



## **Sustainable, successful and responsible fishing in the Fish Habitat Protection Area**

**By Brett Donovan, a local fisherman, with a keen interest in sustainable recreational fishing.**

The fish habitat protection area, which stretches from the Cable station reef area in the south to Grant Street in the north, is a very fertile area for a wide variety of sea life. The types of fish most commonly targeted by the amateur fisherman are the pelagics (THE FISH THAT MOVE AROUND A LOT), herring, tailor, garfish, skippy and whiting and occasionally, when the run is on, the very exciting West Australian salmon.

There are however, many other types of residential fish which although not targeted, may be accidentally caught when fishing for the pelagics. These include eagle and stingrays, wrasse, sweet lip and morwong. The most common mistake made by the amateur fisherperson, is choosing the wrong rig for the area and type of seafloor.

When fishing for herring, tailor etc, a surface rig is generally better as they are predatory surface feeders. Perhaps the only time it is preferable to use a bottom rig is when fishing over a clear sandy stretch of seafloor. Using a bottom rig over reef not only means you will probably not catch the right type of fish, but that you will almost certainly get snagged, lose a lot of tackle, and leave a hazard for swimmers and other sea life. Sand and King George whiting tend to congregate in sand patches where a sinker rig would be more appropriate anyway.

### **Simple is better.**

Talk to any of the old fishermen who have beach fished all their lives, and they will tell you the simpler the rig and method, the more successful you will be and the less likely you are to be snagged and waste valuable tackle. The best way to learn these simple fishing techniques is to watch these old masters at work, and, if they seem friendly, ask them to share their secrets.

In my opinion, there are some very simple rules.

- Be specific about what you are fishing for.
- Choose the correct rig for the job.
- Make sure you are using the right bait and that is fresh.
- Sharpen your hooks!
- Always return undersize and any fish that you are unsure of.
- Take all your rubbish with you. It is a fact that people, who respect their fishing habitat, catch more fish because they are in tune!
- Learn the tides and moon cycles and how they affect the fish feeding and fish habitat in general.

### **Accumulate Local Knowledge.**

The better we know an area, and not just as a fishing spot, the better our relationship with it becomes, and out of this comes respect and a sense of being somehow responsible for its wellbeing. A healthy fish habitat means healthy fish, more fish to be observed and better catch rates. By getting to know the area, the gutters and reefs, the tide flows, the weed beds and where the baitfish hole up, it a certainty that we will all be more successful as fisher people.

### **Learn the Local Species,**

To be able to identify which are the local species and which are the pelagics, (the fish we want to catch), Coastcare, in conjunction with the Cottesloe Marine Protection Group, has placed colourful identification displays at points along the reef system. Not only are these interesting but they show clearly what not to catch and put back if caught accidental.

In simple terms, the best we can do to make sure that the reef system and its inhabitants remain healthy and intact is to learn to fish like the experts, fish specifically and only for what we want to eat, return all unwanted and undersize fish and clean up when we go. If we see anything suspicious, people using spear guns etc, always report it to the Rangers as they are now honorary Fisheries Officers and can be contacted through the Cottesloe Town Council.

### **Education is power!**

The fish habitat protection area is a wonderful resource that is right on our doorstep. The reef system contains a fantastic array of sea life, seagrasses, and corals and is an abundant source of table fish if you know how to fish responsibly and efficiently.

I have eaten fish at least twice a week for the 12 years I have fished this area, and have rarely visited a fish shop. We commonly eat herring, garfish and tailor in our household and these are all caught in the fish habitat protection area without harming the environment. There is no reason that this abundance of fish should not always be there if we all do the right thing

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### **Happy responsible fishing and FISH FOR THE FUTURE!**

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