

# THE VALUE OF COASTAL FISHERIES IN THE SYDNEY AREA

Sydney is the birthplace of Australia's professional fishing industry; fishers began harvesting and selling their catch not long after the start of the colony in 1788. Today a small but diverse industry continues, particularly using offshore traps, lines and trawling. Much of Sydney Harbour is now closed to professional fishing because of heavy metals in the waterways.

## \$ A STRONG ECONOMY

The professional fishing industry contributes more than \$82 million in revenue and accounts for around 490 full-time jobs to the Central Coast and Sydney economy.

## K KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Learning to be a fisher is a complex and lifelong process. Fishers learn by trial and error or through knowledge handed down through the generations. OceanWatch is a Sydney-based environmental group working with the seafood industry to improve the industry's sustainability and address concerns about habitat damage and water quality.

## B FRESH, LOCAL SEAFOOD

- > 91% of Sydney residents agree that it is important we produce our own seafood in NSW
- > 68% want to know where their seafood comes from
- > 92% believe buying local seafood is better for their community.

## C COMMUNITY LIFE

Sydney Fish Market and other fish merchants sponsor and donate to charities and community groups. Local seafood is central to Easter, Christmas, Australia Day and Lunar New Year celebrations. The annual "Blessing of the Fleet" at Sydney Fish Market is an important cultural event for Italian fisher families and the wider Sydney community.

## H CULTURAL HERITAGE

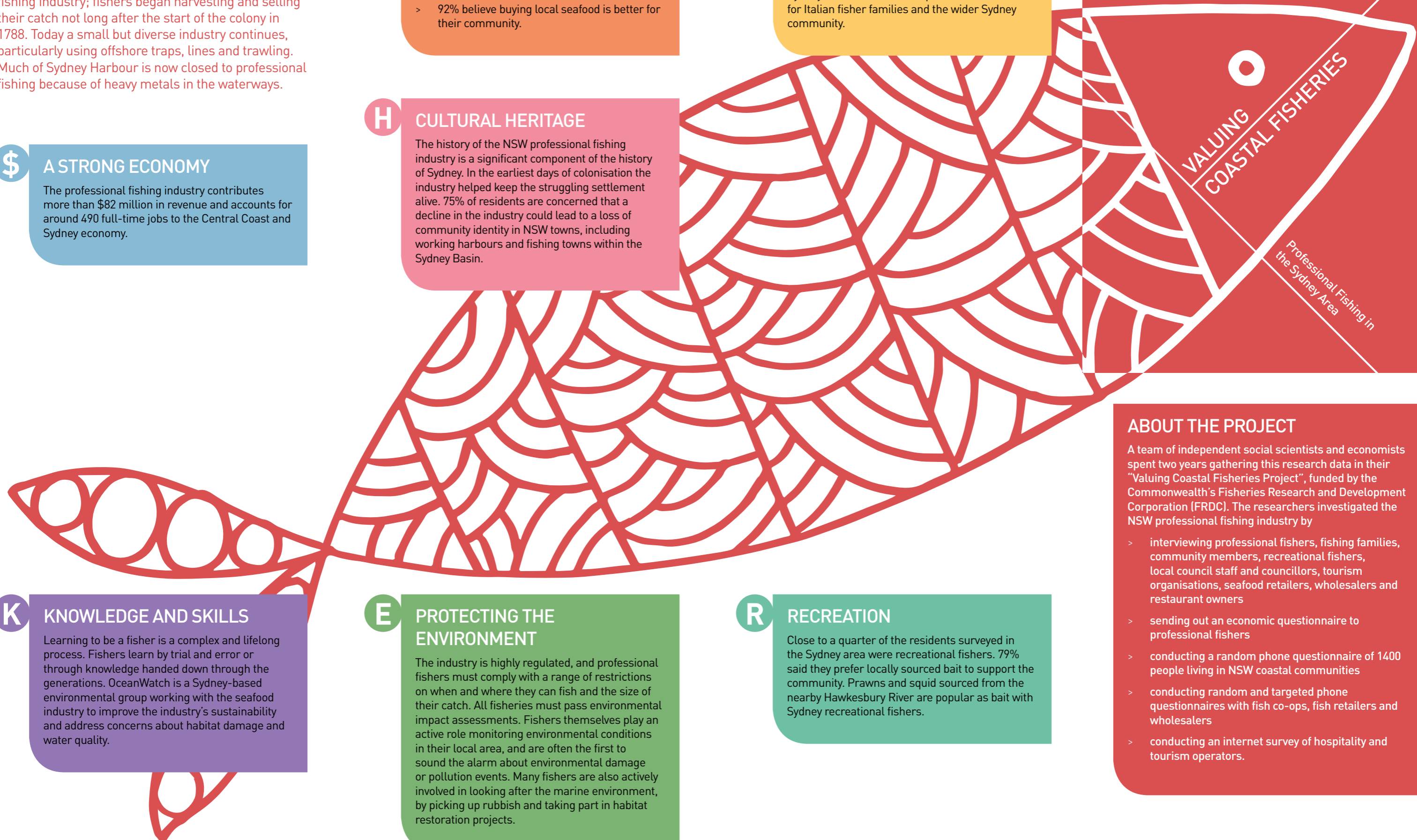
The history of the NSW professional fishing industry is a significant component of the history of Sydney. In the earliest days of colonisation the industry helped keep the struggling settlement alive. 75% of residents are concerned that a decline in the industry could lead to a loss of community identity in NSW towns, including working harbours and fishing towns within the Sydney Basin.

## E PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

The industry is highly regulated, and professional fishers must comply with a range of restrictions on when and where 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 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.

## R RECREATION

Close to a quarter of the residents surveyed in the Sydney area were recreational fishers. 79% said they prefer locally sourced bait to support the community. Prawns and squid sourced from the nearby Hawkesbury River are popular as bait with Sydney recreational fishers.



## 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.

For more information visit:  
[masterfishermen.oceanwatch.org.au](http://masterfishermen.oceanwatch.org.au)

## SYDNEY FISH MARKET

Every weekday at 5:30am the auction at Sydney Fish Market at Pyrmont kicks off. Using the 'Dutch auction' system, the auctioneer begins at the highest price and drops until a bid is made. This system sells an average of 50 to 55 tonnes of fresh seafood daily. The total quantity of fish traded per year is about 13,400 tonnes, with a total value in 2015 of over \$127 million.

From 1979 onwards (until deregulation in the late 1990s) the then NSW Fish Authority required that all fishing co-operatives had to sell through the Market. Today NSW fishers send approximately 46% of their product to Sydney Fish Market and sell most of the rest locally or direct to buyers.

## A FISHING DYNASTY

The history of the Sydney fishing industry is intricately linked with the Bagnato family. Seven brothers emigrated to Sydney from Calabria, Italy in the 1950s and 60s and quickly became well respected members of the fishing community. Their families remain actively involved in the Sydney fishing industry to this day.



## PROFESSIONAL FISHING AND NSW TOURISM

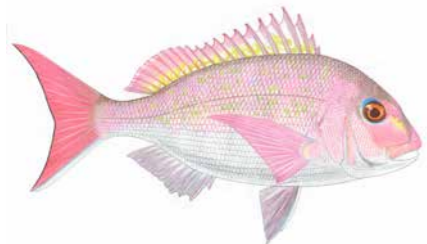
Sydney Fish Market is a Sydney icon and a major tourist attraction within the metropolitan area. In 2015 more than three million people visited SFM. This included more than 690,000 international tourists – equivalent to more than a fifth of all international visitors to the Sydney region.

SFM provides a unique insight into the NSW fishing industry for visitors because they can witness all aspects of the supply chain, from the trawlers delivering their catch, to the wholesale and retail aspects of the industry.

## LINE AND TRAP FISHING IN SYDNEY AND SURROUNDS

Professional fishers harvest many species in the waters around Sydney. Methods include seabed fish traps, setlines and hand-held lines. Fishers must comply with strict regulations on the gear they can use and the size of the fish they can harvest.

Trap and line fishers in the Sydney area harvest a range of popular species include Snapper, a number of Leatherjacket species and Kingfish.



- Snapper (*Pagrus auratus*)



- Leatherjacket (*Meuschenia freycineti*)



- Yellowtail Kingfish (*Seriola lalandi*)



## QUALITY LOCAL PRODUCT

The majority of NSW fishing businesses, including those that fish in the Sydney area, are small family-run operations. Competition in the Sydney market is fierce and these operators must work hard to ensure their product is delivered in the best possible condition.

“You definitely get a name... it's all about how you look after your fish... Because when you're line fishing, quite often it's one at a time, so you can unhook that fish and put it straight in an ice slurry... It chills them to the core straight away... We run a business that's not too small, but not too big in that way. You want to make sure that your product is good and maximise [returns].”

Ben Hay – trap and line fisher (Central Coast)

