squalls, icy waters and extremely cold temperatures can create life-threatening difficulties.

The National Code of Practice for Recreational and Sport Fishing is an initiative of Recfish Australia. Funding for this Code of Practice update and reprint is provided by the Commonwealth Government through Natural Heritage Trust funding. The views expressed in the Code are not necessarily those of the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth accepts no responsibility for the accuracy or completeness of the information or other material contained in the Code.

To find out more about the Code or to find out more about sustainable fishing practices, contact Recfish Australia on 02 – 6257 1997, E-mail: recfishoz@sportnet.com.au visit our website or contact one of Recfish Australia's member bodies.