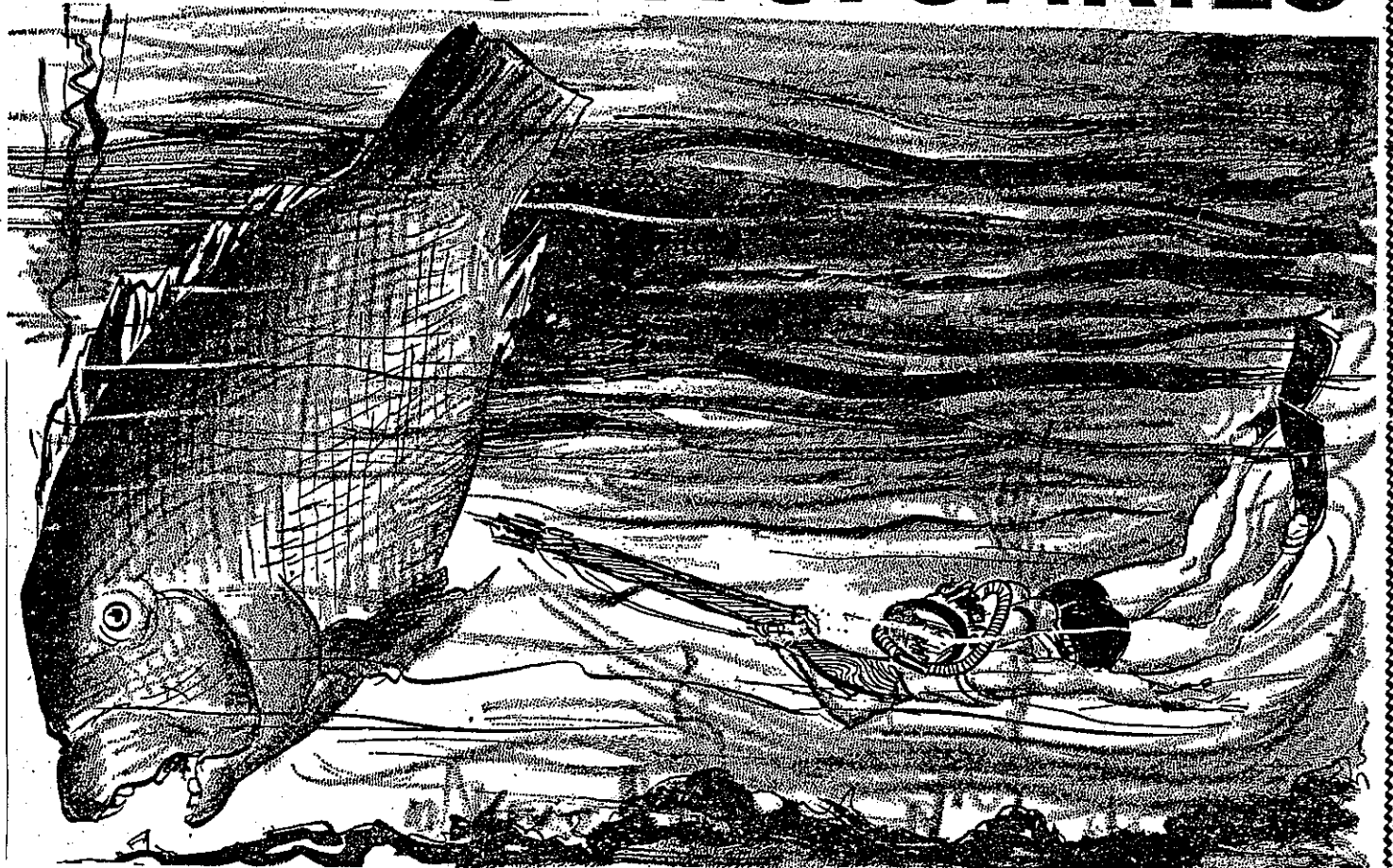


MARINE LIFE SANCTUARIES NEED IS URGENT



Spearfishing limits proposed

Calling for establishment of marine reserves, the report points out—"The protection and conservation of fish and wild life resources is now recognised as a legitimate concern of State Governments.

Although progress has been made in the creation of reserves on land, little has been done to manage the marine resources of the State.

"Fish and marine life should be preserved as a human environmental necessity.

"The contribution that each species makes to the balance of life is not always known and may change in the future.

"It is presumptuous to tamper with this balance without understanding fully the likely consequences."

The areas proposed as reserves are—

West Island and Wright Island, Encounter Bay.

Port Norlin reef,

"If not adequately protected it will be stripped of many forms of marine life. Further,

more, it is of scientific interest as being the only reef in St. Vincent Gulf where marine life can be studied down a nearly vertical rock face of about 60 ft."

ABUNDANT

Pert Stanvac area. Aldinga reef at Snapper Point . . .

"Probably the most spectacular underwater scenery in St. Vincent Gulf. The reef drops precipitously from 25 ft. to about 70 ft. . . marine life is extraordinarily rich and fish life abundant. Spear-men have been responsible for a decline in the number of fishes in the area."

Offshore islands . . .

"It is somewhat anomalous that seals are fully protected, but their habitat is not. Key to preservation of any wild life species depends

upon the maintenance of its environment."

The islands include Goose, the Nuyts Archipelago, Investigator Group and the Sir Joseph Banks Group.

Stressing the need for reef reserves, the report states:

"By world standards South Australian coastal waters are relatively barren and singularly unproductive . . . much of the coastal seabed is either desert sandy bottom, or in the shallower gulf waters extensive meadows of sea grass.

"Reef areas and rocky bottom provide some contrast to this picture and support a prolific flora and rich invertebrate fauna.

"As a consequence of the limited extent of such reefs, the overall numbers of reef dwelling fish are not great and economically are of little importance.

"They attract the at-

tention predominantly of anglers and spearfishermen."

Dealing with shark guns and war heads, the report states:

CARTRIDGES

"Devices loaded with shotgun cartridges are now available and widely used by spear-men, not for killing sharks for which they were developed (which are seldom seen by skindivers) but for killing a variety of other marine animals.

"Some 300 to 400 are believed to be in use in this State.

"By reason of their destructive potential the weapons should either be registrable or prohibited.

"It is noted that they are now totally prohibited in Western Australia and Victoria.

"The devices, as explosives, are strictly illegal under the Fisheries Act, but the provision has not been enforced."

Bag and size limits for spearfishermen and declaration of marine sanctuaries have been commended to the Government by a group of South Australian scientists.

he group also calls for Banning or registration of explosive type underwater weapons. Prohibition of the use of aqualung equipment for spearfishing. Full protection for blue groper and beautiful leafy dragon which is due to South Australia.

scientists collaborate in the report were in the SA Museum,elaide and Flinders universities, SA Oceanographic Research Institute, Mr. I. M. omas, of Adelaide University Messrs. R. Springs, oceanographer.

Mr. A. Shepherd, of Museum Under-Research Group, is the report which is sent to the Minister of Agriculture, the report gives a grim picture of destruction by rapidly growing population of spearfishermen.

EXCESSES

It estimates that in Vincent Gulf alone to 2,000 people go spearfishing in summer. It tells of excesses by spearmen with power guns ranging along the coastlines resulting in catches of 200 to 300 lb. of fish.

fishing has any significant effect on reef fishes."

The report says size limits are regarded as necessary, but greater reliance would have to be placed on bag limits.

Because of natural magnification of all underwater objects viewed through a face mask, inexperienced

fin and 10 in. on the remainder, except dusky morwong where a 15 in. limit is proposed.

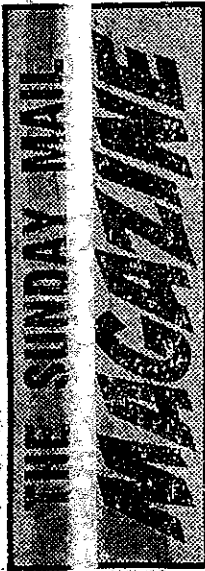
Qualifying its call for protection of the blue groper, the report states:

"This, the largest and most attractive of reef fishes, is also disarmingly curious and will approach closely to a skindiver."

"Consequently it has

taken an easy prey to the spear and has now virtually disappeared from South Australia's accessible coasts. It may be found only on remote and exposed coastlines.

"The blue groper has suffered the same fate in New South Wales . . . In that State a bag limit of two was placed on the species in 1958." The curator of fishes at the SA Museum, Mr. C. J. M. Glover, points out in an appendix to the report that the groper is a very slow growing fish taking about 50 years to reach maximum size.



spearmen would find it difficult to estimate the length of a fish.

It recommends a limit of five fish a day for the whole of St. Vincent Gulf and the southern central coast between Goolwa and Cape Jervis.

Elsewhere the limit could be 10 fish a day. The size limit could be a minimum of 8 in. for coral fish, old wife, parrot fishes, and scaly

"If the skindiver is also equipped with an aqualung, the fish is left little chance.

"The diver's range is extended from waters of about 30 ft. to depths exceeding 120 ft.

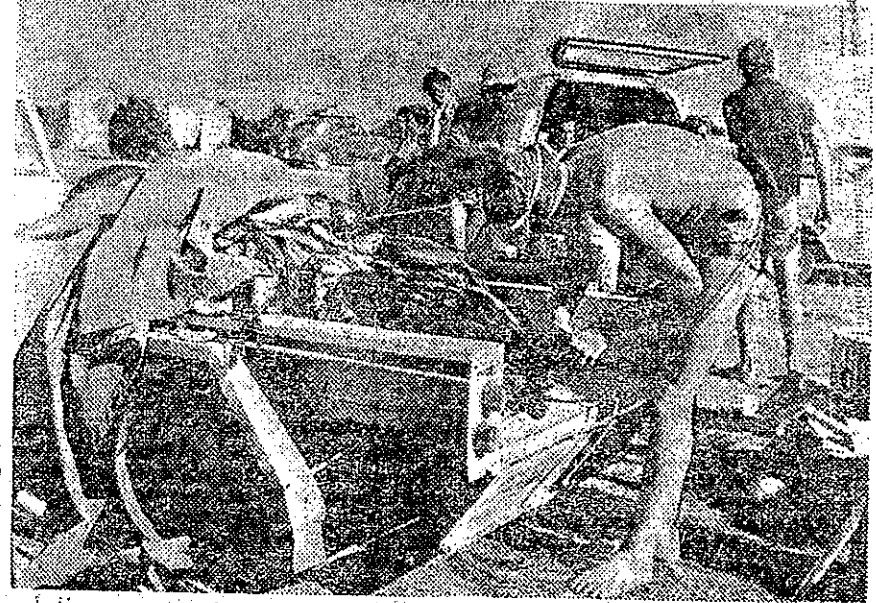
"Thus spearfishing possesses a destructive potential far greater than any previous method of taking reef-dwelling fish. It is doubtful whether line-

SCUBA GROUP WARNS

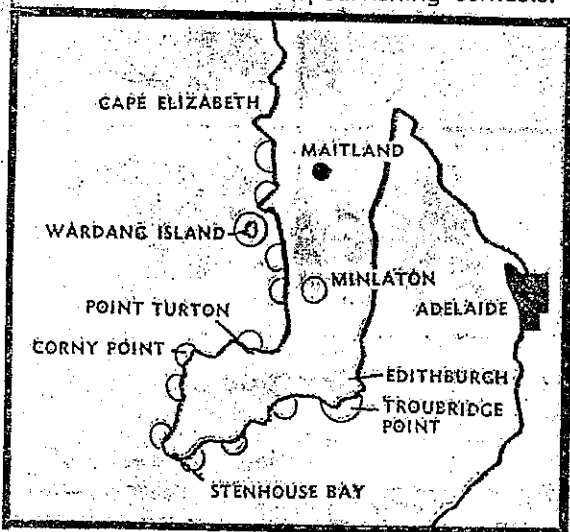


ABOVE: Blue Groper taken by spearfishermen in South Australian waters . . . It's like "shooting elephants." BELOW: Map shows areas for the spearfishing contests.

Bloody future for a diver's friend



Unwanted fish after spearing contest . . . "we have been told they will not be wasted."



A spearfishing bloodbath is feared in Yorke Peninsula waters over Christmas and new year.

A South Australian diving group sees it as a major threat to the rare and disappearing genial giant of the sea—the blue groper.

It stems from a skin-diving convention to be held at Minlaton with spearfishermen from several States.

An estimated 150 spearfishermen are expected to take part in special contests at selected points around southern Yorke Peninsula and offshore islands.

Tourism, Recreation and Sport Minister, Mr. Casey,

will open the program at Minlaton on December 27 at 2 p.m.

The department has given \$1,500 towards costs of the 11-day convention.

Minlaton will be the base for spearfishing and diving contests around the coast from Cape Elizabeth to Troubridge Point.

Reserves

For the past two years the Scuba Divers' Association of SA has been trying to have part of these waters declared as marine reserves.

The association has also been seeking for two years to have the groper given protection under the Fisheries Act.

It considers Government subsidy for spearfishing a bitter pill after its efforts down the years.

by
WILLIAM RESCHKE

to observe, mingle with and photograph fish.

Through affiliations the SDA claims 500 members in this State.

The Minlaton convention has been organised by the Council of Underwater Activities of SA.

Spearfishing has long been a hot issue between the two groups.

Chairman of the Scuba Divers' Association, Mr. C. Deane, said yesterday his main concern was not that spearing of gropers would be organised or encouraged by the South Australians of the CUA.

"We fear pressure from the interstate divers will lead to spearing of the blue groper," he said.

Queensland and is very rare in Victoria, so this gives it added appeal for divers from those States.

"We did ask the CUA for a list of the fish to be taken in the spearfishing contests, but this has not come.

"As a result we do not know if the groper is on it or not. Even if it is not, if the interstate people decide to spear groper, the SA committee can do little about it.

"We are utterly frustrated over the blocking methods used to prevent us making headway in protection of the groper and declaration of marine reserves to protect at least some of our coastline's interest.

"We are disappointed over the Government's lack of action, too, in affording protection for the groper."

"Sunday Mail"
December 18th 1977

Groper slaughter feared

•From Page 4

[Just 11 years ago I wrote on this subject in the Sunday Mail when it was considered urgent. A special report went to the Fisheries Minister pressing for marine reserves and protection of the groper.

Signatories to that report were from the SA Museum, Adelaide and Flinders Universities, SA Oceanographic Research Institute, Ifor Thomas, R. C. Sprigg, C. Freeman and S. A. Shepherd, of the Underwater Research Group of the SA Museum.

All that has happened in the interim is the rapid disappearance from local waters of the groper.]

The big fish is summed up in a letter to the latest issue of Dive South, magazine of the CUA.

"In virgin territory they appear to have no fear of divers, often giving you a friendly nudge when you are not aware of them. Very inquisitive, they follow you round like a dog.

"Hand feeding is quite easy and there is nothing like swimming along with 100 lb. blue groper so close that his fins are brushing against you.

"How could you spear something that is around

100 years old and so trusting?"

But Mr. Deane said yesterday: "Unfortunately it is the size that seems to attract the people who spear the groper.

"For a spearfisherman it's the equivalent of shooting an elephant. They are big and can put up a big struggle.

Bravado

"Mainly it seems to be the bravado thing. The diver can go back home in New South Wales or the other States and say, 'I've speared an 80 lb. groper.' "It sounds good, but it is certainly not sport."

Igo Oak, spokesman for the Underwater Photographic Society of SA, is a long-time champion of the groper.

"Over the Christmas period and possibly all summer, remaining specimens will be hunted down by local and interstate spearfishermen," he said yesterday.

"Even around the Althorpe Islands, very few adult fish can be seen today. One of our members saw just three on a recent trip where only a few years ago there were dozens.

"Along our metropolitan coastline they have been

virtually killed out for kicks or what some call sport."

A Tourism, Recreation, and Sport Department spokesman said yesterday the \$1,500 grant was to offset costs of organisation and administration of the skindiving convention.

It had been granted to other sporting bodies conducting national events or championships.

Cenvenor of the skindiving program Mr. W. Kelly, said yesterday the groper was not on the spearfishing list provided by the CUA.

"Spearfishing will be only 20 per cent. of what will be going on," he said. "We will have photography, swimming carnival, scuba, octopus (underwater hockey) and a whole lot of other events.

"We have been working for two years on this convention and the costs involved are between \$45,000 and \$50,000.

"We are expecting 500 to 600 divers, families and friends. It is a really big program and it has support on the highest levels."

Mr. Kelly said the blue groper was not on the list of contest fish.

"I can say we shall do anything within our power to prevent the shooting of groper.

'Goodwill towards men - and fish'

Sir — With the influx of interstate competition spearfishermen to Yorke Peninsula over the Christmas-New Year period, SA's divers will be receiving a rather raw deal.

While the sharing of our marine environment

with other Australian divers should be encouraged, the interstate minority which comes here to hunt our dwindling stocks of blue groper is not welcome.

With bans on blue groper applying in the eastern States, these

spearman see the SA groper as an easy target. Their egos are satisfied by spearing a large slow fish, at our expense.

The Althorpe Islands have been a popular target for interstate spearman over recent years. Up to a dozen groper were taken in a day by one group of divers.

Blue groper are now a comparatively rare fish around these islands.

The organisers of the skindiving convention must do everything possible to ensure that the gropers are not hunted down ruthlessly by these interstate teams.

SA spearfishermen unfortunately are often blamed for the actions of interstate divers. Our divers have shown a responsible attitude towards preserving the sport by showing some restraint in the numbers and sizes of gropers and other fish taken.

ALEX WYSCHNJA
Birkenhead.

Sir — I'm not against spearing fish for dinner but spearfishing competitions should have gone out with fox hunting and big game hunting in Africa. Even duck shooting is stringently controlled,

so there is no danger to the species.

With the underwater environment there are no such protections, as a result, our mighty blue groper is rarely seen in the gulf waters.

Are they going the way of the whale? I don't know, I've never been lucky enough to see a groper — yet men go out and spear them just for kicks.

How many divers, in their first few dives, would have loved to thrill to the sight of a big 30-kilogram blue groper at our own local Port Noariunga reef?

They used to be there. But, by the time the Port Noariunga area was declared a marine sanctuary, all the fish were long since gone. It has taken 12 years since the ban was placed for some of the fish to return. Old-time divers will tell you, "It will never be the same."

The same story goes for Aldinga reef, though we have seen the baby green groper there again recently, and our hopes rise that in some 20 years they'll mature and turn that lovely blue.

Look at our metropolitan beaches, right through to Halletts Cove — barren, empty as a graveyard. You can dive for kilometers and not see a fish.

Must we always gain our protected dive areas after the killers have finished with them and seriously depleted the fish life?

So I come to my plea.

There is a beautiful and well-dived area on the heel of Yorke Peninsula, about 20 kilometres south of Edithburgh, called Troubridge Hill. There are negotiations with the Government in progress to get this place declared a sanctuary.

It is on the list of the Australian Skindiving Convention — for spearfishing competitions — this Christmas, and 150 spearman are competing.

How can the reefs survive such an onslaught?

Spearman say that line fishermen take more fish than they. But what are a few hundred in a pelagic school of thousands of fish? And compare that with 150 spears in an area where there may be no more than 300 defenceless reef fish.

Please spare a thought for these friendly fish. I pray it may not be too

late. Christmas should be a time for goodwill towards men — and fish

(Mrs.) J. OAK,

Pasadena.

"Advertiser"

December 22nd 1977

"Advertiser"
December 23rd 1977
Page 6

Blue groper may be protected

By Conservation Writer KYM TILBROOK
Spearfishermen may be banned from taking blue groper in SA waters.

being drawn up for the fishing industry. "We are in the midst of a review of every proclamation," Mr. Kirkegaard said.

The assistant director of the fisheries division of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (Mr. L. R. Kirkegaard), said yesterday the ban was among new proclamations

being drawn up for the fishing industry. "We are in the midst of a review of every proclamation," Mr. Kirkegaard said.

The major part of the review had been completed but had not yet gone to the Minister of Fisheries (Mr. Chatterton).

The spearing of blue

groper has caused considerable controversy in recent weeks.

Many divers have expressed concern that large numbers of blue groper will be taken in the Australian Spearfishing Championships off Yorke Peninsula in late January.

In a letter to "The Advertiser" yesterday Alex Wyschnia, of Birkenhead, said organisers of blue groper was "certainly not sport."

do everything possible to ensure the gropers were not hunted down ruthlessly by teams from other States.

Mr. Kirkegaard said the department and championship organisers had agreed that blue groper would not be a "competitive fish."

Groping for survival in the shallows

SIR — The Department of Fisheries and Agriculture wants ideas on how to save the blue groper.

Perhaps the shoreline areas around the southern tip of the Yorke Peninsula for up to two kilometres from the

shore could be closed to the taking of the reef fish.

Many of the offshore islands off this State's coastline have prolific populations of "blues," and, as mentioned by the fisheries spokesman,

"offshore the problem isn't as bad."

The reason is that much deeper water surrounds the islands and the diver must be in top physical condition to be able to spear a big blue groper in 60 feet of water.

I have been diving almost every day around the SA coast for the past two years and I have found the blue groper to be a common fish with a 30 kg specimen not unusual.

CONCERNED DIVER,
Dover Gardens.

Gropers in danger— so fishing ban likely

Blue groper fish may become totally protected in SA waters.

The protection has been sought following reports that the blue groper is in danger of becoming extinct.

A Department of Agriculture and Fisheries spokesman said today the blue groper had fallen prey to spearfishermen.

"The groper is a reef fish," he explained. "We want ideas on how it can be saved."

"In certain in-shore areas accessible to spearfishermen there is a very real danger of the fish being wiped out.

Bright blue

"This is because the groper has no migratory habits.

"Because it is very passive, it is easy for divers to get close to it, which makes it easy prey.

"Off shore, the problem isn't as bad.

"It's mainly the

spearfishermen causing the most concern.

"Anglers and jetty fishermen aren't catching the fish."

The blue groper is a bright blue, short-bodied fish.

It can grow up to more than a metre in length and weigh as much as 90 kg.

All recommendations will be put to the Australian Fishing Industry Council and SA Recreational Fishermen's Advisory Council.

The AFIC represents the commercial fishing industry, and the SARFAC is made up of members of angling clubs and all those interested in amateur fishing.

The councils will be given the recommendations and it will be up to them to decide whether or not to push for legislation to make the fish a totally protected species.

'GODFATHER' WARNING TO CRUSADING DIVER

Gruesome groper find

Fish conservationist Igor Oak has received a cruel backlash in his efforts to protect the rare blue groper from extinction in South Australia.

In a "Godfather" style call on his Pasadena home on Friday night, someone hung the severed head of a 30-40 lb blue groper over his front fence.

It was found on Saturday morning by his two young daughters.

For six years, Mr. Oak has been fighting through the Australian Marine Sciences Association for government legislation to have the blue groper declared a protected species.

"Somebody doesn't like what I'm doing and wants to annoy me," he said. "I've no doubt it was a spearfisherman who did this."

Mr. Oak said the fish was so rare in gulf waters that he knew spearfishermen who had been diving for 10 years without seeing one.

"Some spearfishermen don't want any restrictions at all and are misleading people by saying that the blue groper is common all along the SA coastline.

"There are numbers of them off the West Coast, but they are rare in Gulf waters," he said.

Mr. Oak said he was opposed to the SA Government's intention to impose a total ban on blue groper fishing (see David Capel's fishing column, Page 106).

"This would be unrealistic and would upset the fishermen. We wanted it just for Gulf waters," he said.

Mr. Oak said he had not been affected by the senseless groper head incident,

but his wife and children were.

"It could only be an individual who did this. It couldn't have been an organised thing."

He said the head might have been obtained from a groper that had been accidentally caught in a fisherman's net.



Mr. Oak with his grisly find.

GROPER FISHING RESTRICTION FOR ABALONE FISHERMEN

Additional conditions have been imposed on the licenses of professional abalone fishermen operating in Zone 1 and Zone 2 of the abalone Limited Entry Fishery.

The new conditions, placing restrictions on the taking of blue groper, are as follows:

The license holder:

(a) shall not take blue groper by means of a spear or any other pointed instrument and shall not have in his possession any blue groper taken by spear or other pointed instrument.

(b) shall hold, transport and offer for sale any blue groper taken by line or net in a whole or whole gutted condition only.

Because the blue groper is an inquisitive fish it is particularly vulnerable to capture by spearfishermen. As a conservation measure, a ban on the taking of blue groper by spearguns was imposed in 1973. This ban was lifted in 1978 and replaced by a bag limit of one blue groper per day for amateur fishermen. No bag limit was imposed on the catches of professional fishermen and concern was expressed at the

possibility of a depletion of blue groper stocks if abalone fishermen were permitted to spear blue groper without restriction. Accordingly, the above conditions have been imposed.

It will be noted that professional abalone fishermen are not prevented from taking blue groper by means other than spears etc., however, condition (b) above specifies that abalone fishermen may not process blue groper in any manner which would remove evidence of illegal capture by spears.

NSW bans all groper sales

THE sale of blue, red and brown groper has been banned in New South Wales, the then Minister in charge of Fisheries, Mr Lin Gordon, announced recently.

State Fisheries prepared the new regulation following discussions with the NSW Amateur Fishermen's Advisory Council, he said.

For some years fisheries authorities had been concerned at the depletion of stocks of

groper. In 1969 fears that the survival of the species was threatened led to application of a total ban on spearfishermen from taking groper and a limit of two a day on anglers, Mr Gordon said.

At that time no restriction was placed on the number of groper a licensed commercial fisherman could take for sale.

Mr Gordon said introduction of a ban on sale of all species of groper was now considered essential to adequately protect stocks of these fish