



## **Speech Transcript – Keynote Speaker**

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NSW**

**USFA Event 7 May 2009**

**Sydney**

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### **A Practical Approach to Conservation through the Sustainable Use of Wildlife**

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Good evening everyone, thank you all for coming tonight. Many of you already know me. For those who don't, I started spearfishing 35 years ago and joined my first hunting club at the same time. I fished the Alliman Shield for 16 years and whilst I was never a successful comp diver, I managed to fluke a few good fish along the way. Fifteen years ago I was involved with the foundation of a recreational fishing lobby group, Angler's Action group and have been elected to the committee since. Currently I have been honoured by being selected as a mentor for the Future Leaders program for the Recreational Fishing Alliance.

Tonight I will be talking about conservation. However I am not a biologist, except in the practical sense. I own a deer farm and practice Game Management on several properties. The hat that I am wearing tonight, or should I say, the khaki shirt and pants, is as the Chairman for the Adventure and Safari Industry Association of New South Wales, an organisation which you will no doubt hear a lot more about in the coming months and years.

What is conservation?





Conservation is the sum of the actions taken to preserve and maintain those things to which we attribute a positive use or value. Conservation does not mean there shall be no interference from humans. Fishermen are conservationists. We have called for and accepted regulations on size and bag limits for fish. We fish ethically and to the fisheries management regulations. We have called for better management and enforcement, a halt to habitat destruction, an improvement in the water quality run-off, paid licensing fees, volunteered for habitat restoration and education programs. In particular, fishing organisations have been very successful at spreading the conservation ethic and a responsibility towards the maintenance of fish stocks and bio-diversity. Yet we have been portrayed as the villain for the loss of bio-diversity and continuously have had our access to a public resource taken in the name of conservation.

Recently the National Parks Association, which is a “non-government” organisation of approximately two and a half thousand (2,500) members, released a discussion paper called the “Torn Blue Fringe”. This paper called for a huge section of New South Wales waters to be listed as 1A Sanctuary Zones as prescribed by the World Conservation Union. Sanctuaries listed as 1A are wilderness areas, where the only incursions are for research. The National Parks Association not only wants to exclude fishermen but SCUBA divers and the boating community as well.

Locking up large sections of marine habitat in the belief that “if you leave it alone, there will be no change” to the habitat or bio-diversity is naïve, particularly if you have failed to identify the key threats, such as habitat loss or water quality. If we lock up large parts of New South Wales waters, these key threats will still exist and the change to habitat or bio-diversity will be just as rapid, or more so, as there will be less funding from licensing fees and other revenues for monitoring and management.

The National Parks Association have called for this huge sanctuary on the grounds of conservation biology. Conservation biology is defined as “those action taken to prevent the loss of bio-diversity”, that is, extinctions either localised or complete. The





National Parks Association should clearly identify the key threats and threatening processes to any species and prove it the actions of fishers which are leading to the loss of bio-diversity.

The threat abatement actions should not be based upon non-scientific inferences or perceptions. The “precautionary principle” has merit in its application towards wildlife conservation however, as it is subjective and not scientific, the misuse of this concept will devalue and undermine its credibility.

As fishers and conservationists we need to become more proactive in promoting the “conservation through sustainable use of wildlife” concept. This concept was affirmed at the 18th session of the ICUN (World Conservation Union) in Perth in 1990. It states that, “ethical wise and sustainable use of some wildlife can be consistent with and encourage conservation”. This is a management system where quotas are set at optimum sustainable yields, not maximum sustainable yields and income from the resource is used to maintain value add too and conserve the resource.

This system places a value upon the habitat. When the habitat is protected so to is the bio-diversity. The greatest threat to our marine bio-diversity is habitat destruction and poor quality water from run-off. These are also the key limiting factors to the increase in abundance of valuable fish.

How do we know if we are fishing in a sustainable manner?

Currently we have to rely on our fisheries managers. They set the quotas, size and bags limits. Wildlife populations are a renewable resource. Wildlife populations also fluctuate, becoming more or less abundant.

One should expect that our fisheries managers would monitor this.





If overfishing “was” a key threat to any fish species, the managers could change the regulations and should see a recovery. This is “adaptive management”.

The managers have this authority, yet many fishermen, various conservation groups and the general public have the perception that our resource is over-fished.

Are our fisheries over-fished?

Have the no-take zones in the current marine parks been effective?

Has there been an increase in abundance from the “spill over effect” from sanctuary zones?

Without proper monitoring we cannot manage any wildlife resource, or answer these questions.

The only monitoring that currently occurs for valuable fish species such as Mulloway, is a “trigger point”. That is, we wait until the catch plummets to set indices or “trigger”, before we change the quotas.

This is “harvest till death” management.

Under a sustainable use method, we would use currently available resources to determine if these fish were relatively more or less abundant and adapt management by raising and lowering quotas, size and bag limits accordingly.

As for currently available monitoring resources, the USFA is sitting upon a wealth of information, as is many other fishing organisations.





Score sheets from fishing competitions are very consistent in the way the information is gathered. Regular intervals, consistent amount of effort, information about time, location, date and even the skill level of participants.

An example; in 1980 if the top ten spearfishermen weighed in twenty (20) Mulloway for a combined four hundred (400) hours effort, then in 2008 the top ten weighed in two (2) Mulloway for four hundred (400) hours effort, we can scientifically state that mulloway are ten times less abundant than in 1980.

This does not tell you how many Mulloway are out there however, absolute abundance whilst it would be nice to know is not as important as the trends in abundance.

The USFA should be going through its score sheets, because I know if the fish are here, the top ten will get them and you have a lot of answers and even more questions right there.

Personally I feel that given the choice, monitoring is more important than enforcement. Currently our recreational trust pays for three (3) enforcement officers. I do not want to take their jobs however, if we can divert their activities to monitoring or if extra funding becomes available, we should see better returns.

If we could have a series of transects in place up and down New South Wales where every three (3) months a gill net is set at a regular tide for a set time, then information is collected scientifically, it would help our managers to acquire relative abundance on a broader range of species and to become more adaptive. This point is only for discussion. I am trying to focus upon a solution to help, not just criticise.

On the monitoring of Dog Tooth Tuna in the Coral Sea, I have been asking for information for the last four (4) years from people going on these trips and to date have received none. There is no way that spearfishermen can be a threatening





process to these fish and I doubt they are less abundant now than ten (10) to fifteen (15) years ago. If so, it is not from the insignificant amount of effort from spearo's.

Unfortunately the Greenies have their sights on these reefs and without this monitoring, zoning could be made upon subjective rather than scientific grounds.

The best information to date came from a good mate of mine who I won't embarrass. "Bob, I didn't record anything, because I didn't see many Tuna". My reply; Science is about the truth and the facts, if they are the facts, they are the facts. If you were to go back in ten (10) years and see one hundred (100) Tuna, we could honestly and scientifically state that the Tuna are relatively twenty (20) times more abundant than the same week ten years ago, as long as the information is recorded and collected consistently.

When collecting this type of data, all the information is relevant, obviously the better the quality of the information and the more of it, the better the indices will be.

I have spent a lifetime spearfishing and the last fifteen (15) years defending fishermen and their rights.

When we started Angler's Action Group our objective was "to make ourselves redundant and to get back to fishing" by lobbying to have sustainable, transparent and adaptive management of our fisheries. We would achieve this by spreading truthful, relevant and up to date information. People, fishermen, conservationists and politicians would see these truths and ask themselves and their peers. "What are we doing? How can we fix this mess? Well fifteen (15) years on Angler's Action Group and groups like it are not redundant.

I am incredibly proud of Angler's Action Group and all those dedicated hard working members. AAG will always have a place in the role of education and spreading the most recent information. However, lobbying has not worked. We chose not to





become political and what we have now is a proliferation of marine zones. These zones are a dog's breakfast, where unless you engage a local guide at popular holiday destinations, there is little relaxation for fear that you may inadvertently be fishing in the wrong zone.

Recreational fishers need to become more involved with political organisations, in particular, the Shooters Party.

Why this party?

Well for a start they are a conservation organisation. Take a look at the success of the Game Council and the role the Shooters Party played in that.

More importantly, the Shooters Party promote our brand of conservation; conservation through the sustainable use of wildlife. There are as many brands of conservation as there are brands of cola. Many of the other conservation organisations are little more than animal rights groups who promote to the public that animal rights and conservation are the same thing.

I see the animal rights movement as one of the greatest threats to conservation that we all face.

If I can impress upon you one thing tonight, it is the importance of voting for the Shooters Party at the next state election.

Please don't divide out strength as a group by voting for similar brands of parties. The Shooters Party is the only genuine article.

Remember; don't vote green, vote khaki.

Thank you.

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