

.....and some comments

## OFFICIAL LINE

I would like to address misleading assertions in your report (Call to protect weedy sea dragons, 31/3) and in Robyn Benken's letter (Weedy sea dragons in need of help, 5/4).

Ms Benken's letter says that 1572 Sygnathids were collected in WA in 2007-08. The weedy sea dragon is only one member of the Sygnathid family — which also includes pipefish and sea horses — so including weedy sea dragons with these other species, in this context, serves only to muddy the waters.

Your report said that 30 weedy sea dragons are taken by licensed fishers in WA every year. In fact, Department of Fisheries data indicates that only 36 weedy sea dragons were taken in the four-year period 2005-08, an average of nine a year.

The Department of Fisheries is committed to ensuring sustainable fisheries, including the marine aquarium fishery. The take of Sygnathids in the fishery is reported annually by the department and has been assessed as sustainable by the Australian Government Department of Environment, Heritage and the Arts.

Weedy sea dragons live over a wide area of southern Australia from the central NSW coast to around Geraldton and to depths of around 50m. They may not be taken from the sanctuary zones of marine parks and fish habitat protection areas, such as at Cottesloe. To suggest that an average take of nine weedy sea dragons a year is not sustainable is ill-founded.

**Heather Brayford, director,  
Aquatic Management,  
Department of Fisheries.**

Is Ms Brayford not aware that these 'assertions' are based on Information given by the Department of Fisheries?

This number of 30 weedy sea dragons annually was given to the West Australian by the Dep of Fisheries. The Department originally told me that about 200 weedies were taken every year! Now the figure is suddenly reduced to only nine per annum without any explanation. What are we supposed to believe?

Does it not muddy the waters if the endangered weedies are not reported specifically?

The truth is that nobody knows how many weedies are taken! Firstly, why is Ms Brayford so sure that licensed operators report all catches, and secondly, why is she not admitting that anybody can catch weedies legally, if they are not sold officially.

It seems ill-founded to declare any take of weedy seadragons 'sustainable' if it is clear that no-one has reliable population figures and nobody knows how many are actually taken! Also, Ms Brayford ignores an expert like Professor Gary Kendrick of WA Oceans Institute who has called for increased protection of weedies in the article she comments on.

If this figure of only nine weedies a year is true it could indicate that the weedies are truly endangered! Americans will pay \$6,000 per weedy!! What argument could there possibly be against protecting weedies in Western Australia.