

Fish Habitat Areas – Information Leaflet

Fish Habitat Areas

A Fish Habitat Area (FHA) is a spatially defined area of inshore or estuarine fish habitat which contains values that are important to sustaining local and regional fish stocks and fisheries. FHAs are specifically protected under the provisions of the *Fisheries Act 1994* to ensure that these values are maintained. FHA declaration equally protects all habitat types (e.g. vegetation, sand bars, rocky headlands) from physical disturbance or impacts. A FHA is a form of “multiple-use” marine protected area, protecting natural fish habitats from alteration and degradation while allowing for community use, including community access; boating; commercial and recreational fishing; traditional fishing; yabby pumping; and collection of molluscs.

The FHA Program

The FHA program is a key component of the DPI&F strategy for sustainable fisheries management in Queensland. It ensures that important areas of high quality and diverse coastal and estuarine fish habitats are retained in their natural and productive condition while allowing for continued use and enjoyment of the areas for purposes such as commercial, recreational and indigenous fishing and boating. Safeguarding these habitats provides the foundation for the sustainability of local and regional fish stocks and fisheries.

Fish Habitat Areas are declared by Regulation under Section 120 of the *Fisheries Act 1994* as part of the ongoing identification, management and protection of important fish habitats in Queensland. There are currently 71 Fish Habitat Areas declared throughout coastal Queensland, providing protection for some 801 000 hectares of coastal fish habitats. This Statewide network has been progressively declared over the last 30 years.

A list of the declared Fish Habitat Areas, plans and information is available either by contacting DPI&F on 13 25 23 or visiting the DPI&F website - www.dpi.qld.gov.au

Management of Fish Habitat Areas

There are two levels of management for declared FHAs, each of which may be applied to the entire declared FHA or to zones within a declared FHA.

Management level 'A' is used for locations where very strict management arrangements can be achieved. **Management level 'B'** is used for locations where existing or planned uses require a more flexible management approach.

The DPI&F is responsible for carrying out statutory obligations to protect and manage marine plants and fish habitats under the *Fisheries Act 1994*. Declared FHAs are protected under the Act and a fisheries development approval is required for any disturbance, unless the proposed disturbance and its impacts are authorised by a self-assessable code.

An application for a fisheries development approval in a declared FHA **will only be supported for ‘prescribed declared FHA development purposes’**, including:

- restoring the fish habitat or natural processes in the area;
- managing fisheries resources or fish habitat in the area;
- education or research;
- public health or safety;
- providing public infrastructure to facilitate fishing;
- providing subterranean public infrastructure if the surface of the area can be restored, after completion of the works or activity, to its condition before the performance of the works or activity;
- constructing a temporary structure; and

For a part of the declared FHA that is a management B area:

- constructing a permanent structure on tidal land or within the area; or
- depositing material for beach replenishment.

Activities such as physical, pesticide and biological controls for the management of noxious fisheries resources, declared animals and plants, and environmental weeds may only be used in accordance with the Fish Habitat Area code of practice FHACoP01.

Maintenance of existing authorised structures within a declared Fish Habitat Area may be undertaken provided it complies with the self-assessable codes 'Maintenance works on existing lawful structures (other than powerlines and on farm drains) in a declared fish habitat area or involving the removal, destruction or damage of marine plants' (MP02) and 'Maintenance works on powerlines and associated infrastructure in a declared fish habitat area or involving the removal, destruction or damage of marine plants' (MP04). The FHA Code of Practice FHACoP01 describes the lawful use of physical, pesticide and biological controls in FHAs.

It is important to note that the activities listed below are **not** defined as 'works' and are therefore **not restricted** by the FHA management:

- community use and enjoyment of the FHA;
- recreational, commercial and traditional fishing (*Note: Existing size limits, closures and other fisheries management restrictions still apply*);
- boating; and
- bait collecting (except worm digging).

Further Information

For further information on the FHA program, FHA plans, FHA information and management refer to the DPI&F internet site www.dpi.qld.gov.au or contact DPI&F on 13 25 23.