

8. Discussion

Although most of the catch records are collected with a view to awarding annual prizes within each club rather than investigating the state of the fishery, the analysis of of these records provided a surprising degree of confirmation of frequently voiced opinions on Reef fishing, e.g. catches at nearshore reefs are poor compared with offshore catches, fish are getting smaller, catches have declined from previous high catches in some areas, and large coral trout, red emperor are caught less frequently than in earlier years, etc. Unfortunately there was insufficient information to permit documentation of changes in catch composition of all areas. The only areas for which we have a time series of records of catch composition are for reefs off Townsville and Mackay, and although off Townsville there is some suggestion of a decline in the percentage of coral trout and an increase in the percentage of sweetlip in the catch, these are not so great as to suggest a major change in the catch as yet.

Although we have good records for individual reefs in some areas, e.g. off Townsville and the Capricorn-Bunker area, at this stage it is probably premature to conclude too much from individual reef records. However, in most cases, the results are similar to those for the combined reefs in each area. Future records should enable us to provide a more detailed analysis for individual reefs.

With the co-operation of the various clubs and the Queensland Amateur Fishing Council, the Authority is planning to continue to collect amateur deep sea fishing records chiefly through a record sheet, which serves both the clubs' record keeping purposes and assists the Authority in gathering information.

Additionally, the Authority is planning to start conducting surveys at boat launching ramps to determine whether catches from fishermen using small boats show a similar pattern to those from larger charter boats.

With continued collection of information on amateur fishing, the Authority hopes to obtain a more complete picture of Great Barrier Reef fishing.