

# The State of Health and Wellbeing in the Australian Fishing Industry



**The Australian fishing industry face health and wellbeing challenges that overlap with other sectors of the Australian population. However, in 2017 a national survey revealed that fishing as an occupation impacts on the physical and mental health of those in the fishing industry.**

**Professional wild catch fishers across all jurisdictions of Australia were surveyed to understand the self-reported state of the Australian fishing industry's health and wellbeing.**

**39% of fishers felt their GP didn't understand the pressures of the fishing industry**

**This brochure is intended for GPs to have the information they need to better understand the health issues in the Australian fishing industry.**

**If you are a fisher, please take this brochure to your doctor.**



## **60% of fishers have moderate to very severe bodily pain**

This is higher than reported by the ABS on the general population (46.5%). Over half of the respondents said pain had interfered with their normal activities, suggesting that bodily pain is an occupation-related health issue.

## **22% of fishers experience high or very high psychological distress**

Fishers who responded to the survey experience significantly higher levels of 'high' and 'very high' psychological distress than the Australian population as a whole. Using the K10 survey, high or very high levels of psychological distress were experienced by 16.0% and 6.2% of fisher respondents respectively, compared to 8.0% (high) and 3.7% (very high) of Australians aged 18 years and over. This suggests that high or very high levels of psychological distress is an occupation-related health issue. However, surveyed fishers reported significantly lower levels of low psychological distress than the Australian population. Low levels of psychological distress were experienced by 54.3% of fisher respondents, compared to 68.0% of Australians aged 18 years and over. National statistics are from the 2014-15 National Health Survey.

## **OVER 30% OF SURVEYED FISHERS EXPERIENCED THESE SYMPTOMS**

**Back pain | joint pain | fatigue | stress | trouble sleeping  
sunburn infections | hearing problems**

## **High blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, type 2 diabetes and cancer are diagnosed at a higher rate than the general population**

Surveyed fishers reported being diagnosed with a number of conditions at a higher rate than the general population, particularly high blood pressure, high cholesterol, depression, type 2 diabetes and cancer. This suggests that these conditions may be occupation-related health issues.





## What are the factors affecting physical and mental health of fishers?

### Physical health may be affected by:

- Fatigue from long work hours
- Working at sea exposes fishers to strain and injuries
- Working at sea can result in wear and tear on joints
- High levels of sun exposure
- Poor diet
- Lack of sufficient physical activity
- Irregular work hours make it difficult to see GP
- Seeking treatment is perceived to affect productivity

### Mental health may be affected by:

- Stress caused by uncertainty about the future
- Stress caused by livelihood insecurity
- Stress caused by regulations and red tape
- Unfounded negative media and poor public image
- Financial burdens
- Isolation
- Lack of time spent relaxing



### About the survey

In 2017, the National Health, Safety and Wellbeing survey was posted to 4,584 professional wild catch fishers across all jurisdictions of Australia through peak bodies, industry associations and large fishing companies. The survey was also made available online to capture those fishers without membership to an industry organisation. 872 surveys were returned for analysis. The survey focussed on self-reported health relating to work, and asked respondents about their physical and mental health status and perceived causes, health and safety behaviours, and access to health services and information. The survey was part of the project Sustainable Fishing Families (FRDC Project 2016-400) and was a collaboration of academic and practical expertise including Deakin University, the National Centre of Farmer Health (NCFH), University of Tasmania, and University of Exeter. The project was funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

For the full report please go to <http://www.frdc.com.au/Archived-Reports/FRDC%20Projects/2016-400-DLD.pdf>

King, T., Abernethy K., Brumby, S., Hatherell, T., Kilpatrick, S., Munksgaard, K. and R. Turner. 2018. Sustainable Fishing Families: Developing industry human capital through health, wellbeing, safety and resilience. Report to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation Project No. 2016/400. Deakin University, Western District Health Service, University of Tasmania and University of Exeter. Canberra, October. CC BY 3.0

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