

In 1979-80 130 charter vessels and some 15,000 speedboats out of a total Queensland fleet of 75,000 were estimated to fish in the Great Barrier Reef Region. The Queensland speedboat fleet has increased considerably and if it is assumed that equivalent percentages of speedboats fish the Great Barrier Reef, it is suggested that some 20,000 speedboats now fish in the Region each year. The number of charter vessels has doubled since 1980-81, although 60% of them do not promote fishing as a primary activity (Tor Hundloe, pers. comm.). Although the increase in charter vessels has largely been in the mass tourism non-fishing areas, there is still a significant component of the charter fleet which offers extended fishing trips to the Swain Reefs and Far Northern Section of the Great Barrier Reef Region. Fishing trips on charter vessels are often regarded as self financing with the fish being sold to cover the cost of the charter (although this practice may be illegal). Likewise some recreational fishermen using speedboats sell their catch to recover their investment in fuel, gear and the vessel.

Speedboat activity makes up the major component of recreational fishing. In 1979-80, the 15,000 speedboats fishing in the Great Barrier Reef Region made a total of 197,000 trips (average 13 per boat). The boats averaged 5m and carried 2.6 people per boat. Average fishing time was 6 hours, and average fishing effort was 9 hrs/km /year (Hundloe, 1985).

For comparison there are currently estimated to be approximately 150-200 full time commercial reef fishermen fishing in the Great Barrier Reef whose primary fishing occupation is reef fishing. There are also estimated to be some 100 commercial fishermen for whom reef fishing is a secondary fishery. No specific plan of management has yet been introduced to the Queensland reef fishery other than the overall limit on the number of commercial fishing licences. Discussions are currently in progress to introduce a plan of management for the fishery. The initial response to the plan was unfavourable and the proposals were deferred for further consideration (QCFO, 1986).