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(also Sunday, November 19, 2017 Perth: "Locals see threat to pristine gulf")

<https://www.westernangler.com.au/articles/sunday-times-column/929-anglers-travel-from-across-the-globe-to-catch-permit-around-exmouth>

Sunday Times Column



Anglers travel from across the globe to catch permit around Exmouth

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Exmouth Gulf would have to be one of my favourite places to fish.

Although some would view it as a poor relation to the spectacular bluewater fishing on offer in the area, the gulf has a magical appeal all of its own and holds a special place in the heart of many visiting and local anglers.

In recent years I've been lucky enough to fish it at least once a year and it never ceases to amaze, offering exciting shallow water fishing around its edges for giant trevally, queenfish, golden trevally, permit and even barramundi.

There's also the fishing out around the shoals for spanish mackerel, longtail tuna, trevally, coral trout and even sailfish at certain times of the year.

It's a piscatorial paradise for sportfishing and when you throw in the regular encounters with whales, dugongs, turtles, rays and dolphins and it's just an addictive place to wet a line.

The gulf also plays an important role as a fish nursery for many species, so it's easy to understand why some locals have expressed concern about a new proposal to build a pipe-building facility on its unspoiled shores.

Under the Subsea 7 plan Heron Point, a popular camping spot for locals at the entrance to the Bay of Rest near Learmonth, will be the site of a 435-hectare industrial development to assist the oil and gas industry.

Infrastructure at the site would include a rock groyne and railway tracks into the water and the production facility for the pipes, which would then be dragged to offshore locations.

Well-known Exmouth fly fishing guide Brett Wolf, who runs True Blue Bonefish, is among those who has spoken out against the plan.

Brett is worried about several aspects of the plan, including the implications of opening up the largely untouched gulf to industrial development, the impact of dredging during construction and the dragging of the pipes through the gulf once they are ready to be deployed offshore.

He is aghast at the proposed location development, which he said could occur closer to town and the established industrial area.

“Our concern is the hugely detrimental impact it will have on our pristine marine environment as well as the future of the tourism industry in Exmouth and Ningaloo,” he said.

“The proposed Subsea 7 project will invade and destroy some of the best recreational fishing waters available in the world.

“It will impact heavily on the huge tourism market our great recreational fishing provides here in the gulf and the visual impact of this project alone will be immense.

“Just imagine taking high-end clients to a place where instead of wilderness there’s an industrial site like Kwinana, and instead of pristine sandy beach at Heron Point there’s a huge rocky groyne with a railway line.

“Out on our precious fishing grounds tug boats will be waiting to drag the massive pipe structure across the sensitive seabed.

“Then they’ll tow them right up the Gulf.

“Every part of that is a tourism disaster for us.”

Although some in the town support the project, Brett said the issue had united anglers and conservation groups.

While much of Exmouth Gulf is largely untouched, it does currently support a commercial prawn fishery and this week controversial plans for a salt mine in the gulf resurfaced.

Many locals like Brett believe the gulf is the “engine room” for the nearby Ningaloo Reef and that they’ve largely been kept in the dark in the Subsea 7 planning process.

Although the most recent Environmental Protection Authority public comment period closed last Sunday, it is expected there will be at least one more chance for the public to outline their concerns during the approvals process.

For more information on the process visit www.epa.wa.gov.au/proposals/learmonth-bundle-site or www.ccg.org.au/projects

Locals interested in learning more can attend an information night being held by Subsea 7 at the Ningaloo Centre from 5.30pm on November 23.

Caption: Anglers travel from across the globe to catch permit around Exmouth. Mark Turner caught this one near Heron Point, which is earmarked for a pipe-building facility.