

Fishers helping scientists to assess snapper stocks amid controversial fishing ban

ABC North and West SA / By Shari Hams and Brooke Neindorf

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The three-year snapper ban was introduced when fish stocks plummeted. (ABC News: Brittany Evins)

Commercial fishers have been reeled in to the latest snapper research as scientists investigate if numbers of the fish have increased since a controversial fishing ban was introduced in 2019.

The fishing ban is set to continue until next February and [will target Gulf St Vincent and Spencer Gulf as well as the state's west coast.](#)

Lead researcher Dr Mike Steer said a number of projects were underway to check stock numbers.

He said "comprehensive stock assessment" involving an egg survey was successfully carried out in both of the gulfs.

Key points:

- Commercial fishers are working with scientists to research snapper stocks
- South Australia has a ban on fishing the species
- Scientists say it is too early to tell when the ban will be lifted

"[The aim was] to understand the quantity of snapper eggs that are spawned during the peak spawning period," he said.



Dr Mike Steer says it's too early to tell if stocks have improved. (Landline: Tony Hill)

In 2019, the SA government introduced a statewide ban [running from November 2019 until February 2023](#), excluding south-eastern waters over winter, after [data revealed the fish population had been decimated](#).

At the time, data showed that stocks in the Spencer Gulf were rapidly decreasing and had declined by 23 per cent, while in Gulf St Vincent, stocks had declined by 87 per cent and were considered to be depleted — meaning the snapper population could not replenish itself.

Research 'a bit of an eye-opener'

Port Pirie fisherman David Wilks has been part of the latest research, but said he was initially against the ban.

"They've employed commercial fisherman across the state to catch snapper for them and, in the meantime, they're using their own boats to catch eggs with lava nets," Mr Wilks said.

"I was not in favour of a total ban, however it's something that has been forced upon us but it's up to us to try and get involved and get some good numbers back to them."



Commercial fisherman David Wilks has learnt lots from the project. *(Supplied)*

Mr Wilks said participating in the research had helped him to gain a better understanding of what was involved to help boost stock numbers.

"We did three trips out from Port Pirie and Port Broughton to catch samples for them," he said.

"It's been a bit of an eye-opener because I've learnt a lot of stuff in regards to snapper, and we did garfish as well.

"The scientific side of things, as fishermen we don't really know much about."

Dr Steer said the snapper caught during the research had been donated to food services.

"We go out with them and catch a sample, a representative sample from all around the state and then we use that biological information to support the model," Dr Steer said.

"The cool thing about that is the fish get donated to Foodbank."

While some fishers hope the extreme snapper ban will be lifted next year — scientists say it's too early to tell if numbers have reached an acceptable level.

"It's way too early, it's a really complicated process," Dr Steer said.