



Conservation and Fisheries Directorate, Ascension Island Government
Policy on Inshore Fisheries Registration and Licencing in
Ascension

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ISSUE DATE:	5th December 2022
VERSION NO:	V0.1
STATUS:	Draft
DATE OF LAST REVIEW:	
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW:	

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Background

Recreational and subsistence fishing

The sea plays a prominent role in Ascension life and fishing is part of the identity of many people on the island. Fishing for food and recreation is carried out by people living on Ascension and visitors to the island. Small boats moored at Georgetown are used to fish with rod and line up to around 3NM from the shore. Rod and line fishing also takes place from the coast (rock fishing), and spear fishing using SCUBA or while freediving is also practised.

Sports fishing

Ascension has a world class reputation for its sports fishing, which is defined here as a commercial operation where the main purpose is the experience of catching fish, and the fish caught could either be retained or released following capture. In practice, the dividing line between this and recreational fishing is not always clear and the same boat can take friends and family on a non-commercial basis as well as paying customers. At the extreme, however, there are dedicated sports fishing businesses that have charged international clients several thousand pounds for the opportunity to fish around Ascension with most customers flying in from Europe or the USA.

No sports fishing businesses have operated on Ascension since the suspension of the South Atlantic Airbridge in 2017. Businesses are keen to return once the runway is repaired and frequent direct flights to the UK restored.

The Governor has powers to prohibit fishing anywhere in Ascension's waters, unless it is authorised by a license.

The sports fishing boats that operated out of Georgetown until 2017 primarily target tuna and billfish by rod or spear fishing out to around 3NM from the coast. Other pelagic species such as wahoo, dorado, jacks are also fished and when fishing is poor grouper and eel may be taken too.

Potential impacts of fisheries

The fishing pressure on Ascension is constrained by the small size of the island population and limited routes for export, but that doesn't prevent all risk of damage to inshore fish stocks

Context

This policy is one of two (alongside the Inshore Fisheries: Stock Assessment and Management Measures Policy) that implements the Ascension Inshore Fisheries Management Strategy. The Strategy sets out how the inshore fisheries around Ascension will be managed to secure social, economic and environmental objectives.

Issue

The small absolute size of Ascension's shallow water habitat and the island's isolation from other similar habitats make Ascension's fish stocks inherently vulnerable. Species such as rockhind grouper, moray eel, glasseye snapper and spiny lobster that are tied to shallow water may have very limited distribution and little capacity for replenishment if stocks are severely depleted.

The Ascension inshore fishery is made up of many individuals who mostly catch small amounts of fish. This is in contrast to other places where there may be a small number of dominant players in a fishery. To effectively manage a fishery like Ascension's, all members of the fishing community need to be included to ensure that good data can be gathered from the fishery and any new management measures can be communicated to everyone who needs to know about them. At present, there is no means of knowing who on the island is fishing, and so that essential two-way flow of information cannot occur.

Visitors to the island and businesses have a greater potential to impact Ascension's fish stocks and marine environment either because they do not have a long-term stake in the health of the fishery or because their level of exploitation will be higher than an individual. There is currently no means of imposing requirements on visitors or businesses to ensure they fish in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Principles and Objectives

The objective of inshore fisheries management is to create a fishery that is sustainable in the long-term and does not have a negative impact on Ascension's marine environment so that future generations have the same fishing and recreational opportunities enjoyed today.

The objective of the registration scheme is that it will provide a guide to AIG as to how many people are regularly fishing in Ascension. This, combined with reporting of catches by those registered being actively encouraged, and compulsory for those who are licensed, will assist in a proactive and sustainable management of Ascension's fish stocks. The conditions applied to licences will ensure those who do not necessarily have a long-term interest in the health of Ascension's fisheries are obliged to fish in a responsible manner.

The principles that will guide the Inshore Fisheries Registration and Licensing System are:

- Young people are excluded from the need to register or obtain a licence to reduce any barriers to them taking up fishing.
- People living on Ascension have an interest in the long-term health of the island's fish stocks and are more likely to fish responsibly. Therefore licences are not required for this group. To ensure there is a thriving fishery that everyone on Ascension benefits

from, there is no cost and a very low administrative burden for people living on the island with registration made as simple as possible.

- Visitors to the island and businesses have a greater potential to impact Ascension's fish stocks and marine environment and so it is reasonable to impose greater requirements on them through a licensing system. Conditions applied to licences ensure visitors and businesses understand what constitutes responsible fishing on Ascension and are obliged to fish in this manner. By this means individuals or businesses who may not have a long-term stake in the health of Ascension's fisheries are still required to act in a manner that protects them.
- The licence fees are designed to ensure that those making the most money from Ascension's fishing resource (sports fishing businesses) contribute the most to the island.
- The licence fees for visitors, local retail fish businesses and researchers are low because we want to encourage these activities as part of thriving fishing and research sectors that operate sustainably.
- Nobody living on Ascension will be prevented from registering to fish and so there will be no limit on the number of people who can register. If in the future the fishing pressure is too great, then this will be managed by limiting the number of fish each person can take in a fair way rather than barring access to the fishery for people who live on Ascension.
- The number of licences for visitors or businesses may be restricted if the level of exploitation needs to be reduced to protect fish stocks. This will prevent visitors and businesses from fishing at the expense of individuals living on Ascension. Business licences may also be restricted if it is felt that competition between companies needs to be managed to maximise the socio-economic benefit to the island.

Application of Policy

Eligibility for registration and licences

People aged under 18 are not required to register or obtain a licence to fish in Ascension.

People with a contract to work on Ascension lasting six months or more and their dependents would be eligible to register to fish, and not require a licence.

All Visitors and short-term contractors require a visitor fishing licence to fish in Ascension's waters by any means. Licences have to be issued to the named individual and cannot be issued to an employer, friend or family member on behalf of an individual. This is to ensure that an individual receives information about any restrictions and takes personal responsibility for their actions.

Everybody aboard a boat engaged in fishing activity must either be exempt from needing a licence (because they come under the definition of living on Ascension) or have a visitor licence. This would not apply to boat trips where no fishing takes place. This is necessary for enforcement purposes.

Fishing businesses operating in Ascension require a business licence. Businesses are defined as commercial enterprises designed to generate an income. Boat owners taking friends out fishing and receiving a contribution towards the running costs of the boat would not be classed as a business.

Paid employees of a business can fish under the business licence while at work, but must either register (if they have a contract to work on Ascension lasting more than six months) or obtain a visitor licence if they wish to fish outside of work.

There are different licences for retail and sports fishing businesses. Retail businesses generate income by selling the fish caught. Fish can only be sold on Ascension and the export of fish for sale is prohibited.

A sports fishing business is defined as a commercial operation where the main purpose is the experience of catching fish, and the fish caught could either be retained or released following capture. Each client of a sports fishing business must have a licence that is obtained by the business on the client's behalf. The business is responsible for ensuring the client complies with the conditions of the licence.

Fishing without an appropriate licence, or registration, (where the person is not under the age of 18) will be an offence.

Registration

Registration requires the simple act of signing a register once a year. An annual sign up event will be organised and reminders circulated to encourage compliance. A two-month grace period at the start of each year will allow for people on leave, and new arrivals or people taking up fishing for the first time will be able to sign up at any time during the year. There is no limit on the number of eligible people (those with contracts longer than 6 months) who can register and no conditions will be applied to registration.

Registration cost

There is no cost to registering and AIG will never seek to impose a cost.

Legislation will state that a fee will not be charged for registration. This will not be altered without a recommendation from the Island Council and representatives of the fishing community. The aim is to provide complete reassurance that there will never be any charge for registration now or in the future.

Issuing of licences

Any sports fishing sector operating on Ascension must be well-managed, compatible with the objectives of the MPA and contribute socio-economic benefits to the island.

The Director of Fisheries will decide whether to grant a fishing business licence.

When considering whether to grant a fishing licence for a business, the Director of Fisheries will consider:

- (i) Whether fish stocks are healthy enough to sustain additional exploitation

(ii) Undertakings from the applicant that they will comply with AIG best practice guidance and make an additional contribution to the island community

(iii) Past record of compliance and behaviour of any individuals associated with the application

Visitor licences will be in the form of photographic cards and issued at the Post Office. These will be issued to any applicant on production of a completed application form and the required fee. Temporary licence lasting up to three days may be issued by the Shipping Office or accommodation providers where visitors arrive at times when the Post Office is closed, but a full photo licence must be obtained from the Post Office at the first opportunity.

There will be no grace period and all visitors must obtain a temporary or full licence prior to fishing.

Ordinarily there will be no limit on number of business or visitor licences that can be issued and any need to control fisheries exploitation rates will preferentially be achieved through other management measures such as closed seasons or bag limits. However, the Director of Fisheries may decide to restrict the number of licences issued if fish stocks are in very poor health.

Licence period

Visitor licences will be for a period of up to 12 months, but for no longer than the person is eligible to remain in Ascension under the Entry Control Policy.

Ordinarily business licences will be for a period of 12 months, but the Director of Fisheries has discretion to issue licences for a longer period if that is required to secure significant larger investment that would benefit the island.

Visiting sports fishing vessel licences will be for a period of one month. Applications can be made for multiple consecutive licences if a visit lasts longer than a month.

Sports fishing client licences will be for a period of one week. Applications can be made for multiple consecutive licences if a visit lasts longer than a week.

Licence costs

Licence costs are designed to ensure that those making the most money from Ascension's fishing resource (sports fishing businesses) contribute the most to the island. License costs may vary accounting for a number of matters, including the size of the boat, the equipment used, or the methods of fishing authorised by the terms of the license.

The current proposed licence costs are:

Category	Registration or licence	Time period	Cost
Under 18s	None required	-	Free
People ordinarily resident on Ascension and their dependants	Registration	Annual	Free
Visitors/short term contractors	Licence	Up to 12 months	£10

Visiting sports fishing vessel	Licence	Up to 30 days	£2,500
Sports fishing business licenced on Ascension	Licence	Annual	£2,000
Sports fishing client	Licence	Weekly	£50
Retail fish businesses	Licence	Annual	£50
Scientific research fishing	Licence	Annual	£100

Licence costs are required to be in legislation. This may be reviewed at any time, and will be reviewed at a minimum of every two years. Changes to licence costs will be made where they are necessary to ensure Ascension attracts fishing visitors, maximises income generation for the island and keeps costs in line with similar fisheries in other countries.

Licence Conditions

The Director of Fisheries may impose conditions on a licence, for certain purposes. Conditions for a license may authorise fishing generally, in specified areas, or at specified times. Template licence conditions are given in the Appendix.

As far as possible, licence conditions will be consistent within each licence category, but the Director of Fisheries can impose specific conditions for an individual licence when it is deemed necessary to protect fish stocks or marine ecosystems, or to ensure the business operates safely and generates socio-economic benefits for the island.

Any licence applicant who is unhappy with the conditions imposed on their licence may appeal to the Administrator for a review.

Licence Renewal

At the end of a licence period, a business or individual may apply to renew a licence. When deciding whether to renew a licence the Director of Fisheries will consider:

- (i) Compliance with conditions of previous licence
- (ii) Adherence to AIG best practice guidance during previous licence period
- (iii) Whether fish stocks are healthy enough to sustain additional exploitation
- (iv) Undertakings from the applicant that they will comply with AIG best practice guidance and make an additional contribution to the island community in the next licence period.

Grounds for the Director of Fisheries to refuse to renew a licence include:

- (i) A breach of any previous licence conditions
- (ii) A sports fishing business that repeatedly lands undersize billfish on the basis they may be record attempts will not have its licence renewed. This is defined as more than three landings of billfish that are less than 90% of the current weight record for that species.
- (iii) The conviction of a licence holder for an offence relevant to the operation of a business or conduct of fishing activities

(iv) Unsafe practices and behaviours that endangers people living on Ascension or visitors to the island

(v) Practices or behaviours that threaten the reputation of AIG or Ascension Island

Any applicant whose licence renewal is refused may appeal to the Administrator for a review.

Revocation of licences

The Director of Fisheries may revoke a licence before the end of the licence period.

Grounds for the Director of Fisheries to refuse to revoke a licence include:

- (i) A serious breach of licence conditions
- (ii) The conviction of a licence holder for an offence relevant to the operation of a business or conduct of fishing activities
- (iii) Unsafe practices and behaviours that endangers people living on Ascension or visitors to the island
- (iv) Practices or behaviours that threaten the reputation of AIG or Ascension Island

Any licence holder whose licence is revoked may appeal to the Administrator for a review.

Enforcement of licence conditions

Failure to comply with licence conditions will be an offence. The purpose of this is to ensure that fishing in Ascension is carried out in a sustainable fashion.

Enforcement will be carried out by Fishery Protection Officers warranted under the Fisheries (Management and Conservation) Ordinance, 2015 and police officers.

Enforcement action is always be carried out with proportionality, consistency and accountability to ensure it is fair, and with a view to encouraging compliance, rather than punishing those who have made innocent mistakes.

For less serious breaches, enforcement action will escalate if there are repeated breaches. A guide to those enforcing the legislation with regard to minor breached would be the following:

- 1st breach – provide information and a deadline to remedy the situation;
- 2nd breach or failure to remedy 1st breach within deadline – issue a formal warning;
- 3rd breach – suspend licence or refuse to issue new licence for set period of time;
- 4th breach - prosecution with the potential for a fine or imprisonment.

For the most serious breaches prosecution will be considered in the first instance. Serious breaches would involve a complete disregard for multiple licence conditions or actions that endanger the safety of people or pose a significant threat to Ascension's marine environment. Examples of serious breaches include chumming near swimming beaches or the repeated landing of blue marlin below the 251cm minimum landing size.

How fishing business licences relate to other permits and licences

All sports fishing and retail fishing businesses require a business permit to operate in Ascension in addition to a business fishing licence. These must be applied for separately and a business will need to comply with the conditions of both the licence and permit. The AIG Conservation and Resources Directorates will work to ensure that the conditions applied to fishing licences and business permits are complimentary and consistent with all of AIG's strategic objectives.

A fishing business that operates a vessel will also require a vessel licence issued under regulation 10 of the Harbours (Ascension) Regulations, 2010. The person in charge of the relevant vessel will also be required to have a Coxswain licence, in accordance with the regulation 14 of the Harbours (Ascension) Regulations, 2010. This is in addition to the fishing licence and business permit and is aimed at ensuring good safety standards.

Publicising the need for a licence

The need for a fishing licence will be well publicised to ensure high compliance. This will be achieved by:

- (i) Informing fishing businesses when they contact AIG or apply for a business permit
- (ii) Providing information with every tourist visa issued
- (iii) All employing organisations will be asked to forward information to short-term workers (including the RAF detachment)
- (iv) Placing posters aimed at visitors at the Airhead, Pierhead, accommodation providers and public noticeboards
- (v) Providing information on the AIG and Ascension MPA websites

Appendix – Example conditions for inshore fisheries licences

Sports fishing business

- The licence holder must have in place mechanisms to ensure compliance with all regulations and management measures applied to the inshore fishery and take steps to ensure they are aware of any changes to these.
- No fish caught by the licence holder can be sold by the licence holder or through a third party.
- Catch and release of all billfish except world record attempts. Under no circumstances should blue marlin of less than 251cm lower jaw fork length, white marlin of less than 168cm or swordfish of less than 125cm or 25kg be landed.
- Catches of the following species are limited to the following per rod per week:
 - Yellowfin tuna - 2
 - Wahoo - 2
 - Dorado - 2
 - Rockhind (grouper) - 3
 - Eel (all species combined) - 3
 - Lobster (crayfish) - 2
- Spearguns (as defined by the Firearms Ordinance, 2020) cannot be used on SCUBA. This does not include handheld spears or lances.
- Chumming can only be carried out using chum sourced from Ascension Island. Chumming is defined as: *The release of chum (dead fish, fish parts or blood) into the water with the intention of attracting fish in order to aid fishing. The chum is not attached to fishing gear such as hooks or traps.*

No chumming is permitted within the areas identified on the map below.

MAP showing Pierhead and Clarence Bay, Comfortless and English Bay.

- All fish retained must be filleted onshore and the fish waste disposed of through island waste collection services.
- No fish aggregated devices (FADs) are permitted anywhere in the Ascension MPA.
- All employees must participate in a training briefing delivered by the Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD) that covers protected species and release of bycatch species.
- Catch data must be provided on the prescribed form to the AIGCFD every 6 months, on request or before departure from Ascension.
- The licence holder must allow the installation of remote electronic monitoring equipment on the fishing vessel if requested by AIGCFD. This equipment must not be tampered with.
- The licence holder must permit an observer to be present on the vessel if requested by AIGCFD.
- The licence holder must cooperate with all reasonable requests from AIGCFD or their research partners to participate in research projects being undertaken on Ascension. This includes the reporting of any tagged fish caught.
- Ascension Island Guidelines on wildlife watching and diving must be followed where applicable.

Retail fish business

- The licence holder must comply with all regulations and management measures applied to the inshore fishery and take steps to ensure they are aware of any changes to these.
- All fish caught must be filleted onshore and the fish waste disposed of through island waste collection services.
- No chumming is permitted anywhere in the Ascension MPA.
- No fish aggregated devices (FADs) are permitted anywhere in the Ascension MPA.
- Catch data must be provided on the prescribed form to the Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD) every 6 months or on request.
- The licence holder must cooperate with all reasonable requests to participate in research projects being undertaken on Ascension. This includes the reporting of any tagged fish caught.
- Ascension Island Guidelines on wildlife watching and diving must be followed where applicable.

Individual visitor

- The licence holder must comply with all regulations and management measures applied to the inshore fishery and take steps to ensure they are aware of any changes to these.
- No chumming is permitted anywhere in the Ascension MPA.
- No fish aggregated devices (FADs) are permitted anywhere in the Ascension MPA.
- Catch data must be provided on the prescribed form to the Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate (AIGCFD) at the end of the licence period.
- The licence holder must cooperate with all reasonable requests to participate in research projects being undertaken on Ascension. This includes the reporting of any tagged fish caught.
- Ascension Island Guidelines on wildlife watching and diving must be followed where applicable.