

Study exposes misperception of poaching on the GBR and its remedy

February 20 2018



Coral trout over a *Porites* bommie, Heron Island, Aug. 2016. Coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*) is the most targeted poaching species on the Great Barrier Reef. Credit: ARC CoE for Coral Reef Studies/ Molly Scott

New research has revealed the tiny minority of fishers who poach on the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) think the illegal practice is justified, because they believe "everyone else is doing it."

Researchers at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Coral Reef Studies at James Cook University asked nearly 700 recreational fishers at boat ramps in Townsville about their perceptions of poaching (i.e. fishing in no-take zones).

PhD candidate Brock Bergseth led the study, and said the results were overwhelmingly encouraging.

"97 percent of fishers thought poaching was personally unacceptable, and most supported enforcement of the rules. But a small number did not."

Mr Bergseth said the 21 self-admitted poachers thought poaching occurred much more often than did non-poachers.

"People involved in illicit activities such as illegal drug use and drink driving are more prone to overestimate the prevalence of their behaviour in society. This 'false consensus effect' often allows offenders to justify their actions - they think it's ok because everyone else is doing it. Our data suggest that this effect may also be occurring among poachers in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP)."

He said it was a dangerous trend, because fishers who know poachers can also be 'contaminated' if they begin to think the bad behavior is widespread.



Despite a common misconception, the vast majority of recreational fishers in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park follow the rules. Credit: ARC CoE for Coral Reef Studies/ Brock Bergseth

"People who know a poacher have significantly higher estimates of the level of poaching compared to fishers that don't know poachers. This implies that these fishers believe that poaching is more common than fishers who do not associate with poachers."

Mr Bergseth said 13 percent of fishers reported knowing someone who had poached within the past 12 months.

"In all, this study showed how numerous misperceptions are probably supporting the continuation of poaching on the GBR. If left unchecked,

these misperceptions could lead to a cascading effect that encourages further poaching."

Mr Bergseth said the research pointed to a way of addressing the problem.

"There are three specific messages that could be communicated to poachers. First, that nearly every recreational fisher thinks that poaching is socially and morally unacceptable. Secondly, it is really important for everyone to know that almost all recreational [fishers](#) follow the rules - [poachers](#) are just a small minority that people don't respect. And lastly, the likelihood of getting detected while poaching is high, as are the consequences - the fine for poaching in a no-take zone is \$2100."

More information: Brock J. Bergseth et al. Discerning the culture of compliance through recreational fisher's perceptions of poaching, *Marine Policy* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.marpol.2017.12.022](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2017.12.022)

Provided by ARC Centre of Excellence in Coral Reef Studies

Citation: Study exposes misperception of poaching on the GBR and its remedy (2018, February 20) retrieved 8 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-exposes-misperception-poaching-gbr-remedy.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--