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FISHERIES RESEARCH &
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Look at what you've done!

The Final Report for the
*Empowering recreational fishers
as champions of healthy fish
habitat* project.

OzFish Unlimited
and the Fish Habitat Network

October 2018

FRDC Project No 2015/501



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In submitting this report, the researcher has agreed to FRDC publishing this material in its edited form.

Executive Summary

A person wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and sunglasses is leaning over the side of a boat, looking down at something in the water. The background is a bright, slightly hazy outdoor setting, likely a body of water with some vegetation in the distance.

From 2016 to 2018, recreational fishers across Australia focussed their attention on fish habitat as part of the project, *Empowering recreational fishers as champions of healthy fish habitat*.

Why did we need this project?

Fish habitat throughout Australia is in trouble. Progressive degradation of fish habitat has occurred since European settlement and continues today. The degradation of the recreational fishery has significant implications socially and economically for Australia. Degradation of fish habitat needs to be slowed and the big challenge is to rehabilitate what has been lost. However, these changes are not happening to the degree needed; nor will they happen, without the active support of the recreational fishing community. In order for progress to be made, the skills, knowledge, capability and collaboration among Australia's recreational fishing community regarding fish habitat and habitat rehabilitation needed to be escalated.

What was done?

The project partners, in conjunction with recreational fishers:

- Held 13 fish habitat forums and masterclasses in 6 states and territories.
- Organised the National Fish Habitat Roundtable.
- Developed the National Fish Habitat Action Plan.
- Promoted fish habitat and built capacity within the recreational fishing community through talks, school activities, field days, and as part of fishing competitions and learn to fish days.
- Developed a range of online tools and targeted messages.
- Formed 18 groups across Australia to support and promote local fish habitat rehabilitation.
- Got fish habitat news out through newspapers, newsletters, radio and magazines, as well as social media posts.
- Improved capacity of recreational fishers so that they undertook fish habitat restoration works in 5 states such as resnagging, revegetation and clean-ups as well as habitat mapping and monitoring.
- Most importantly, left a legacy of improved capacity of recreational fishers to contribute to the management of fish habitat throughout Australia.

Who was involved?

The project was a massive effort on behalf of the recreational fishing community to do things that would both improve fish habitat and enhance fishers' capacity to take on this work. This report documents these activities and the outcomes for fishers and for fish that have been achieved.

OzFish Unlimited coordinated the project on behalf of the Fish Habitat Network, a group of like-minded organisations from government and non-government sectors.

The project was funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC), on behalf of the Australian Government. Additional financial support was provided by The Nature Conservancy and Recfishwest. Valuable in-kind contributions were provided by Amateur Fisherman's Association of the Northern Territory, Reef and Rainforest Research Centre, Healthy Land and Water (formerly SEQ catchments), NSW DPI Fisheries, VR Fish, Arthur Rylah Institute, Victorian Fisheries Authority, Recfish SA and Primary Industry and Regions SA. The contributions provided by these organisations were enhanced by the thousands of hours of work contributed by individual recreational fishers.

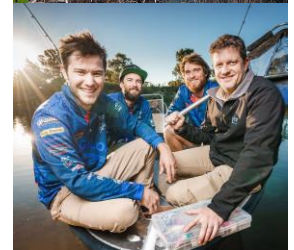
Through this shared effort a lot more recreational fishers were able to be engaged with a common message about the status of fish habitat and the role that they can play in its management.

What we learnt and how we can build on the project

It is especially important to involve fishers directly in sharing information, both at a local level and as ambassadors, and to provide opportunities for fishers to talk with, learn from and work with each other. Partnerships build partnerships and we found as more fishers got involved, more wanted to be involved. However, follow-up is an essential aspect of the capacity building process so that the good work on engagement builds into sustained capacity to deliver local habitat improvements.

While this project has been successful there are over 4 million recreational fishers and we need to continue to expand this work to enhance recreational fishers' involvement in fish habitat management. While successful engagement initiatives have to be continued, the use of social media needs to be improved particularly using our newly established habitat engaged fishers to communicate with other recreational fishers. The development of the National Fish Habitat Strategy is an essential platform to sustain these efforts and work needs to occur to ensure its widespread adoption and underpinning of the actions it recommends.

Finally, despite efforts by OzFish and FHN partners, the efforts by recreational fishers in improving habitat are still not well known among the broader community and efforts to promote or recognise the great efforts by volunteer recreational fishers should also be a priority.



We set out to deliver these 3 objectives ...

and, all sorts of things happened as we planned ...

And those & a whole lot more led to ...

1 Deliver activities that increase the capability of recreational fishers to define, participate, and lead activities that improve fish habitat outcomes.

Fishers for Fish Habitat Forums

Fishers got together and learnt 2

Newstreams

Fishers got together and made things happen 3

Social media engagement

Groups were formed 4

Blogs on grant projects

Lots of resnagging 5

Magazine articles

Oyster reef rebuilding underway 6

Habitat Project Officers (WA, SA, Nth and SE Qld)

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National Fish Habitat Roundtable

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Fish Habitat Masterclasses

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National Fish Habitat Strategy

Habitat was monitored and mapped 11

3 Prepare the recreational fishing sector's framework and contribution to a National Fish Habitat Strategy and Action Plan.

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Funding was leveraged for other activities 13

Fish habitat information was provided 14

Fish habitat is news 15

We learned what worked and what didn't 16

We know what needs to be done 18

Fishers got together and learnt

You know how important it is to have opportunities to get together and share your knowledge, skills and experience. You organised many such opportunities to share stories and enjoy finding other people who were trying to find ways to bring native fish back.



Fish Habitat Forums

Eagleby, QLD
Babinda, QLD
Caloundra, QLD
Gold Coast, QLD
Onkaparinga, SA
Port Noarlunga, SA
Barmera, SA
Albany, WA
Perth, WA
Darwin, NT
Campbell Town, TAS

Fish Habitat Masterclass

Burendong Dam near
Wellington, NSW
Lake Boga, Vic

Fishers attended and presented:

Native Fish Forum, Canberra ⓘ

National Recreational Fishing Conference, Darwin.

Fishers making more habitat on the Macquarie – Matt Hansen ⓘ

Artificial habitat enhancement – Michael Tropiano ⓘ

Helping fishers restore habitat across Australia – Craig Copeland ⓘ

Fishers got together and made it happen

Wetland Education Program



Gone Fishing Day events



Burrendong Classic – a habitat flagship



Landholders engaged
Richmond, NSW



Talked to others



River Repair Bus



180 concrete blocks installed at Perry's Bend.



Kids engaged



Carp mustered!



... and talked some more!



Fish hotel construction
working bees



Tilapia removed



Groups were formed

New groups of recreational fishers are getting together to become active with projects in their area such as resnagging, river bank planting, weir removal, fish ladders or anything that will ultimately improve local fish habitat. There are now 18 additional fish habitat focussed groups across Australia thanks to this project:

Onkaparinga - South Australia [📍](#)

Gold Coast – Queensland [📍](#) [f](#)

Pumicestone Passage – Queensland [📍](#)

Central Moreton Bay – Queensland [📍](#)

Cairns – Queensland [📍](#)

NW NSW - New South Wales [📍](#)

Hawkesbury-Nepean - New South Wales [📍](#)

Richmond - New South Wales [📍](#) [f](#)

Tenterfield - New South Wales [📍](#) [f](#)

Wagga – New South Wales [📍](#)

Tweed – New South Wales [📍](#)

Sunraysia – Victoria [📍](#) [f](#)

SW Victoria – Victoria [📍](#)

Perth - Western Australia [📍](#)

Bunya Bunya – Queensland [📍](#)

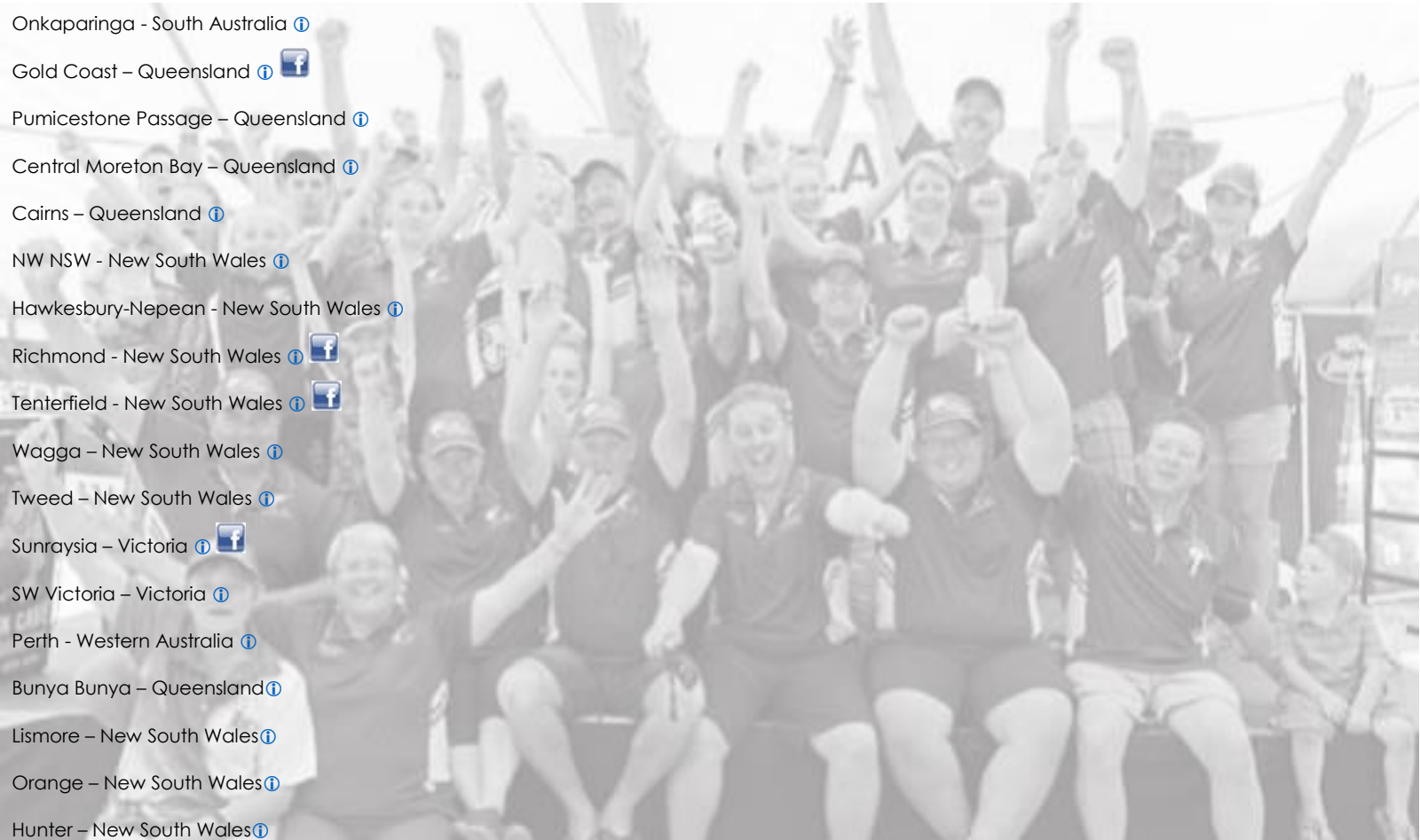
Lismore – New South Wales [📍](#)

Orange – New South Wales [📍](#)

Hunter – New South Wales [📍](#)

There are also long-standing groups of fishers that are continuing their great efforts on fish habitat such as:

Inland Waterways, Bass Sydney, Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club and the Australian Trout Foundation that stand out.



Lots of resnagging

Snags and other structure in our rivers and estuaries are important for native fish and we have only recently learned how much we have lost.

As part of this project recreational fishers contributed to putting back this structure in many waterways across Australia by:

- Building and installing fish hotels (complex wood constructions)
- Re-purposing root balls, stumps and logs from road works and other clearing
- Constructing engineered log jams
- Using rocks
- Getting ready for resnagging by mapping existing snag locations.

Sites where fish are benefitting from your activities:

- Merri River, Victoria [📍](#) [i](#)
- Onkaparinga River, SA [i](#)
- Macquarie River, Dubbo, NSW
- Canning River, Perth, WA
- Kings Billabong, Victoria

Sites getting ready for work with habitat mapping

- Murray River – near Dareton NSW



Oyster reef rebuilding

Big engineering projects are underway to restore once-prolific oyster reefs and recreational fishers are getting involved.

These are big projects, needing lots of money and coordination. Recreational fishers are working together with other partners to make them happen.

- Western Australia's *Oyster Harbour*: Recfishwest; The Nature Conservancy and the Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund [i](#)
- Victoria's *Port Phillip Bay*: The Nature Conservancy; Victorian Fisheries Authority; Albert Park Yachting and Angling Club [i](#)
- Queensland's *Pumicestone Passage*: OzFish, Healthy Land & Water, and BCF [i](#)
- Queensland's *Maroochy River*: OzFish, Healthy Land & Water and Bunya Bunya Country Aboriginal Corporation [i](#)
- Queensland's *Moreton Bay*: OzFish and BCF [i](#)
- NSW's *Richmond River*: OzFish and Fisheries NSW [i](#)

Fishers are contributing to these significant projects in many ways, including:

- Finding money and sponsors.
- Helping to source oyster shells and other resources needed to rebuild the reefs.
- Monitoring survival and recruitment onto new reefs.
- Promoting the projects and harnessing broader community support.
- Monitoring changes in fish abundance and diversity following reef installation.



Trees were planted

As well as trees, there were also native shrubs and grasses added to riparian areas on many creeks, rivers and estuaries. Fishers also were busy with removing and controlling weeds in these areas. Many of these projects were assisted through partnerships with organisations such as Recfish SA, Recfishwest, VRFish, Catchment Management Authorities, local Councils, NSW DPI Fisheries and Victoria Fisheries Authority.

Riparian revegetation and repair activities include:

- Shimano Family Tree Planting Day on the Macquarie, Dubbo, NSW 📍
- Numerous riparian plantings including along the Richmond River tributaries, Chickiba ⓘ, Maguires ⓘ and Emigrant Creeks, NSW
- Mole River, Tenterfield, NSW ⓘ
- Peel River, Tamworth ⓘ
- Merri River, Vic ⓘ
- Pioneer River, Mackay, QLD



Fish habitat issues were promoted

Lure of Leadership – All Girls Fishing for the Future Program

Helping to inspire the next generation of female anglers to get into fishing and to learn about the importance of fish habitat. ⓘ



When they're on the nest, give them a rest

OzFish Inland Waterways Chapter launched this TV campaign aimed at reducing anglers fishing for Murray Cod in the closed season. ⓘ

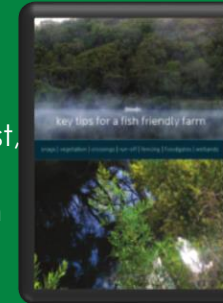


Give back to habitat

OzFish Ambassador Michael Guest gets behind the *Give Back to Habitat* campaign which is helping every Aussie make a difference to Australia's fishing future. Simply round up to the nearest dollar next time you shop with BCF and your donation will help create healthier waterways for our Aussie fish! ⓘ

Fish Friendly Farms®

A partnership with South Coast Resource Management, Recfishwest, the Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund and OzFish Unlimited, this program developed by NSW DPI Fisheries provides extension activities to encourage farmers' active consideration of aquatic habitat preservation during routine farming practices. ⓘ



Junior Indigenous Marine and Environment Program

OzFish Unlimited is an active supporter of this program which provides indigenous students with the education and training to become employed in aquatic based industries. ⓘ



Engaged Fishers Advisory Group

NSW DPI Fisheries, in partnership with the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, worked closely with the *Engaged Anglers Advisory Group* to develop infographics which answer some common questions posed by fishers about river flows and fish. ⓘ

Champions stood up to be counted

True Champions of fish habitat rehabilitation, these fisher folk have excelled in their efforts to improve their fishery by creating better habitat. These champions deserve to be honoured for their stewardship as true custodians of our waterways. They ensure a better fishing world is passed on to future generations.




OzFish Richmond River Chapter

The first of its kind, the Chapter was formed by a bunch of fishers keen to reverse the demise of their local fishery. The group consists of both commercial and recreational fishers.



Kym Manning

My advice to anyone who wants to do something similar is just to get out there and make a start. You might be surprised at the support people are willing to offer." 




Harry Davey

What I love about this is I'm just a normal bloke come rec' fisher and I know I can make a difference.



Luke Galea

It is hugely satisfying after completing a project to step back and watch fish moving into parts of the river they have not been to for decades. However, to get results like this takes team work. There is so much recreational fishers can accomplish if we group together. 



Habitat was cleaned up

Fishers joined up with other community groups, and in many cases drove clean-up activities in their local waterways. Many hundreds of kilos of rubbish were picked up, fished out, and taken away leaving our habitats just that bit more hospitable for fish.

Some of the sites supported by OzFish Chapters were:

- Peel River
- Murray River
- Coomera River
- Tenterfield Creek
- Macquarie River
- Cairns



Fish habitats were monitored and mapped

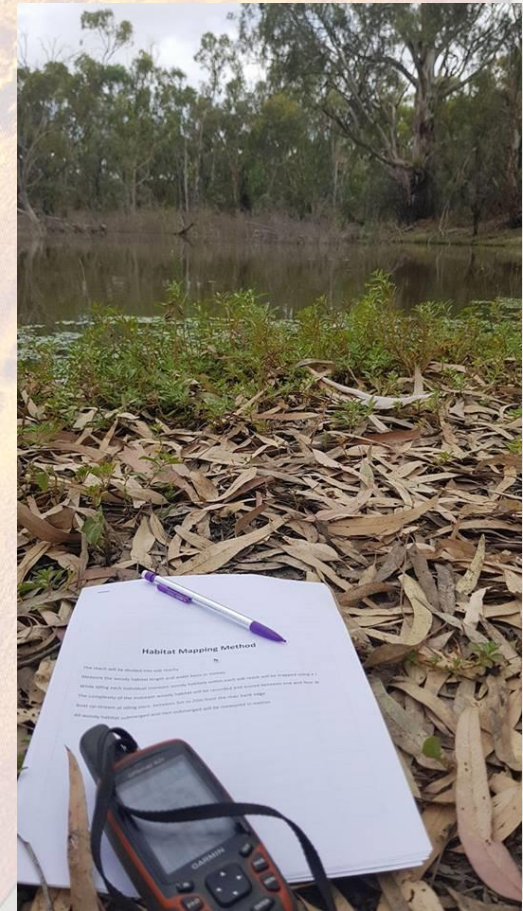
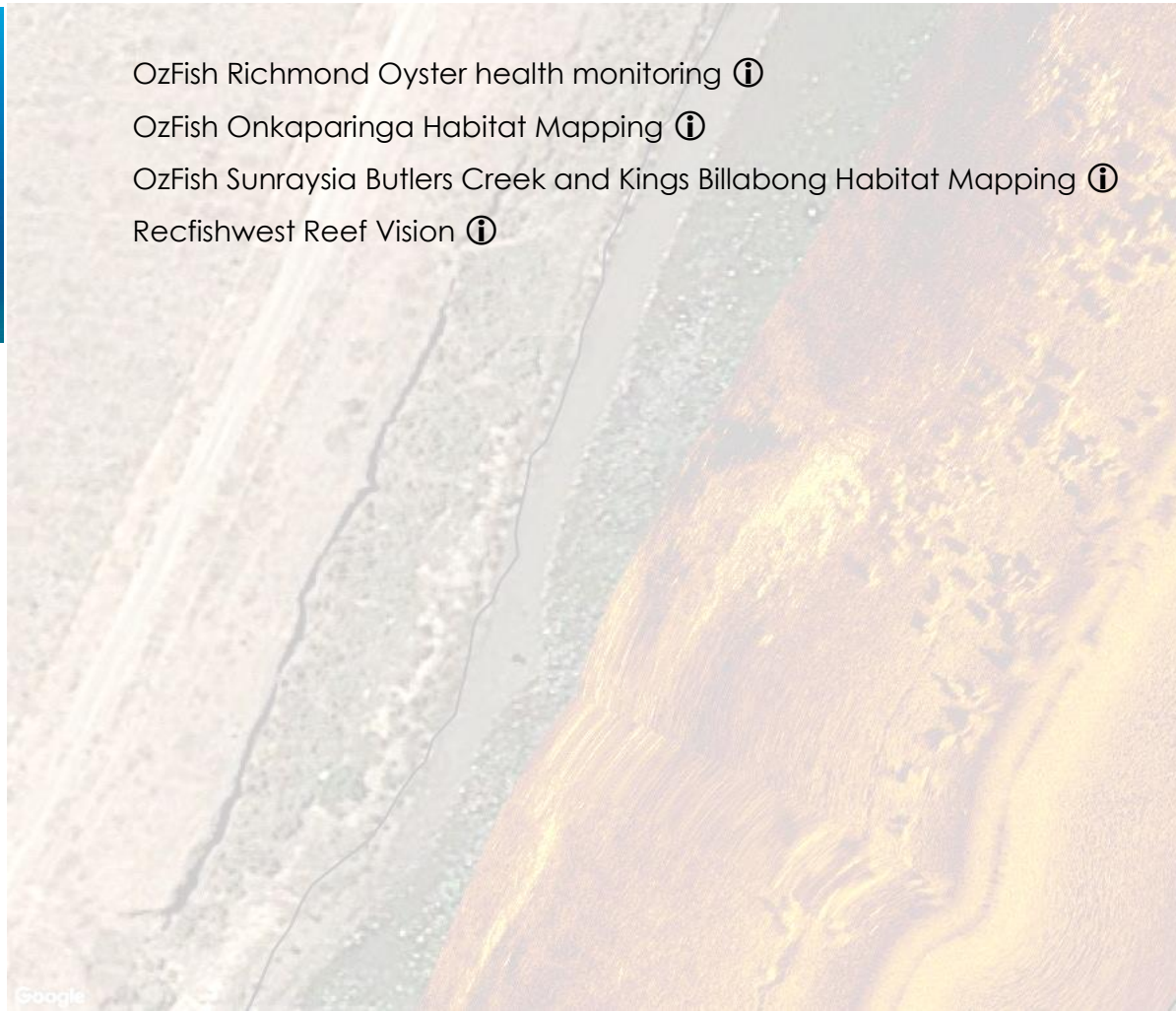


OzFish Richmond Oyster health monitoring ⓘ

OzFish Onkaparinga Habitat Mapping ⓘ

OzFish Sunraysia Butlers Creek and Kings Billabong Habitat Mapping ⓘ

Recfishwest Reef Vision ⓘ



A National Fish Habitat Strategy was developed

2018

National Fish Habitat Strategy
:Recreational fishers managing fish habitat



OzFish, FHN and FRDC have developed a National Fish Habitat Strategy ^① to help protect and improve our recreational fisheries into the future.

The draft strategy was first discussed in 2015 at the National Recreational Fishing Conference where Fish Habitat Network Partners discussed what was needed and what would work in their jurisdictions. Based on this framework and ongoing discussions with recreational fishers over 18 months a draft national strategy was developed.

The draft strategy was provided nationwide for general comment from recreational fishers and over 100 fishers contributed to the National Fish Habitat Strategy Survey ⁱ with their responses. The results were discussed during the Fish Habitat Roundtable at the National Recreational Fishing Conference in Darwin, November 2017 and a final strategy was agreed to by government and non-government representatives.

Thanks to all fishers who provided feedback! The Strategy provides guidance on how you and your fishing club can work with funding bodies and agencies to improve fish habitat in your area.

Funding was leveraged

One of the important things you did through the project was use the increased capacity and interest to leverage funding for habitat projects. Supported by hours of time that was volunteered and the in-kind resources secured, the relatively small amount of start-up funding became something far more significant.

The additional funds were sources from a range of opportunities. Only some examples are:

- OzFish Sunraysia Chapter: Victorian Fisheries Small Grant Program for Butlers Creek Habitat Mapping.
- OzFish Sunraysia Chapter: Mallee CMA – Riparian Partnerships Program – Kings Billabong Habitat Mapping and Restoration (\$30,000)
- OzFish Northwest Chapter: National Landcare Program for the OzFish on the Peel – Anglers for Habitat project (\$5,000)
- OzFish Richmond River Chapter: \$160,000 from the NSW Recreational Fishing Trust and \$160,000 from Office of Environment and Heritage, Ballina Shire Council, Lismore City Council and two local philanthropists for restoration to parts of Tuckean Swamp.
- OzFish Pumicestone Chapter: Pumicestone Passage Shellfish Restoration \$355,000 from Healthy Land and Water as well as National Landcare Program, BCF, Unity Water and Moreton Bay Regional Council.
- OzFish Richmond River Chapter: NSW DPI Habitat Action Grant for Emigrant Creek re-snagging project (\$19,300).
- BCF and their customers provided one of the largest corporate contributions ever to fish habitat improvements through the "Give Back to Habitat Campaign". The campaign launched in November 2017 encourages BCF customers to round up their purchases to the nearest dollar with that funding going to fish habitat actions around Australia.
- Shimano Fishing Australia funded habitat restoration projects in the Macquarie River, NSW, and in Victoria.
- Summerland Credit Union 'Ecomonth' donation to support the work of OzFish Richmond River Chapter (\$1200).
- BCF funding for habitat restoration in the Merri River, Warrnambool, Victoria (\$30,000).
- FIIG Securities for habitat restoration Maroochy River, Qld; Macquarie River, NSW; and Merri River, Warrnambool, Victoria (\$40,000).
- Funding from Recfishwest for a joint Habitat Project Officer with Recfishwest/OzFish (\$60,000).
- WA Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund and Recfishwest for Fish Friendly Farms® in WA (\$88,000).
- Recreational Fishing Grants Programme for the Onkaparinga River Restoration (\$20,000).
- Ballina Fishermen's Cooperative for water quality monitoring for oyster health in the Richmond River, NSW (\$3,000).
- Urquhart Charitable Trust for habitat action in Victoria.
- WA Community Rivercare Program for Restoring the Canning River's natural habitat (\$19,250).

Fish habitat information was provided

Newsreams

8 issues co-funded with NSW DPI on behalf of the Fish Habitat Network



The Key Tips to a Fish Friendly Farm® **Fishes of a Fish Friendly Farm®**

Thanks to the WA Fish Friendly Farms® program

OzFish blog



Fish Habitat Network on Facebook



Fish Habitat Factsheets

SE QLD – habitat loss

Saltmarsh for Life

Shellfish Reef Restoration

Fish Habitat Factsheets

WA black bream

WA habitat loss

WA Freshwater flows

WA Shellfish reefs

Many, many posts on Facebook: OzFish, OzFish Chapters and FHN partners



Fish Habitat Factsheets

SA habitat loss

SA Woody debris

SA Mulloway

Fish Habitat Factsheets

Qld Wet Tropics

Habitat Loss

Barramundi

Mangrove Jack

Fish habitat fixes

Videos

Irrigation pump screening:
20000 views

Improving native fish stocks:
3100 views

And OzFish on Youtube

Fish habitat in the newspapers, magazines and on TV

Face-to-face

Fish Habitat Forums

Fish Talks at the Pub

Fish habitat is news!



A force for change FISH Vol 26 No. 2 (FRDC) June 2018 ⓘ

Dubbo Catches: Macquarie River set to receive more snags 21 March 2018 ⓘ

Macquarie River to receive snags to improve fish habitat Daily Liberal 6 March 2018 ⓘ

Creating habitat warriors with OzFish Fishing World, 6 Feb 2018 ⓘ

Tamworth Landcare, OzFish and West Tamworth League Fishing Club glove up for Clean Up Australia Day The Northern Daily Leader, 4 March 2018 ⓘ

More fish thanks to OzFish Fishing World, 14 Jan 2018 ⓘ

River's health on the agenda Northern Star 26 July 2017 ⓘ

Oysters given a chance at life Northern Star 22 May 2017 ⓘ

Can these oysters survive the Richmond River? 17 May 2017 ⓘ

Recfish SA teams up with OzFish to protect local fish habitat Fishing World, 26 September 2016 ⓘ

Recfishwest and OzFish Unlimited team up to tackle habitat issues Fishing World, 22 June 2016 ⓘ

OzFish Unlimited aims to change the way Aussies fish Fishing World, 6 June 2016 ⓘ

Wilson's River in very poor health: report Echonet, 25 May 2016 ⓘ

Dubbo fisherman Matt Hansen wins habitat hero award Daily Liberal 26 July 2015 ⓘ

OzFish on the Peel – Anglers for Habitat project. Clean-up from the Jewry street weir area generated media interest and a TV news segment received 5,700 views on Facebook. 📘

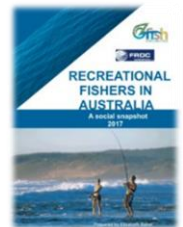
Fish habitat articles have also been published in:

- Fishing SA magazine
- AFTA trade magazine
- Boat Angler magazines
- Fishing World magazine

We learned what worked and what didn't

We found out about recreational fishers and habitat

An international survey covering Australian fishers in regards to fish habitat activities as well as previous work was combined to give us **Recreational Fishers in Australia - A social snapshot**. This snapshot summarised why we love to fish and how it makes us feel, and importantly how we like to communicate and what would make a difference in getting us involved in managing fish habitat. This allowed us to direct our actions to have the maximum effect. [i](#)



It's important to provide opportunities for fisher face-to-face

It seems that every opportunity for fishers to get together and learn about habitat and doing habitat activities, works. Formal feedback from Fishers for Fish Habitat Forums and similar events, like Fish in the Pub, and informal feedback provides the same message over and over: *I learnt things, I met like-minded fishers, This was really helpful / inspirational, There are others who care about fish like I do, Now I know there are things we can do*. These events are resource-intensive, but the payback is significant. They also demonstrate respect for the fisher community by providing an opportunity to learn and interact that is comfortable, appropriate and facilitates building relationships.

Follow-up is essential


Habitat coordinators were employed in Western Australia, in partnership with Recfishwest; in Queensland, in partnership with Healthy Land and Water; in South Australian with Recfish SA; and in Far North Queensland with the Reef and Rainforest Research Centre. The Coordinators were valuable in transferring growing interest into long term commitment. The most successful of these was in Western Australia due to its longevity (over two years). This was possible due to the matching funding from Recfishwest. This long time period allowed relationships with state government agencies, local government and recreational fishers to be created and enhanced.

Partnerships build partnerships

OzFish Unlimited, the other members of the Fish Habitat Network, recreational fishing clubs, Government agencies, Catchment Management Authorities, non-government organisations – large and small – as well as businesses and Trust Funds in states that have a recreational fishing licence, have come together in many different ways to contribute to improving fish habitat across the country. In working together, we've found other ways of working together. We complement each other's strengths and shore-up each other's weaker areas.



High profile fishers helped

The **OzFish Ambassadors**  are well-known and respected fishers with an established media and industry profile. These fishers are fully behind the fish habitat story and support the work being done by fishers around the country. The current Ambassadors are: Michael Guest, Steve Starling, Al McGlashan and Scott Hillier.



Fishers are involved – and loving it

Given a chance, some information, some assistance or some funds and fishers are more than willing and able to get going with habitat work. It's our job to ensure all these things continue to be available.

Fishers are also finding the habitat work they are involved in rewarding. Yes, frustrating at times and things don't always go to plan. However, more and more, doing their bit for habitat is becoming an everyday part of being a good fisher.



"When I first started I didn't know how to go about it or who to contact. But over the years we have made many valuable contacts that have helped us along the way. My advice to anyone ... is just to get out there and make a start. You might be surprised at the support people are willing to offer." Kim Manning

"What I love about this is I'm just a normal bloke come rec' fisher and I know I can make a difference." Harry Davey

"There is so much recreational fishers can accomplish if we group together." Luke Galea

"It only took about 3 hours to plant the trees and to think the legacy we have left there could last for generations." – Harry Davey

Once you have an awareness of what the fishery once was and what it is today, you need to act. ... The damage is widespread and the job won't be done in our lifetimes, but I want my kids to be in the most natural environment we can possibly maintain and create. I want them to be able to catch a fish sourced from a stable, healthy fish population, and know that the fish will be doing it naturally and supporting themselves." – Matt Hansen

We know what needs to be done

Scale

Fishers respond positively to one-on-one messages - both our research and our actions have told us this. But there are over 4 million recreational fishers and reaching all of these that haven't yet understood the importance of habitat will require some specific additional efforts. We will need to continue the existing activities that work, such as the Fishers for Fish Habitat Forums, but we will now be able to use the expanding network of habitat engaged fishers to help with this task. Our work on social media is in its infancy and all Fish Habitat Network members will need to create bigger readerships and fisher spokespeople so that the good messages that are being communicated are picked up by more and more fishers.

Governance

The development of the National Fish Habitat Strategy is an essential platform to sustain current efforts and to involve further improvements. The strategy needs to be adopted by Government and non-government recreational fishing bodies in all jurisdictions and efforts to ensure adoption and reporting on the strategy will yield benefits.

Marketing

This report indicates that there is a growing national trend of recreational fishers leading or participating in fish habitat management. Despite efforts by OzFish and FHN partners these efforts are still not well known among the broader community and efforts to promote or recognise the great efforts by volunteer recreational fishers should be a priority.





Recfishwest

RecFish SA

VRFish

AFANT

PIRSA

Victoria Fisheries Authority

Arthur Rylah Institute

NSW DPI Fisheries

OzFish Unlimited

Sunfish

Capital Region Fly Fishing
Alliance

WA Fisheries

Fisheries Research and
Development Corporation
