

**“REEL WOMEN” AND “SECRET WOMEN’S BUSINESS”: WOMEN’S RECREATIONAL FISHING IN THE TOP END OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY, AUSTRALIA**

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The economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits of recreational fishing are increasingly recognised in the scholarship on the sector, but the male-dominated nature of the sport globally means that the gendered nature of these benefits is poorly understood by researchers, fisheries managers, and recreational fishing businesses and organisations. Therefore, there is a risk that such benefits are not equitably shared, and the experiences of women and gender diverse anglers, and those working in the recreational fishing sector, are overlooked.

The case of the Northern Territory of Australia provides a rare example where the participation rates of women and men in recreational fishing are equal, according to a recent National Social and Economic Survey of Recreational Fishers. Using a feminist qualitative approach, this study explored women’s experiences of recreational fishing in the Top End region of the Northern Territory, the barriers and enablers of their participation, the role of women’s fishing competitions and the private sector, and the vision that women anglers have for the sector. This qualitative approach highlights a number of issues that shape women’s experiences of recreational fishing, which are not captured by existing gender-disaggregated participation data.

The findings reveal the inclusive nature of recreational fishing in the Top End while highlighting barriers and opportunities for improvement. Participants shared experiences that showcase the importance of fishing as a family activity in the Northern Territory. Key issues identified include managing family commitments and social dynamics involving various relationships such as interactions with friends, family romantic partners and other fishers. The study examines women's roles in fishing and their representation in media and decision-making. It concludes with participants’ vision for the future and recommendations for promoting inclusive recreational fisheries research.

This research contributes to a growing discourse about understanding the social, wellbeing and cultural aspects of recreational fishing and emphasizes the need for greater recognition of fisher diversity. It provides insights for fishing communities aiming to enhance female participation and equitable resource distribution, with broader implications for outdoor recreation and the blue economy.