

# **On the hook: Sustainable fishing in Papua New Guinea**

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A multi-disciplinary team from James Cook University has been busy unlocking the secrets of the Papuan Black Bass, one of the world's toughest sportfish.

The group is working in West New Britain province in Papua New Guinea, looking to develop an eco-tourism industry around the fish.

Two new studies from the scientists say that although the fish is a mystery, with almost nothing known about it, there may be ways to commercialise it that benefit local communities.

The team brought together researchers from diverse fields including fisheries science, ecosystem ecology, natural resource management, governance, tourism, economics, business management, and social science.

JCU's Dr Ronnie Baker said the paper by the group in the *Fish and Fisheries* journal was a roadmap for others looking to do the same thing. "It's the first paper on how sportfishing tourism can work in developing countries for the benefit of the people and see economic benefits go directly to undeveloped areas," he said.

Dr Baker said many places with great sportfishing potential were isolated areas where local people retained effective control over the land and resources, which was both an opportunity and a challenge, and underlined the most basic lesson the group had learned. "In these places, if the local people are not on board and won't benefit - it won't work," he said.

The companion paper by the group in the *Fisheries Management and Ecology* journal found only patchy records on almost all aspects of the Black Bass' biology and ecology, with even the extent of its global distribution uncertain.

Professor Marcus Sheaves, the project leader, said the first step in implementing an effective fisheries management strategy would be to fill in the gaps in knowledge about the fish.

"Our ongoing project is providing the PNG government with the critical knowledge needed to sustainably manage and develop a sportfishery into the future," he said.

Dr Amy Diedrich, the social science leader of the project, said the multi-disciplinary nature of the collaboration was key.

"For PNG to realise the goal of a sportfishing industry providing sustainable alternative livelihoods and promoting conservation, it is critical to mesh together [fisheries](#) ecology with a clear understanding of the economic and social benefits and consequences of its development."

The team works in partnership with the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority (NFA) and is supported by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). The project is expected to run for another ten years.

**More information:** M. Sheaves et al. The conservation status of Niugini black bass: a world-renowned sport fish with an uncertain future, *Fisheries Management and Ecology* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/fme.12153](#)

Provided by James Cook University

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