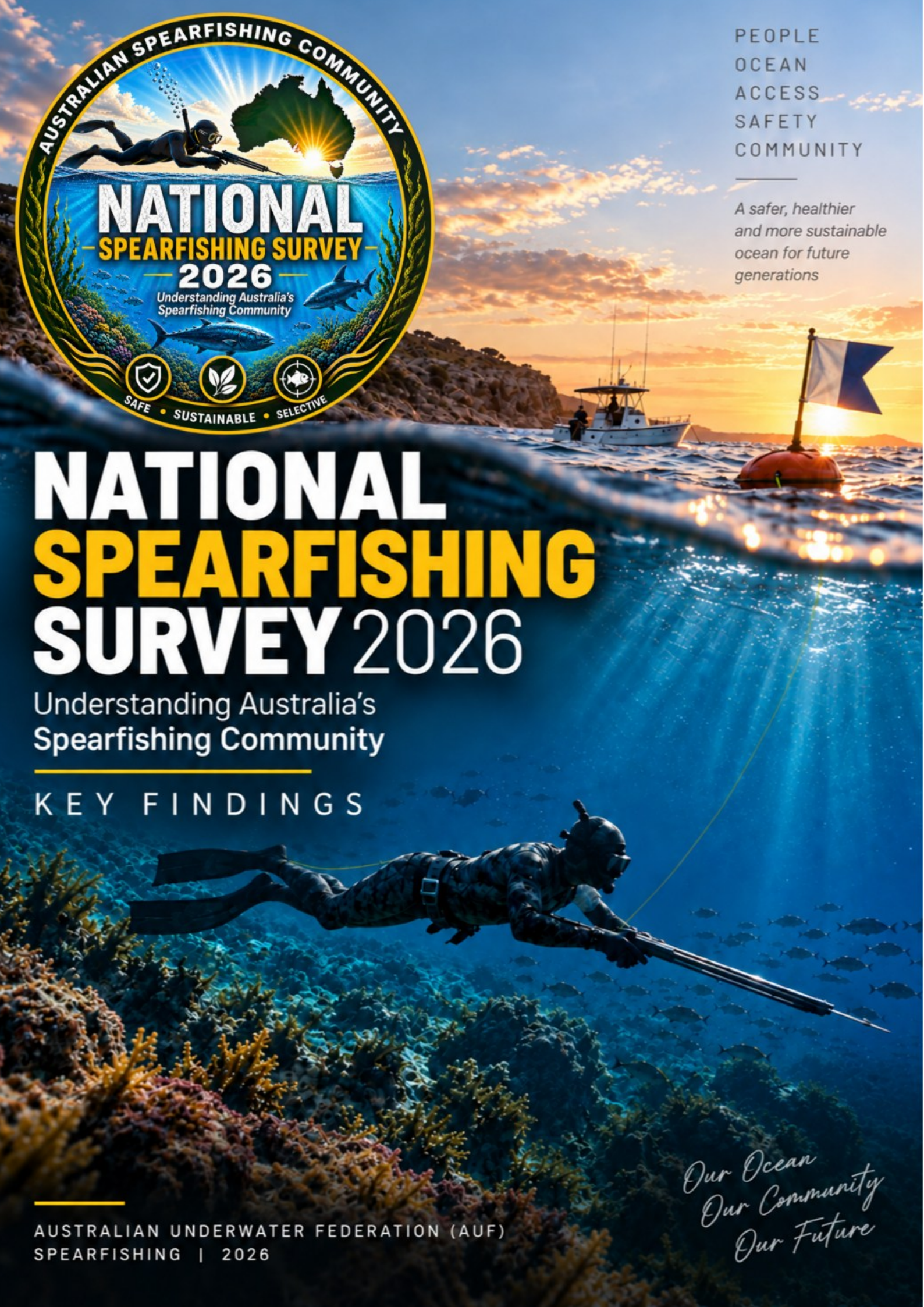


PEOPLE
OCEAN
ACCESS
SAFETY
COMMUNITY

A safer, healthier and more sustainable ocean for future generations

NATIONAL SPEARFISHING SURVEY 2026

Understanding Australia's **Spearfishing Community**

KEY FINDINGS

Our Ocean Our Community Our Future

AUSTRALIAN UNDERWATER FEDERATION (AUF)
SPEARFISHING | 2026

1. Executive Summary

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 received 616 responses from recreational spearfishers across Australia. The survey was undertaken nationally by Luke Randell and Dr Adam Smith, with support from spearfishing organisations, clubs and the wider community. It examined participation, economic contribution, health and wellbeing, shark interactions, safety, access and the future of spearfishing.

The findings reveal an experienced and engaged community whose participation extends well beyond harvesting seafood.

Five key findings

1. Spearfishing provides broad benefits. Respondents valued sustainable seafood, recreation, physical fitness, mental wellbeing, friendships and connection with nature. Some 94.0% agreed that spearfishing strengthened their connection with nature, 91.2% that it increased their appreciation of marine conservation and 86.9% that it helped build lasting friendships.

2. Participation supports communities and businesses. Some 88.6% had introduced another person to spearfishing. Participants also reported substantial expenditure on equipment, boats, fuel, maintenance and travel.

3. Shark interactions are a significant regional issue. Experiences varied considerably across Australia, with Queensland respondents reporting particularly frequent sightings and depredation. The findings support further research and practical safety initiatives.

4. Access and representation are major concerns. Loss of access to spearfishing areas was identified as a major challenge by 69.0% of respondents. Participants emphasised evidence-based management, consultation and effective representation.

5. The community remains optimistic. Despite these challenges, 61.3% were optimistic or very optimistic about the future of Australian spearfishing.

The survey provides an evidence base for improving safety, supporting research, strengthening representation and recognising the broader value of spearfishing.

2. About the Survey

The survey was conducted online between 1 September and 31 October 2026 and received 616 responses from across Australia.

Participation was voluntary and open to all recreational spearfishers, regardless of club membership or competition involvement. The survey was promoted through organisations, clubs, social media and individual participants.

Questions covered participation, expenditure, motivations, wellbeing, sharks, safety, citizen science, access and future priorities.

As a voluntary, self-selected survey, the results describe respondents rather than all Australian spearfishers. Responses were self-reported, and percentages generally reflect valid answers to individual questions. The findings should not be interpreted as independent evidence of fish stocks, shark populations or national economic impacts. More engaged spearfishers, including club members, may be overrepresented in the results, although the extent of any such bias cannot be determined.

3. Respondent Profile and Participation

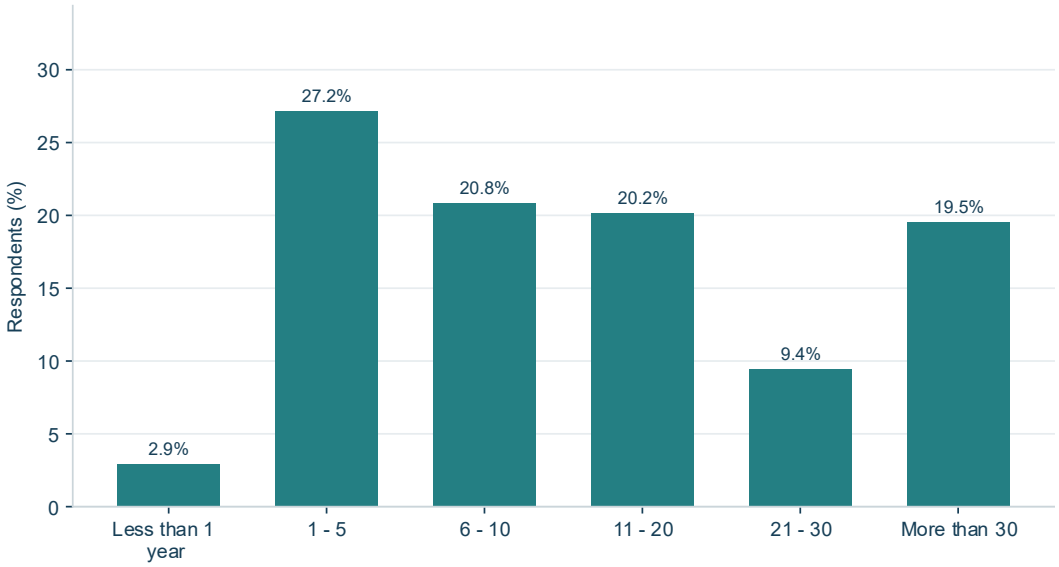
3.1 Experience and participation

The survey attracted respondents from across Australia, predominantly Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. Most were aged between 25 and 54, and the respondent group was largely male.

Many had been spearfishing for decades, providing considerable firsthand experience of Australia's marine environments.

Years of spearfishing experience

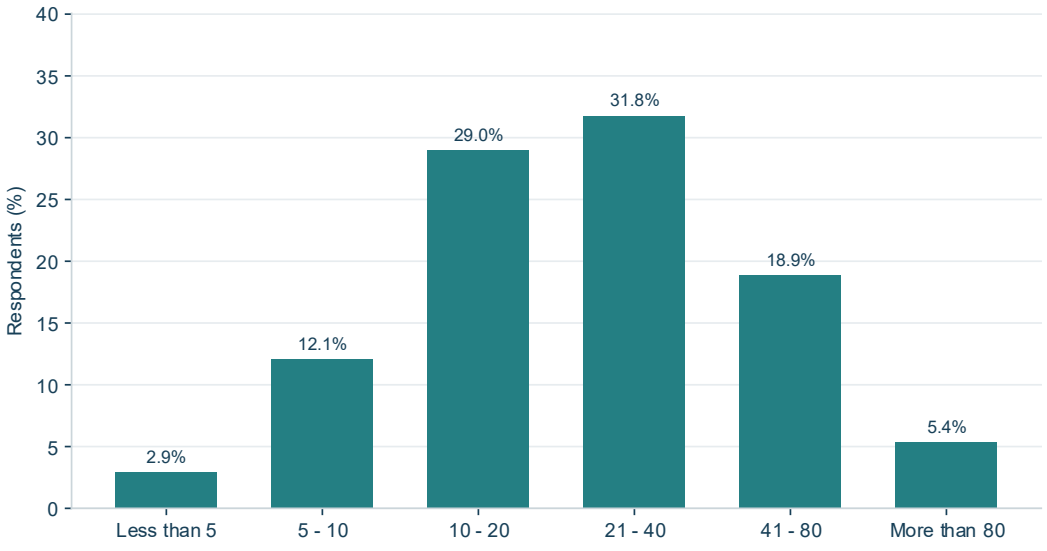
Valid responses: n = 615



Spearfishing encompasses shore, reef, offshore and bluewater diving. Participation ranged from occasional outings to regular diving throughout the year.

Annual spearfishing participation

Valid responses: n = 614



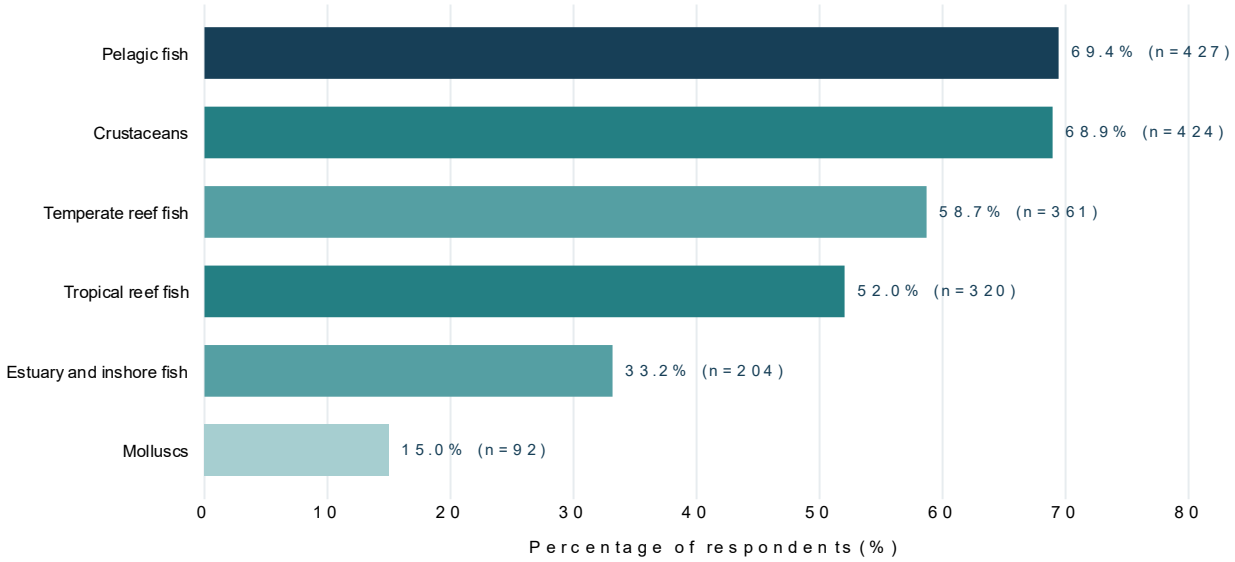
Almost half of respondents belonged to neither a spearfishing club nor the AUF, highlighting the importance of engaging independent recreational spearfishers alongside organised clubs and competitors.

3.2 Harvesting and sustainability

Respondents targeted a broad range of fish and seafood species, reflecting Australia's diverse marine environments.

Broad species groups targeted

Valid respondents: n = 615 | Multiple selections permitted (up to three)



Percentages are of respondents answering this question, not total selections. Categories below 1% omitted.

DID YOU KNOW?

Spearfishers can observe an individual fish before deciding whether to harvest it, allowing them to consider its species, size and suitability before taking a shot.

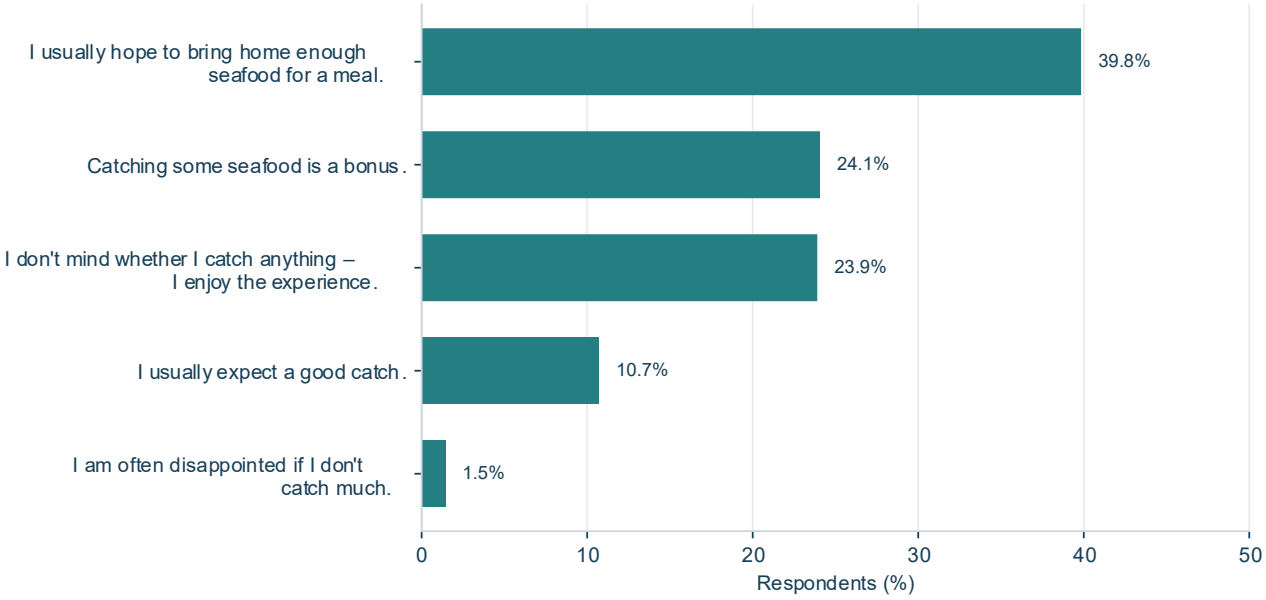
Sustainability was an important consideration. Spearfishing allows participants to observe individual fish before deciding whether to harvest them, including consideration of species, size and suitability.

Although harvesting seafood remains an important motivation, respondents did not generally regard catching fish as essential to an enjoyable outing.

'Spear fishing can be the most sustainable way to catch seafood. With education and the backing of science, rules and regulations should reflect that'

Expectations of catching seafood

Valid responses: n = 615



'Not everyone is out there chasing trophies. Most people I know just want to feed their family in a sustainable way from local resources'



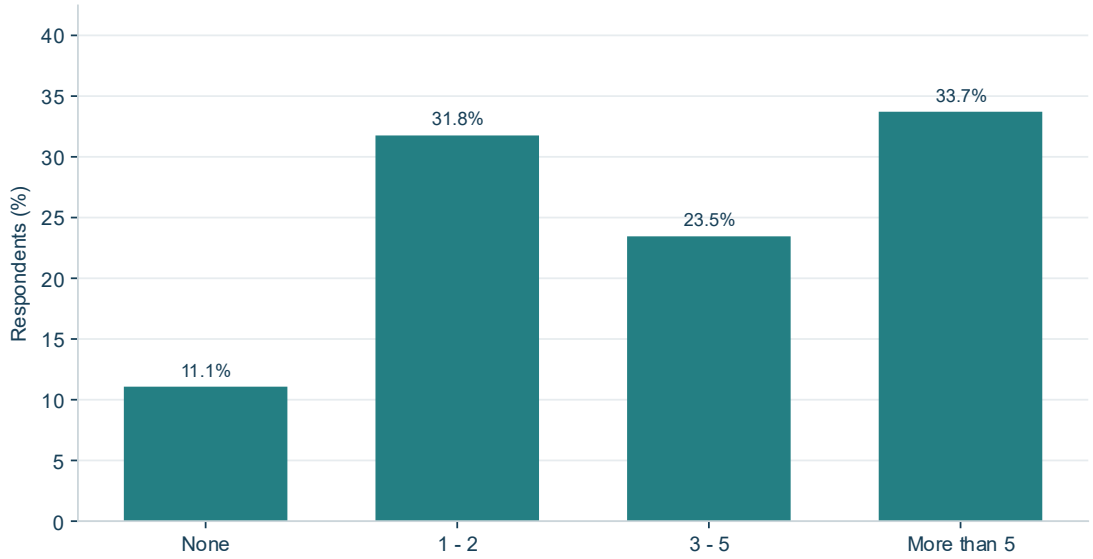
3.3 Travel and community

Spearfishers travel varying distances to reach suitable diving locations, including offshore grounds, with some undertaking interstate and overseas trips.

Participation is also strongly social. Most respondents dive with friends, family or regular companions, while 88.6% reported introducing at least one other person to spearfishing.

People introduced to spearfishing

Valid responses: n = 614



These informal networks play an important role in mentoring, safety education and passing knowledge between generations.

89%

Of respondents have introduced someone else to spearfishing

4. Economic Contribution

Spearfishing generates economic activity through equipment purchases, boating, fuel, maintenance, travel and associated services.

DID YOU KNOW?

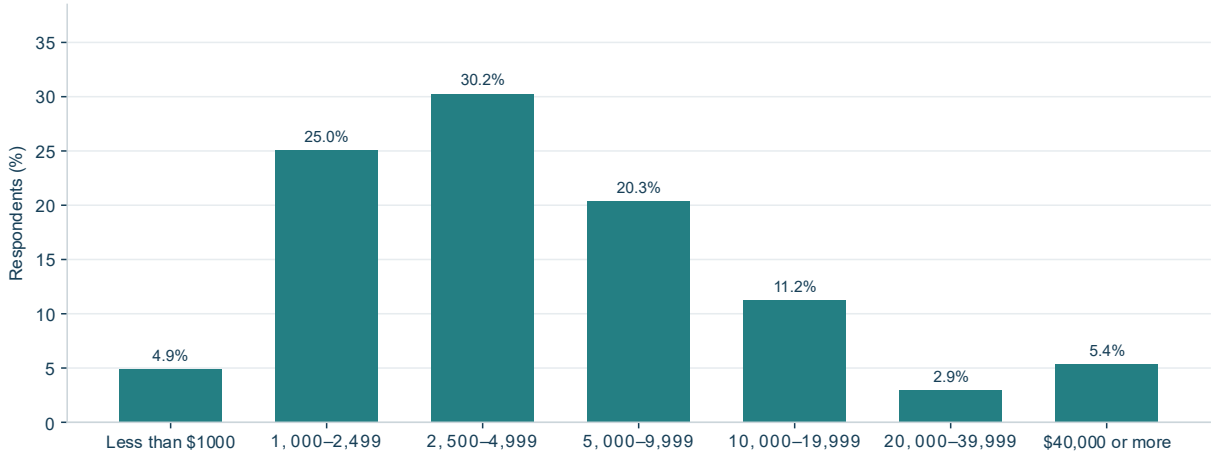
The economic contribution of spearfishing extends well beyond equipment purchases. Boat ownership, fuel, maintenance, travel and accommodation all contribute to expenditure associated with participation.

4.1 Equipment and marine investment

Respondents reported substantial accumulated investment in spearguns, wetsuits, fins and other specialist equipment.

Accumulated capital investment

Valid responses: n = 615



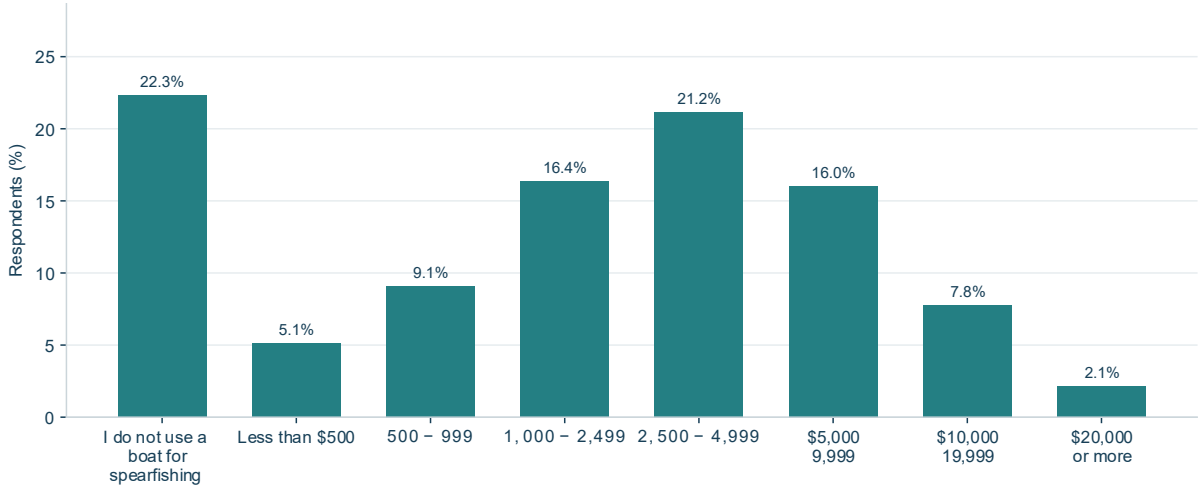
Many also own or use boats, trailers, personal watercraft, vehicles and marine electronics. Although these assets may support other recreational activities, they demonstrate spearfishing's connection with the broader marine industry.

4.2 Boat operating expenditure

Boat-based participation involves continuing expenditure on fuel, servicing, repairs, insurance and registration.

Annual boat operating expenditure

Valid responses: n = 605



Operating costs vary according to boat ownership, diving frequency and offshore travel distances. Additional expenditure arises through equipment replacement, transport, food, accommodation and longer trips.

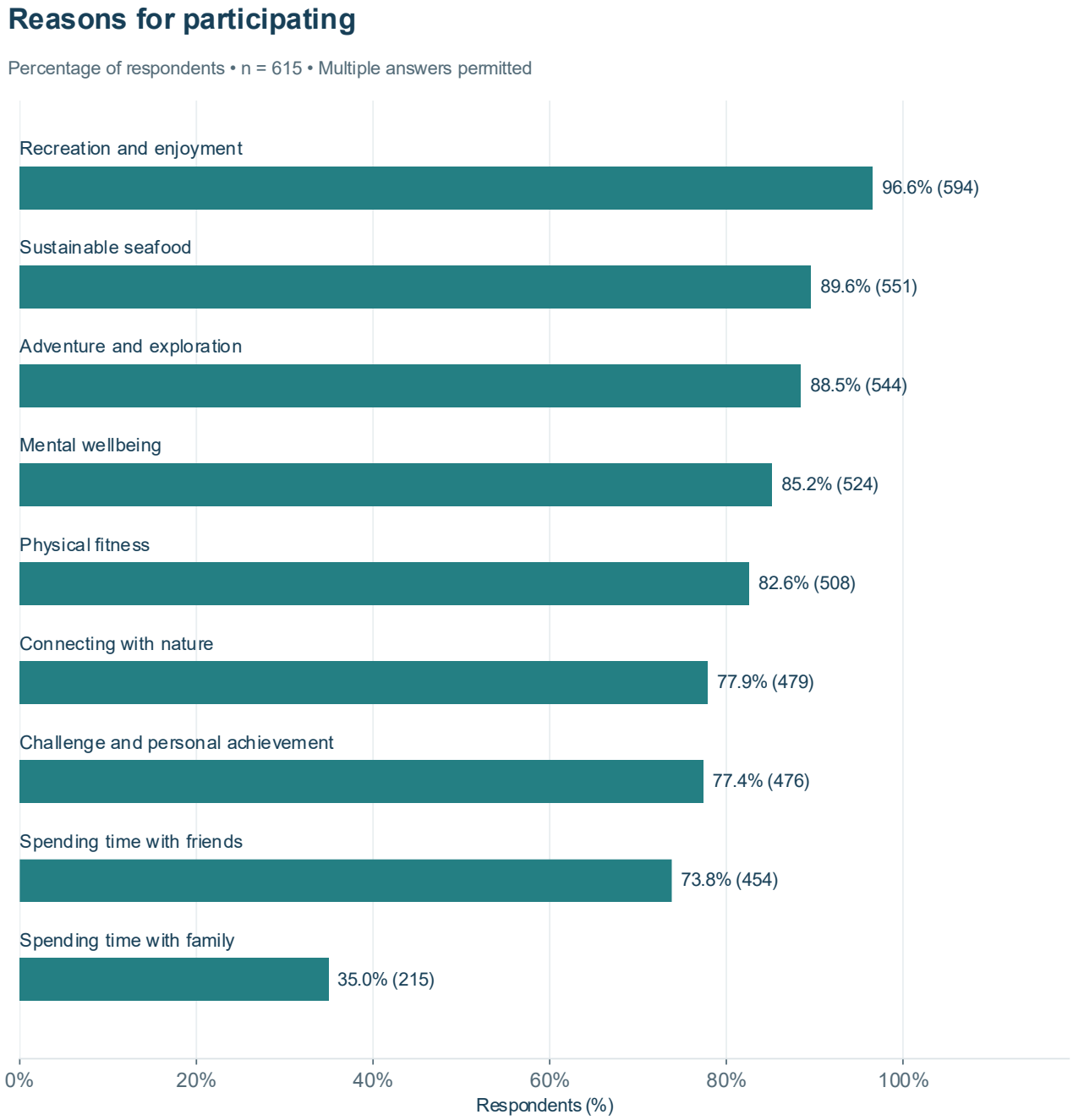
Respondents also expressed strong preferences for purchasing equipment through Australian retailers.

The survey was not designed to calculate national economic impacts. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that spearfishing supports economic activity extending well beyond the value of seafood harvested, including expenditure benefiting regional coastal communities.

5. Motivations, Health and Wellbeing

5.1 Reasons for participation

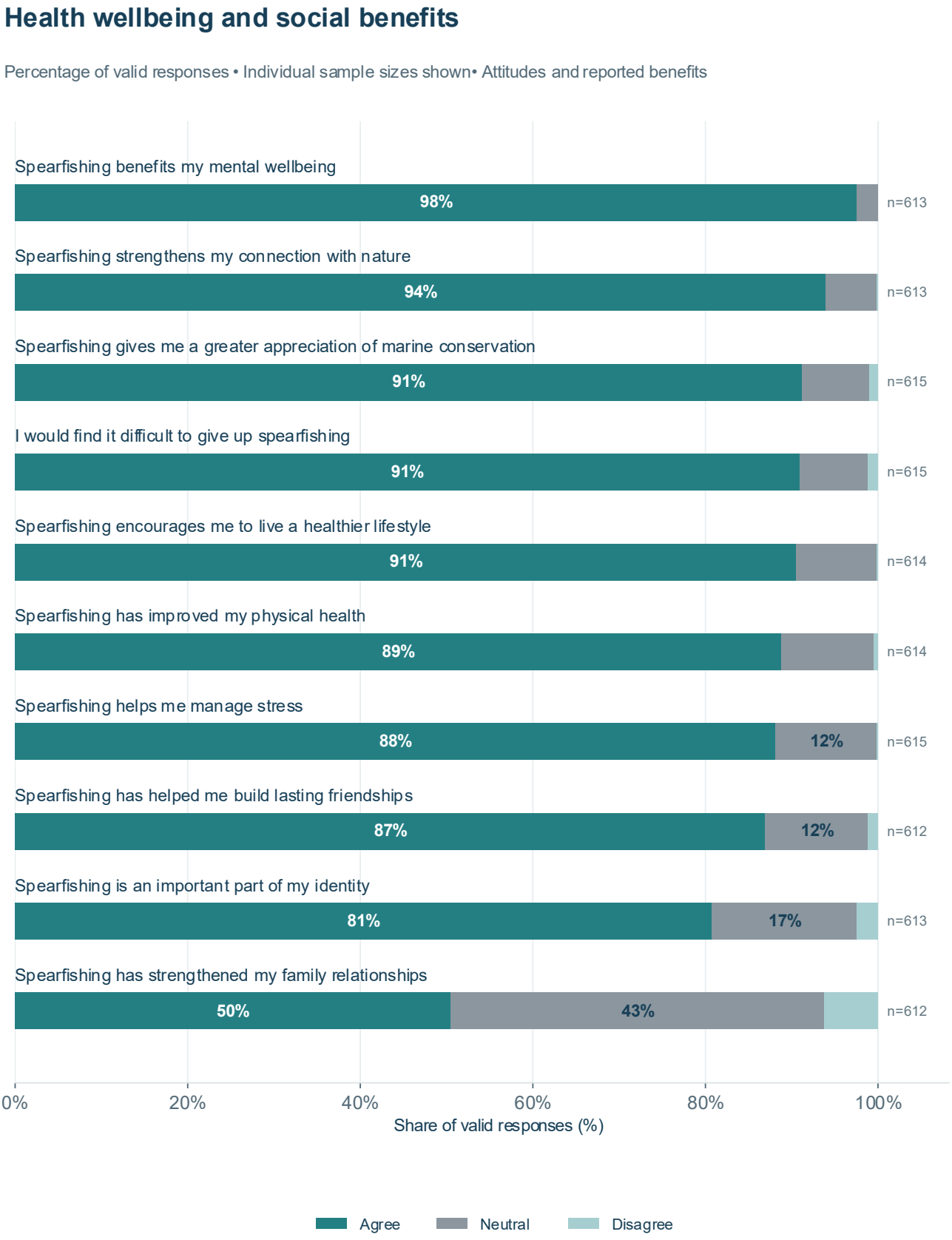
Respondents identified recreation, sustainable seafood, adventure, fitness, mental wellbeing, connection with nature and spending time with friends and family as important motivations.



These findings demonstrate that spearfishing's value cannot be measured solely by the quantity of seafood harvested.

5.2 Health and social benefits

Respondents reported substantial physical, psychological and social benefits from participation.



Some 94.0% agreed that spearfishing strengthened their connection with nature, 91.2% that it increased their appreciation of marine conservation and 86.9% that it helped build lasting friendships.

94%

Report that spearfishing strengthens their connection to nature

Although these are self-reported benefits rather than independently measured health outcomes, they demonstrate the importance of spearfishing to respondents' lifestyles and wellbeing.

These broader benefits deserve recognition when considering decisions affecting opportunities to participate.

'I'd be lost without the sport and my friends within it'

87%

Agree that spearfishing has helped them build lasting friendships

6. Sharks and Spearfishing

Shark interactions are an important issue for many Australian spearfishers. The survey examined sightings, adverse interactions, species encountered and measures used to manage risks.

DID YOU KNOW?

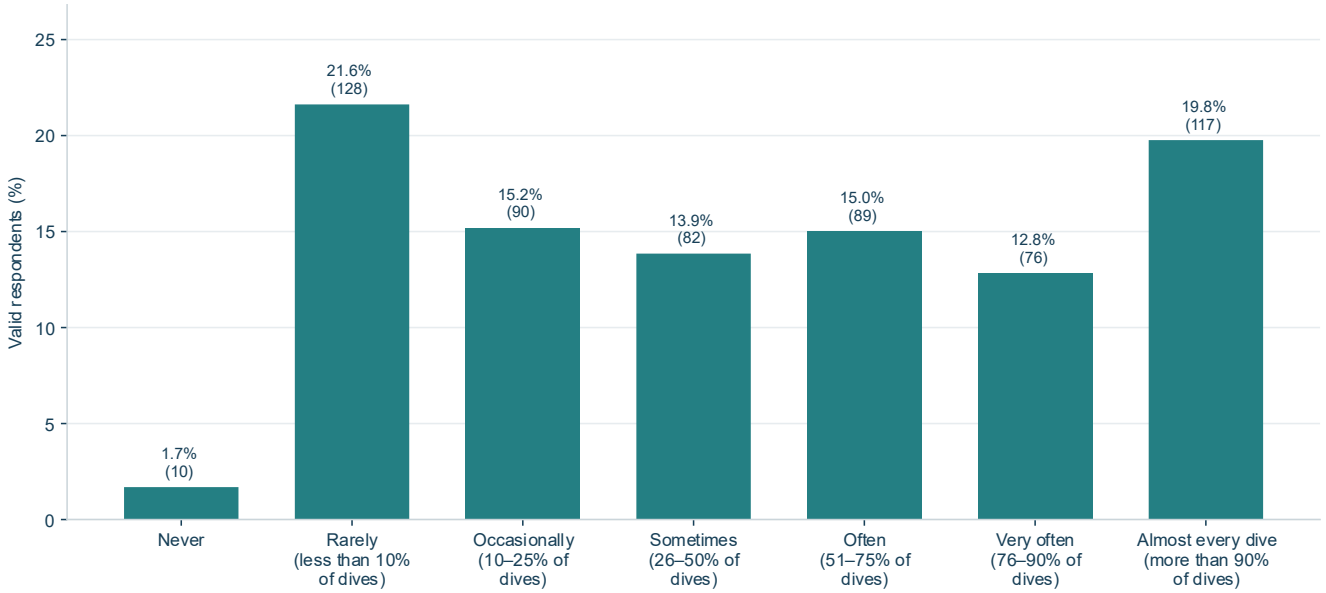
Not every shark encounter involves threatening behaviour. The survey distinguishes between shark sightings, depredation (sharks taking speared fish) and interactions involving potential safety risks.

6.1 Shark sightings and affected dives

The frequency of shark sightings varied substantially, with Queensland respondents reporting particularly frequent encounters.

Frequency of shark sightings

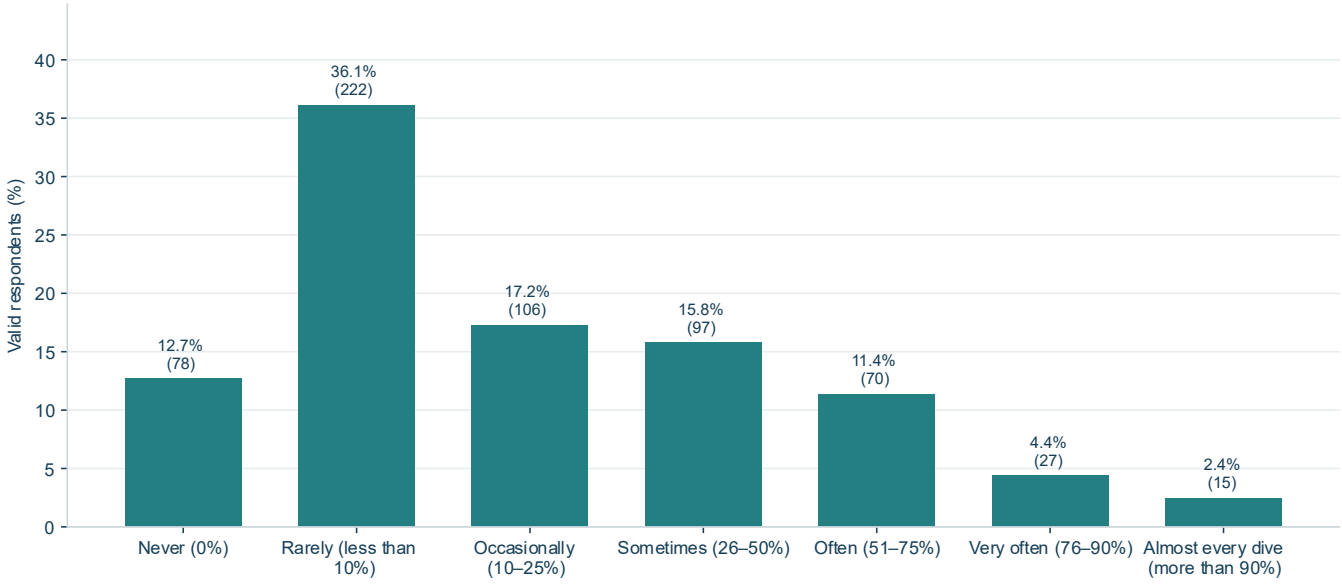
Valid responses: n = 592



Not every sighting adversely affects a dive. However, some interactions cause divers to change locations, abandon catches or terminate diving.

Dives negatively affected by sharks

Valid responses: n = 615



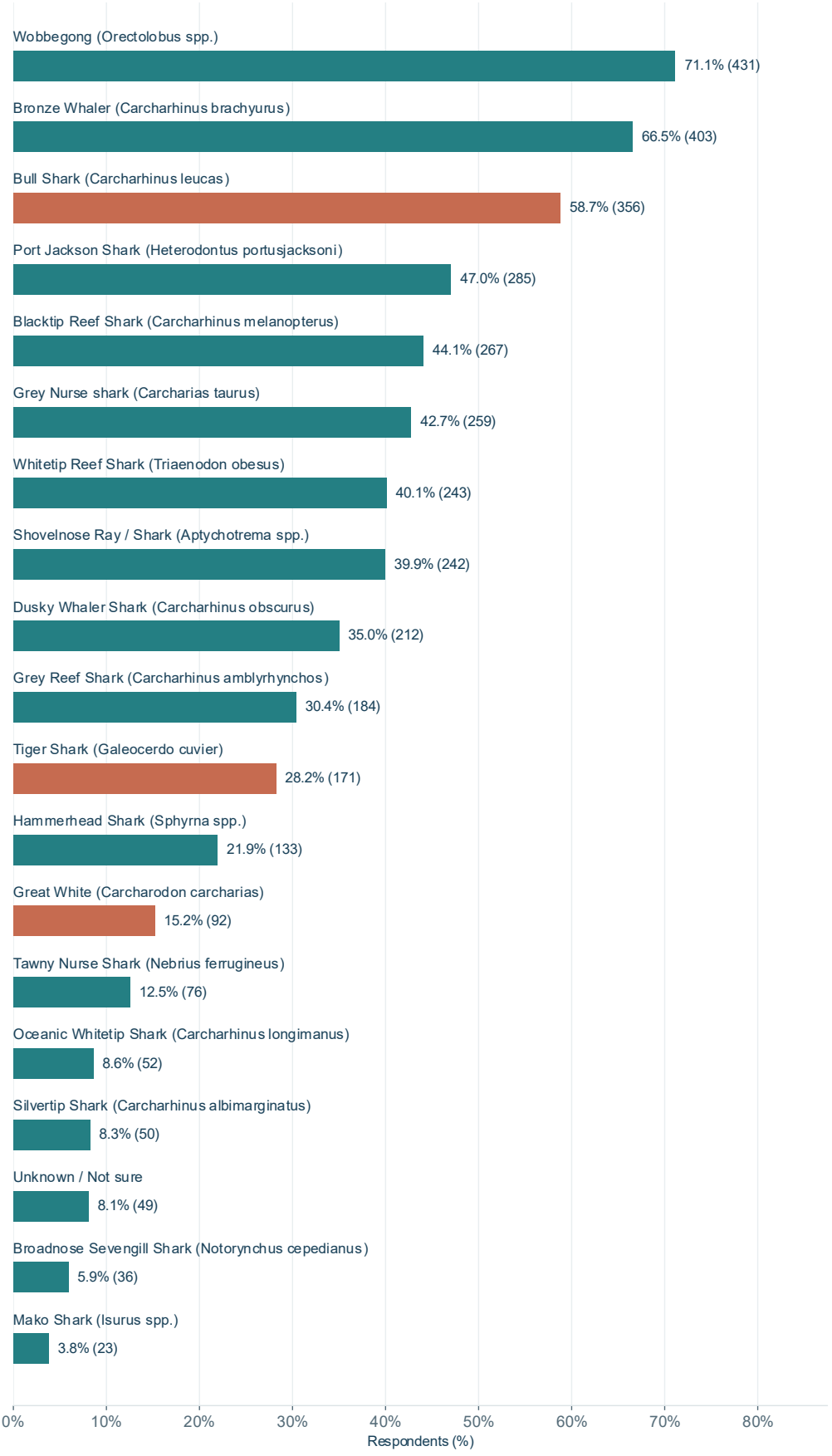
The distinction between routine sightings and adverse interactions is important when considering research, safety and management responses.

6.2 Species and interactions

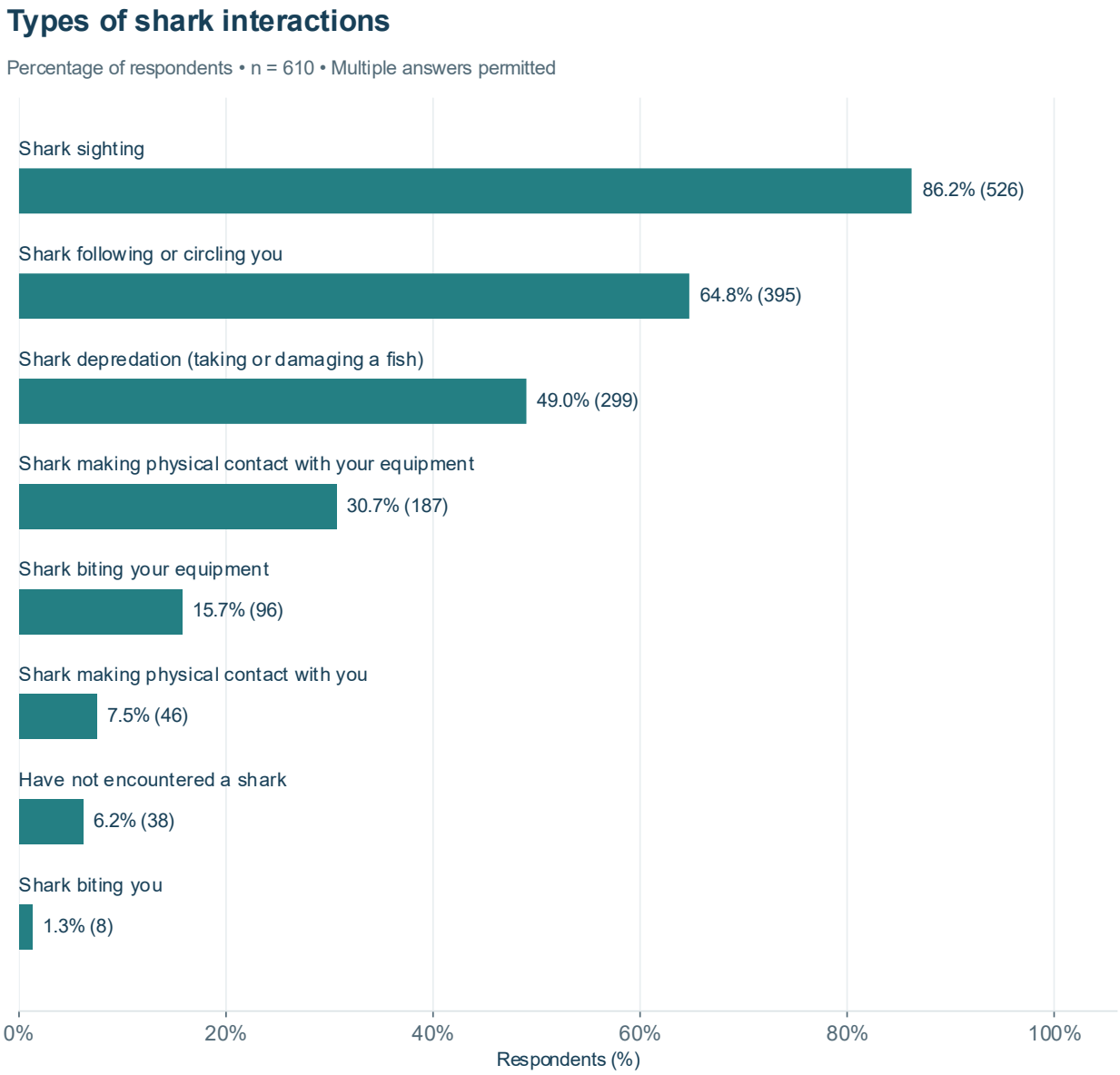
Respondents encountered a wide range of shark species, reflecting Australia's diverse marine environments.

Shark species encountered

Percentage of respondents • n = 606 • Multiple answers permitted



Reported interactions included sharks following or circling divers, approaching captured fish, contacting equipment and taking or damaging catches.



Depredation can affect both enjoyment and safety, particularly where divers must abandon fish or terminate a dive.

Some respondents also reported physical contact or bites. These responses were not independently verified and should not be interpreted as confirmed shark attacks or injuries.

6.3 Changes over time and regional differences

A substantial majority of long-term spearfishers who expressed a view reported increasing shark interactions.

Experiences varied considerably between States. Queensland respondents reported particularly frequent sightings and depredation, with substantial concerns also recorded in New South Wales and Western Australia. Southern States generally reported fewer interactions.

These observations do not independently establish changes in shark abundance. However, they identify regional patterns warranting further research.

6.4 Shark mitigation

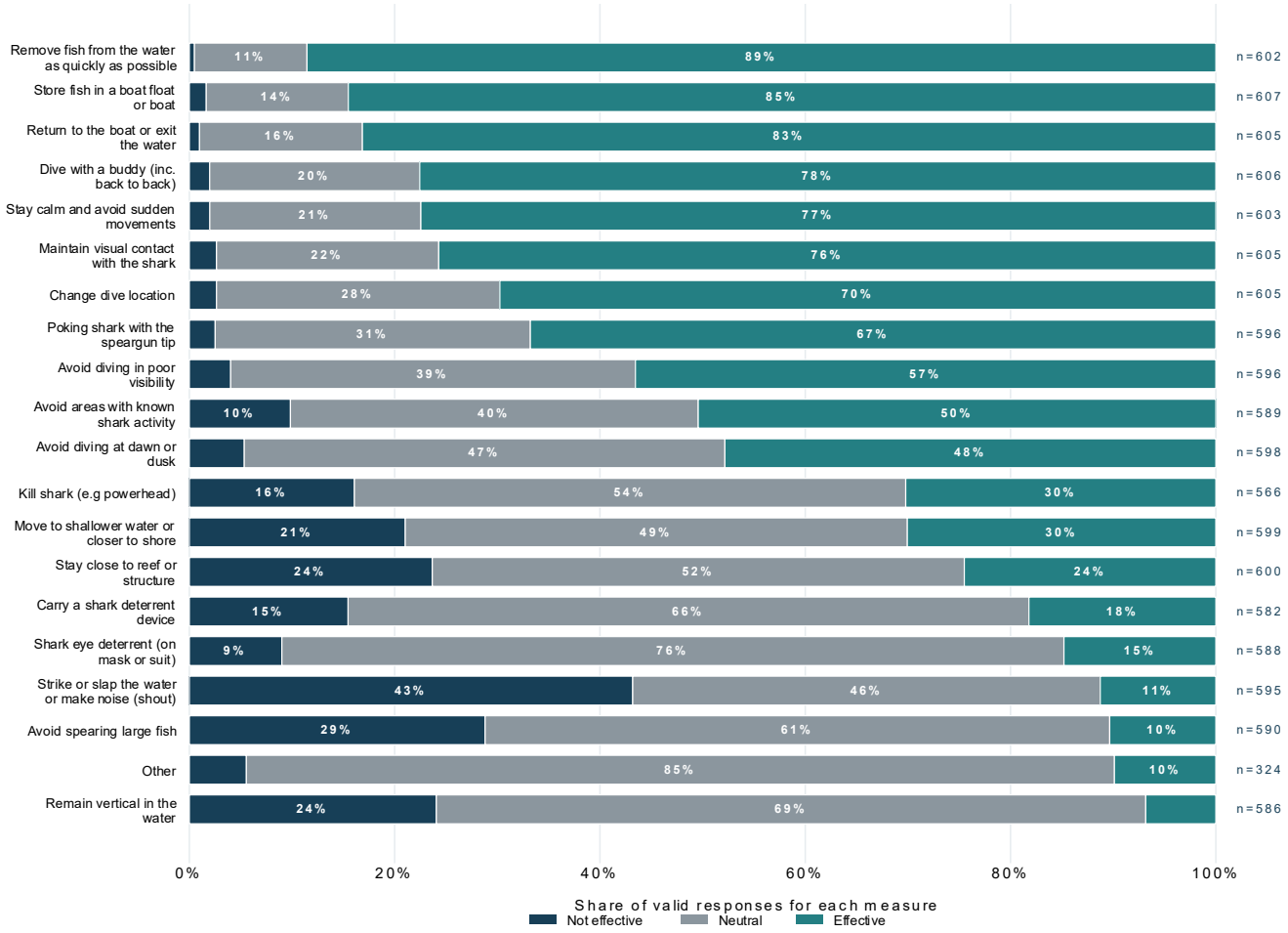
Respondents assessed a range of measures for reducing adverse shark interactions, including catch handling, changing locations, maintaining awareness and using deterrent devices.

These results reflect respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of various shark mitigation measures, rather than independently verified effectiveness. Their inclusion does not constitute endorsement or a recommendation to use any particular measure.

Shark mitigation measures

Ranked by the proportion rating each measure Effective (highest to lowest)

Valid responses vary by measure (n = 324–607); percentages calculated separately for each measure



The findings provide guidance for practical safety education and further investigation of effective mitigation measures. Shark management should recognise regional differences and distinguish between shark presence, depredation and direct risks to divers.

DID YOU KNOW?

Spearfishers can contribute to marine research through observations of fish, sharks, habitats and environmental changes made during their time underwater.

7. Citizen Science and Spearfishing Safety

7.1 Citizen science

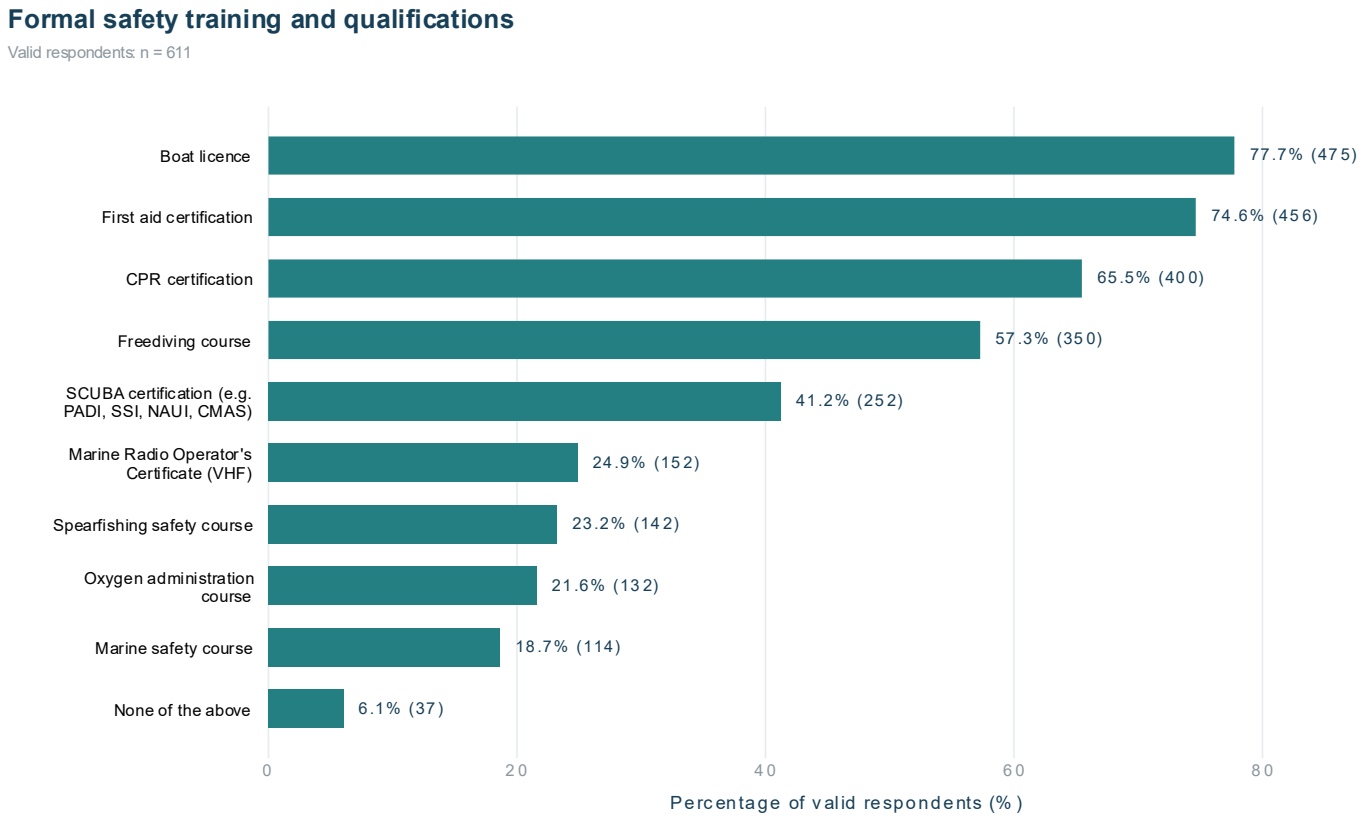
Spearfishers regularly observe marine species, habitats and environmental conditions, creating opportunities to contribute to scientific research.

Although participation in formal citizen-science programs remains limited, respondents expressed interest in contributing observations concerning fish, sharks, habitat changes and environmental issues.

Appropriately designed research partnerships could make greater use of this firsthand knowledge.

7.2 Safety training

Respondents reported qualifications in first aid, CPR, freediving, boating and other marine safety disciplines.



General safety qualifications were relatively common, but spearfishing-specific training was less widespread.

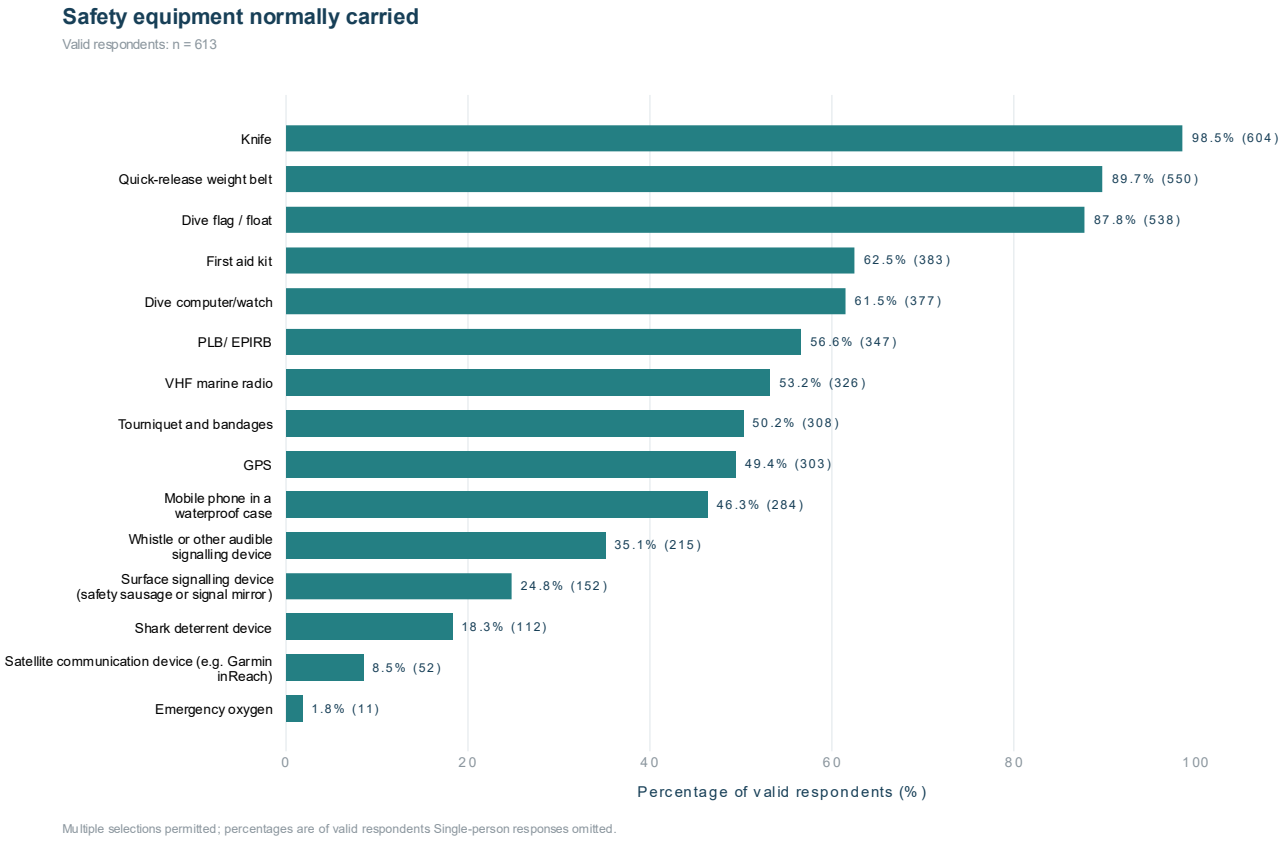
Formal freediving and spearfishing safety training was associated with more consistent buddy-system use, although the survey does not establish causation.

7.3 Buddy practices and equipment

Although most respondents normally dive with others, active buddy-system practices vary considerably.

Diving with companions does not necessarily mean using a one-up, one-down system in which one diver actively monitors another.

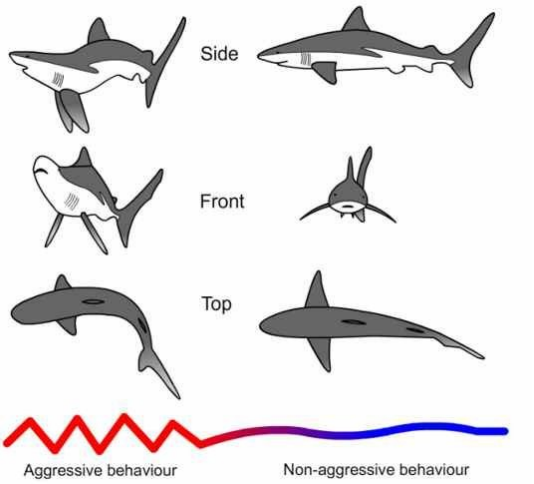
Respondents also reported carrying various safety items, including dive floats, flags, knives, quick-release weight belts, communication devices and emergency equipment.



Equipment requirements vary according to diving locations and methods. Safe catch handling is also important, particularly in areas with frequent shark interactions.

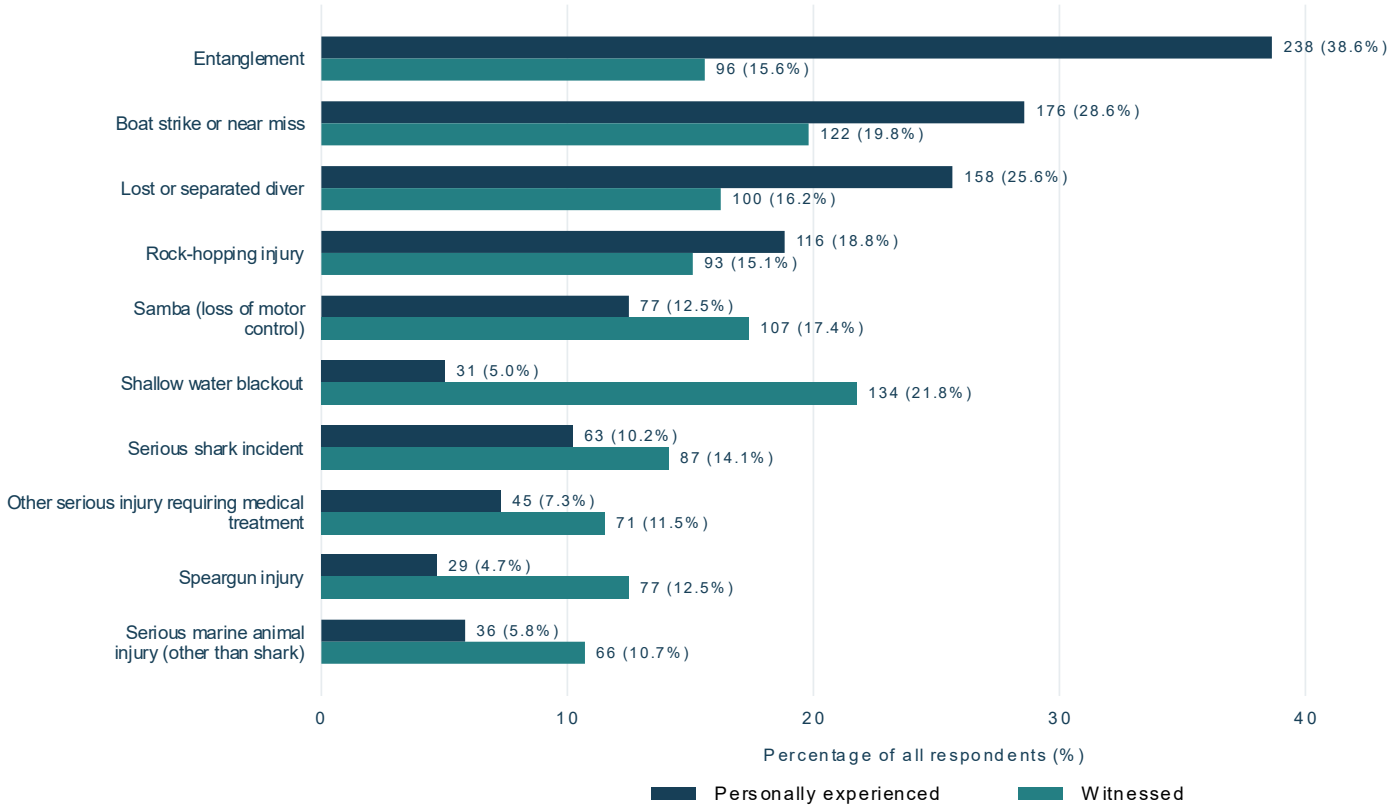
7.4 Safety incidents

The survey recorded incidents personally experienced or witnessed by respondents, including shallow-water blackout, loss of motor control, entanglement, speargun injuries, boating incidents and marine-animal interactions.



Safety incidents

Ranked by the average of personally experienced and witnessed responses | n = 616



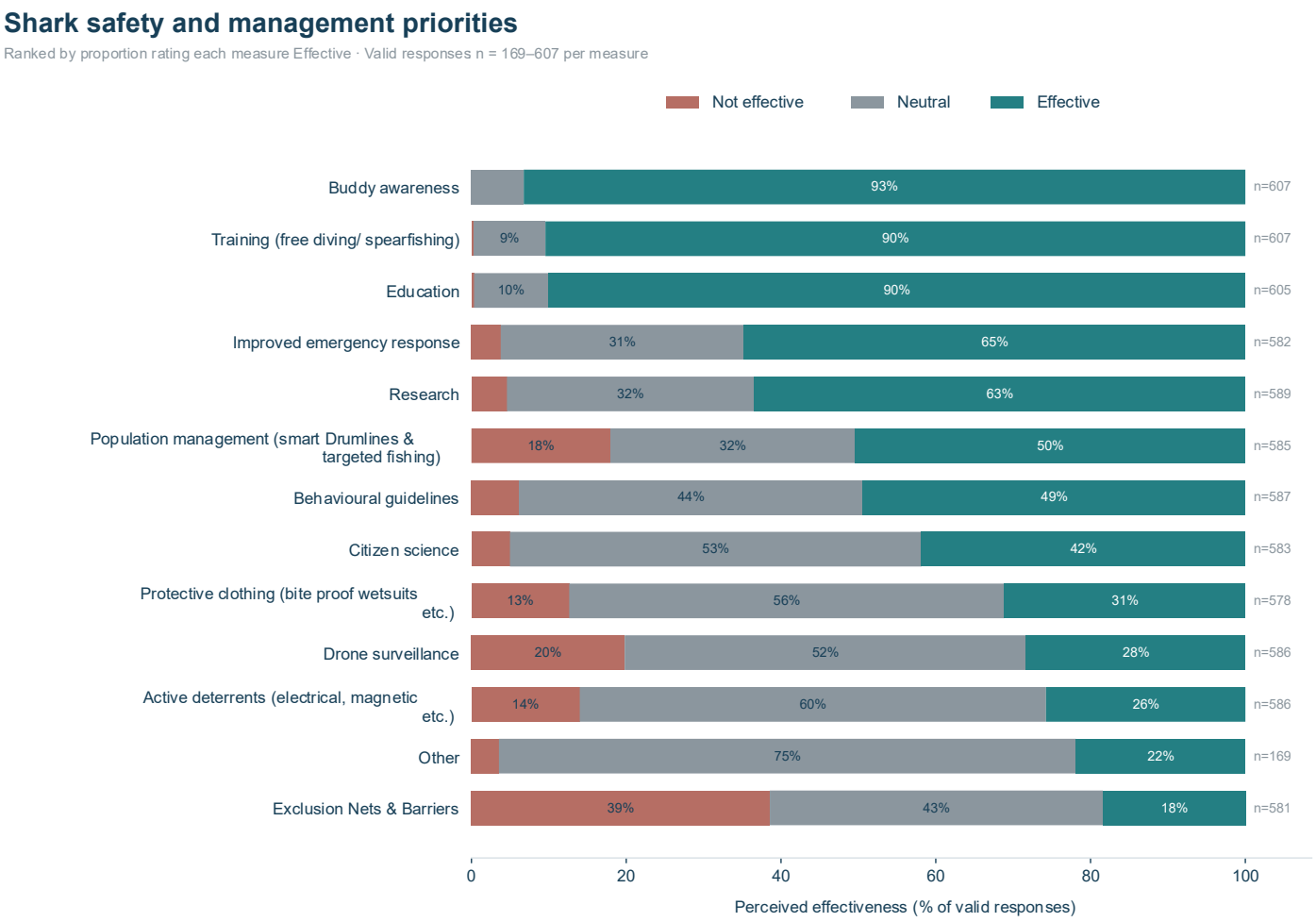
These findings identify important safety risks but should not be interpreted as population-wide incident rates. Personally experienced and witnessed incidents are separate measures.

7.5 Safety and management priorities

Respondents assessed measures intended to improve safety in relation to shark interactions and manage associated risks.

> ***'It is my belief that for the concern of sharks isn't that there are more of them but they have a learned behaviour with boats. In a lot of years spent shore diving shark encounters are lower however still there. In saying this that is the dangers of the sport'***

> ***'Most spearos understand that we are entering a sharks habitat and don't want harm done to any shark. Spearing is the most sustainable way to feed ourselves and limits by catch and pollution from fishing gear.'***



The findings support further development of practical education in breath-hold diving, buddy practices, first aid, oxygen administration, emergency response and shark safety.

Clubs, training providers and experienced spearfishers have important roles in sharing this knowledge, including with participants outside formal organisations.

> ***'We need to better manage the shark fishery- not a cull, or a short term fix, but a management plan! We manage every other fish in the fishery, but have failed to manage the shark population. If we want people to keep engaging in spearfishing, this needs to be addressed. Not only for fish degradation, but for human safety.'***

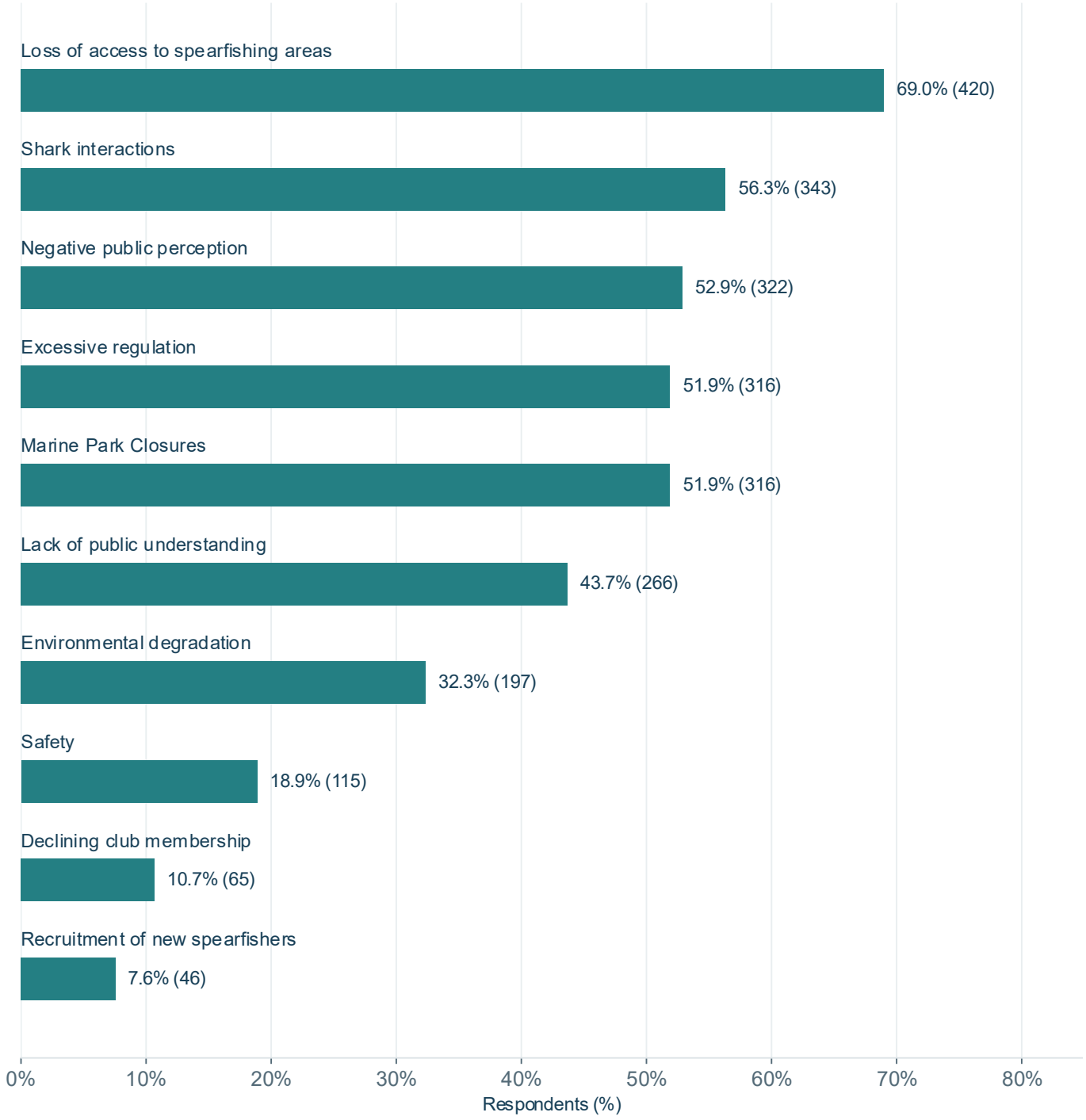
8. Challenges and Organisational Priorities

8.1 Challenges facing spearfishing

Loss of access to spearfishing areas emerged as the leading challenge, identified by 69.0% of respondents answering the question.

Greatest challenges facing spearfishing

Percentage of respondents • n = 609 • Multiple answers permitted



Other prominent concerns included shark interactions, marine park closures, regulation, negative public perceptions and environmental degradation.

Access concerns were particularly strong in Western Australia and New South Wales.

These findings reinforce the importance of transparent, evidence-based and proportionate management, supported by meaningful consultation.

'Stop changing all the rules and closing everything down with no science'

69%

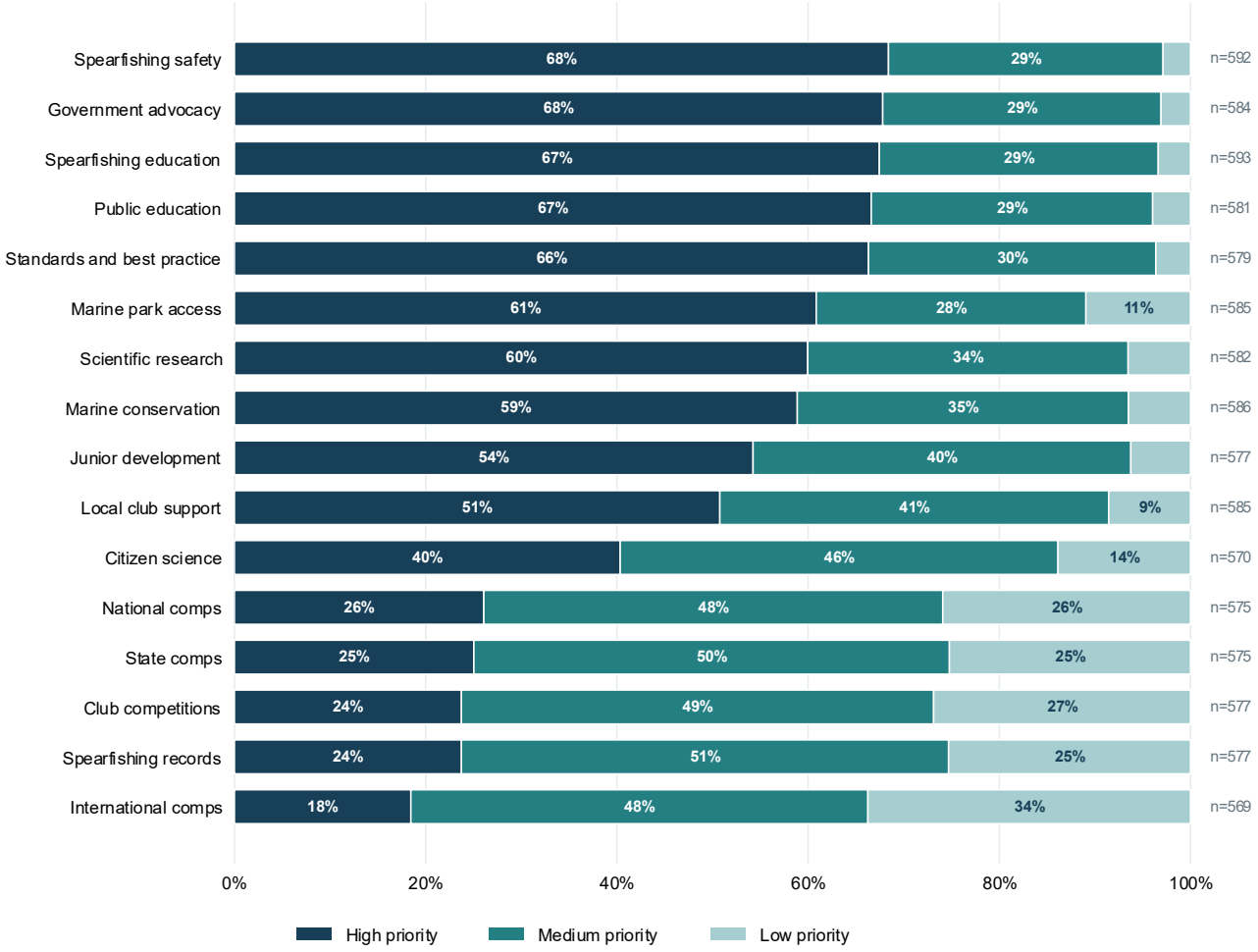
Identify loss of access to spearfishing areas as a major challenge

8.2 Organisational priorities

Respondents identified government advocacy, protection of access, public education, safety, research and conservation as important responsibilities for representative organisations.

Priorities for representative organisations

Ranked by the proportion rating each activity High priority



The findings demonstrate that respondents expect organisations to do more than organise competitions.

Effective representation should include independent recreational spearfishers as well as club members and competitors, and involve constructive engagement with governments, researchers and marine-management agencies.

'Clubs and associations need to have more representation in anything related to government regulation'

9. Outlook, Clubs and Future Engagement

9.1 Confidence in the future

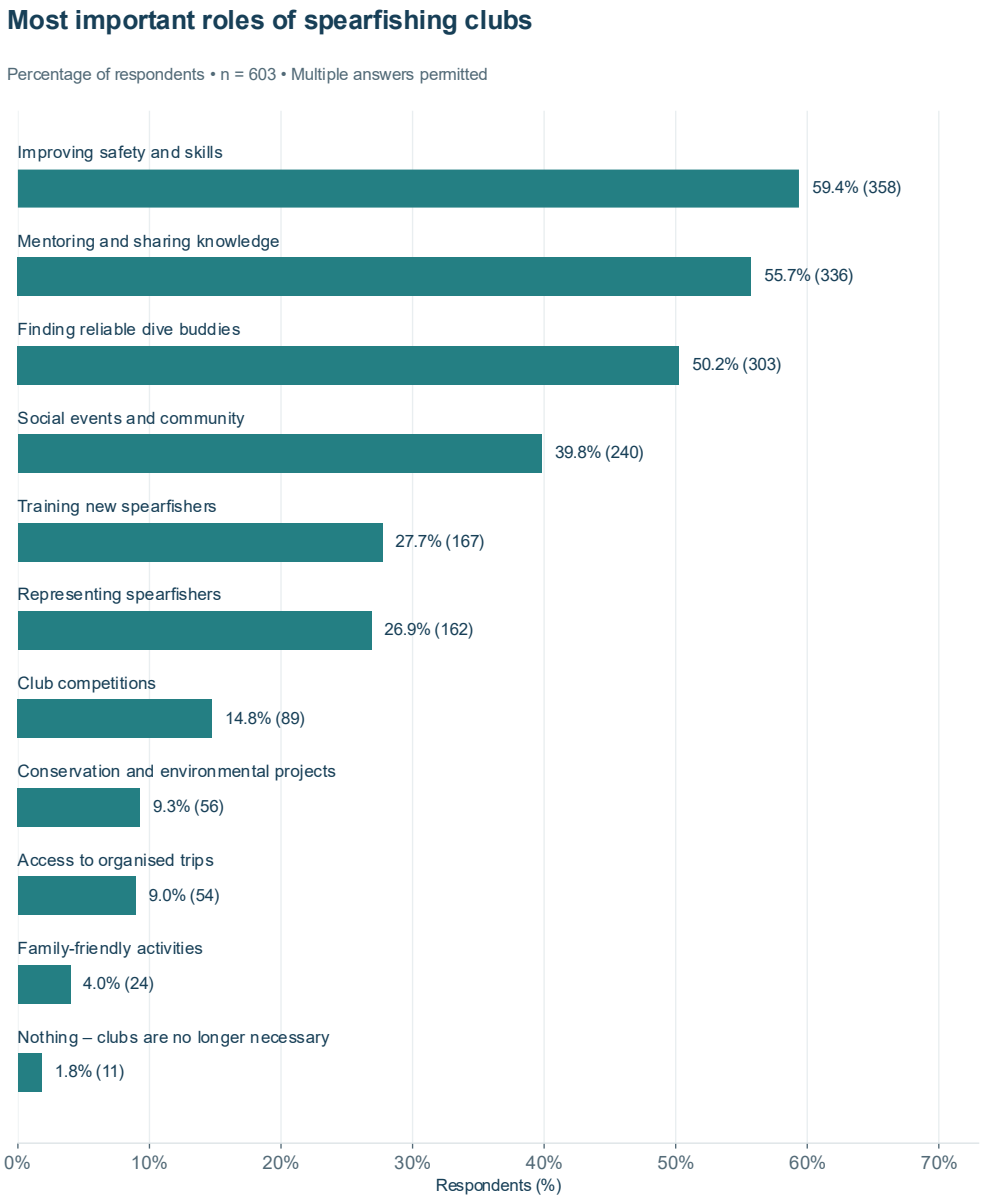
Despite concerns about access, regulation, sharks and public understanding, 61.3% of respondents were optimistic or very optimistic about the future of Australian spearfishing.

Respondents expressed mixed views about changes in participation opportunities over the preceding decade, with long-term participants particularly likely to report declining opportunities.

These findings demonstrate that optimism about the future can coexist with concerns about current management arrangements.

9.2 The role of clubs

Spearfishing clubs contribute through competition, social activities, safety education, mentoring, training and helping participants find reliable dive buddies. These broader functions are particularly important for introducing new participants and transferring practical knowledge.



61.3%

Are optimistic about the future of Australian spearfishing

The survey also identified opportunities for clubs to improve engagement with recreational spearfishers who do not currently belong to formal organisations.

9.3 Looking forward

The survey reveals an experienced and engaged community that recognises significant challenges but remains broadly positive about the future.

Opportunities exist to strengthen participation through mentoring, safety education, research, citizen science, public engagement and effective representation.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Conclusions

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 demonstrates that recreational spearfishing provides benefits extending well beyond harvesting seafood.

It supports recreation, physical and mental wellbeing, friendships, family participation, connection with nature and economic activity.

Respondents place considerable importance on sustainability and responsible harvesting, while identifying opportunities to improve safety, research and public understanding.

Access and effective representation remain central concerns, but the community is broadly optimistic about its future.

10.2 Recommendations

The findings support eight practical recommendations.

1. **Protect fair access.** Ensure marine park and fisheries management decisions are evidence-based, proportionate and informed by meaningful consultation.
2. **Strengthen representation.** Engage constructively with governments and management agencies while representing both organised and independent spearfishers.
3. **Improve public understanding.** Promote awareness of selective harvesting, responsible practices and the recreational, social, environmental and economic value of spearfishing.
4. **Expand safety education.** Improve access to training in breath-hold diving, buddy practices, first aid, oxygen administration and emergency preparedness.
5. **Research shark interactions.** Investigate regional differences, depredation, diver safety and practical mitigation measures.

6. **Support clubs and mentoring.** Strengthen training, junior development, buddy networks and opportunities for recreational participation.
7. **Expand citizen science.** Develop research partnerships that use spearfishers' observations of marine species, habitats and environmental changes.
8. **Recognise broader value.** Consider the health, social, environmental and economic contributions of spearfishing in marine-management decisions.

These recommendations are directed towards the broader spearfishing community, representative organisations, clubs, governments, researchers and other interested parties. Their implementation is voluntary, does not depend upon any single organisation and may be pursued independently or collaboratively according to available resources and shared priorities.

10.3 Final message

Australian spearfishers want a future in which their activity remains accessible, safe, responsible and sustainable.

They want their contribution to marine recreation and coastal communities recognised, their experiences considered in management decisions and opportunities for future generations to participate.

The challenge now is to translate these findings into constructive action.

For detailed results, additional graphs, regional comparisons and methodology, refer to the National Spearfishing Survey 2026 — Full Report.

Feedback, enquiries and data access

Feedback, corrections and enquiries concerning the report, its findings or access to de-identified survey data are welcome. Clubs, researchers, fisheries managers and other interested parties are encouraged to use the findings and explore opportunities for further research and collaboration.

Acknowledgements
The authors sincerely thank the 616 spearfishers who participated in the National Spearfishing Survey 2026 and generously shared their experiences, opinions and perspectives.

We also acknowledge the Australian Underwater Federation (AUF), Australian Spearfishing Association (ASA), Underwater Skindivers and Fishermen's Association (USFA), Adreno, and the many clubs, organisations, community groups and individuals who helped promote the survey across Australia.

Special thanks are extended to Isaac Daly (“Shrek”) and Tom Sandstrom for their valuable feedback and contributions during the preparation and review of the report.

We hope the findings provide a valuable resource for spearfishers, researchers, fisheries managers and other interested parties, and encourage further research and collaboration in Australia and internationally.

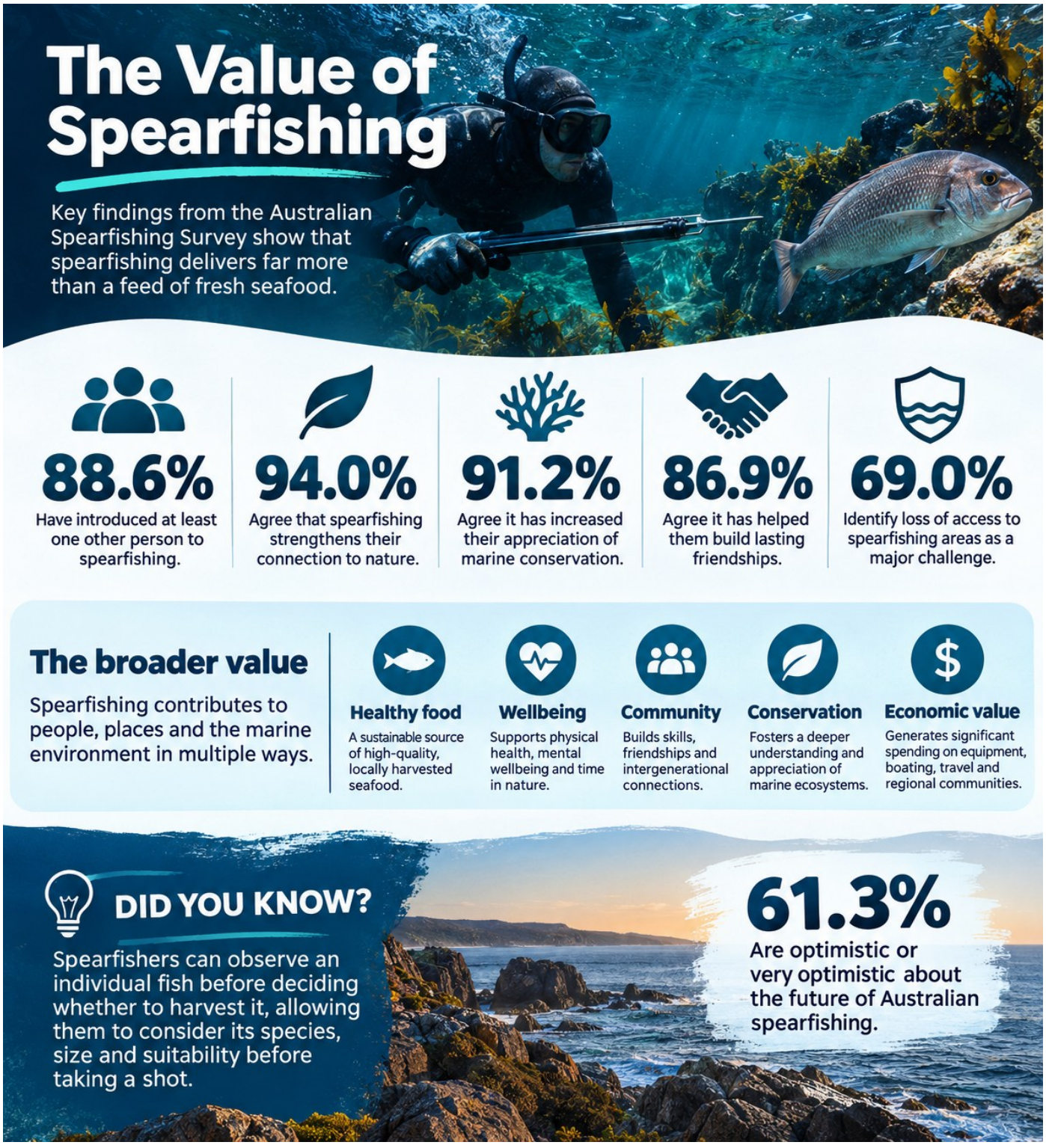
Luke Randell and Dr Adam Smith *Authors*

National Spearfishing Survey 2026 – Key Findings

For detailed methodology, results and analysis, refer to the accompanying Full Report.

Contact: Australian Underwater Federation (AUF) – Spearfishing | aufspearfishing.com.au | spearfishing@auf.com.au

Version 1.0 |17 November 2026


The Value of Spearfishing
Key findings from the Australian Spearfishing Survey show that spearfishing delivers far more than a feed of fresh seafood.
88.6%
Have introduced at least one other person to spearfishing.
94.0%
Agree that spearfishing strengthens their connection to nature.
91.2%
Agree it has increased their appreciation of marine conservation.
86.9%
Agree it has helped them build lasting friendships.
69.0%
Identify loss of access to spearfishing areas as a major challenge.
The broader value
Spearfishing contributes to people, places and the marine environment in multiple ways.
Healthy food
A sustainable source of high-quality, locally harvested seafood.
Wellbeing
Supports physical health, mental wellbeing and time in nature.
Community
Builds skills, friendships and intergenerational connections.
Conservation
Fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of marine ecosystems.
Economic value
Generates significant spending on equipment, boating, travel and regional communities.
DID YOU KNOW?
Spearfishers can observe an individual fish before deciding whether to harvest it, allowing them to consider its species, size and suitability before taking a shot.
61.3%
Are optimistic or very optimistic about the future of Australian spearfishing.