

COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL FISHING

Introduction

The Section to be zoned includes some of the least disturbed coastal areas of Queensland. Fisheries in the zoning area are directed primarily at finfish, crabs and prawns. Fisheries between Cape Townshend and Corio Bay are more diverse than in Shoalwater Bay. The area supports a small charter boat fishery and more extensive recreational and commercial fisheries.



The sheltered estuaries and seagrass beds of Port Clinton and Shoalwater Bay are essential and vulnerable habitats which should be protected in order to maintain fisheries productivity.

Fisheries habitat

The zoning area is adjacent to two substantial estuaries, Port Clinton and Corio Bay. These estuaries are characterised by small catchments which are relatively unmodified.

The extensive tidal flats exposed during low tide in Port Clinton, Island Head Creek and Shoalwater Bay support large areas of mangrove. A notable feature of the estuaries is the large tidal range of between five and seven metres.

Many species that are fished in the area (including mud crabs, barramundi and banana prawns) rely on diverse wetland and mangrove habitats which dominate the southern end of Shoalwater Bay and the upper estuaries of Corio Bay, Port Clinton and Island Head Creek.

The diversity of habitats found along the Byfield coast ranges from extensive mangrove forests to large inter-reefal communities. These habitats support a large and diverse fish fauna and provide important fishing grounds, especially for prawns, scallops, crabs, barramundi and king salmon.

The presence of freshwater systems (Freshwater and Dismal Swamp) adjacent to the in the zoning area are important for the fishery, for example barramundi and mullet are known to inhabit freshwater streams and waterholes during part of their life cycle.

Significant permanent fresh water within the Shoalwater Bay Training Area is associated with the Manifold Hills sand dunes. Other water bodies associated with sand dunes occur in depressions in sand dunes such as those on the Clinton Lowland island. Dismal Swamp is perched 50–60 metres above sea level. Freshwater Swamp is a peat sedge swamp, both are fed by the Manifold Hills dunes.

The large areas of seagrass and mangrove habitats have an important function as nurseries for juvenile fish species, many of which are commercially targeted. Many species are also resident in these habitats for a large portion of their life.

The availability of suitable nursery areas is a critical factor of both species diversity and abundance of commercial and recreational seafood species. The estuaries of Shoalwater Bay and Port Clinton appear to be important nursery areas for banana, tiger and endeavour prawns. The mangrove-lined creeks which flow into Port Clinton provide a nursery habitat for banana prawn.

Commercial fisheries

Commercial fisheries consist of an inshore net and crab pot industry which target a wide range of species, including barramundi, threadfish salmon, shark, whiting and mullet. There is a seasonal fishery for banana prawns and an extended fishery for endeavour and tiger prawns along the

Byfield coast, including the area outside the mouth of Port Clinton. The prawning grounds are largely fished by trawlers from Yeppoon, Rockhampton, Mackay and Gladstone. The prawn fishery, whilst not of major significance in the context of total state landings, is important to the economies of nearby ports, particularly Yeppoon. The mud crab fishery in the mangrove areas of Port Clinton and Shoalwater Bay, and to a lesser extent in Corio Bay, is a significant industry for the region. Around 8% of the annual Queensland crab production is harvested in the Shoalwater Bay region.

Recreational fishing

Most recreational fishing occurs in areas between Five Rocks and Corio Bay. Vehicular access limits the fishery beyond this point. The fishery targets pelagic and estuarine species. Catches in Corio Bay are dominated by estuarine species such as whiting, flathead, bream and grunter. The intensity of these fisheries is far less than in most other areas of coastal Queensland due to the area's remoteness and difficulty of access for both vehicles and vessels.

Charter operations

The area supports a small charter boat fishery of between six to eight vessels which work from Yeppoon and operate between Townshend Island and Corio Bay. As well as fishing the inshore areas these charters use the estuaries of Port Clinton and Island Head Creek as anchorages. There is limited fishing of reef species for snapper and trout in the waters off Island Head Creek and east of Port Clinton. The use of charter boats as mother ships for estuarine fishers fishing in Port Clinton and Island Head is a practice which may increase over time. The demand for charter vessels to take fishers, divers and tourists into the coastal and estuarine areas, particularly between Port Clinton and Island Head Creek is expected to increase as the cost of chartering vessels to the outer Great Barrier Reef increases.

Conservation issues

Land use in these catchments has been restricted to low intensity cattle grazing, military usage, and, in the southern part of the Corio Bay catchment, development for tourism.

Mesh netting is the most commonly employed method for catching finfish. The use of mesh nets has been restricted in Port Clinton to river set nets due to the risk of dugong mortality from these types of nets.

No exotic fish species are present in the waters of the Shoalwater Bay Training Area. This is due to the remoteness of the area from major population centres. Catchments free from exotic fishes are becoming increasingly rare and of national significance as reserves for native fishes.

Sources

This report is based on a report by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries on the *Status of Fisheries and Fisheries Resources in Shoalwater Bay* and a resource report prepared by Trinski et al. 1994 for the Shoalwater Bay Commonwealth Commission of Inquiry.

This report has been prepared as background material for preparation of a draft zoning plan for the Gumoo Woojabuddee Section of the Great Barrier Marine Park and adjacent areas including the waters of Port Clinton, and the intertidal areas of Freshwater Bay and the Byfield coast. There are no management proposals contained in this report. If you have any questions about the process contact:



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