



Frequently Asked Questions

Cocos (Keeling) Islands Recreational Fishing Rules 2022

August 2022

Why have new fishing rules been introduced?

Previously, all of the Western Australian (WA) fishing rules were applied at Cocos (Keeling) Islands (CKI). However, these rules were not designed for the local marine environment and community values. Over the past year, the Australian Government has worked with Cocos Marine Care and CKI community members, together with Sea Country Solutions and the Pew Charitable Trusts, to develop new rules that are suitable for CKI.

These proposed rules were endorsed by the CKI community at a public meeting in November 2021 and have become the basis for the 2022 CKI fisheries ordinance.

The new fishing rules take into account the unique CKI environment, alongside the values and cultural needs of the community. These rules aim to protect fish stocks, ensuring sustainability of these fisheries for current and future generations of CKI residents.

When will the new rules come into effect?

The new rules have already been introduced, and are currently in effect.

Over the next few months, the focus will be on educating the CKI community and visitors to the islands about the new rules. A community education campaign, providing further information about the new rules and management framework, will be rolled out in the near future.

Additionally, the Australian Government will continue to work with the local community and Cocos Marine Care to introduce a collaborative and adaptive fisheries management for CKI.

What are the key elements of the new rules?

The new fishing rules include a range of measures to protect fish stocks, including:

- Daily bag limits for pelagic, demersal and lagoon finfish, mud crabs, kima (clams), gong gong and rock lobster
- Minimum size limits for some demersal and lagoon finfish and rock lobster
- Requirements for fish to be landed whole, as fish trunks or skin-on fillets
- Requirements for gong gong to have fully formed and closed spines

- Totally protected species, which must not be taken
- Airport possession limits for the export of fish off island of:
 - 5 kilograms (kg) of fish,
 - 2 kg of gong gong and
 - 2 kg of kima (clam) per person.
- Fishing gear controls, including restrictions on net and mesh sizes
- Sanctuary areas to protect the humphead Maori wrasse and gong gong
- Net fishing closure at the West Island northern lagoon
- Cultural fishing arrangements to allow for the continued take of fish for important cultural events.

How do the new rules compare to WA rules?

When compared to WA rules, the new rules for CKI are less restrictive, for example:

Rule	Cocos (Keeling) Islands	Western Australia mainland
Recreational fishing licences	No recreational fishing licence requirements.	Required when fishing from a boat or when targeting specific species.
Possession limits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No general possession limit. • Limit of 5kg of finfish, 2kg of gong gong and 2kg of kima (clam) per person at CKI airport (for export of fish off island). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possession limit of 20 kg of fillets of any species at a person's principal place of residence. • Possession limits applied for rock lobster, marron and abalone.
Pelagic finfish mixed daily bag limit	4 per person, per day	3 per person, per day
Demersal finfish mixed daily bag limit	16 per person, per day	5 per person, per day (north coast)
Boat limit	None	Applies for blue swimmer crabs, mud crabs, squid, octopus, cuttlefish, greenlip/brownlip abalone, rock lobster and dhufish (west coast).
Size limits applied	Yes, for some species	Yes, for some species

Why is there a limit to what fish I can take off CKI?

The CKI airport fish possession limit is an important tool to keep fishing pressure at a reasonable level and ensure the benefits from CKI fish stocks can continue to be enjoyed by those on island.

Each person in the airport area is allowed to have in their possession up to 5 kilograms (kg) of any fish that may be legally caught at the island, 2 kg of gong gong and 2 kg of kima (clam).

When in the airport area, the fish must:

- if finfish, have the skin attached
- be packaged flat
- be packaged so it is easily accessible for identification
- if frozen, be identifiable without being thawed.

This is to support easy identification of the species being taken off island.

Will I be able to spearfish?

Yes, you can spearfish at CKI, however, not while using compressed air breathing apparatus (such as SCUBA). This helps to protect fish stocks and supports community safety.

Are there areas closed to fishing?

Yes, there are sanctuary areas to protect the stocks of humphead Maori wrasse and gong gong.

The humphead Maori wrasse sanctuary area is located between West Island and Horsburgh Island. Humphead Maori wrasse cannot be taken within this area. There are three gong gong sanctuary areas in the eastern part of the lagoon. Gong gong cannot be taken within these areas, to allow gong gong to grow. There is also a netting closure in the northern lagoon on West Island to protect this important fish nursery area.

Are there protections for invertebrates?

Yes, reproducing crustaceans, including female crabs and female rock lobsters with eggs or spawn attached beneath their bodies, are totally protected and must not be taken.

There are also daily bag limits for rock lobster, kima (clams), gong gong and mud crabs.

To protect young individuals, a minimum size limit of 10cm carapace length applies for rock lobster, and gong gong must have fully formed and closed spines.

You may not use a spear or gidgee to take rock lobster.

Will I be able to catch enough finfish for special cultural and religious occasions?

Yes, you will. In recognition of traditional Cocos community fishing practices, cultural fishing provisions have been included that allow individuals to take finfish in excess of the daily bag limits for cultural and religious events.

These events include Ramadan, Hari Maulad Nabi, Islamic New Year, Ceremonies of Death, weddings and significant Cocos Malay ceremonies.

People wishing to fish for cultural events will need to notify the CKI Fisheries Advisory Committee one month before they wish to go fishing. A report of what was caught must also be provided to the Advisory Committee within two weeks after the end of the fishing period.

While the Advisory Committee is being established, notifications and fishing reports should be sent to IOTfisheries@infrastructure.gov.au.

Will these new rules be permanent?

The new rules are currently in effect and will continue into the future. However, we anticipate that community values, environmental conditions and fish stocks may change over time and with these changes, the rules may need to adapt. Any future changes will involve input and consultation with the CKI Fisheries Advisory Committee and engagement with the CKI community.

Recreational fishing activities and their impacts will be subject to ongoing research and will be monitored closely. The new rules will be reviewed as additional information becomes available, including through

community-based projects and citizen science. The primary focus remains that CKI fish stocks are managed in a sustainable way for current and future generations of CKI residents.

What community consultation occurred to develop these rules?

Fishing practices on CKI have been the subject of community consultation for many years with stakeholders including the local community, the Administrator of the Territory of Cocos (Keeling) Islands, the Shire of Cocos (Keeling) Islands, local businesses, community groups, other government agencies, port operators, fishers and other interested individuals.

More recently, Cocos Marine Care has worked with local residents to capture and represent the views of the CKI community for consideration by the Government. These new rules, including bag and export limits, are based on the rules proposed by the CKI community and endorsed at a public meeting in November 2021.

What is the CKI Fisheries Advisory Committee?

The CKI Fisheries Advisory Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister regarding local fisheries matters. The members are appointed based on their ability to contribute to fisheries management at CKI, drawing on their local knowledge and expertise to provide advice to the Minister.

The members of Cocos Marine Care forms the membership of the inaugural CKI Fisheries Advisory Committee.

What studies and research have taken place?

Research and monitoring of key fish species and marine habitats at CKI has expanded since 2001, using methods such as underwater visual census, baited remote under water video (BRUV) surveys, deep sea angling surveys, invertebrate movement acoustic surveys, and eDNA sampling of marine faunal and coral communities. These studies have provided information about species diversity, distribution and abundance, and how environmental factors affect local fish populations, which has been used to inform the development of the new rules.

More recently, a community ranger program has been implemented to collect information about local fishing activities including information about the species caught, fishing effort and shark interactions.

Research and monitoring activities will continue into the future with a focus on species and habitats of high importance for the CKI community and local marine ecosystems. Community involvement and collaboration will be a key element of these programs, along with scientific research.

What happens if someone breaks the rules?

The new rules, which are now in effect, include penalties for fishing offences.

The initial focus will be on educating the CKI community and visitors to the Island about the new rules.

Over the next few months, the Australian Government will continue to work with Cocos Marine Care and the CKI community to implement an effective fisheries compliance system that takes into account community expectations.

What if I have further questions?

Please contact the Department of Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts by emailing IOTfisheries@infrastructure.gov.au