



Marine Life Society of South Australia Inc.

120 Wakefield Street,
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"Understanding, enjoying & caring for our oceans"

14/05/07

The Hon. Rory McEwen MP,
Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries,
GPO Box 668, Adelaide, SA 5001 /
Level 17, 25 Grenfell St, Adelaide, SA 5000

cc:
Mr. Andrew Dalgety,
PIRSA Fishwatch,
PO Box 282,
Port Adelaide,
SA 5015

The Hon. Gail Gago, MLC,
Minister for Environment and Conservation,
GPO Box 1047, Adelaide SA 5001
Level 9 Chesser House, 91-97 Grenfell Street, Adelaide SA

Dear Ministers,

I write to take up the issue of the full protection of the Western Blue Groper, an iconic species in SA waters, of great significance for dive tourism, as well as being intrinsically important in reef ecosystems.

The species was partly protected in the 1970s, after strong evidence of its depletion from spear- and line-fishing. Protection, however, only extended to the waters of the two gulfs.

In the last 4 years extensive surveys of the species, supported by Dept. of Environment and Heritage via Reef Watch, were undertaken by Dr. S.A. Shepherd; from the far west of the State to the South East. Numerous reports were submitted to the Scale Fishery Management Committee and in consequence, the Committee agreed to full protection of the species throughout State waters in 2006.

A paper has since been prepared and is in process of publication in an international fish journal. The study has shown a steep decline in recruitment from west coast waters to the Murray mouth, and, more disturbingly, has shown a significant effect of fishing on sub-adult groper, even in the gulf regions where it is legally protected.

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Patron – Dr Scoresby Shepherd
Senior Research fellow, SARDI
Honorary Associate, South
Australian Museum

MLSSA supports the ReefWATCH
initiative.





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The fishing effect arises partly from the fact that some shore fishers do not recognise the groper when it is caught due to its unusual colouration - even though the State Fishing Magazine has published an article and photo of juvenile groper by Dr. Shepherd to help educate fishers.

The groper is especially vulnerable to fishing because it is very slow growing and long-lived ie 16 years to maturity, with large adults living up to 50 years or more.

Large adults once occurred as far east as the coasts of southern Yorke Peninsula, but have not been seen in recent decades.

In the light of the steep decline of the blue groper in central SA waters, it is all the more important to protect the species in the west of the State, as it is likely that larvae from spawning adults drifts eastward in the Leeuwin Current in the late winter to spring, and settle in central SA waters, as noted in the attached study.

It is also imperative that education of fishers continue, in order to reduce fishing mortality.

The draft paper of Dr Shepherd et al. (2007, in press) is attached for your information.

Yours sincerely

Neville Skinner
Secretary

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