



media release

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Innovative “Fishutes” perplex pelicans

Keen to help returned juvenile fish escape from predators, a group of professional estuarine fishermen from the South Coast have invented a unique “Fishute” device.

The bycatch reduction device comprises a concertina-style mesh shute that allows any undersized fish to be returned to the water out of sight of seabirds.

Normal fishing activities attract pelicans which prey upon released fish, particularly juvenile black bream, before they have the opportunity to escape.

WA SeaNet extension officer Neil MacGuffie said he helped invent the Fishute after being approached by industry to reduce the environmental impact of the fishery.

“We came up with the idea together through trial and error. It really was through industry initiative to operate more sustainably that we were able to develop this,” he explained.

Mr MacGuffie revealed the device was introduced to a wider fishery industry meeting last week where it was enthusiastically received.

20 Fishutes have been constructed and are currently being used by the South Coast Estuarine Fishery.

South Coast Licensed Fishermen’s Association president Paul Benson said the device allowed the fish to be safely released and to acclimatize to their surroundings, before attempting their escape from the pelicans.

“We’ve popped some fake eyes on the outside of the device and it’s working well to stop the birds getting too close,” Mr Benson added.

South Coast NRM chief executive Rob Edkins said that by returning the juvenile fish to the water, the fishers were ensuring the future harvest and supply of locally caught fish.

“The Fishute is a great example of local ingenuity born out of a real desire to conserve and protect South Coast fish stocks,” he said.

The development of the Fishute also highlights the advantages of this estuarine fishery introducing a Code of Practice for Responsible Fishing.

The Fishute project is supported by the professional fishermen of the South Coast Estuarine Fishery, SeaNet, OceanWatch Australia and South Coast NRM. The project was funded under South Coast NRM’s coastal community engagement program through the Australian Government’s Caring for our Country initiative.

The South Coast Estuarine Fishery’s Fishute has been nominated for an Environment Award in the 2010 Western Australian Seafood Industry Awards. The winner will be announced on Friday 26 February.

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Captions:

- 1/ South Coast Licensed Fishermen's Association president Paul Benson gets an eyeful of the Fishute.
- 2/ South Coast NRM's Dylan Gleave, WA SeaNet's Neil MacGuffie, and South Coast Licensed Fisherman's Association president Paul Benson prepare to test the Fishute.

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South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc. is the leading regional group for natural resource management on the South Coast of Western Australia. As an independent nonprofit organisation, we work with the community to improve the environment by preserving and protecting unique plants and animals, managing land and waterways, and sharing knowledge and skills in natural resource management.