

The Queensland Saltwater Fly Fishery

Introduction

Saltwater fly fishing is sometimes associated with high value fishing tourism; many charter operators practice 'catch and release' and are promoted as examples of sustainable ecotourism due to their low impact.

Despite this, few studies have documented the ecological and social aspects that are specific to 'saltwater fly fisheries'. In the last 30 years, Queensland, Australia has hosted a developing Saltwater fly fishery, spearheaded by industry guides which often seek target species regarded as bycatch in other sectors. This study interviewed 14 fly fishers (11 guides and 3 clients) to gather both ecological and social information on the fishery.



When fishing takes place

The busy season differs between Region 1 (November-May) and Region 2, 3, & 4 (May-November), although some level of fishing is maintained year round except in Region 4. Fishers are time restricted due to tide (depth) and position of the sun (sight).

Regions, areas, and habitats

Guides operate in **inshore** areas from Brisbane to Weipa in **four broad regions** defined by various differences in operational characteristics and environmental conditions. The activity is mainly concentrated on **sand flats**, open water, estuaries, and reef flats. Freshwater creeks and impoundments are also important but understudied fishing options for many fly fishing guides; often due to unfavorable weather conditions on the coast.

"... anything that can offer shallow visual fishing, I think, is always preferred by fly fishermen." **(guide)**



Catch & release target species

This fishery practice **almost exclusively C&R**, releasing on average **~98%** of the total catch. Although the broad regions vary somewhat in preference of target species, **on average**, the top 5 valued target species are: **1) Permit, 2) Barramundi, 3) Queenfish, 4) Golden Trevally, and 5) Longtail Tuna**. Some of these species are mainly targeted by fly fishermen in Queensland, and can be considered novel or bycatch in the other fishing sectors of the region.

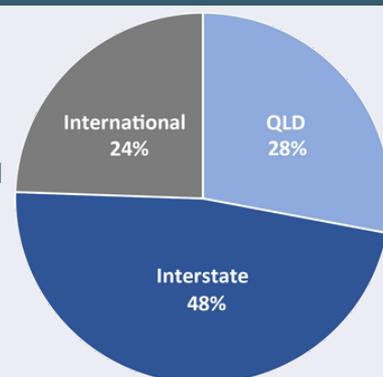


Rank	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Region 4	Clients
Top	Longtail Tuna	Tuskfish	Permit	Queenfish	Permit
Second	Black Marlin	Permit	Barramundi Golden Trevally	Longtail Tuna	Golden Trevally
Third	Barramundi Giant Trevally Golden Trevally	Giant Trevally	Queenfish	Blue Bastard	Barramundi
Fourth	Permit Yellowfin Tuna	Golden Trevally Harry Hotlips Tuna (unspecified)	Giant Trevally	Barramundi	Queenfish
Fifth	Queenfish	Queenfish	Blue Salmon Jungle Perch	Permit	Giant Trevally

"... I think it's the species. Everyone wants to catch a permit, and everyone wants that sight fishing experience..."
(guide)

Client demographics

On average, **most clients travel from interstate locations** to fish in Queensland (except region 2 where Queensland clients are in the majority). Most clients are men between 40-60 years of age but some guides reported that more women and younger clients are entering the fishery. The top three countries clients travel from were: **1) The United States, 2) New Zealand, & 3) the United Kingdom**. The top three states clients travel from were: **1) New South Wales, 2) Victoria, & 3) even split between the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania**.



How and why fishers are fishing

Most guides use 4-5 metre specialized boats equipped with **electric trolling motors** and/or push poles that are used to cruise around quietly while **visually looking for fish**. Fishers were often more motivated by experiences such as **the challenge** of fly fishing and the **comradery** between fishers, than harvest of fish, and often satisfied by just getting the **opportunity to cast** a flie towards a challenging fish, regardless of catching it or not.

"The biggest thing with saltwater flyfishing is the sight fishing, so they want to get shots, so they want to ... physically see fish up in the flats, in the clean water and get good shots at those fish." **(guide)**

Limitations and threats

Guides percieve many limitations and threats to the fishery; such as negative effects to fish populations from **boating pressure, recreational fishing, shark depredation**, and nutrient runoff. The most common threat was **commercial fishing**. But the most mentioned limitation was mis-management of the fishery, where **most guides felt their fishery is overlooked**.

"But our fish ... queenies, goldies and then the very least permit, are very much not on the radar at all with Queensland fisheries." **(guide)**

Moving forward

The environmental impact of saltwater fly fishing is likely low; more research is needed to understand post-release mortality effects from air exposure, handling, and depredation on key species. Collaborating with fly fishers may be a positive opportunity for management as fly fishers can influence other Queensland fishers with voluntary C&R practices. This project will be presented at the 10th world recreational fishing conference in Melbourne next year (<https://wrfc10.com>) and we expect to publish 2 scientific articles from these results.

Questions or comments: andreas.hansen@my.jcu.edu.au