

THE VALUE OF COASTAL FISHERIES ON THE MID-NORTH COAST

The Mid-North Coast extends from the Woolgoolga to Diamond Head and includes the main fishing ports of Coffs Harbour, Nambucca, South West Rocks, Port Macquarie (Hastings) and Laurieton. The area supports ocean prawn trawling, ocean trap and line, lobster trapping, ocean hauling, a seasonal longline tuna fishery, and an estuary fishery.

\$ A STRONG ECONOMY

The professional fishing industry contributes more than \$38.5 million in revenue annually and over 360 full-time local jobs to the Mid-North Coast's economy. 89% of residents believe the industry is important for their area and also good for tourism, with locally caught fish a favourite among tourists and locals.

K KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Fishers learn the skills of their profession by trial and error or through knowledge handed down through the generations. Local professional fishers use the annual mullet barbeque at South West Rocks as an opportunity to inform the general public about fishing, the species they target and the history of the industry. Proceeds from the day go to local charities.

B FRESH, LOCAL SEAFOOD

- > 94% of Mid-North Coast residents agree that it is important we produce our own seafood in NSW
- > 66% want to know where their seafood comes from
- > 95% believe buying local seafood is better for their local community.

H CULTURAL HERITAGE

Many towns dotted along the Mid-North Coast evolved from professional fishing communities, and still identify with their fishing heritage. In many areas, working harbours, particularly Coffs Harbour and Laurieton, remain civic focal points. 78% of residents are concerned that an industry decline could lead to a loss of community identity.

E PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

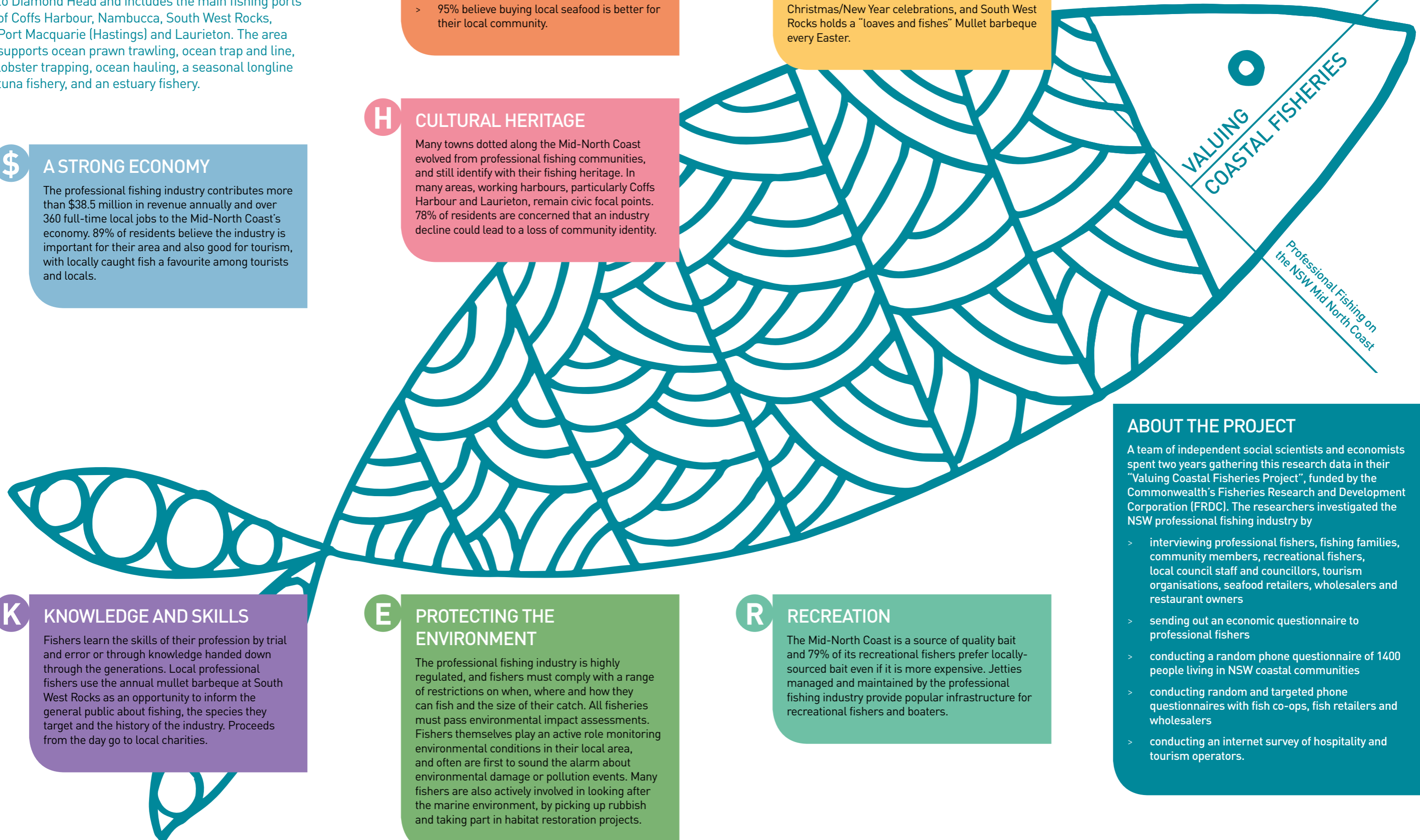
The professional fishing industry is highly regulated, and fishers must comply with a range of restrictions on when, where and how they can fish and the size of their catch. All fisheries must pass environmental impact assessments. Fishers themselves play an active role monitoring environmental conditions in their local area, and often are 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

The Jerseyville (South West Rocks), Coffs Harbour, Hastings and Laurieton fishing co-ops and other fish merchants give donations and sponsorship to community and sporting groups. Mid-North Coast professional fishers join in life saving search and rescue missions. Local seafood is central to Christmas/New Year celebrations, and South West Rocks holds a "loaves and fishes" Mullet barbeque every Easter.

R RECREATION

The Mid-North Coast is a source of quality bait and 79% of its 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

A PRESENCE ON THE WATER

The estuary general fishery operates year round, targeting small numbers of different species during different seasons rather than a large amount of any one species. Estuary general fishers spend long hours on the water, so it is not uncommon for them to come across other vessels in trouble.

“I’ve certainly towed broken down people from outside and on the river. Or (if) they haven’t got a radio, I’ll just radio in where they are and they (Marine Rescue) will come and get them. Yeah, probably half a dozen in a year would be normal.”

Laurie McEnally – Co-op director and fisher (South West Rocks)



LOCAL MARKETS

Estuary general fishers sell the majority of their catch in local markets or through fish co-operatives, and they also supply bait to recreational fishers. The fish are an affordable source of protein for the local community, especially retirees.

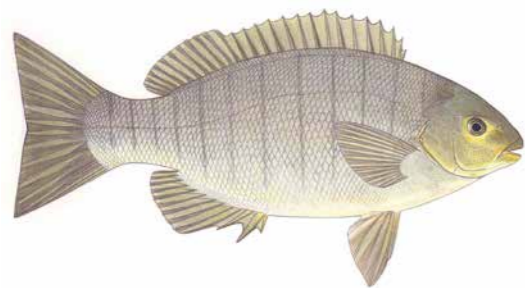
“Well, if you look at us here, we basically just go and catch enough fish to sell locally. Probably 90 - 95 % of the fish we catch is sold locally. We catch some crabs and a few Bream that we send to the markets. But basically all the fish we catch is sold locally. For Blackfish and Mullet this can be anything up to 300 kilos a week. If we go out and get a couple of hundred kilos, we’ll come home. We’ll sell that. When it’s just about sold, go and get some more. So we try and keep it sustainable.”

Chris Davis – Fish retailer (Nambucca)

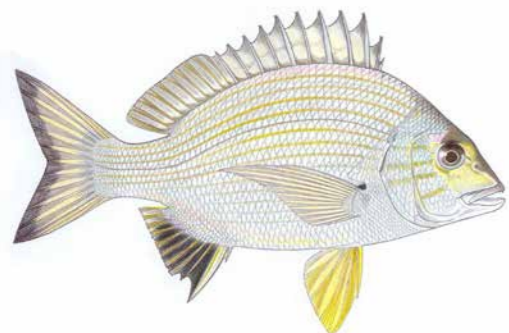
PROFESSIONAL FISHING IN NSW ESTUARIES

Small estuary-based fishers work up and down the Mid-North coast. Known as the “estuary general” fishery, these fishers operate on their own or with one crew member in small boats.

Estuary general fishers catch small volumes of many different species including *Sea Mullet*, *Luderick*, *Bream* and *Pipis*.



- Luderick (*Girella tricuspidata*) also known as Blackfish



- Yellowfin Bream (*Acanthopagrus australis*)



BY MESH AND BY HAND

A mesh net is made out of a length of mesh with floats at the top and weights at the bottom to keep it vertical. The size of the holes in the mesh determines the size of the fish – fishers keep the marketable fish and release the prohibited size. Fishers also use traps to harvest crabs and collect eels. Pipis and beachworms are collected by hand as bait for recreational fishers.

