

Article 31st March 2010



Concern: Conservationists want the weedy sea dragon put off limits. Picture: Mark Binns
West. A'lian - 31/3/10

Call to protect sea dragons

JANE HAMMOND

Conservationists and scientists are calling for better protection for the weedy sea dragon, a seahorse-like creature found only in the temperate waters of southern Australia.

WA is the only State where commercial collecting of the animals is allowed. The sea dragons, which measure up to 45cm in length, live in seagrass, kelp beds and near piers from Geraldton to the central NSW coast.

Up to 12 fishers are licensed to collect the sea dragons from WA waters. They are popular in the aquarium trade.

The Cottesloe Coastcare Association

is leading the calls for full protection for the weedy sea dragon in a bid to save the species from collectors and loss of habitat.

University of WA Oceans Institute acting head Gary Kendrick also called for increased protection.

Local marine photographer Mark Binns has been documenting weedy sea dragons off Cottesloe for the past few years and said it was astounding they were not protected in WA.

Shane O'Donoghue, manager of Northern Bioregions for the Department of Fisheries, said only 30 weedy sea dragons were collected by licensed fishers each year and the fishery was sustainable.

Letters to Editor
5th April 2010



Uncommon: The weedy sea dragon.

Weedy sea dragons in need of help

The Cottesloe Coastcare Association is pushing for the protection of weedy sea dragons in WA. Thank you for your article (Call to protect sea dragons, 31/3).

I note that Shane O'Donoghue said that "only 30 weedy sea dragons were collected by licensed fishers each year and the fishery was sustainable".

The Fisheries WA website says that 1572 of the Syngnathidae family were legally collected in 2007-08. This includes weedy sea dragons, various seahorses and pipefish. I was told by Fisheries that more than 200 weedy sea dragons were legally exported to aquariums in Sydney and overseas last year.

This year in WA there are 17 licensees who may collect 2000 weedy sea dragons and their relatives for sale. And I wonder how Fisheries WA can say this fishery is "sustainable" when they told me they do not have population figures. The truth is that because weedies are not protected, no one has any idea how many are taken.

Weedy sea dragons live nowhere else in the world and are protected in all other States. They are officially listed as a nationally threatened species.

Weedies are also known as the "common sea dragon", so perhaps this is the problem. But they are not common. Your readers can find more information and a video on our website www.cottesloecoastcare.org

Robyn Benken, Cottesloe Coastcare Association Inc.