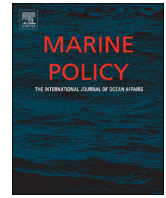




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Why do fishers fish? A cross-cultural examination of the motivations for fishing

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ABSTRACT

As pressure on the world's marine resources mounts, it is critical to understand the motivations that influence fisher behaviour to enable effective management. This study employed an ethnographic approach to interview experienced fishermen in Australia (recreational) and the Solomon Islands (subsistence/artisanal) and to provide cross-cultural insight into their behaviour, perceptions and motivations to fish. Although food and income were the most identified motivations by fishers in the Solomon Islands (100% and 93% of fishers, respectively), 75% of motivation categories paralleled those of recreational fishers. Fishermen in the Solomon Islands also expressed an eagerness to actively pursue fishing despite the potential for alternative incomes, possibly reflecting the presence of a recreational mindset. The willingness to continue fishing in the absence of necessity illustrates the potential for growth of recreational fisheries where economic conditions improve. In Australia, connection to the environment was the most common motivation for recreational fishers (96% of fishers). Recreational fishers also perceived that fishing enhanced social capital, promoted respect for nature and provided health and economic benefits. Senior fishers identified young males to be most likely to engage in excessive fishing through displays of machismo, but emphasised the role of fishing in providing a safe environment for youth to vent angst and frustration. These results suggest that fishing activities may deliver fundamental benefits to individuals and societies and that in some regions fishers may be valuable advocates for conservation and social cohesion if their motivations and values are appreciated and channelled appropriately.

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1. Introduction

Humans have fished the earth's waterways for at least 40,000 years [1]. Indeed, the earliest evidence for fishing implements (harpoons) is from Africa 90,000 years ago [2]. For many coastal and sea faring peoples, fishes provide an important source of protein and fishing plays an integral role in social, cultural and religious identity [3,4]. Today, fish constitute more than 16% of the global intake of animal protein [5]. Fish products derived from wild caught fisheries and aquaculture are also the most traded of food commodities, worth more than \$129 billion USD in 2012 [5]. The consumption of fish crosses a broad spectrum of cultures and societies, from subsistence living in developing countries to the high-end restaurant trade in affluent countries [6,7]. Thus, humans have a long and deeply embedded history with fishing and a strong dependency on fish protein.

The world's rivers, estuaries and oceans were once perceived as a limitless resource and humans unwittingly plundered fish populations [2,3,8]. However, following the industrialisation and intensification of fishing over the past century, the demise of the planet's fish populations became conspicuous [4,9]. The collapse of Atlantic cod and orange roughy populations are two high profile case studies in overexploitation [3,10]. However, many smaller or less studied fisheries have suffered similar fates [11,12]. As human populations, middle class wealth, longevity, and the subsequent demand for marine resources continues to grow globally [13,14], reports of overfishing, declining fish populations and habitat destruction are also likely to rise [2,15,16].

Although governments have often been slow to act on declining marine resources and ecosystem degradation [12,17,18], gear and catch regulations and the implementation of marine reserves have been popular response measures in recent decades [19–21]. Evidence suggests that these actions have led to successful outcomes for ecosystems, fisheries and fishers [22,23] but their benefits have been the subject of much debate [24–26]. Despite being generally supportive of regulation, recreational fishers have expressed frustration at a perceived lack of consultation, weak

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supporting evidence for measures and poor communication [27,28]. Enforcement and compliance has also been an ongoing problem in developed and developing regions, illustrating the importance of consultation and the need for fisher support and involvement prior to implementing measures [21,29,30]. Conflict between fishers and regulatory authorities is one of the biggest hurdles faced during the establishment of fisheries regulation and marine reserves, and disputes are becoming increasingly politicised [26,31]. Therefore, it is important for scientists, managers and governments to possess a thorough understanding of the motivations, behaviour and perceptions of fishers [32]. Such insights would provide valuable guidance for measured approaches to the implementation of regulation. This knowledge may also help authorities form strategies that harness stronger support from fishing communities and lead to improved outcomes.

An extensive body of research has examined the motivations of fishers in the developed world [32–34]. These studies primarily focus on recreational fishers and reveal that the motivations for fishing are diverse [32]. However, little research to date has directly compared the motivations of recreational fishers and subsistence fishers from an ethnographic perspective to examine the motivations for fishing in the absence of necessity. There are also comparatively few studies exploring the role of masculinity in fishing or the perceived personal, societal and economic benefits of the activity. While recreational fishing is defined as fishing for aquatic animals that do not constitute the individual's primary resource to meet basic nutritional needs [35], subsistence fishing is the act of fishing primarily to feed the family and relatives of an individual [36]. Likewise, artisanal fishing typically involves small-scale fisheries for subsistence and/or local markets [36]. Both subsistence and artisanal fishing are generally perceived as necessary for survival or livelihood. In a world where rising wealth may increase the prevalence of recreational fishing [29,35], it is important to explore the underlying motivations that facilitate shifts in fisher mindset. Greater insight across these economic and

social boundaries may help to understand and anticipate future changes in fisher behaviour and fishing pressures.

This study provides a cross-cultural examination of the motivations of fishers. It explores the similarities and differences between subsistence and artisanal fishers in the Solomon Islands (a developing country) and recreational fishers in Australia (a developed country) to provide an understanding of why fishers fish and why they continue to fish in the absence of necessity. The research also investigates recreational fisher perceptions of the benefits of fishing. As pressures on global marine populations grow, calls for conservation measures and conflict with fishers also increase. This work offers insight into the motivations, behaviour and perceptions of fishers that can help to guide appropriate engagement measures, encourage collaborative conservation efforts and lead to effective outcomes for ecosystems and people.

2. Methods

An ethnographic approach was employed to conduct a cross-cultural comparison of the motivations of fishers in the Solomon Islands and Australia (Fig. 1). Study sites in the Solomon Islands were located within Langalanga Lagoon on the west coast of Malaita and on the small islands of Kwai and Ngongosila on the east coast of Malaita. In Australia, research was conducted along the eastern coast between Sydney and Townsville. In both countries semi-structured interviews were conducted and a snowball technique was used to identify a total of 53 interviewees. Experienced male fishers (minimum five years experience) between 20 and 80 years of age and with no medium- or large-scale commercial fishing interests were identified for interviews. The 28 interviewees in the Solomon Islands were subsistence or small-scale artisanal fishers who employed a variety of fishing techniques. In Australia, the 25 interviewees were exclusively recreational fishers (15 spearfishers and 10 linefishers). Interviews were

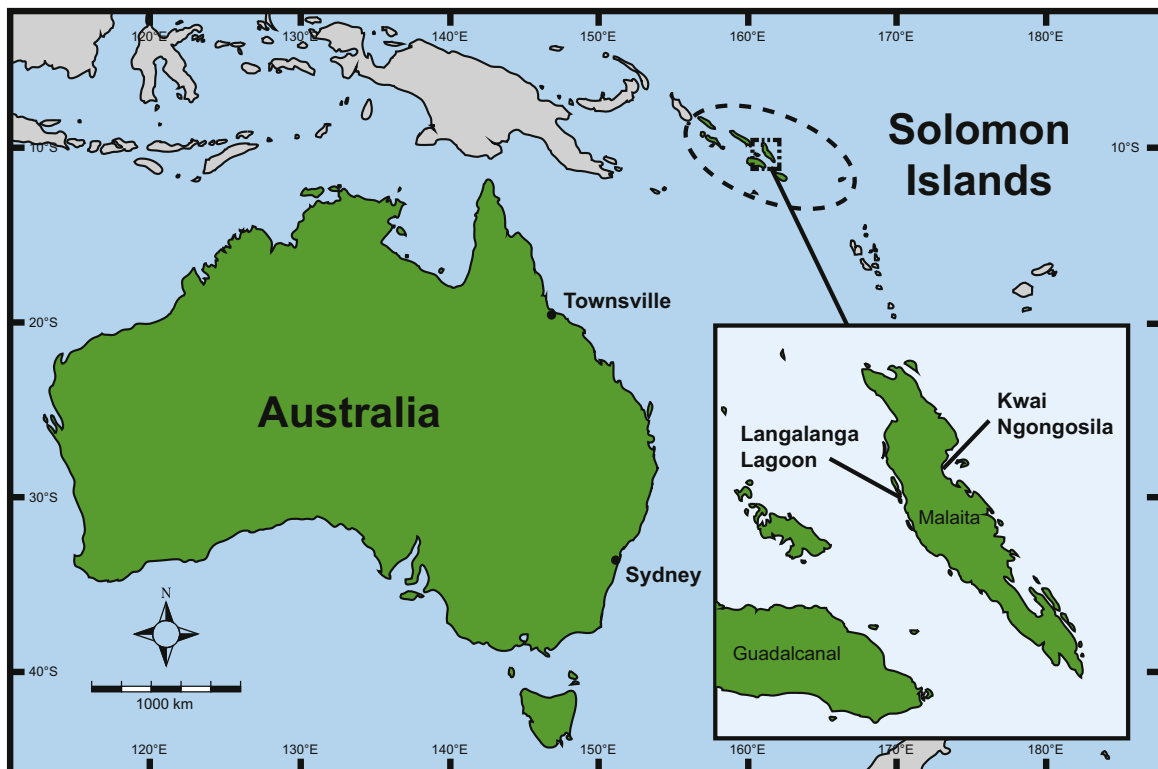


Fig. 1. Map of the study sites in Australia and the Solomon Islands. Interviews were conducted between Townsville and Sydney on the east coast of Australia, at Langalanga Lagoon on the west coast of Malaita and on the islands of Kwai and Ngongosila on the east coast of Malaita.

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