

THE VALUE OF COASTAL FISHERIES ON THE FAR NORTH COAST

The Far North Coast extends from the NSW/ Queensland border south to Evans Head, and includes the fishing ports of Tweed, Brunswick Heads, Ballina and Evans Head. The area supports ocean prawn trawl, Spanner crab and Mud crab fisheries, as well as inshore and estuarine fisheries. It has several Fishermen's Co-operatives, which have been active since the 1940s.

\$ A STRONG ECONOMY

The professional fishing industry contributes more than \$23.6 million in revenue annually and over 223 full-time jobs to the Far North Coast economy. 87% of residents believe the industry is important for their area and 86% feel it is also good for tourism, with locally caught fish a favourite among tourists and locals.

K KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

A third of the professional fishers in the Far North Coast say they are currently or were previously involved in formal research programs. Other fishers conduct seminars, guest lectures or tours for students from universities and local schools.

B FRESH, LOCAL SEAFOOD

- > 95% of Far North Coast residents agree that it is important we produce our own seafood in NSW
- > 72% want to know where their seafood comes from
- > 98% believe buying local seafood is better for their local community.

H CULTURAL HERITAGE

Many towns dotted along the NSW coast evolved from fishing communities and still identify with their professional fishing heritage. In many areas, working harbours remain important civic focal points. Three-quarters of coastal residents in NSW are concerned that a decline in the industry could lead to a loss of identity for NSW fishing towns.

E PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

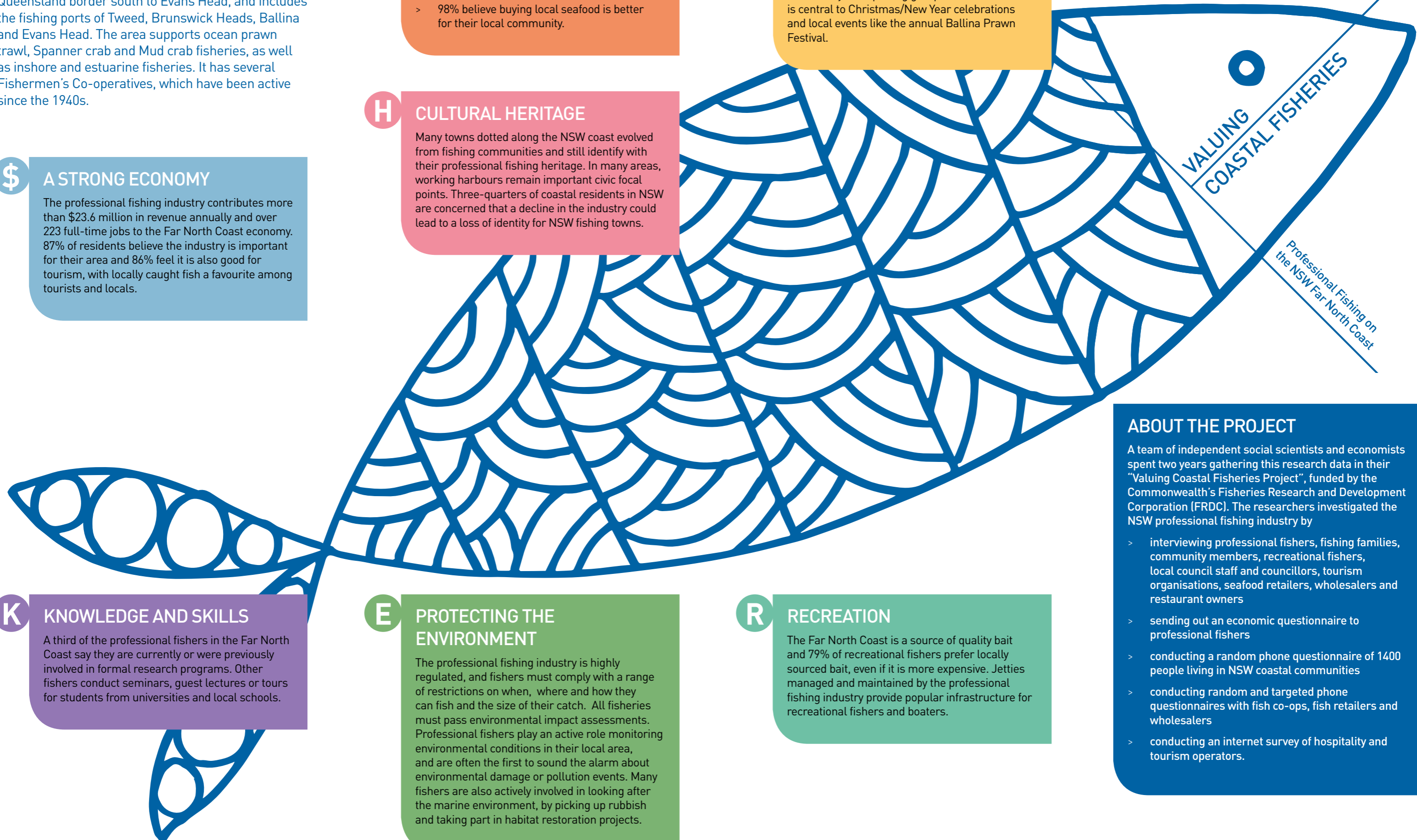
The professional fishing industry is highly regulated, and fishers must comply with a range of restrictions on when, where and how they can fish and the size of their catch. All fisheries must pass environmental impact assessments. Professional fishers play an active role monitoring environmental conditions in their local area, and are often the first to sound the alarm about environmental damage or pollution events. Many fishers are also actively involved in looking after the marine environment, by picking up rubbish and taking part in habitat restoration projects.

C COMMUNITY LIFE

Far North Coast professional fishers play an active role in community life. They frequently join in life saving search and rescue missions. 80% of local fish merchants (retailers, co-ops and wholesalers) supply ice, donations and sponsorship to community and sporting groups. Local seafood is central to Christmas/New Year celebrations and local events like the annual Ballina Prawn Festival.

R RECREATION

The Far North Coast is a source of quality bait and 79% of recreational fishers prefer locally sourced bait, even if it is more expensive. Jetties managed and maintained by the professional fishing industry provide popular infrastructure for recreational fishers and boaters.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

A team of independent social scientists and economists spent two years gathering this research data in their "Valuing Coastal Fisheries Project", funded by the Commonwealth's Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC). The researchers investigated the NSW professional fishing industry by

- > interviewing professional fishers, fishing families, community members, recreational fishers, local council staff and councillors, tourism organisations, seafood retailers, wholesalers and restaurant owners
- > sending out an economic questionnaire to professional fishers
- > conducting a random phone questionnaire of 1400 people living in NSW coastal communities
- > conducting random and targeted phone questionnaires with fish co-ops, fish retailers and wholesalers
- > conducting an internet survey of hospitality and tourism operators.

HOW DO PROFESSIONAL FISHERS CATCH WILD FISH?

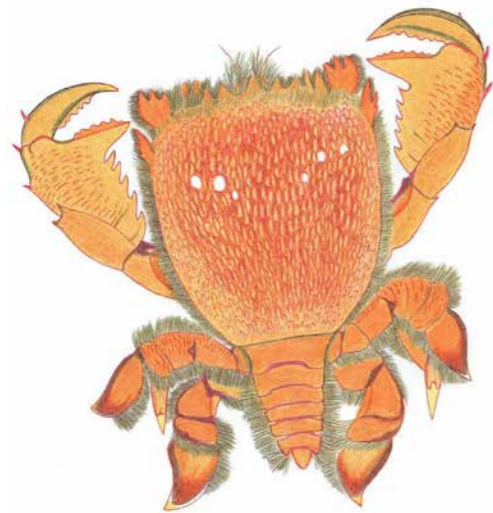
They use

- > estuary meshing of fish and prawns
- > line fishing (catch includes Snapper and Kingfish)
- > **trapping of Mud crabs, Lobster and fish**
- > trawling or purse-seining (catch includes Flathead and Sardines and prawns)
- > ocean (including beach) hauling (catch includes Mullet and Salmon)
- > diving for Abalone and Sea Urchins.
- > hand gathering of pipis and worms

For more information visit:
masterfishermen.oceanwatch.org.au

TRAPPING CRABS IN NSW

Professional fishers trap a variety of crabs throughout NSW, including Mud crabs, Spanner crabs and Blue Swimmer crabs. Each species is managed differently and control measures include restrictions on the number of traps, size limits, quota and seasonal closures.



Spanner crabs (*Ranina ranina*) are found in open ocean in depths of more than 100 m. They can weigh up to 900 gm.

Fishers catch Spanner crabs using Spanner crab nets or dillies. These are frames with netting stretched across them – no more than one metre square, with a bait bag attached to each. The fisher clips 10 or 15 dillies to a trotline at about 50 m intervals, marked by a flagged buoy. Only legal-sized crabs are kept.

FISHERS AT WORK

Fishing is hard, physical and sometimes dangerous work. Mud crab fishers work irregular hours on their own, governed by tides, and often have to deal with illegal poaching and theft of their traps. Spanner crab fishers risk their lives in treacherous conditions and long hours at sea.

Fisher Gary Bordin recounts a time when he was able to rescue some fellow Spanner crab fishers:

“I found them upside down. One bloke was sitting on the upturned hull. He was waving...and then I asked him where his mate was and he said, well he didn't get onto the boat, this was four hours ago and I saw him on an esky lid and he was behind me. So ...we zig-zagged up behind him and luckily this guy just had enough strength to take his hat off and we saw his hat. We pulled this guy out of the water and I tell you what, if he had been there another two hours I don't reckon he would have [survived].”

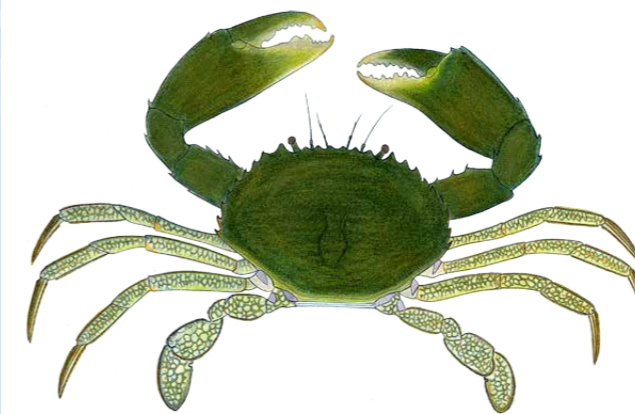


MULTIPLE MARKETS

Fishers sell the live crabs locally to wholesalers, retailers and the Sydney Fish Market, after tying their claws so they don't harm themselves or others. Crabs are particularly popular in Asian cultures, and restaurants in Sydney's Chinatown are an important market for NSW crabs. Some fishers on the Far North Coast also supply Mud crabs to tourism operators in Tweed Heads, which cater for International visitors.

“They get a busload of Asian tourists – and they take them out, and they all go out for a feed of fish and chips and crab, And they're eating the crab (that we supply).”

Tweed Mud crab fisherman



Mud crabs (*Scylla serrata*) are found in estuaries, mud flats, and mangroves. They can reach up to 3.5 kg in weight.

Mud crab traps are constructed from wire mesh with a solid frame, weighted to remain upright. Bait in the centre of the trap attracts crabs, which enter through the tapered funnels on the side of the trap. Fishers check the traps daily on high tide.

