

# Queensland Groper Mortality Investigation Task Force

## Report sick or dying groper and finfish

June 2009

### Fact sheet

## Groper fish deaths

Since October 2007, Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF) has received more than 50 reports of dead Queensland groper (*Epinephelus lanceolatus*) on beaches and in waterways between Cooktown and Cairns.

Reports have also been received from the Cardwell, Mackay, Mission Beach, Burdekin and Bowen areas.

Testing has found the bacterium, *Streptococcus agalactiae*, to have caused fatal blood-poisoning in some of these fish.

This is first time this bacteria has been found in sick fish in Australia. It has been linked to fish deaths in the Middle East, the United States and Thailand.

QPIF wants to know how widespread the bacteria is, how it is transmitted, if environmental factors are involved, and why Queensland groper in the coastal north Queensland region appear to be susceptible to the bacteria.

## Other marine finfish

Two sick grunter taken from Trinity Inlet in early 2009 were also found to be infected with the bacteria. Healthy grunters tested were found to be free from the bacteria.

QPIF has tested several fish species from Trinity Inlet this year and has found the bacteria in a single mullet and a catfish.

Fishers should not be alarmed as the bacteria are destroyed when fish is cooked.

**It is safe to enjoy fishing in the far north and to eat cooked fish from this area.**



Photo of Groper supplied by Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority

## We need your help

Recreational fishers and beach-goers can assist with our investigation.

If you see a dead Queensland groper or any other dead fish species in the water or washed up on a beach or in mangroves, please contact QPIF immediately on **13 25 23**.

Early reporting is vital. QPIF fisheries scientists need to access fresh carcasses quickly to test the best possible samples.

The best samples are those taken from sick or dying fish. Recreational boaters and fishers are asked to promptly report any fish they see showing symptoms of sickness.

## Symptoms of a dying groper

- Underweight and apparent difficulty in feeding
- Lighter in colour than a healthy groper
- Skin lesions
- Cloudy or bulging eyes
- Weak swimming or swimming near the surface.

## Do not touch dead fish

If you find a dead fish, do not touch it.

If you do touch a dead fish, you are advised to wash your hands as soon as possible.