THE VALUE OF COASTAL FISHERIES THE CENTRAL COAST

The Hawkesbury River and Tuggerah Lakes are the major fishing grounds on the Central Coast, with most fishers based at Gosford, Wyong, Patonga and Wisemans Ferry. Types of fishing include prawn trawl, meshing of fish and squid, trapping Mud crabs, Lobster and Snapper and ocean hauling Mullet and Australian Salmon.

A STRONG ECONOMY
The professional fishing industry contributes $2 million in revenue and accounts for around 490 full-time jobs to the Central Coast economy. 88% of Central Coast residents believe the industry is important for their area and 86% feel it also good for tourism, with locally caught fish and prawns a favourite among tourists and locals.

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. The local professional fishing industry works with the Hornsby Council environmental team. Council staff record fishers’ observations and fishers are represented on relevant council committees.

FRESH, LOCAL SEAFOOD
- 91% of Central Coast residents agree that it is important we produce our own seafood in NSW
- 64% want to know where their seafood comes from
- 93% of Central Coast believe buying local seafood is better for their local community

COMMUNITY LIFE
Professional fishers play an active role in community life on the Central Coast, supplying ice, seafood trays and other donations to community events and sporting groups. They frequently join in life saving search and rescue missions. Local seafood is central to community celebrations such as Christmas, Easter and Chinese or Lunar New Year.

CULTURAL HERITAGE
Many towns, for example, Patonga, and Wiseman’s Ferry, evolved from fishing communities and still identify with their professional fishing heritage. Nearly three-quarters of coastal residents are concerned that a decline in the industry could lead to a loss of identity for fishing towns.

PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT
The industry is highly regulated, and professional 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 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.

RECREATION
The Hawkesbury River is famous for the quality of its prawn and squid bait, and 67% of Central Coast 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.

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

MULTIPLE MARKETS
The Hawkesbury prawn goes to a variety of markets. The smaller prawns go to bait and tackle shops around the metropolitan and Central Coast area, while larger prawns are sold to Sydney restaurants and direct to consumers through local outlets or the Sydney Fish Market.

“It’s all natural and it’s a bigger prawn in the Hawkesbury than other estuaries that are school prawn fished. It just has a reputation of being a good quality, nice big prawn that doesn’t go off in the freezer. I supply cooked prawns locally in the butcher shop…my prawns are probably only six hours old and they’re in the shop.”

Gary Howard – prawn fisher (Hawkesbury River)

ESTUARY PRAWN TRAWLING IN NSW
The Hawkesbury River is one of only three rivers in the state (along with the Clarence and Hunter Rivers) where estuary prawn trawling vessels can operate. The fishery is managed through controls on gear, seasonal and area closures, and controls on the number of vessels.

THE HAWKESBURY RIVER PRAWN
School prawns (Metapenaeus macleayi) are found all the way along the NSW coast. Consumers and fishers maintain that School prawns taste and act differently according to the estuarine system in which they live. The Hawkesbury River prawn is a small, sweet and succulent species popular amongst Sydney chefs and highly valued for both human consumption and bait.

School prawns are short lived, with a life cycle of 12 to 18 months. The prawns live in the estuarine areas for 12 months before moving out to sea to spawn. Catches of School prawns can fluctuate significantly, and fishers believe they are heavily influenced by rainfall patterns: high rainfall means better catches.

CATCHING THE PRAWN
Estuary prawn trawlers have been operating in the Hawkesbury River since the 1940s. They use otter trawl nets, which include mandatory Bycatch Reduction Devices. Otter trawl nets are nets which are pulled through the water column. The mouth of the net is held open by two large ‘doors’ attached to either side.

The fishery operates within a complex system of temporary and permanent closures, and gear controls designed to ensure that fishing has minimal impact on sensitive habitat such as seagrass beds. To ensure sustainability, the Department of Primary Industry limits the number of prawn trawlers allowed in the river.

FISHERS BUILDING COMMUNITY
Professional fishers belong to the regional communities and play an active role in them. For three decades local fisherman Mary Howard has played a prominent role in the Lower Hawkesbury River’s estuary prawn trawl fishery. Mary and her son Gary have been tireless advocates for the fishery and the health of the River, taking part in various environmental, estuary and fisheries management committees at national, state, regional and local government levels. Today she’s a member of many committees and community groups concerned with commercial fishing, hydroplane boat racing, public infrastructure development, and estuary management.

Over the years, Mary has also been an integral player in the growth and development of the small fishing village of Wiseman Ferry.

“We arrived in the (Hawkesbury) Valley with two children and another one on the way, and we populated the school with three kids! To get a community centre, I had to negotiate with four councils.”

Mary Howard – prawn fisher (Hawkesbury River)