



P.O. Box 630  
NARRABEEN NSW  
2101

16th January 2006

The Letters Editor,  
The Manly Daily,  
26 Sydney Road,  
Manly NSW 2095

Your article "Bringing species secrets to the surface" (MD January 12), which describes the use of volunteer divers to survey fish population in Sydney Harbour and along the NSW coast, is of concern for two reasons.

Firstly, sampling to be used in any research requires expertise in that field in both the procedures that will be used, the application of these procedures and a knowledge of the applicability and limitations of the sampling to the field being studied. Sampling has many pitfalls and various types of sampling programs are associated with their own limitations in the use of the data obtained, with the resultant limitations and cautions in any interpretations and conclusions. Upon reading this article, AAG contacted local marine biologist Dr Marcus Lincoln-Smith of the Ecology Lab who had this to say: "I heard an interview about this on the ABC yesterday and it made my blood boil. I did my MSc on underwater fish surveys and I can tell you that to do anything that will yield meaningful results requires considerable expertise."

Secondly is the fact that apparently NSW DPI (Fisheries) will be accepting these results and incorporating them into the BioNet database, which is used by decision makers that need information on the range and abundance of marine life along the NSW coast. These decision makers are likely to include scientists and managers from both DPI Fisheries and the Marine Parks Authority.

There is an old adage used in statistical analysis that has been extended to the use of databases, spreadsheets and the like with advent of personal computers, "garbage in, garbage out". There is no doubting the sincerity of these volunteers, and even the need for underwater fish surveys, but any data obtained for scientific studies for use in decision

making processes must be undertaken by those with the appropriate expertise and qualifications so correct conclusions and informed decisions can be made.

Yours sincerely

Phillip Ingram  
President  
Anglers Action Group