

PEOPLE
OCEAN
ACCESS
SAFETY
COMMUNITY

A safer, healthier and more sustainable ocean for future generations

NATIONAL SPEARFISHING SURVEY 2026

Understanding Australia's **Spearfishing Community**

FINAL REPORT

Our Ocean Our Community Our Future

AUSTRALIAN UNDERWATER FEDERATION (AUF)
SPEARFISHING | 2026

Publication Details

National Spearfishing Survey 2026
Understanding Australia's Spearfishing Community | Final Report, 2026
Version 1.0 | 17 November 2026

Authors

Luke Randell, BSc, LLB — Law and Environmental Science (Policy and Economics); lawyer for 25+ years; former Chair - AUF Queensland; Life Member - Tweed Gold Coast Freedivers.

Dr Adam Smith, BSc (Hons), MBA, PhD — Marine scientist; CEO, Reef Ecologic; Adjunct Associate Professor, James Cook University; former Chair - AUF Spearfishing Commission; AUF Life Member.

Suggested citation

Randell, L. & Smith, A. (2026), *National Spearfishing Survey 2026: Understanding Australia's Spearfishing Community*, Australian Underwater Federation (AUF) – Spearfishing.

Disclaimer

This report presents the results of a voluntary survey of Australian spearfishers. The results reflect the experiences, views and perceptions of respondents and should not be taken as statistically representative of all Australian spearfishers. The survey was designed to examine participation, social and economic value, safety, environmental engagement, access and issues affecting spearfishing. **It was not designed as a recreational catch survey or fish-stock assessment.** While reasonable care has been taken in preparing this report, the authors and the AUF make no warranty as to its completeness or accuracy and accept no liability arising from its use or reliance upon it. Respondent views do not necessarily represent those of the authors or the AUF.

Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Underwater Federation acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Australia and their continuing connection to Country, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and recognise the enduring relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with Australia's marine and coastal environments.

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.

Contact

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



Acknowledgements from the Authors

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 began with a simple objective: to develop a better understanding of Australia's spearfishing community and provide a stronger evidence base for its future.

We sincerely thank the 616 spearfishers who took the time to complete the survey and share their experiences, opinions and perspectives. Their contributions form the foundation of this report.

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

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 also recognise the generations of volunteers, clubs and divers who have contributed to Australian spearfishing through participation, mentoring, competition, safety, conservation and community service.

Our intention has been to present the survey findings objectively, reflecting the experiences and views of respondents rather than advocating any particular position or outcome. We hope this report will serve as a valuable resource for Australian spearfishers, researchers, fisheries managers, policymakers and other interested parties.

We particularly encourage spearfishing organisations internationally to build upon this work and undertake similar surveys, contributing to a better understanding of spearfishing communities around the world.

Above all, we hope the findings contribute to greater recognition and understanding of spearfishing as a recreational activity that connects people, communities and the marine environment.

Luke Randell and Dr Adam Smith

Authors — National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary 6
2. About the National Spearfishing Survey 9
3. Respondent Profile and Participation 10
3.1 Respondent Profile 10
3.2 Clubs, Organisations and Participation 13
3.3 Harvesting and Sustainability 15
3.4 Competition and Travel 17
3.5 Social Participation and Introducing New Spearfishers 20
3.6 Regional Differences in Offshore Participation 23
4. Economic Contribution 24
4.1 Investment in Equipment and Marine Assets 24
4.2 Boat Ownership and Operating Expenditure 26
4.3 Recurring Expenditure and Participation Costs 27
4.4 Supporting Australian Businesses 28
4.5 Expenditure Attributable to Spearfishing 29
4.6 The Broader Economic Contribution 30
5. Motivations, Health and Wellbeing 30
5.1 Reasons for Participation 30
5.2 Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits 32
5.3 Mental Wellbeing and Participation Frequency 34
5.4 The Broader Value of Spearfishing 34
6. Sharks and Spearfishing 35
6.1 Shark Encounters and Their Impact 35
6.2 Species and Types of Interaction 37
6.3 Shark Depredation 39
6.4 Changes in Shark Interactions Over Time 40
6.5 Managing Shark Interactions 41
6.6 Regional Differences 42
6.7 Implications for Research and Management 45
7. Citizen Science and Spearfishing Safety 45
7.1 Citizen Science and Marine Research 45
7.2 Safety Training and Qualifications 47
7.3 Buddy Practices and Safety Equipment 48
7.4 Diving Methods and Catch Handling 49

7.5 Safety Incidents and Risk Awareness 51
7.6 Safety and Management Priorities 51
7.7 Training, Competition and Buddy Practices 52
7.8 Opportunities for Improvement 54
8. Challenges and Organisational Priorities 54
8.1 Challenges Facing Spearfishing 54
8.2 Priorities for Representative Organisations 56
8.3 Regional Differences in Access Concerns 57
8.4 Implications for the Future 59
9. Outlook, Clubs and Future Engagement 59
9.1 Outlook for Australian Spearfishing 59
9.2 Changes in Participation Opportunities 60
9.3 The Role of Spearfishing Clubs 60
9.4 Barriers to Club Membership 62
9.5 Future Engagement 62
9.6 Regional Differences in Optimism 63
9.7 Looking Forward 64
10. Conclusions and Recommendations 64
10.1 Conclusions 64
10.2 Recommendations 65
10.3 Proposed SMART Implementation Framework 66
10.4 Looking Forward 68
Appendices 69
Appendix A — Survey Methodology 69
Appendix B — Response Numbers and Sample Profile 70
Appendix C — Data Notes and Definitions 70
Appendix D — National Spearfishing Survey 2026 Questionnaire 72

1. Executive Summary

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 provides a national picture of Australia's recreational spearfishing community, drawing on responses from 616 participants across Australia.

The survey examined who participates in spearfishing, why and how they participate, the social and economic value of the activity, their relationship with the marine environment, and the challenges and priorities facing the community.

The findings reveal an experienced, diverse and highly engaged community whose participation extends well beyond harvesting fish. Spearfishing combines recreation, sustainable seafood, physical activity, adventure, friendship, mental wellbeing and a close connection with the marine environment.

Key Findings

A diverse and experienced community

Respondents represented a broad range of ages, experience levels and forms of participation. Almost half had been spearfishing for more than ten years, while approximately half belonged to neither a spearfishing club nor the Australian Underwater Federation. The findings highlight both the accumulated experience of the community and the importance of engaging with spearfishers beyond formal organisations.

The value of spearfishing extends beyond the catch

Recreation, sustainable seafood, adventure, physical fitness and mental wellbeing were among the strongest motivations for participation. Respondents reported substantial benefits to their physical and mental health, friendships, family relationships and connection with nature. These findings demonstrate the importance of considering the broader recreational and social value of spearfishing alongside fisheries management objectives.

Sustainability and environmental engagement

Respondents placed considerable importance on sustainability, selective harvesting and marine conservation. Their extensive time underwater also provides opportunities for environmental observation, citizen science and collaboration with researchers. These findings reflect respondents' attitudes and experiences rather than independently establishing environmental outcomes.

A meaningful economic contribution

Spearfishing involves substantial investment in equipment, boats and marine assets, together with ongoing expenditure on fuel, maintenance, travel, accommodation and associated services. The survey demonstrates economic activity extending into marine industries, retail and regional coastal communities, although it does not provide a statistically representative estimate of total national expenditure.

Safety and education remain essential

The survey identified considerable variation in formal safety training, buddy-system practices and emergency preparedness. The findings reinforce the importance of practical safety education, mentoring, responsible diving practices and improving access to training.

Shark interactions vary considerably across Australia

Shark encounters, depredation and interference with spearfishing were significant concerns, particularly in Queensland. Experiences differed substantially between jurisdictions, highlighting the importance of recognising regional conditions and supporting further research into shark interactions and effective mitigation.

Access is the community's greatest concern

Loss of access to traditional spearfishing areas was the most frequently identified challenge, alongside marine park closures and regulation. Respondents expressed strong support for fair, transparent and evidence-based management that recognises the characteristics of spearfishing and provides meaningful opportunities for community consultation.

A positive outlook and clear priorities

Despite concerns about access, sharks, regulation and public understanding, most respondents remained optimistic about the future. Safety, education, government advocacy, public awareness, research and conservation emerged as important priorities for representative organisations. Clubs were also valued for their contributions to mentoring, friendships, skills development and finding reliable dive buddies.

Five Key Messages

The survey identifies five overarching messages for governments, researchers, representative organisations and the wider community:

1. **Spearfishers are experienced and engaged marine users** whose knowledge, observations and perspectives deserve consideration in marine management.
2. **Spearfishing has distinctive characteristics**, including selective harvesting, underwater participation and particular safety and access requirements, which should be recognised in fisheries and marine park management.
3. **The value of spearfishing extends well beyond the fish harvested**, encompassing recreation, health, wellbeing, community, environmental connection and economic activity.
4. **There are substantial opportunities for collaboration** in safety education, mentoring, scientific research, citizen science, conservation and responsible marine management.
5. **The future of spearfishing depends on fair access, responsible participation and effective representation**, supported by evidence-based decisions and constructive engagement with the community.

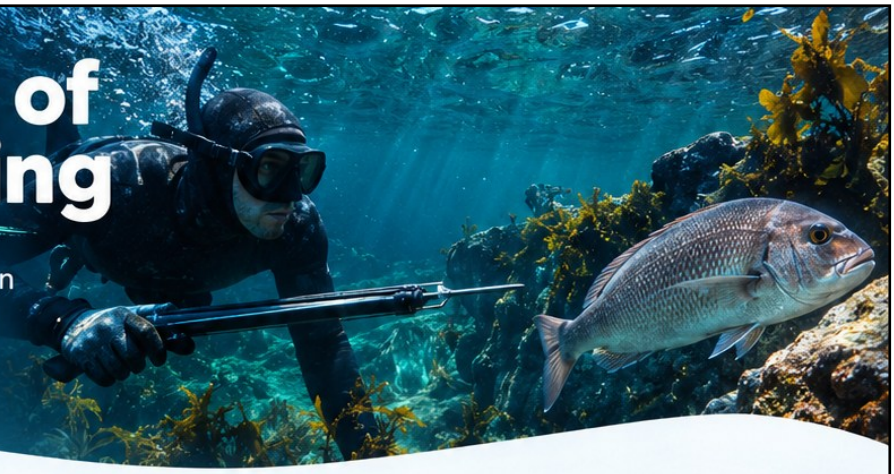
Conclusion

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 demonstrates that spearfishing is much more than a method of recreational fishing. It is a valued recreational, social, environmental and economic activity undertaken by an experienced and committed community.

The findings provide a foundation for improving public understanding, informing policy, strengthening safety and education, and supporting the continued development of safe, sustainable and accessible spearfishing in Australia.

The survey was voluntary and self-selected. Its findings describe respondents' experiences and perceptions.

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.

2. About the National Spearfishing Survey

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 was undertaken to develop a better understanding of Australia's recreational spearfishing community, including its participation, experiences, values and priorities.

The survey was conducted online using Microsoft Forms between 1 September and 31 October 2026 and received 616 responses from across Australia. Participation was open to all recreational spearfishers, regardless of club membership, affiliation with representative organisations or involvement in competition.

The survey was promoted nationally through spearfishing clubs, representative organisations, social media groups and individual participants, with particular efforts made to reach spearfishers outside established organisational structures.

Survey Scope

The survey examined:

- Respondent characteristics and participation patterns;
- Economic contribution and expenditure;
- Motivations, health and wellbeing;
- Shark encounters and interactions;
- Safety, training and citizen science;
- Challenges, access and organisational priorities; and
- Attitudes towards the future of spearfishing.

The survey was not designed to measure recreational catch, assess fish stocks or determine the abundance of marine species.

Survey Limitations

Participation was voluntary and self-selected. Accordingly, the findings describe the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of respondents.

Not all respondents answered every question. Percentages are generally calculated using valid responses to each question, and multiple-response questions are reported as percentages of respondents rather than percentages of selections.

Comparisons between States, experience groups and other categories should be interpreted cautiously, particularly where sample sizes are small. Reported experiences and perceptions, including observations about sharks and environmental conditions, should not be treated as independent scientific evidence of population trends or environmental change.

Despite these limitations, the survey provides a substantial national dataset covering a broad range of participants and offers valuable insights to inform research, policy, safety education and the future development of Australian spearfishing.

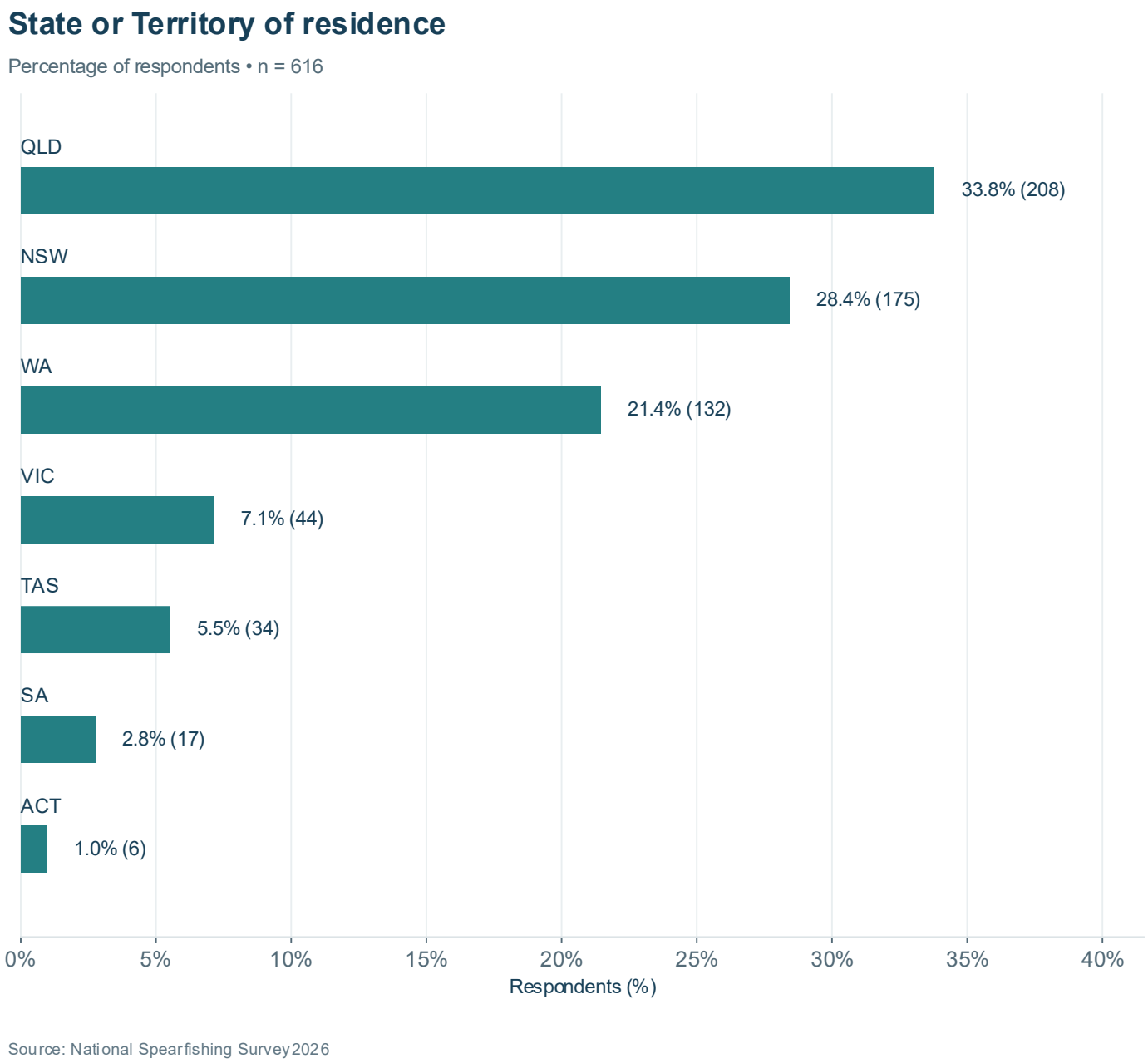
Further methodological details and supporting data are provided in the appendices.

3. Respondent Profile and Participation

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 attracted 616 respondents from across Australia, representing a broad range of ages, experience levels and forms of participation. The results provide an insight into who participates in spearfishing, how they engage with the activity and the social networks through which participation is sustained.

3.1 Respondent Profile

Respondents came from seven Australian States and Territories, with the largest numbers from Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. The geographic distribution reflects the survey's voluntary participation rather than the relative size of spearfishing populations in each jurisdiction.

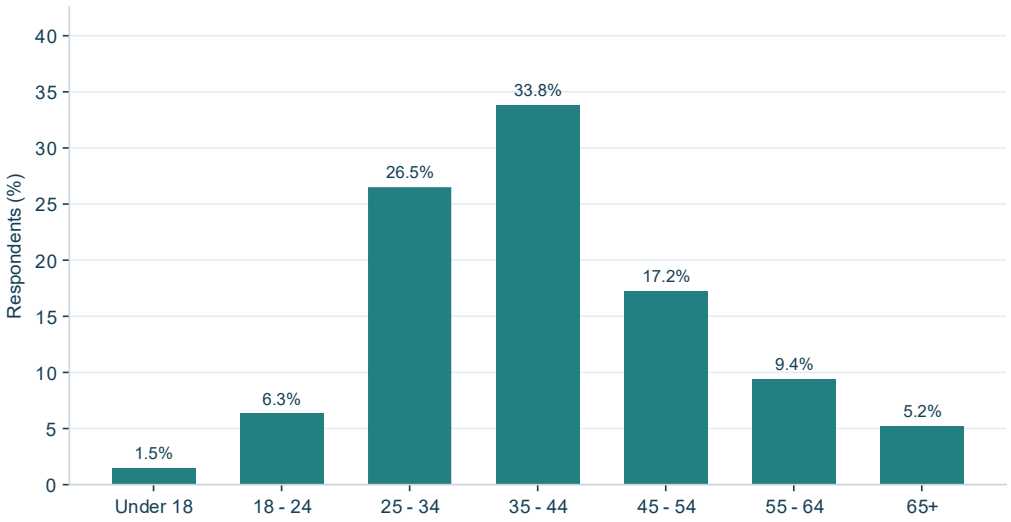


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

The survey attracted participants across a wide age range, predominantly adults aged 25–54, and a largely male respondent group.

Age distribution

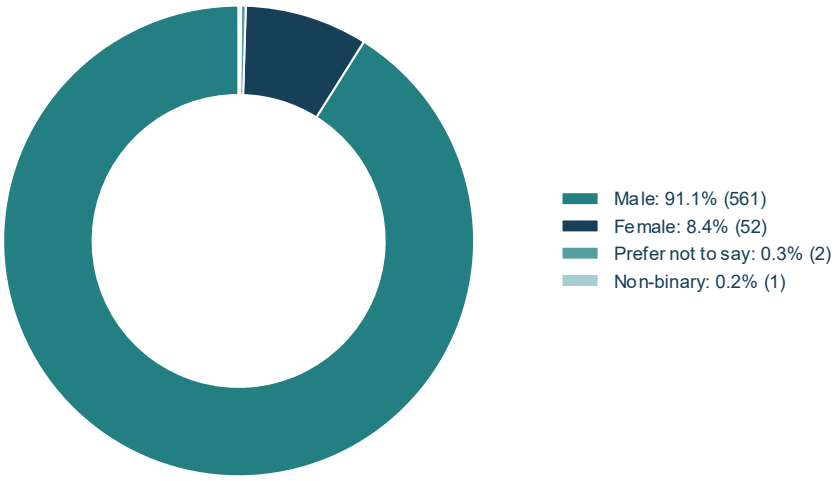
Valid responses: n = 615



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Gender

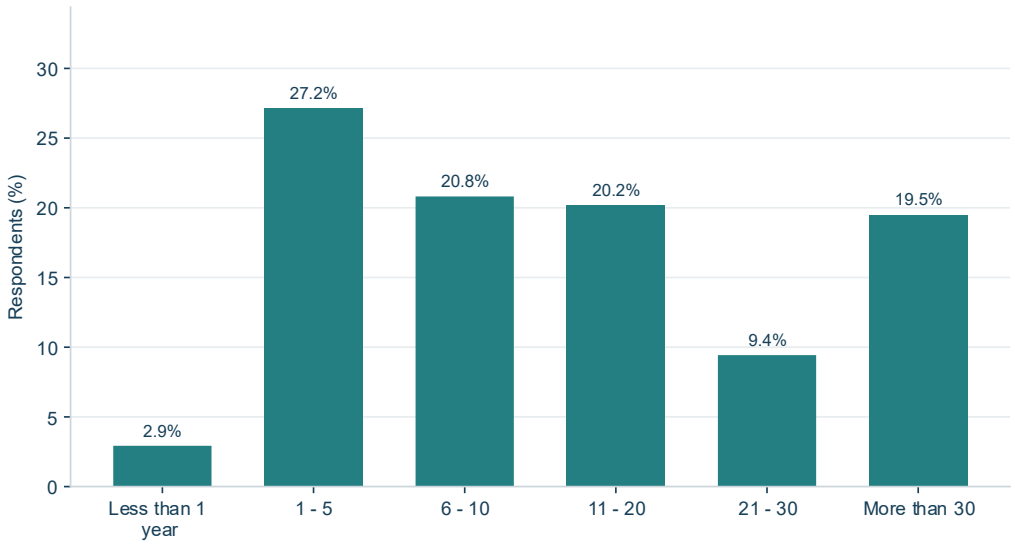
Valid responses: n = 616



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Years of spearfishing experience

Valid responses: n = 615



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

A notable feature of the survey is the depth of experience among respondents. Many have participated for decades, providing an accumulated body of practical knowledge of Australia's coastal and marine environments. This experience provides important context for the observations and attitudes examined throughout the report.



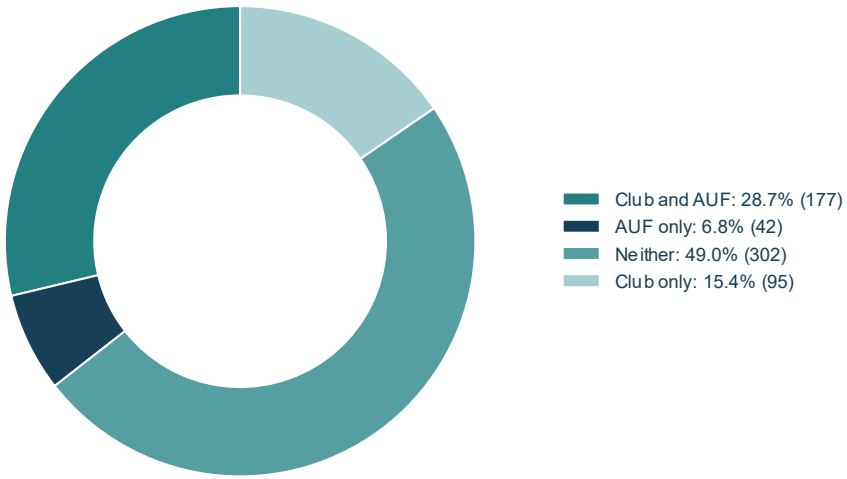
3.2 Clubs, Organisations and Participation

Australian spearfishing includes both formally organised and independent participants. While clubs, representative organisations and competitions remain important, almost half of respondents belonged to neither a spearfishing club nor the Australian Underwater Federation.

This distinction has implications for communication, safety education and representation, particularly where initiatives seek to reach the broader spearfishing community.

Club and AUF membership

Valid responses: n = 616

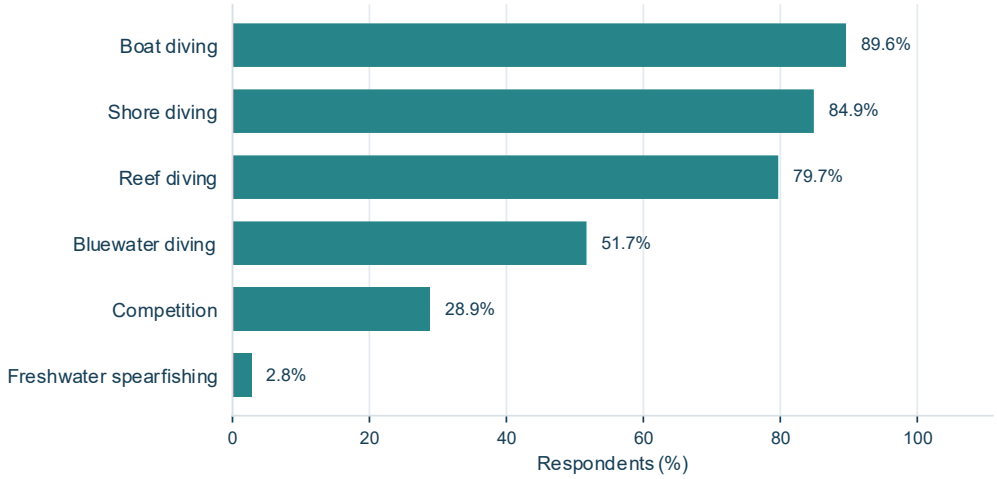


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Spearfishing is undertaken across a variety of environments, including shore, reef, offshore and bluewater diving. Many respondents participate in several forms of the activity, reflecting differences in geography, access, conditions and personal preferences.

Types of spearfishing undertaken

Valid responses: n = 615



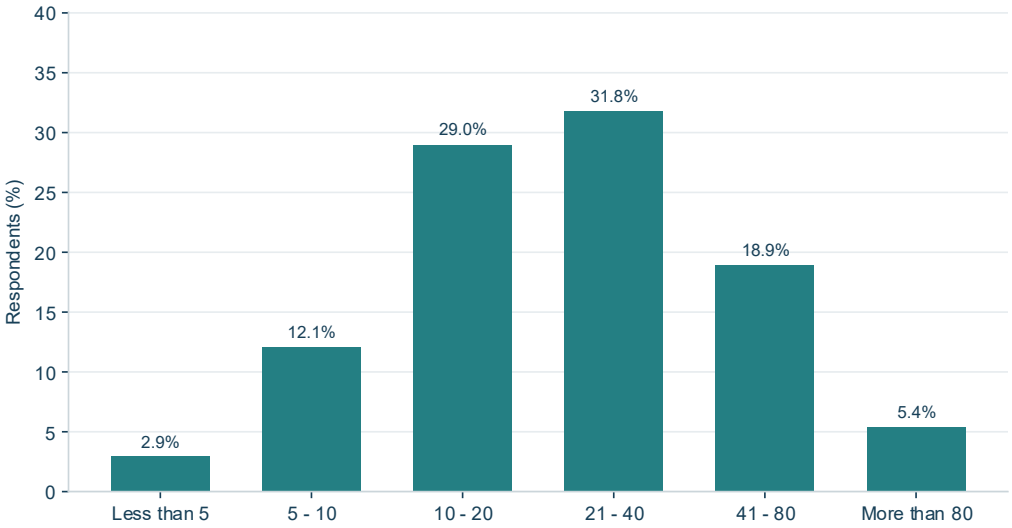
Multiple selections permitted, percentages based on valid respondents .

Note: Five additional responses, each representing 0.2% of respondents, have been omitted from the graph for clarity. These were bow fishing, caving, jet ski, pool, and a respondent who indicated they were mostly a freediver before taking up spearfishing. All responses remain included in the underlying survey data.

Participation also varies considerably in frequency, from occasional outings to regular diving throughout the year.

Annual spearfishing participation

Valid responses: n = 614



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

3.3 Harvesting and Sustainability

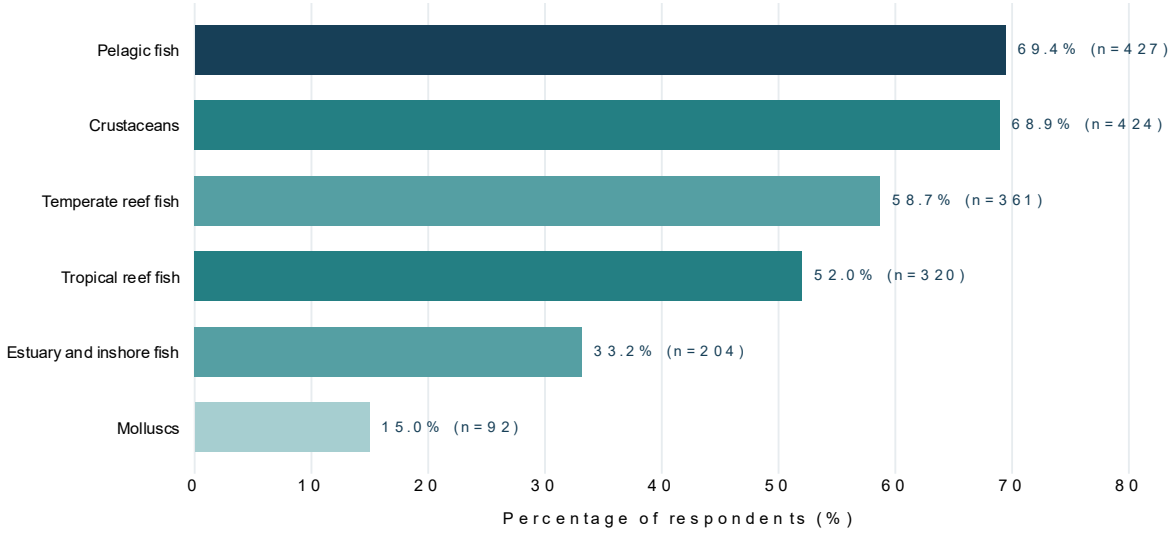
Respondents reported targeting a broad range of fish and seafood species, reflecting the diversity of Australia's marine environments and regional fisheries.

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



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.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Note: In addition to the six principal species groups, 17 respondents provided individual responses representing less than 1% of participants each. These included references to particular fish species, such as barramundi, wahoo, mahi-mahi, leatherjackets, flounder and freshwater fish, as well as octopus and other locally targeted species. Some responses provided additional detail about existing categories or expressed a preference for selecting more than three groups. These individual responses have been excluded for clarity but remain part of the survey dataset.

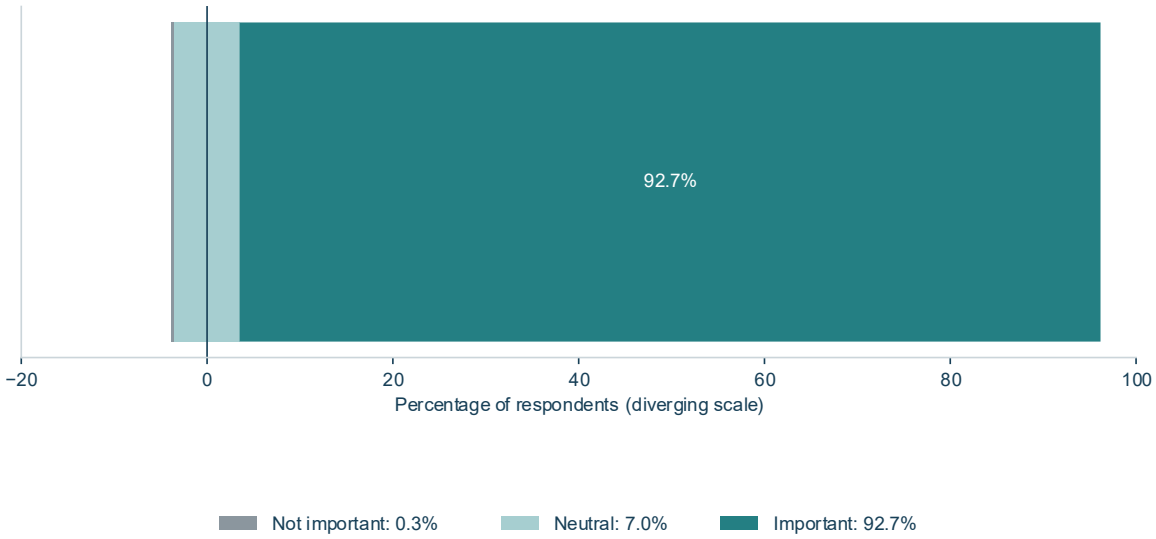
Sustainability was an important consideration for respondents, consistent with the selective nature of spearfishing, where individual fish can be observed before a decision is made to harvest them.

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.

Importance of sustainability when harvesting

Valid responses: n = 614

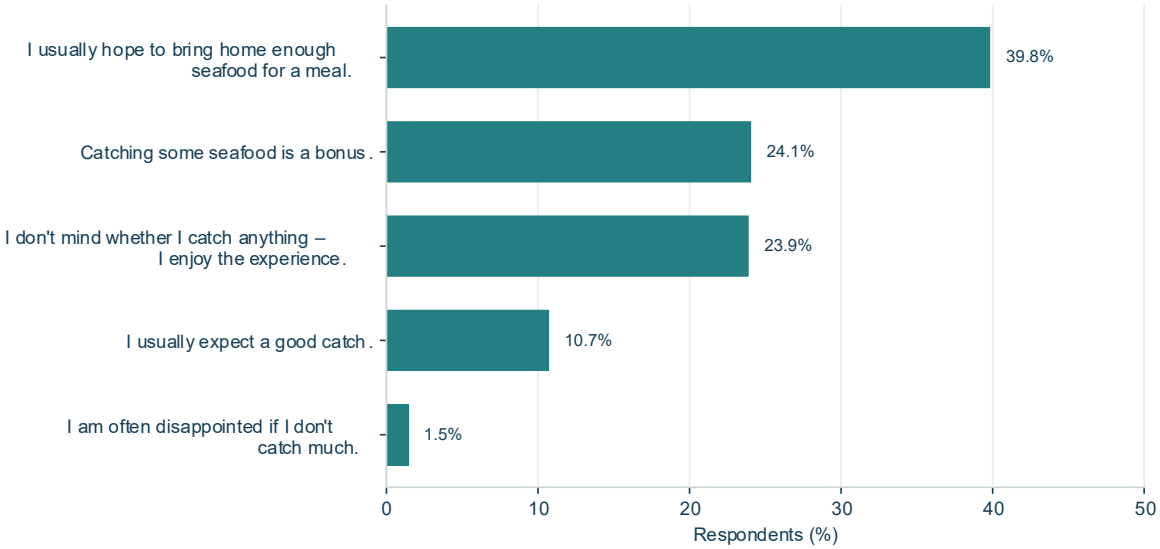


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Although harvesting seafood remains an important part of spearfishing, respondents generally did not regard the quantity caught as the sole measure of a successful outing. For many, the experience itself is as important as returning home with a catch.

Expectations of catching seafood

Valid responses: n = 615

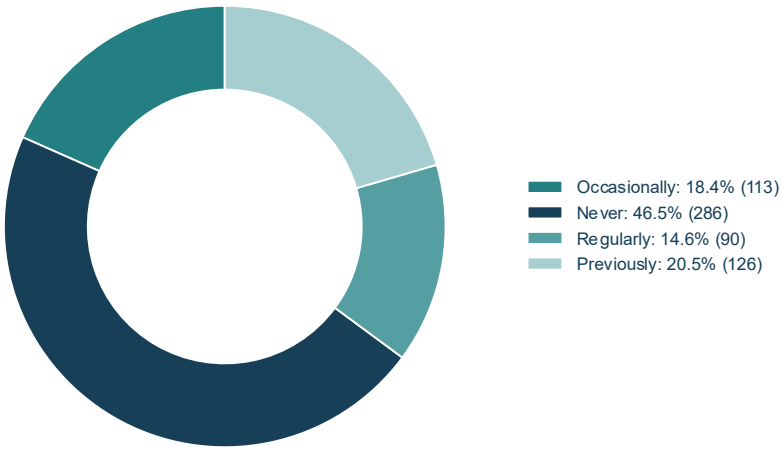


3.4 Competition and Travel

Organised competition remains an established part of Australian spearfishing, although participation extends well beyond competitive divers. Respondents included regular and occasional competitors, former competitors and those who had never competed.

Competition participation

Valid responses: n = 615



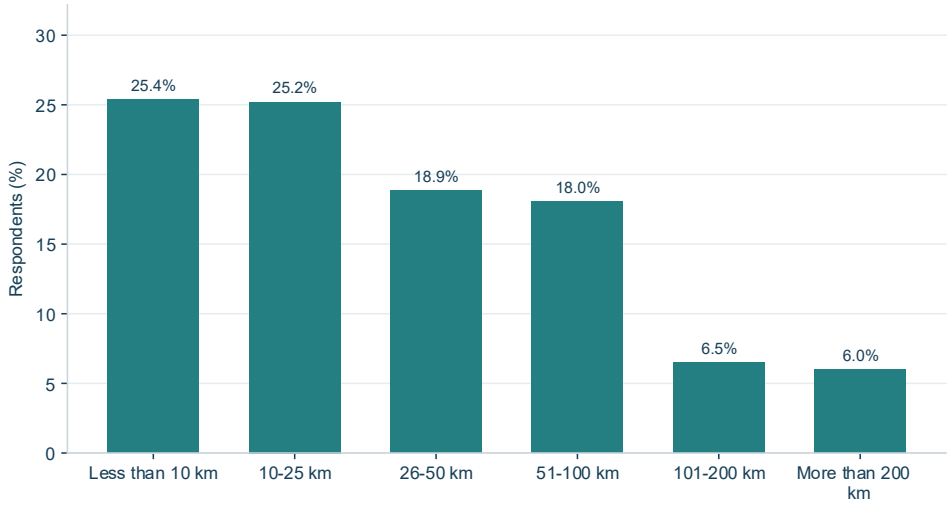
Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Spearfishing also involves considerable travel, both to reach the water and, for boat-based participants, to access offshore diving locations.



Distance travelled to launch or water entry

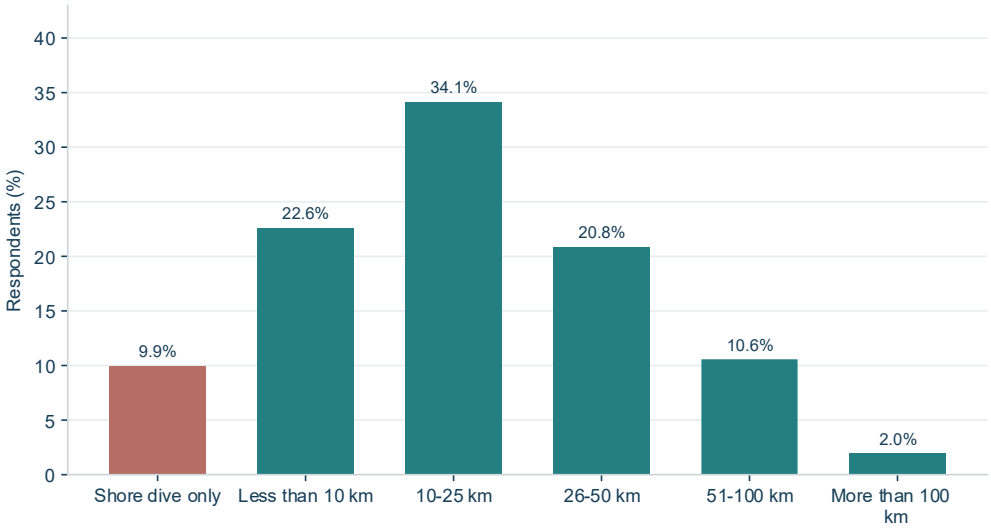
Valid responses: n = 615



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Distance travelled by boat to dive sites

Valid responses: n = 615

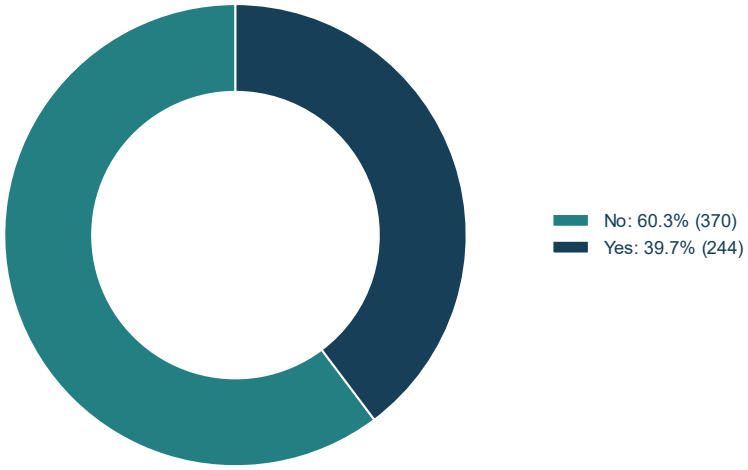


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Travel extends beyond local participation, with respondents reporting interstate and international spearfishing trips. These patterns provide context for the economic contribution examined in Section 4.

Interstate spearfishing travel

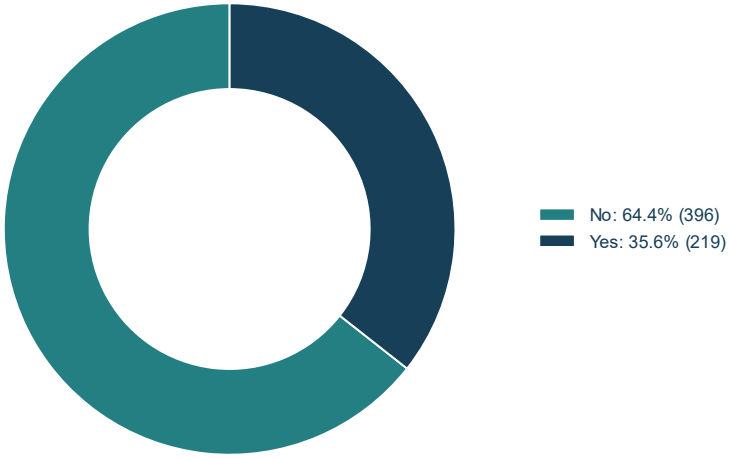
Valid responses: n = 614



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Overseas spearfishing travel

Valid responses: n = 615



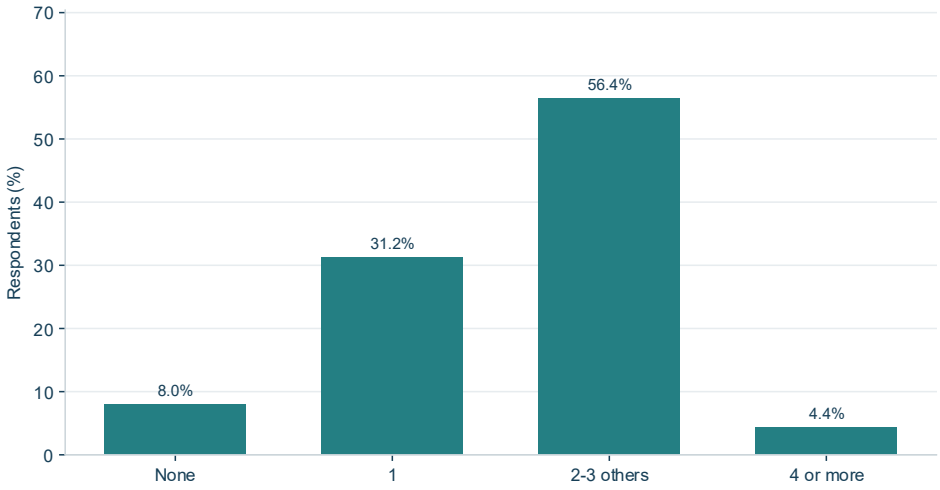
Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

3.5 Social Participation and Introducing New Spearfishers

Spearfishing is a strongly social activity, with respondents commonly participating alongside friends, family members and regular diving companions.

Number of regular diving companions

Valid responses: n = 615



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

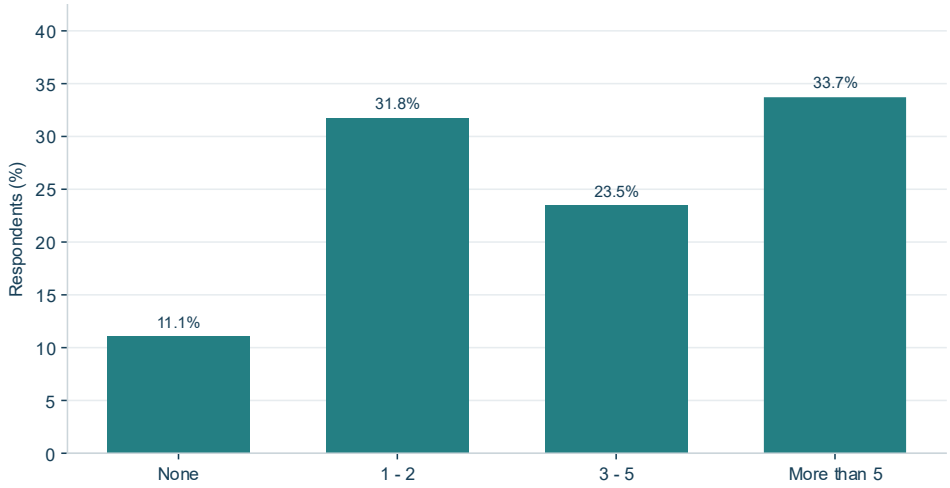
An important finding is the role existing participants play in introducing others to spearfishing. This occurs through both organised clubs and informal networks, demonstrating how experience, knowledge and participation are passed between generations of spearfishers.

89%

Of respondents have introduced someone else to spearfishing

People introduced to spearfishing

Valid responses: n = 614

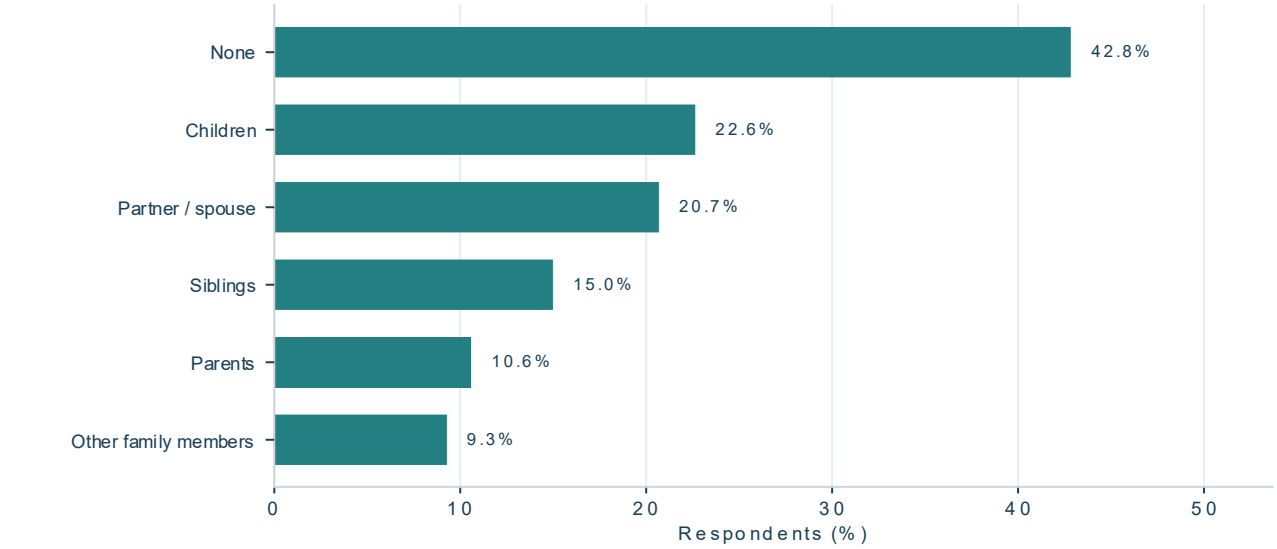


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Family participation further illustrates the social connections associated with the activity.

Family members participating

Valid responses: n = 614



Multiple selections permitted percentages based on valid respondents .

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These informal relationships provide opportunities for mentoring and knowledge sharing, while also reinforcing the importance of consistent safety education beyond formal club structures.



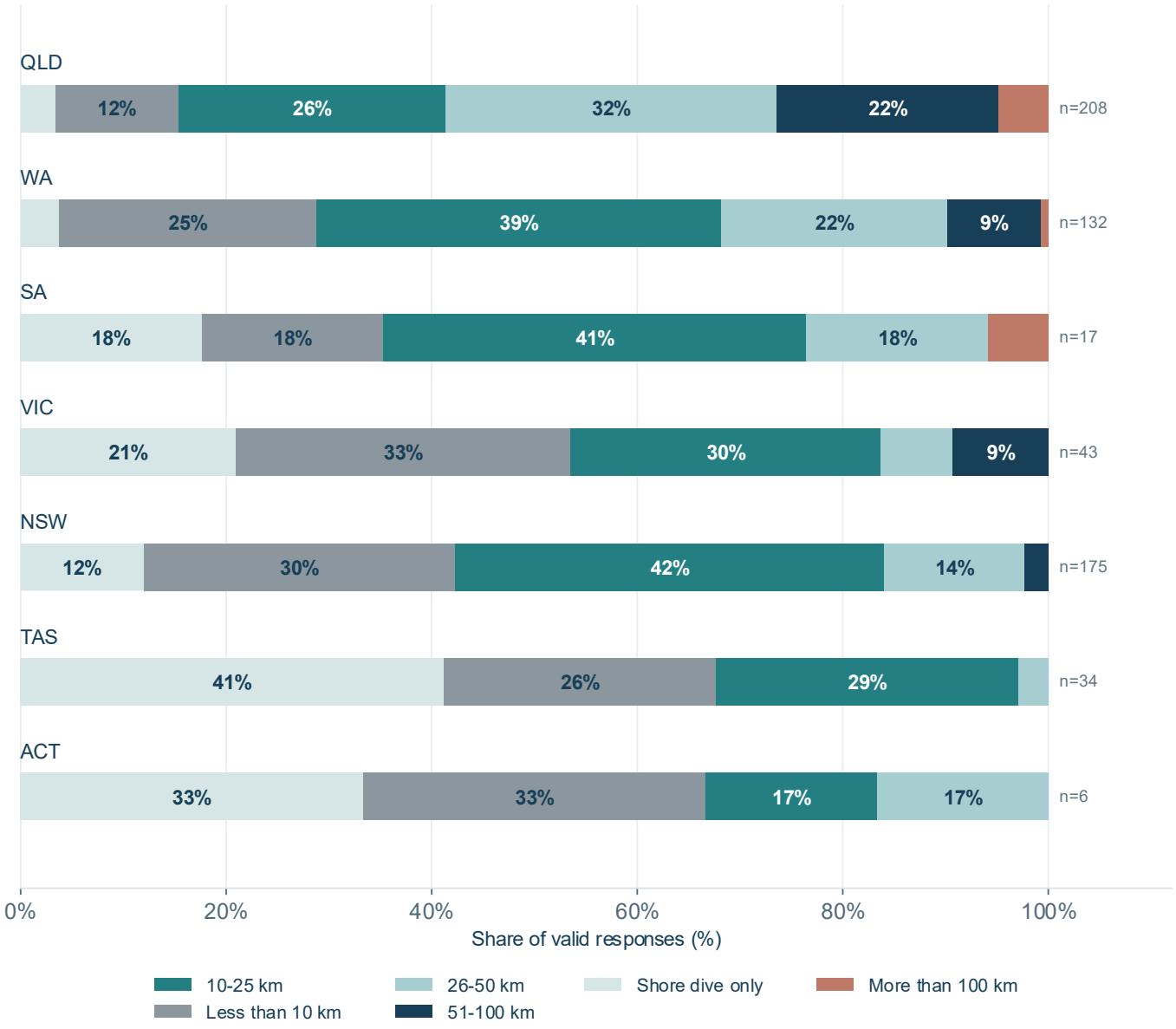
3.6 Regional Differences in Offshore Participation

The distances travelled by boat to reach spearfishing locations vary between States, reflecting differences in coastal geography, marine environments and access to suitable diving grounds.

> ***'It's a great interaction into nature, if people can't access the environment they will not care to protect it.'***

Boat travel distance by State

Percentage of valid responses • Individual sample sizes shown • Ranked by share travelling over 25 km



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These differences are relevant to understanding the costs, practical requirements and access considerations associated with spearfishing in different parts of Australia.

Section Summary

The survey reveals an experienced, geographically dispersed and socially connected recreational community. Participation encompasses a wide range of diving environments, harvesting interests and levels of formal organisation.

Importantly, spearfishing is sustained not only through clubs and competitions, but also through informal networks of friends, families and experienced participants who introduce others to the activity and share practical knowledge.

These characteristics provide important context for the economic, social, environmental and safety findings examined in the following sections.

4. Economic Contribution

Spearfishing generates economic activity through investment in specialist equipment, boats and other marine assets, together with recurring expenditure on fuel, maintenance, travel and associated services.

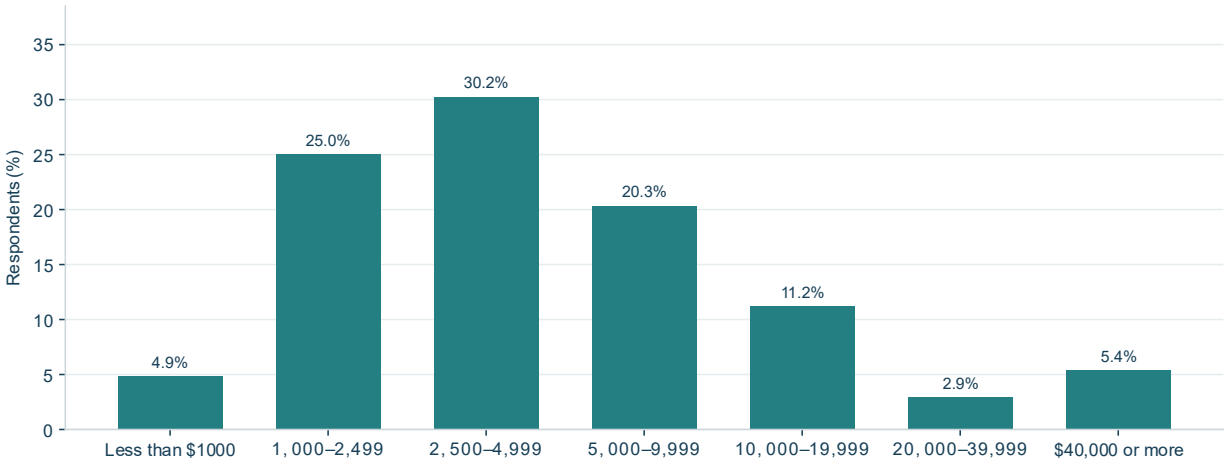
The survey provides an insight into the scale and nature of this expenditure, including its contribution to marine businesses, retailers and coastal communities.

4.1 Investment in Equipment and Marine Assets

Participation in spearfishing often involves substantial accumulated investment in specialist equipment, including spearguns, wetsuits, fins, diving equipment and associated accessories.

Accumulated capital investment

Valid responses: n = 615

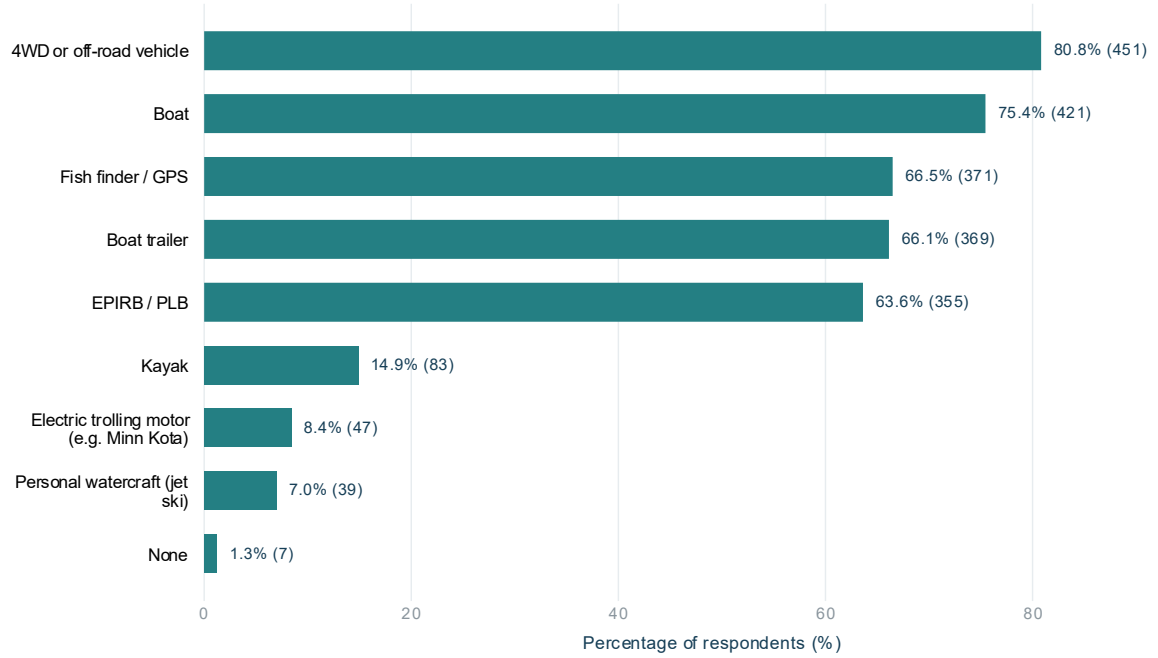


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

For many participants, investment extends beyond personal equipment to boats, trailers, personal watercraft and other assets supporting access to diving locations.

Major assets owned or used

Valid respondents: n = 558

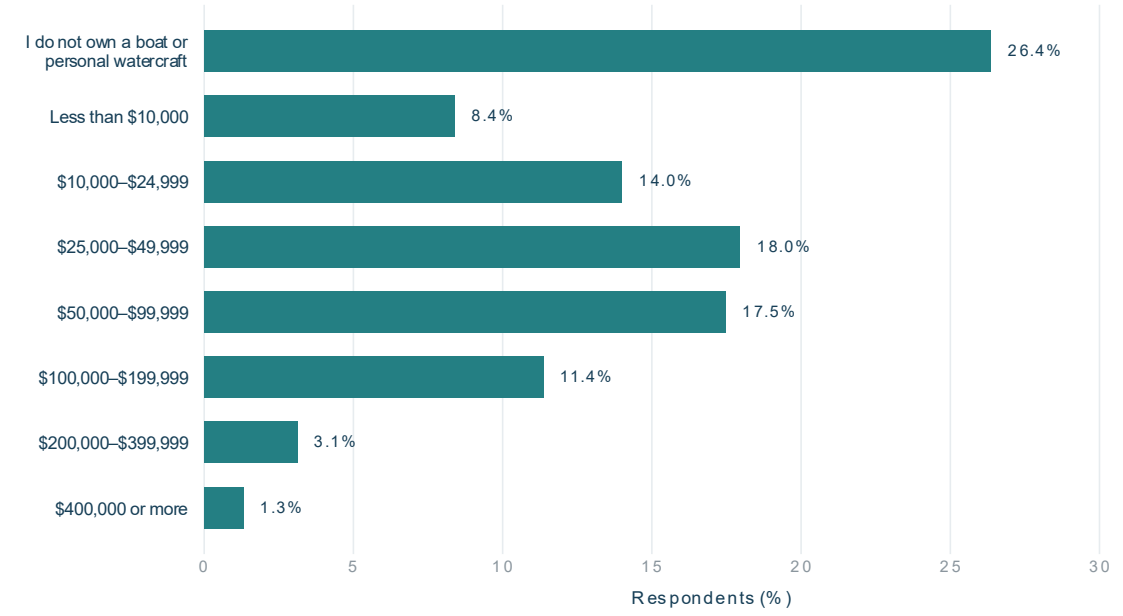


Multiple selections permitted; percentages are of respondents, not selections. Categories below 1% omitted.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Value of boats, trailers and personal watercraft

Valid responses: n = 607



Reported combined approximate current value of boats, trailers and personal watercraft owned and used for spearfishing

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

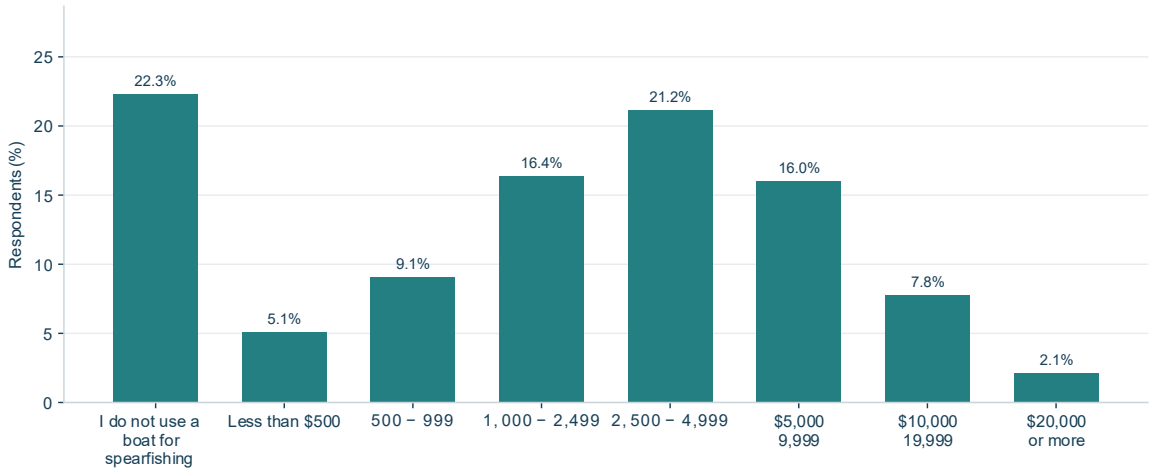
These assets represent a significant commitment to participation, although their full value cannot necessarily be attributed to spearfishing where they are also used for other activities.

4.2 Boat Ownership and Operating Expenditure

Boat-based spearfishing involves continuing expenditure on fuel, servicing, repairs, insurance, registration and other operating costs.

Annual boat operating expenditure

Valid responses: n = 605

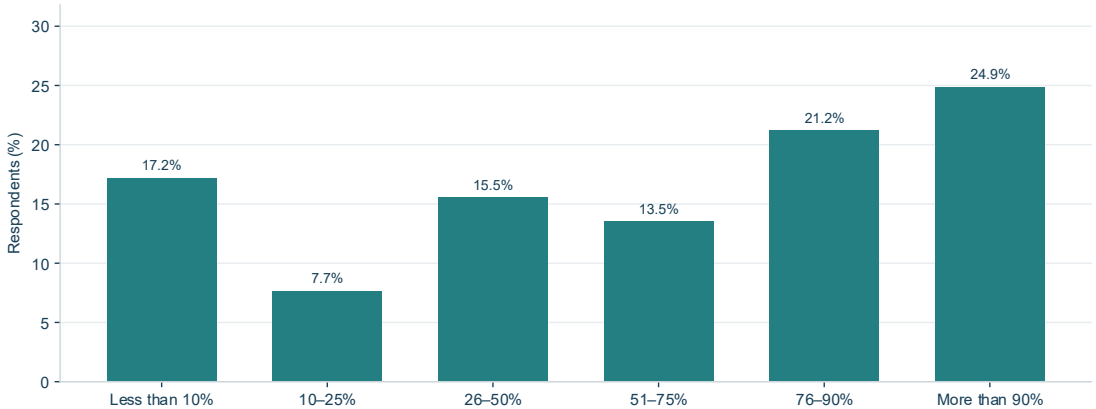


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

The proportion of boat use attributable to spearfishing varies considerably. Some respondents use their boats primarily for spearfishing, while others combine it with recreational fishing, boating and other activities.

Proportion of boat use attributable to spearfishing

Valid responses: n = 547



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

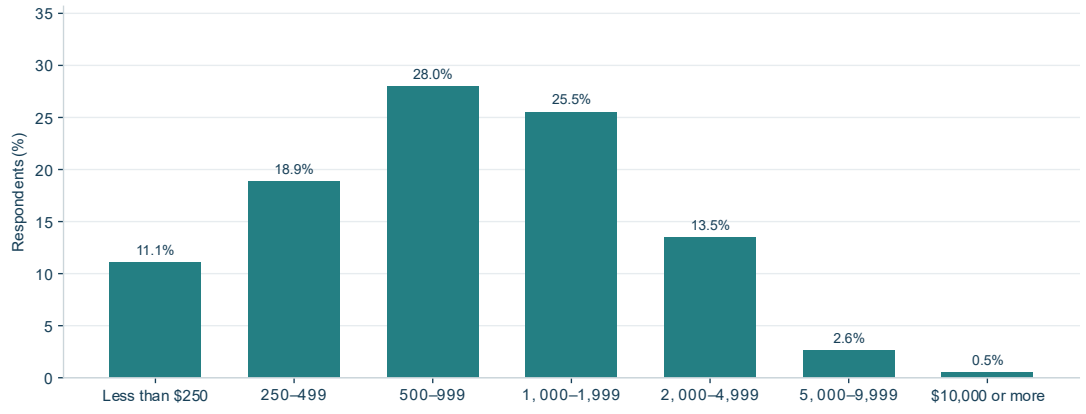
These findings demonstrate the connection between spearfishing and the broader recreational marine industry, particularly in areas where offshore participation requires substantial travel by boat.

4.3 Recurring Expenditure and Participation Costs

Beyond capital investment, spearfishers incur recurring costs through equipment purchases, replacement and maintenance.

Annual equipment expenditure

Valid responses: n = 615

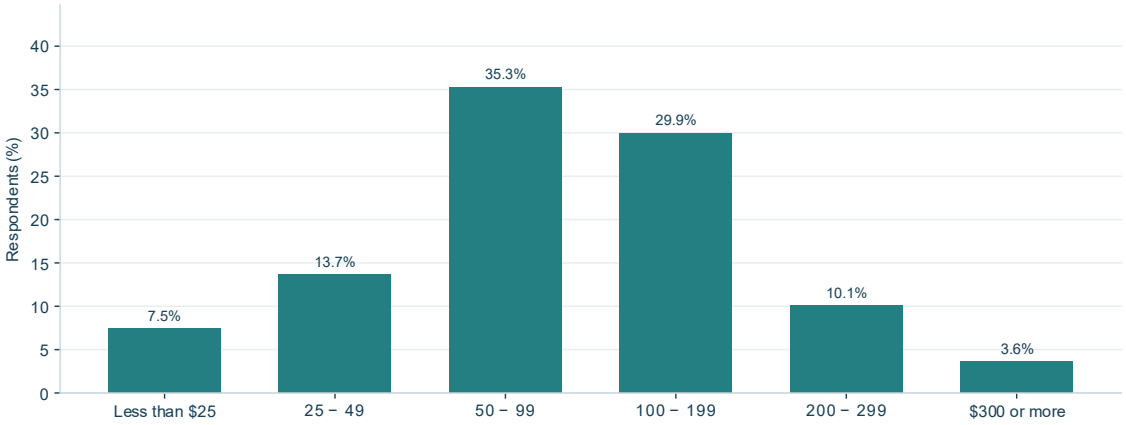


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Individual outings also generate expenditure on fuel, food, transport and other goods and services, with additional costs associated with longer trips and travel away from home.

Typical day-trip expenditure

Valid responses: n = 615

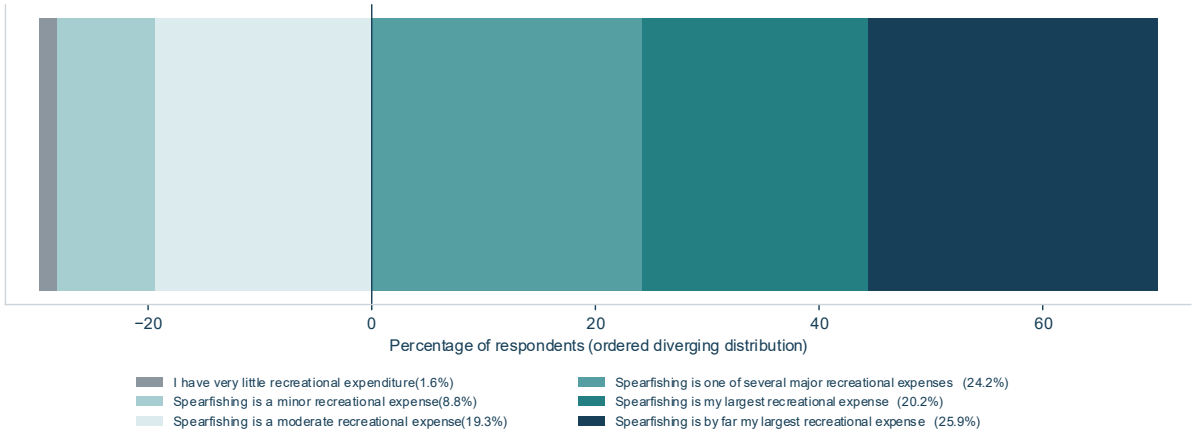


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Respondents' perceptions of the cost of spearfishing relative to other recreational activities provide further context for understanding the financial commitment associated with participation.

Expenditure compared with other recreational activities

Valid responses: n = 615



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

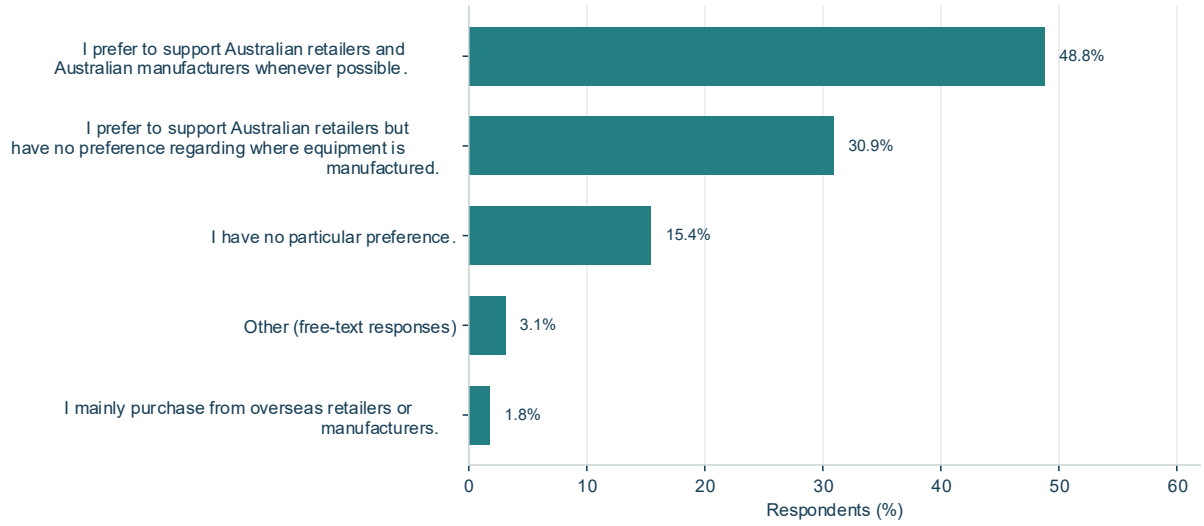
4.4 Supporting Australian Businesses

Expenditure associated with spearfishing supports specialist retailers, equipment suppliers, manufacturers, marine businesses and service providers.

The survey identifies a strong preference among respondents for purchasing equipment through Australian retailers, with many also expressing a preference for Australian-manufactured products.

Equipment purchasing preferences

Valid responses: n = 615



Free-text responses grouped as Other ; not reclassified into fixed -choice categories .

These preferences indicate opportunities for domestic businesses, although purchasing preferences do not necessarily reflect actual expenditure or establish the proportion retained within the Australian economy.

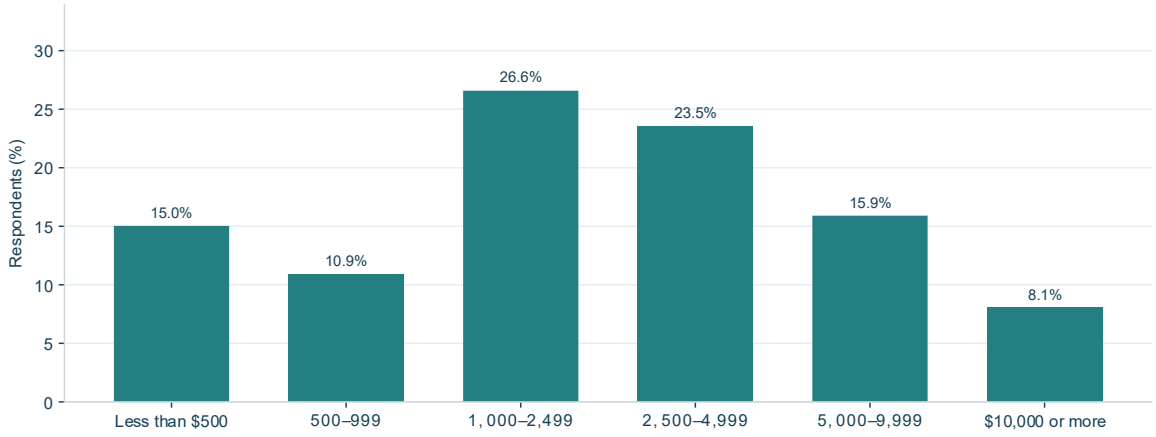
4.5 Expenditure Attributable to Spearfishing

An important distinction is the difference between total boating expenditure and the proportion reasonably attributable to spearfishing.

By combining respondents' reported annual boat operating costs with their estimated proportion of boat use for spearfishing, the survey provides an indicative measure of recurring expenditure associated with the activity.

Estimated annual boat expenditure attributable to spearfishing

Valid responses: n = 459



Estimate: expenditure-band midpoint × boat-use-band midpoint. Open-ended costs assumed $25,000; >90% use assumed 95%.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

The estimates use the midpoints of reported expenditure and boat-use categories, with assumptions applied to open-ended categories. They are indicative rather than actual expenditure figures and exclude respondents without complete paired responses.

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.

4.6 The Broader Economic Contribution

The survey demonstrates that spearfishing is associated with meaningful economic activity extending beyond the purchase of specialist equipment.

Investment in marine assets, recurring operating costs, equipment purchases and travel all contribute to expenditure across a range of industries, including businesses operating in regional and coastal communities.

The survey was not designed as a statistically representative national economic-impact assessment, and the results should not be extrapolated into a definitive national expenditure figure.

Nevertheless, the findings establish that spearfishing supports continuing economic activity and that its economic significance extends well beyond the value of the seafood harvested.

5. Motivations, Health and Wellbeing

Spearfishing provides benefits extending well beyond the harvesting of seafood. The survey examined why Australians participate and the importance they attach to the physical, psychological, social and environmental aspects of the activity.

5.1 Reasons for Participation

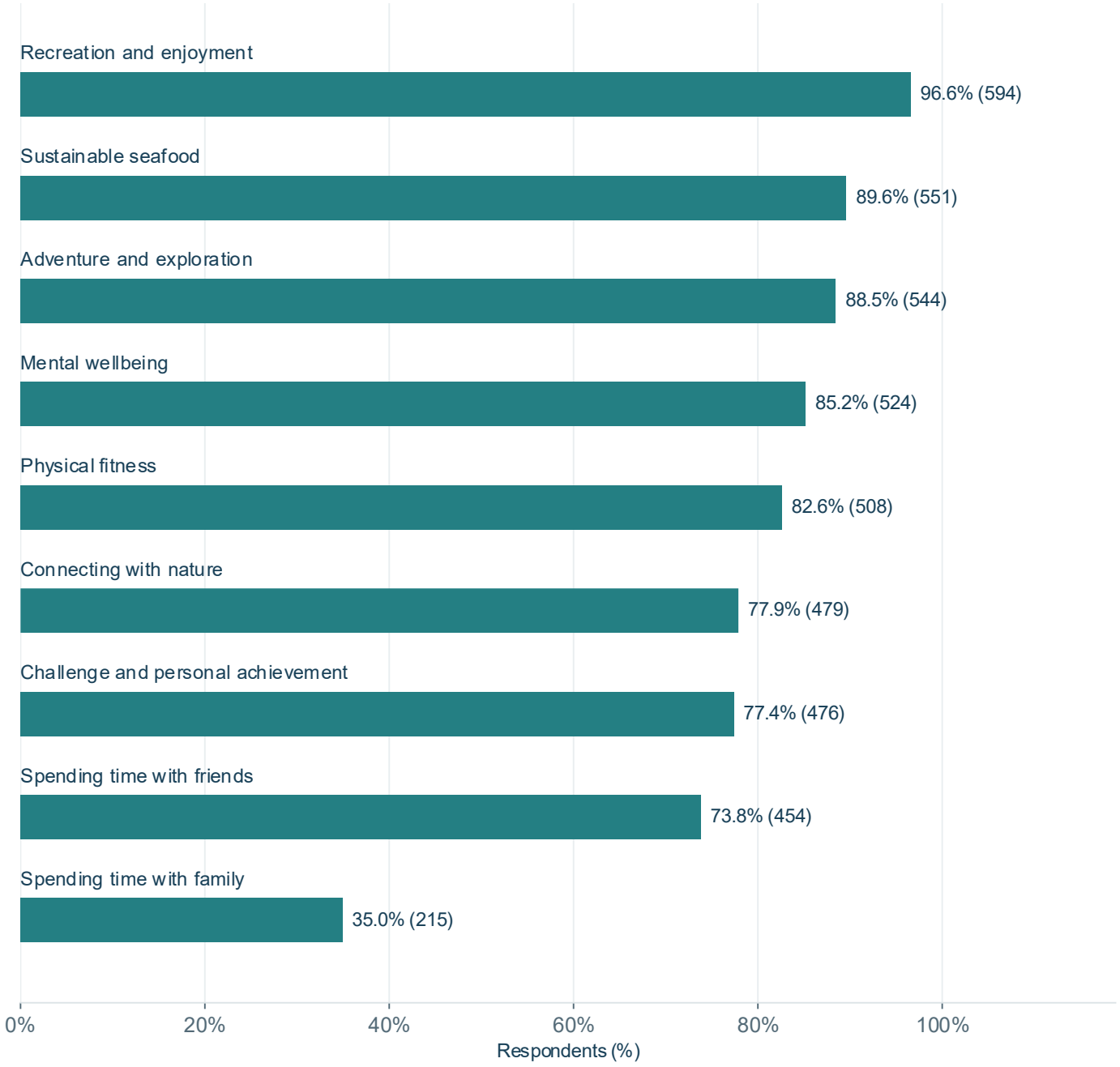
Respondents identified a broad range of motivations, including recreation, sustainable seafood, adventure, physical fitness, mental wellbeing, connection with nature and spending time with friends and family.

'The benefits available to the individual, fitness, connection to nature, fresh fish with minimum damage to environment or other fish'



Reasons for participating

Percentage of respondents • n = 615 • Multiple answers permitted



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

The diversity of these motivations demonstrates that spearfishing cannot adequately be understood or valued solely by reference to the quantity or economic value of fish harvested. For many participants, the experience of being in the marine environment is itself a principal reason for participation.

5.2 Health, Wellbeing and Social Benefits

Respondents reported substantial benefits associated with physical activity, mental wellbeing, stress reduction, friendships, family relationships and connection with the natural environment.

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

87%

Agree that spearfishing has helped them build lasting friendships

The findings also highlight the importance of spearfishing to participants' lifestyles and personal identities. For many, it represents an enduring recreational pursuit that contributes to their quality of life and sense of belonging.

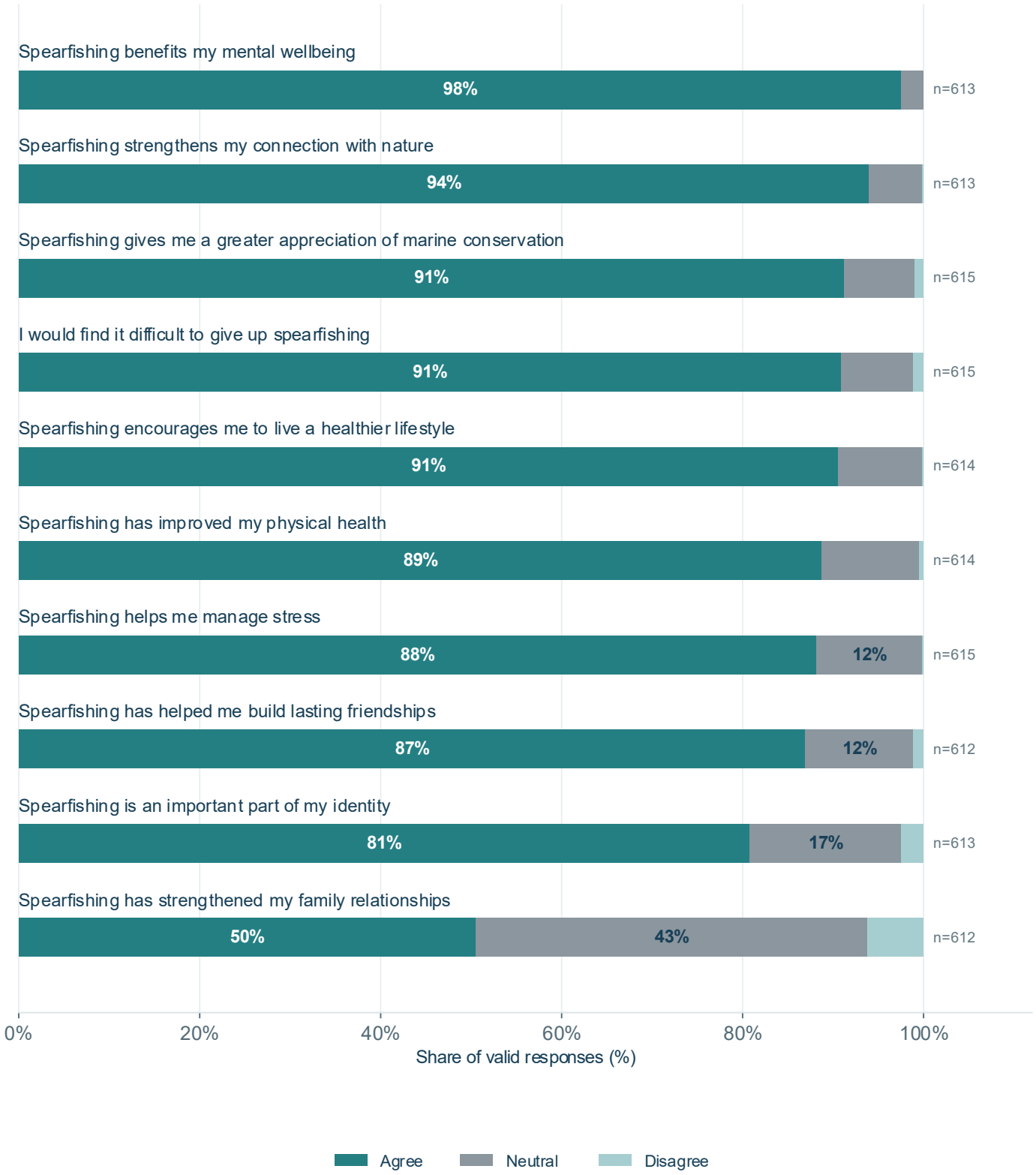
These benefits are self-reported rather than independently measured health outcomes. Nevertheless, they demonstrate the considerable personal and social value respondents attach to participation.

94%

Report that spearfishing strengthens their connection to nature

Health wellbeing and social benefits

Percentage of valid responses • Individual sample sizes shown • Attitudes and reported benefits



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

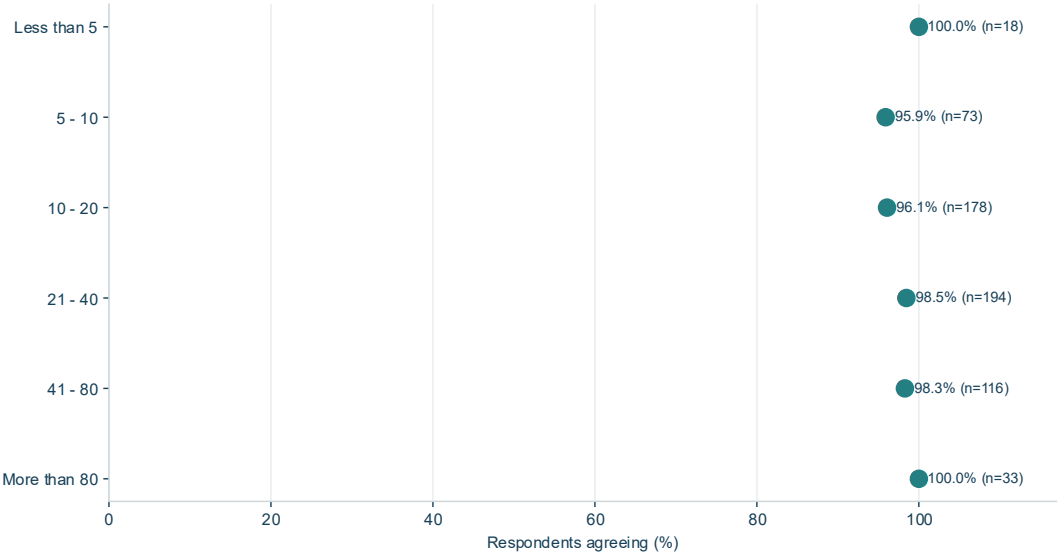
5.3 Mental Wellbeing and Participation Frequency

The survey also examined the relationship between participation frequency and respondents' perceptions of the mental wellbeing benefits of spearfishing.

> ***'Spearfishing is an environmentally sustainable practice when carried out correctly, it's a great way to connect people to nature and improve physical and mental wellbeing'***

Mental wellbeing by participation frequency

Valid responses: n = 612



Survey response options are Agree, Neutral and Disagree; no Strongly agree category was offered. Association only; no causal inference.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

The results provide an opportunity to compare perceived benefits across different levels of participation, although any association should not be interpreted as establishing a causal relationship.

5.4 The Broader Value of Spearfishing

The findings reinforce the importance of recognising spearfishing as more than a method of recreational fishing.

Its contribution to physical activity, mental wellbeing, social connection, food gathering and engagement with nature represents a broader recreational and community value that cannot be measured simply by reference to catch or expenditure.

These benefits are relevant when considering the social consequences of marine management decisions, particularly where changes to access may affect opportunities for participation.

6. Sharks and Spearfishing

Shark interactions are a significant aspect of spearfishing in many parts of Australia. The survey examined the frequency and nature of encounters, their effects on participation, reported changes over time and the measures spearfishers consider effective in managing interactions.

The findings reveal substantial differences between jurisdictions, highlighting the importance of recognising regional experiences rather than treating shark interactions as a uniform national issue.

6.1 Shark Encounters and Their Impact

Shark sightings are a regular feature of spearfishing for many respondents, although the frequency of encounters varies considerably.

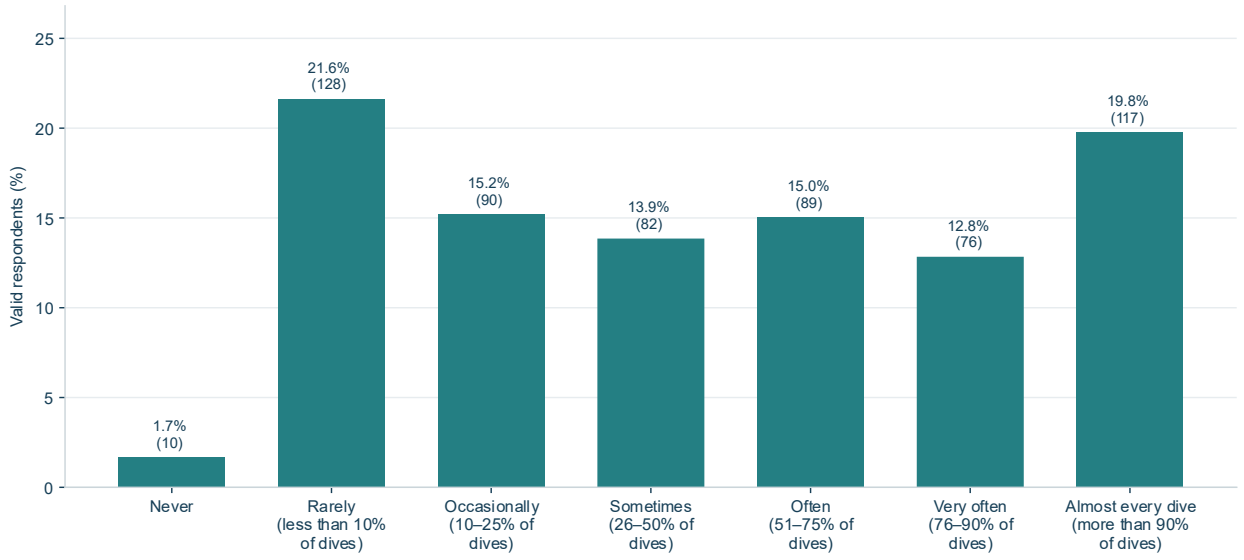
DID YOU KNOW?

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



Frequency of shark sightings

Valid responses: n = 592



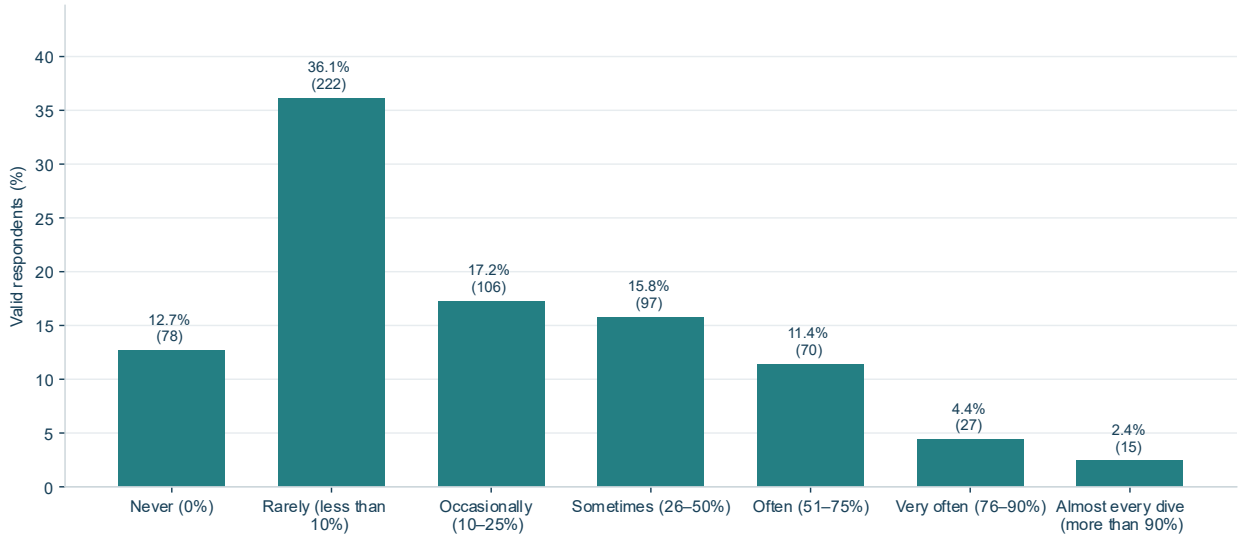
Respondents selecting multiple frequency bands excluded (ambiguous single-frequency response).

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Importantly, encountering a shark does not necessarily mean that a dive is negatively affected. The survey separately examined the extent to which shark interactions interfere with participation.

Dives negatively affected by sharks

Valid responses: n = 615

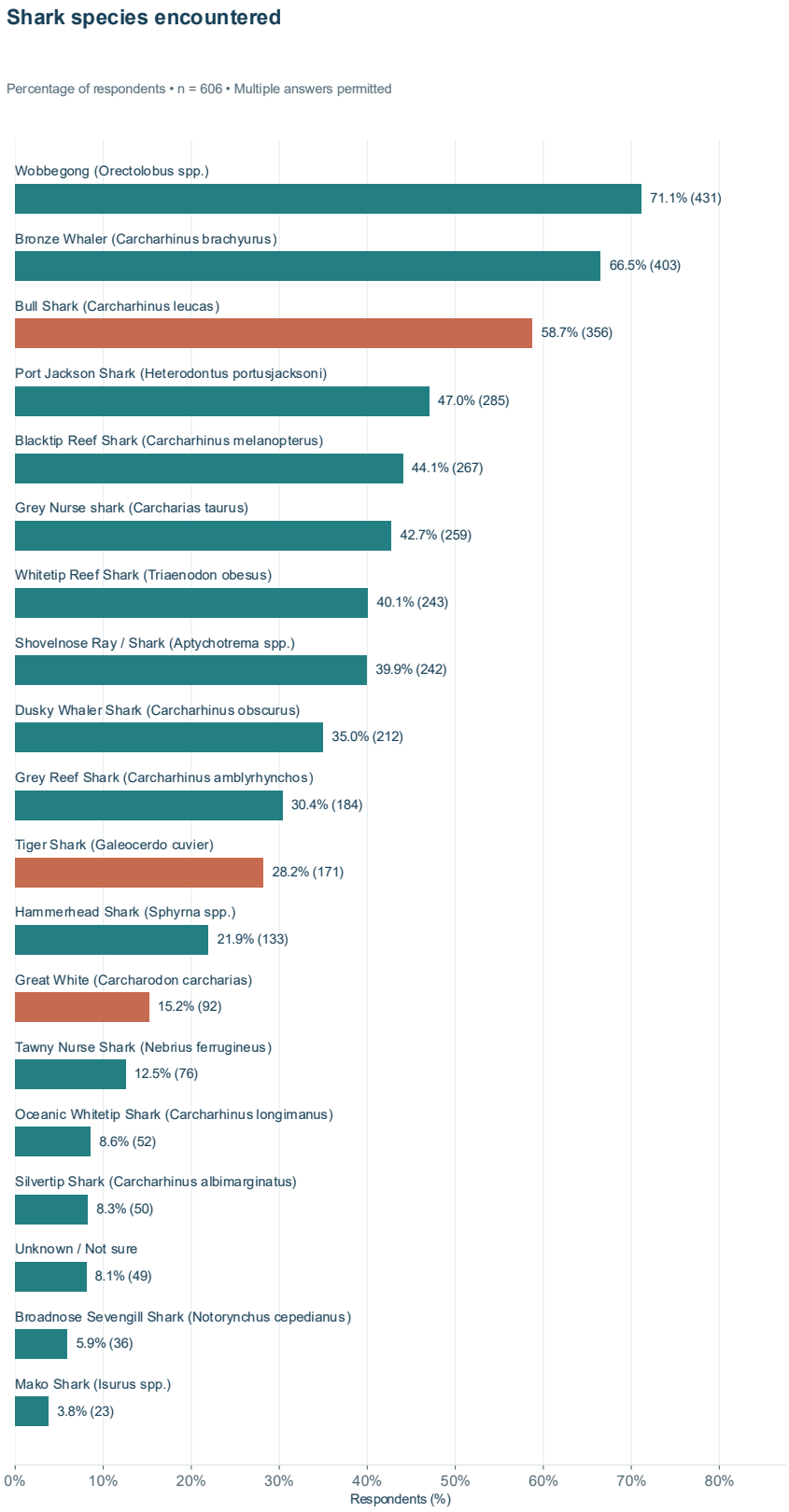


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

This distinction is important when considering the practical impact of sharks on spearfishing and the potential risks associated with different forms of interaction.

6.2 Species and Types of Interaction

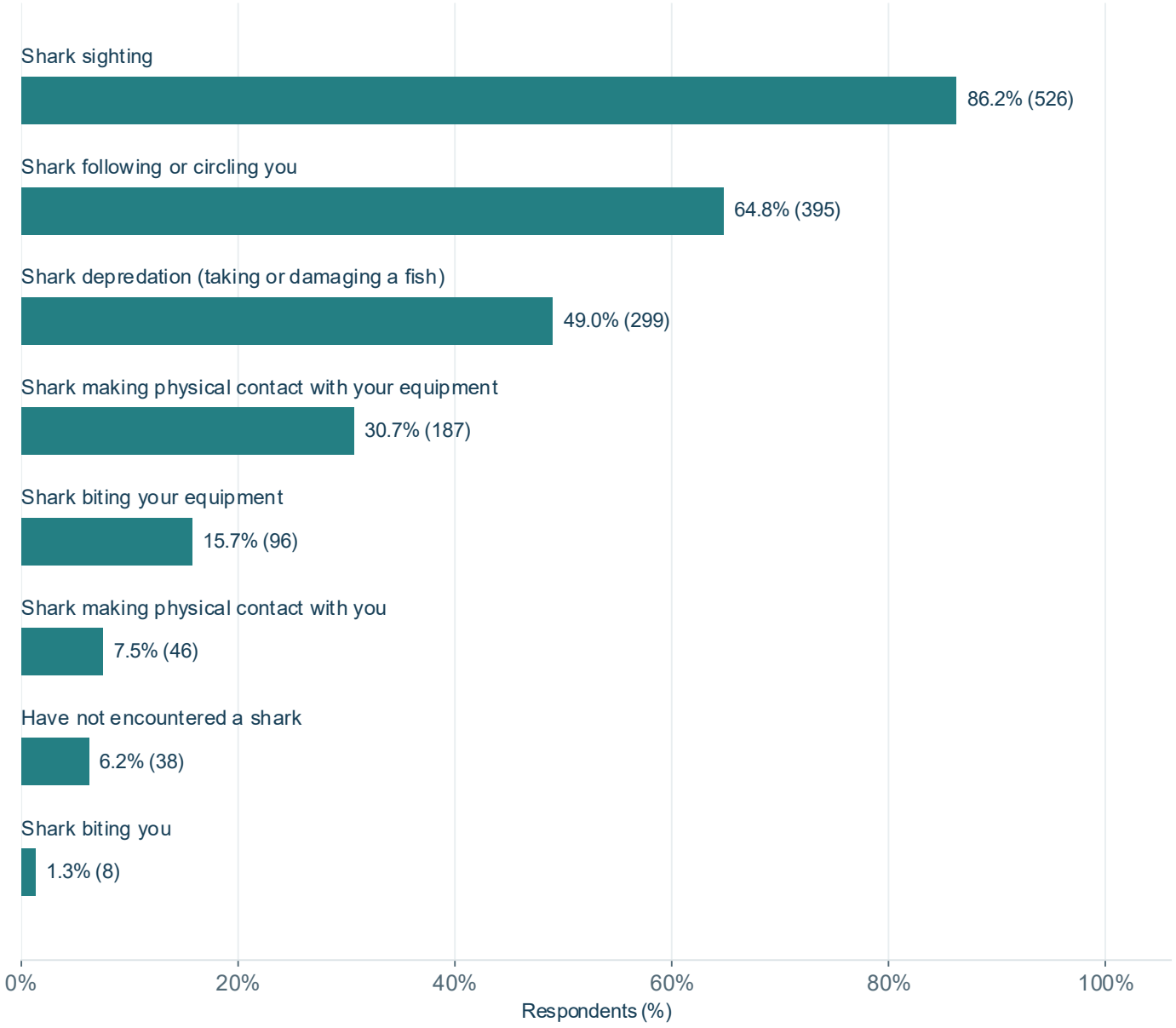
Respondents reported encounters with a range of shark species, reflecting the diversity of marine environments in which spearfishing occurs.



Interactions ranged from routine sightings to sharks following divers, interfering with equipment, taking captured fish and making physical contact.

Types of shark interactions

Percentage of respondents • n = 610 • Multiple answers permitted



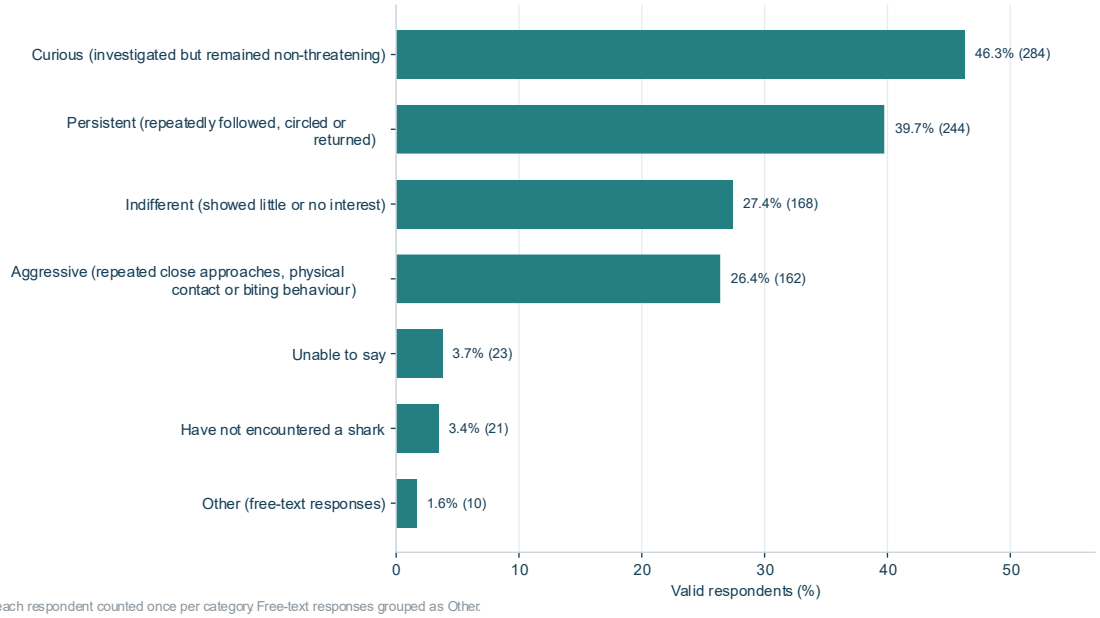
Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Respondents also described the behaviour of sharks during their most serious interactions, including behaviour perceived as curious, persistent, indifferent or aggressive.

'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'

Behaviour during most serious interaction

Valid responses: n = 614



Multiple selections permitted; each respondent counted once per category. Free-text responses grouped as Other.

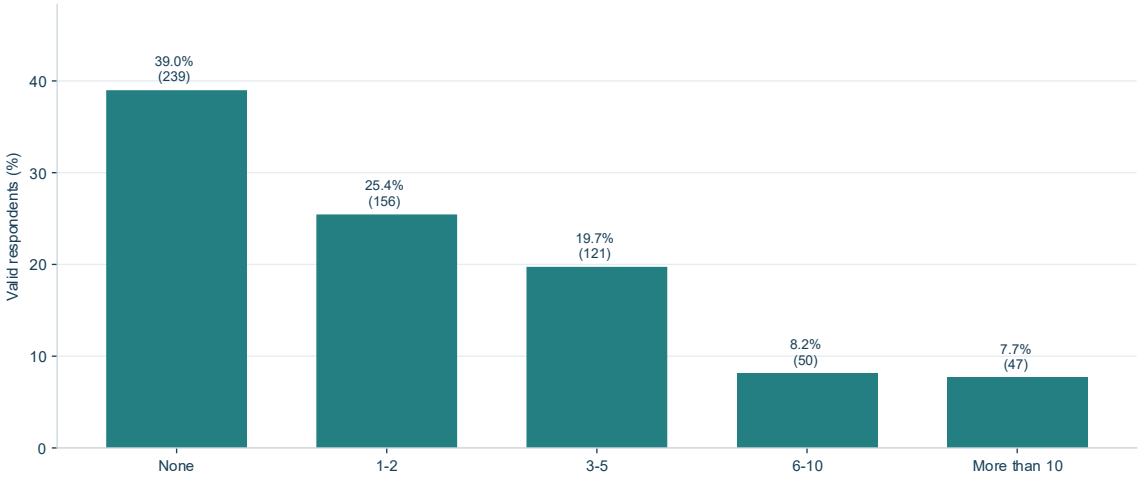
These descriptions reflect respondents' experiences and perceptions rather than independently verified assessments of shark behaviour. Similarly, reported contact or biting incidents should not be interpreted as confirmed attacks or injuries without further verification.

6.3 Shark Depredation

Shark depredation, involving sharks taking or damaging captured fish, was a prominent experience among respondents.

Shark depredation events

Valid responses: n = 613



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Depredation is particularly relevant because it can affect both the enjoyment and safety of spearfishing. It may require divers to change their behaviour, abandon captured fish, relocate or terminate a dive.

Repeated depredation also raises questions concerning the effectiveness of different approaches to managing shark interactions.

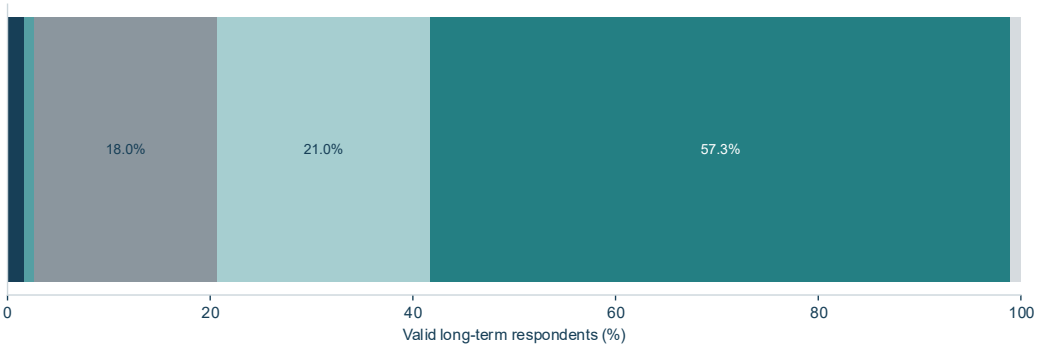
6.4 Changes in Shark Interactions Over Time

Long-term spearfishers provide a valuable perspective on changes in their experiences over time.

The survey found that a substantial majority of experienced respondents who expressed a view believed shark interactions had become more frequent since they began spearfishing.

Changes in shark interactions over time

Valid responses: n = 300



Only respondents reporting more than 10 years of spearfishing and a valid change response .

Become much less frequent
Become somewhat less frequent
Stayed about the same
Become somewhat more frequent
Become much more frequent
Unsure

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These findings document perceived changes in interactions rather than establishing changes in shark abundance. Differences in diving locations, participation patterns, environmental conditions and shark behaviour may all influence respondents' experiences.

Nevertheless, the consistency of these observations among experienced participants provides a basis for further structured research.

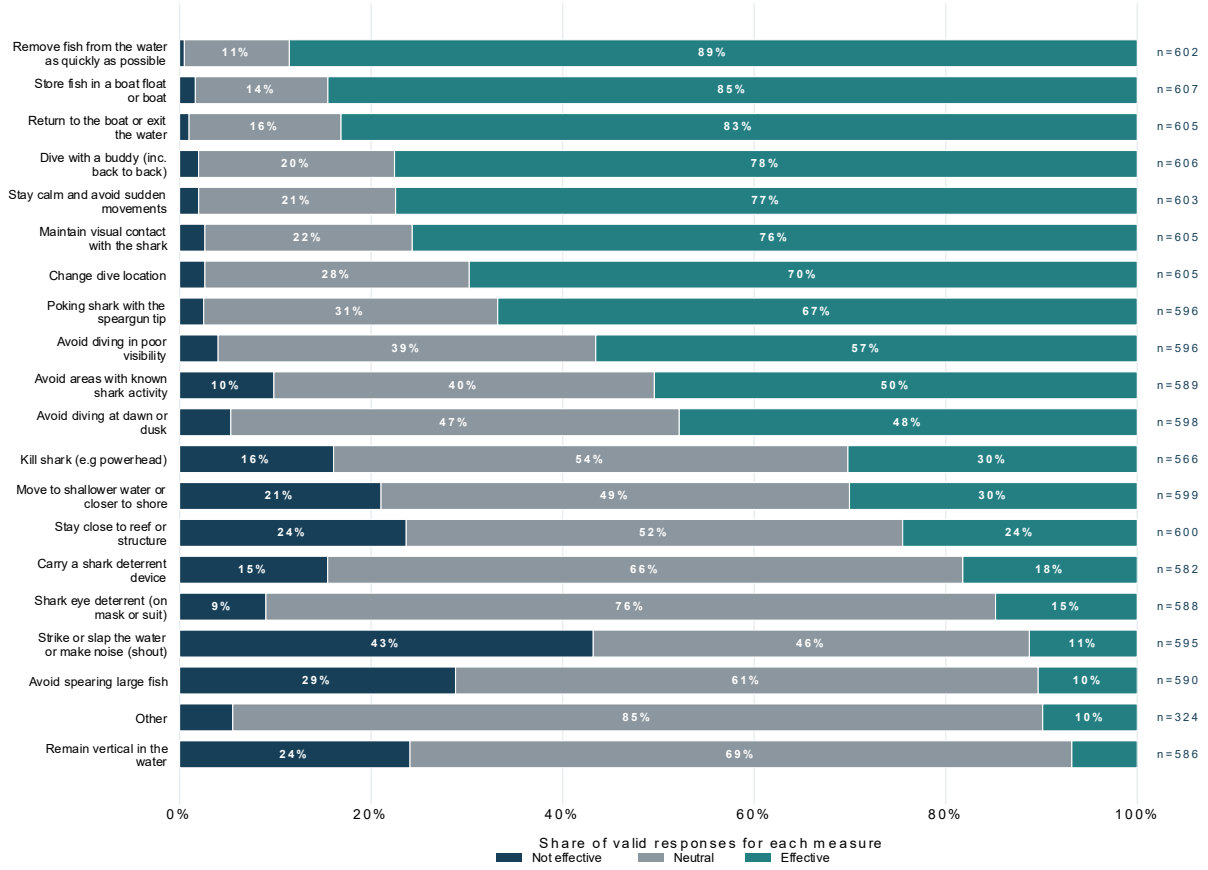
6.5 Managing Shark Interactions

Respondents assessed a range of measures intended to reduce shark interactions and improve diver safety, including catch handling, changes to diving practices, avoidance strategies and other mitigation approaches.

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



Ratings represent respondents perceived effectiveness, not how frequently each measure is used.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

The results provide an insight into which measures spearfishers consider most effective. These perceptions may assist in identifying priorities for safety education and further research, although they do not independently establish the effectiveness of particular measures.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Shark interactions are not experienced uniformly across Australia. Research, safety initiatives and management responses should recognise regional differences rather than assume that the same issues and solutions apply nationally.

Physical shark deterrence measures used by some spearfishers range from gently poking or pushing an approaching shark away with a speargun tip, generally without causing injury, through to lethal measures such as the use of a powerhead. These practices were included in the survey because they occur in real-world spearfishing situations, not because their use is endorsed or encouraged. The survey sought respondents' perceptions of their effectiveness and does not condone or recommend any particular practice, nor independently establish its safety or effectiveness.

6.6 Regional Differences

Some of the most significant findings concern the substantial differences in shark encounters between States.

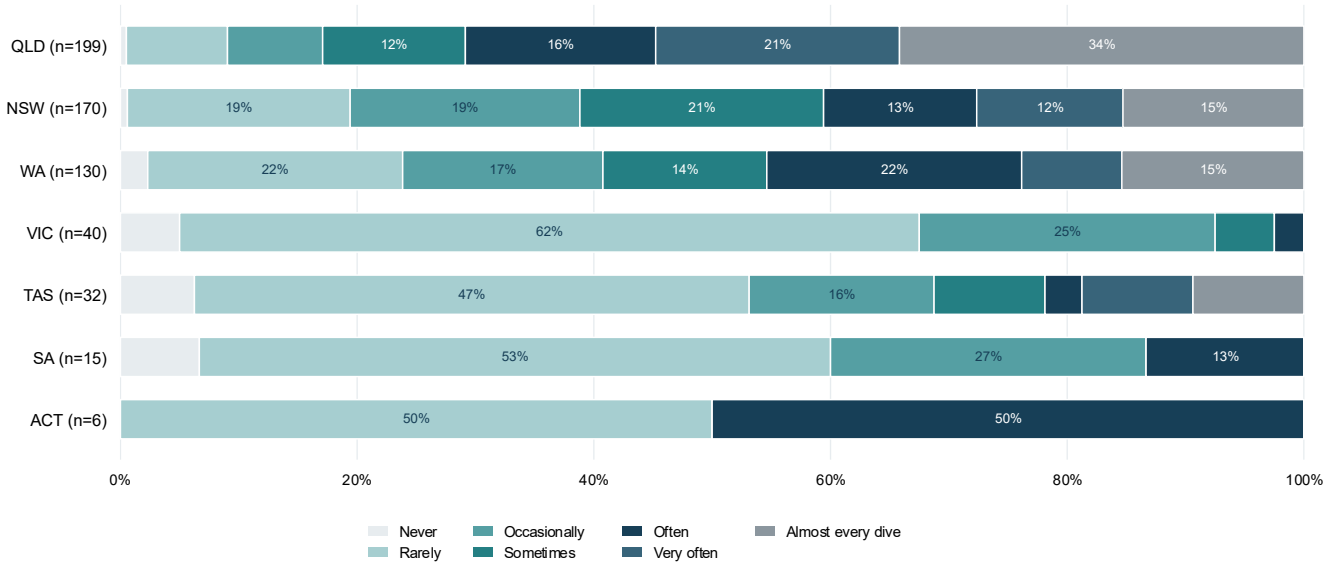
Queensland respondents reported particularly frequent sightings and depredation, with substantial levels also recorded in New South Wales and Western Australia. Experiences in Victoria and Tasmania were generally less frequent.

'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.'



Shark sightings by State

Percentage of valid respondents within each State · total n= 592

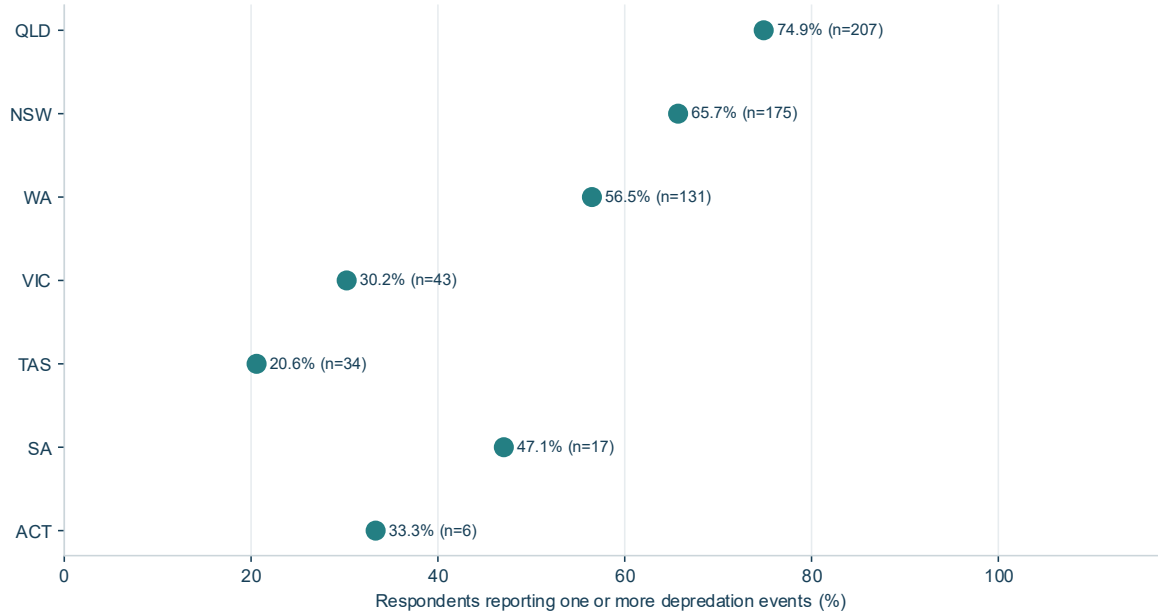


Note: Respondents selecting more than one sighting -frequency category were excluded. Percentages use valid State responses.
Small samples: SA (n=15) and ACT (n=6); interpret these State percentages cautiously

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Shark depredation by State

Valid responses: n = 613

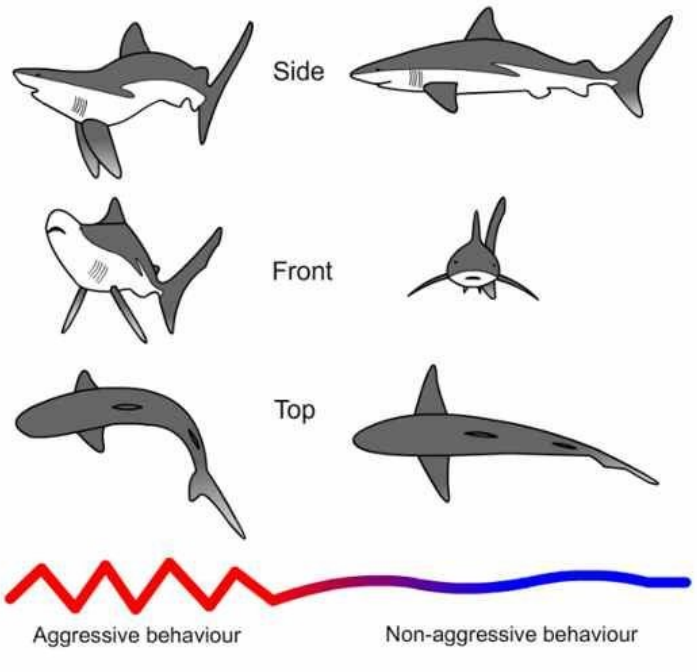


Based on reported number of depredation events in preceding12 months; ACT and SA have small samples.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

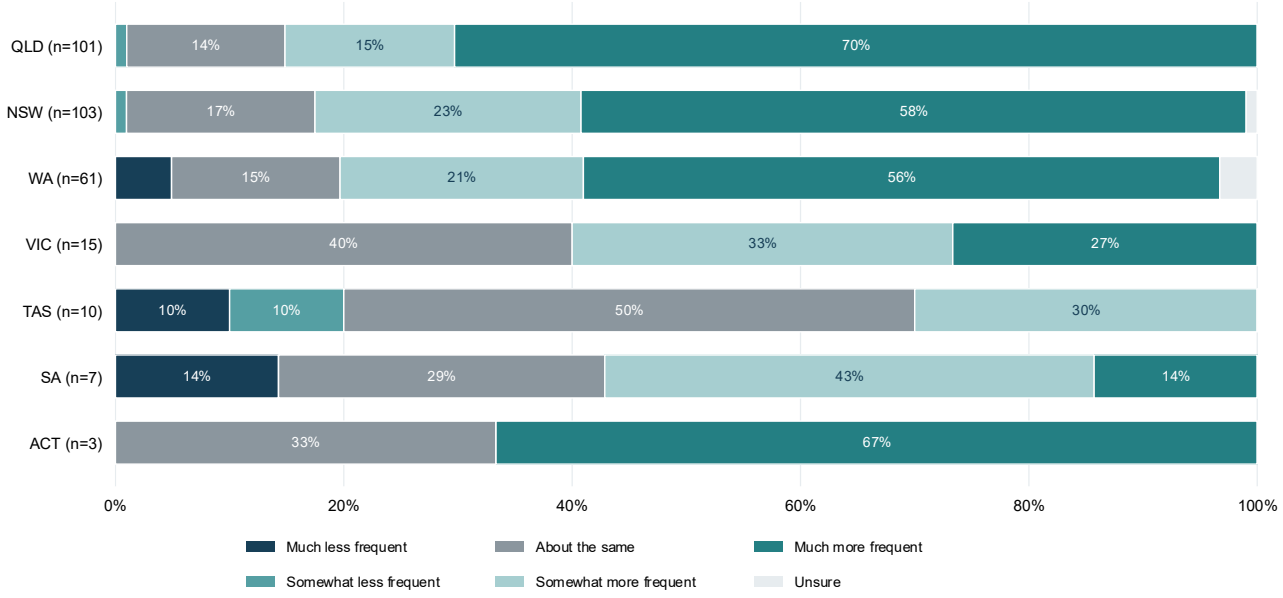
Perceptions of changes over time also varied geographically, although respondents in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia commonly reported increasing interactions.

'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.'



Changes in shark interactions by State

Valid long-term respondents: n = 300 | Respondents with more than 10 years' experience



Percentages are calculated within each State . Only segments ≥9% are labelled to avoid crowding .
SA and ACT have very small samples ; comparisons should be interpreted cautiously .

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These comparisons demonstrate that there is no single Australian experience of shark interactions while spearfishing. Regional differences should be recognised in research, safety education and management responses.

6.7 Implications for Research and Management

The survey highlights the value of incorporating spearfishers' observations into research concerning shark interactions, depredation and diver safety.

Spearfishers regularly observe sharks in circumstances that may differ from those encountered by other marine users. Their experiences provide opportunities for structured data collection and collaboration with researchers.

The findings support further investigation of regional interaction patterns, effective mitigation measures and practical approaches to reducing adverse encounters.

Any management response should distinguish between shark presence, depredation and direct risks to diver safety, while recognising the substantial differences in experiences across Australia.

7. Citizen Science and Spearfishing Safety

Spearfishers spend considerable time underwater observing marine life, habitats and environmental conditions. This provides opportunities to contribute to scientific research and environmental monitoring.

At the same time, spearfishing involves risks associated with breath-hold diving, boating, weather, equipment and marine life. The survey examined citizen-science participation, safety training, diving practices, equipment, incidents and priorities for improving safety.

DID YOU KNOW?

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

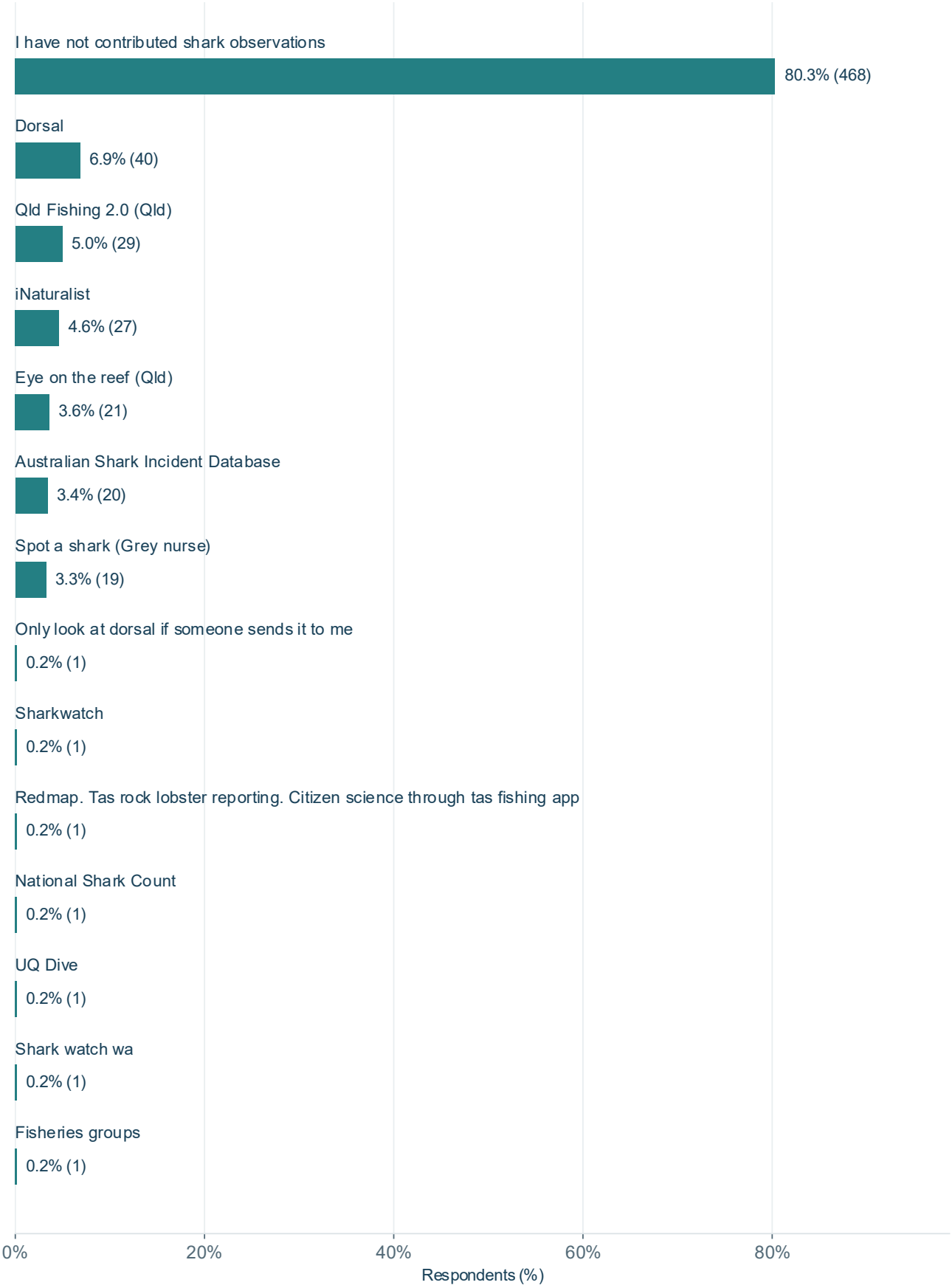
7.1 Citizen Science and Marine Research

The survey examined participation in citizen-science programs, particularly those involving shark observations and reporting.

'Our potential as ocean users. Citizen science projects, reporting pollution/environmental issues, reporting illegal fishing, a group of enthusiastic outdoorsmen who are often keen to support initiatives that benefit the ocean and our community.'

Shark citizen science participation

Percentage of respondents• n = 583



Although participation in established reporting programs remains limited, the survey identifies opportunities for greater collaboration between spearfishers, researchers and marine-management agencies.

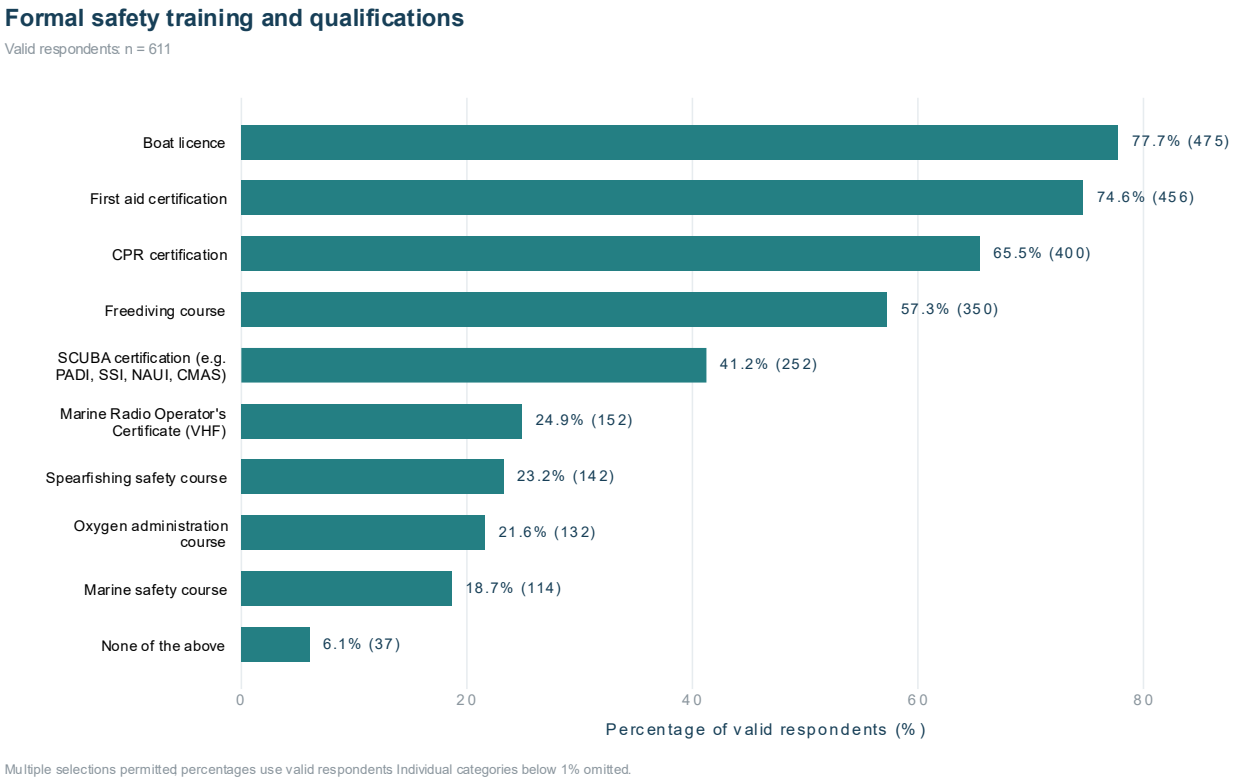
Experienced spearfishers may contribute valuable observations through appropriately designed projects, particularly where consistent reporting methods and scientific oversight are provided.

> ***'With education and citizen science helping we can be integral to ensuring both fish populations and the sport we love.'***

7.2 Safety Training and Qualifications

Respondents reported a range of formal qualifications, including first aid, CPR, freediving, boating and marine safety training.

> ***'The Best fishing method for environmental, selective, low catch per man hour spent... but NEED training for beginners'***



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

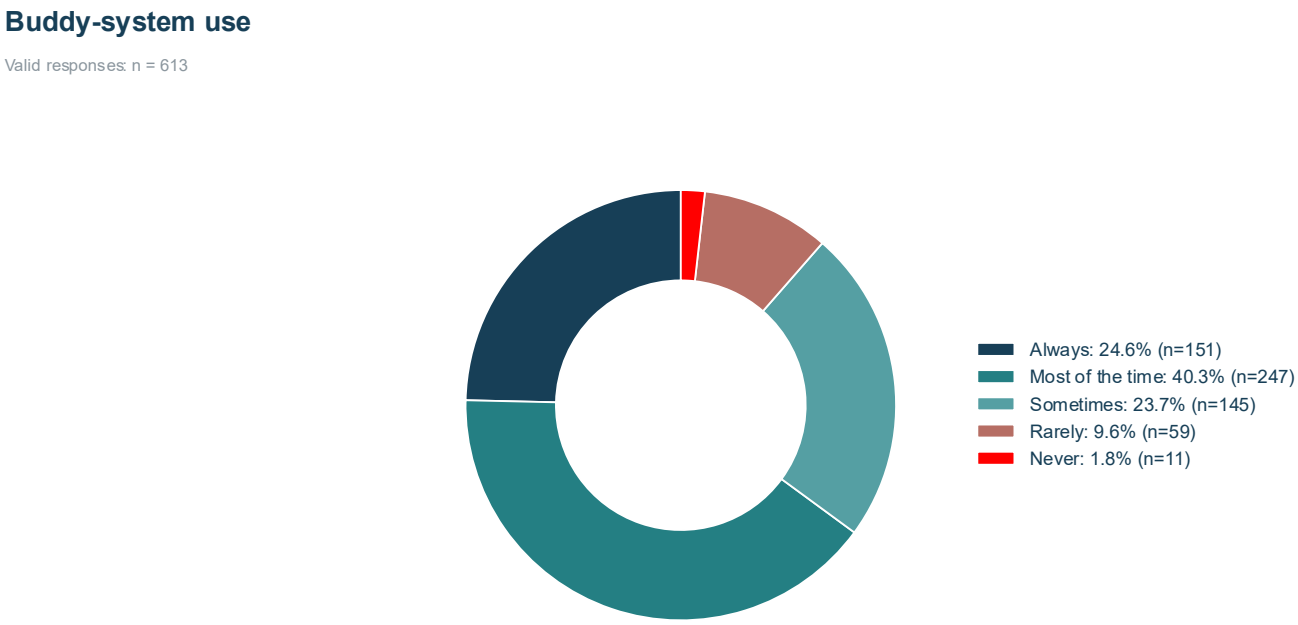
Note: A further 26 respondents (4.3%) provided individual responses, each representing less than 1% of participants. These included specialist commercial diving and maritime qualifications, naval diving and survival training, surf lifesaving qualifications, rescue and trauma first aid courses, and coaching or club-based freediving instruction. A small number also referred to additional marine radio qualifications. These individual responses have been excluded for clarity but remain part of the survey dataset.

While general safety qualifications were relatively common, participation in spearfishing-specific safety training was considerably lower.

This identifies an opportunity to strengthen practical education addressing the particular risks of breath-hold diving and spearfishing.

7.3 Buddy Practices and Safety Equipment

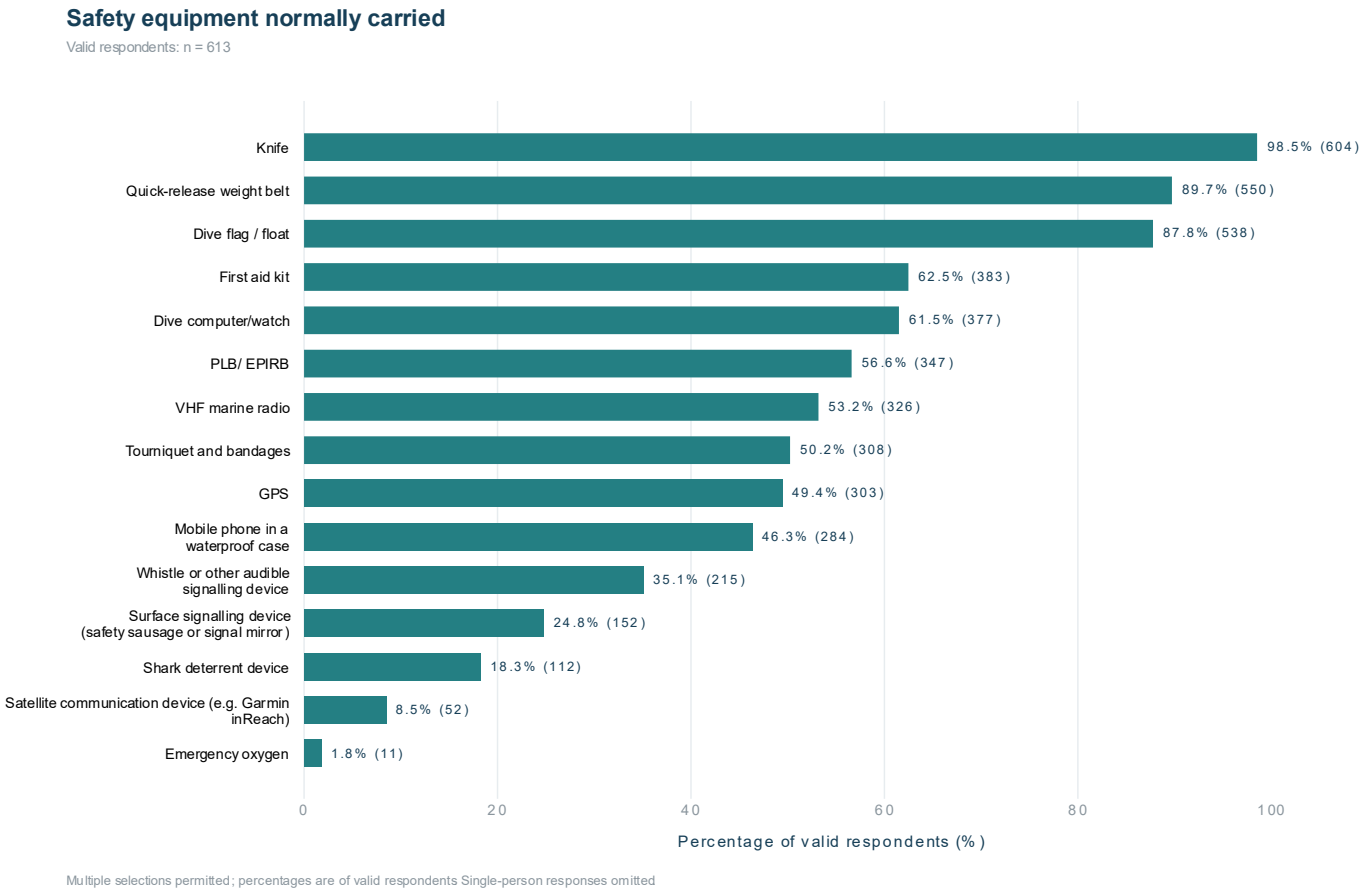
The buddy system is an important component of breath-hold diving safety, although respondents reported considerable variation in how consistently they dive with a buddy.



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Respondents also reported carrying a range of safety equipment, reflecting differences in diving methods, locations and individual practices.





Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Note: A further 14 respondents (2.3%) provided individual responses, each representing only one participant. These included additional safety equipment such as powerheads, CO_2-activated floats and signalling mirrors, together with references to boat safety equipment, dive flags carried on both boats and floats, and the presence of a boat driver. Several respondents clarified that communications and emergency equipment were carried aboard their vessel rather than personally while diving. Others described alternative safety practices, including shallow-water diving, shore-based emergency arrangements and plans to purchase additional communication equipment. These individual responses have been excluded for clarity but remain part of the survey dataset.

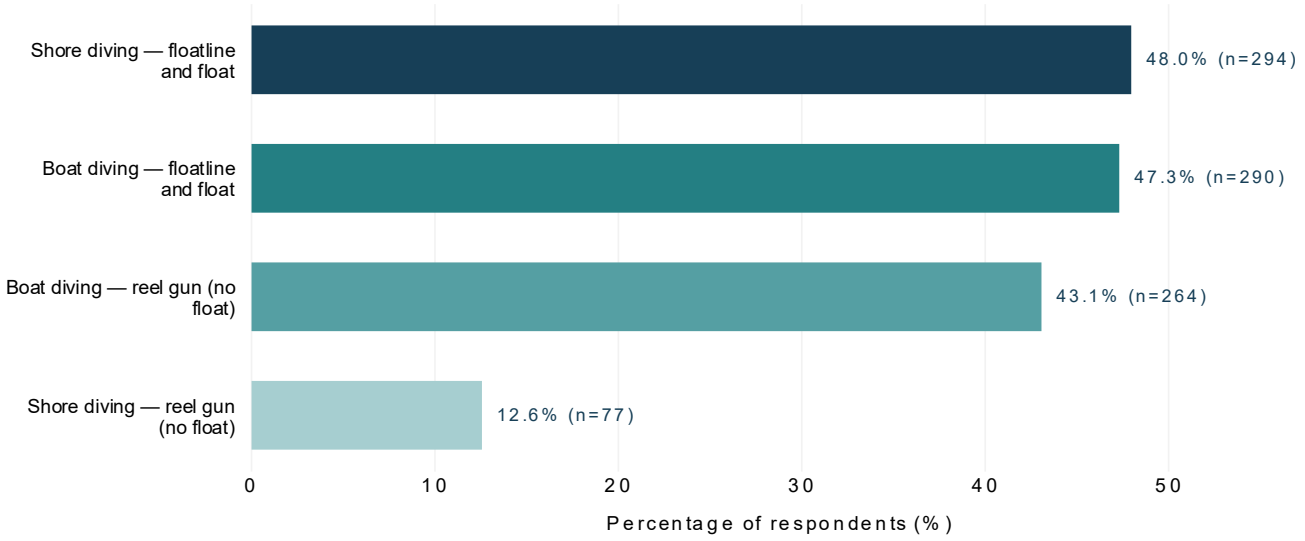
These findings highlight the importance of promoting consistent safety practices and ensuring participants understand the equipment and procedures appropriate to their diving circumstances.

7.4 Diving Methods and Catch Handling

Spearfishing is undertaken from shore, boats and other platforms, with different arrangements presenting distinct safety considerations.

Normal diving method

n = 613 valid respondents



Multiple selections permitted; percentages are of respondents. Single-response free-text categories omitted.

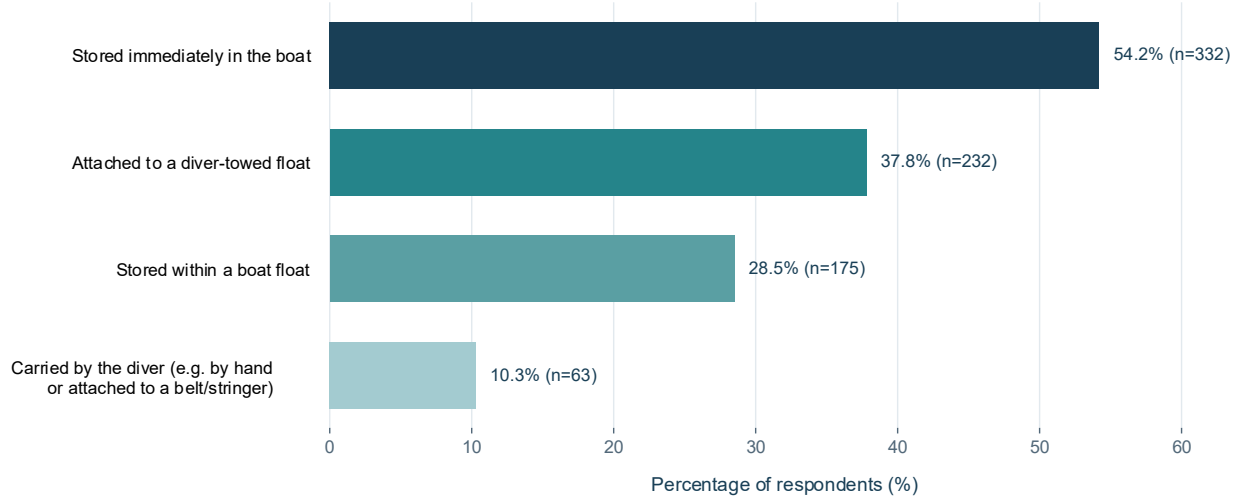
Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Note: A further 19 respondents (3.1%) provided individual responses, each representing only one participant. These included variations involving handspears, spearguns without reels or floats, combinations of reel guns and floats, and different equipment configurations depending on the diving location or target species. Some respondents also described specialised practices, including crayfish diving without a speargun, shallow estuary diving and shore diving without a float. These individual responses have been excluded from for clarity but remain part of the survey dataset.

The methods used to carry and store captured fish are also relevant to diver safety, particularly in areas where shark interactions are common.

Carrying and storing catch

Valid respondents: n = 613



Multiple selections permitted percentages are of respondents Single-person responses excluded.

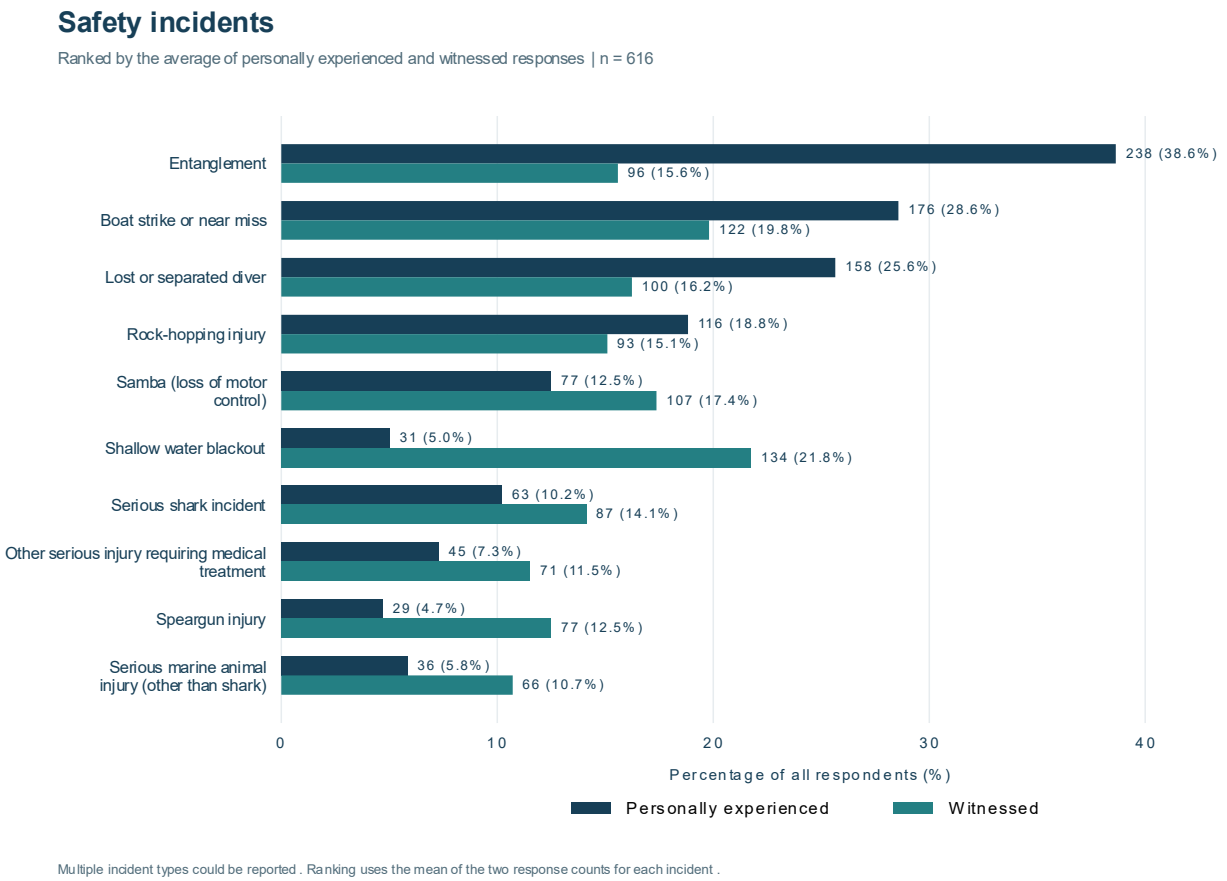
Source: National Spearfishing Survey2026

Note: A further seven respondents (1.1%) provided individual responses, each representing only one participant. These included returning directly to shore after catching fish, storing catches on shore, using catch bags attached to floats, and keeping catches out of the water on diver-towed floats. Other respondents described carrying fish temporarily while returning to their boat or limiting diver-carried catches to species such as crayfish and abalone. These individual responses have been excluded from clarity but remain part of the survey dataset.

Safe catch handling forms part of a broader approach to managing risks associated with spearfishing, alongside buddy practices, situational awareness and emergency preparedness.

7.5 Safety Incidents and Risk Awareness

The survey recorded respondents' experiences of a range of diving and spearfishing incidents, including incidents personally experienced or witnessed.



Multiple incident types could be reported . Ranking uses the mean of the two response counts for each incident .

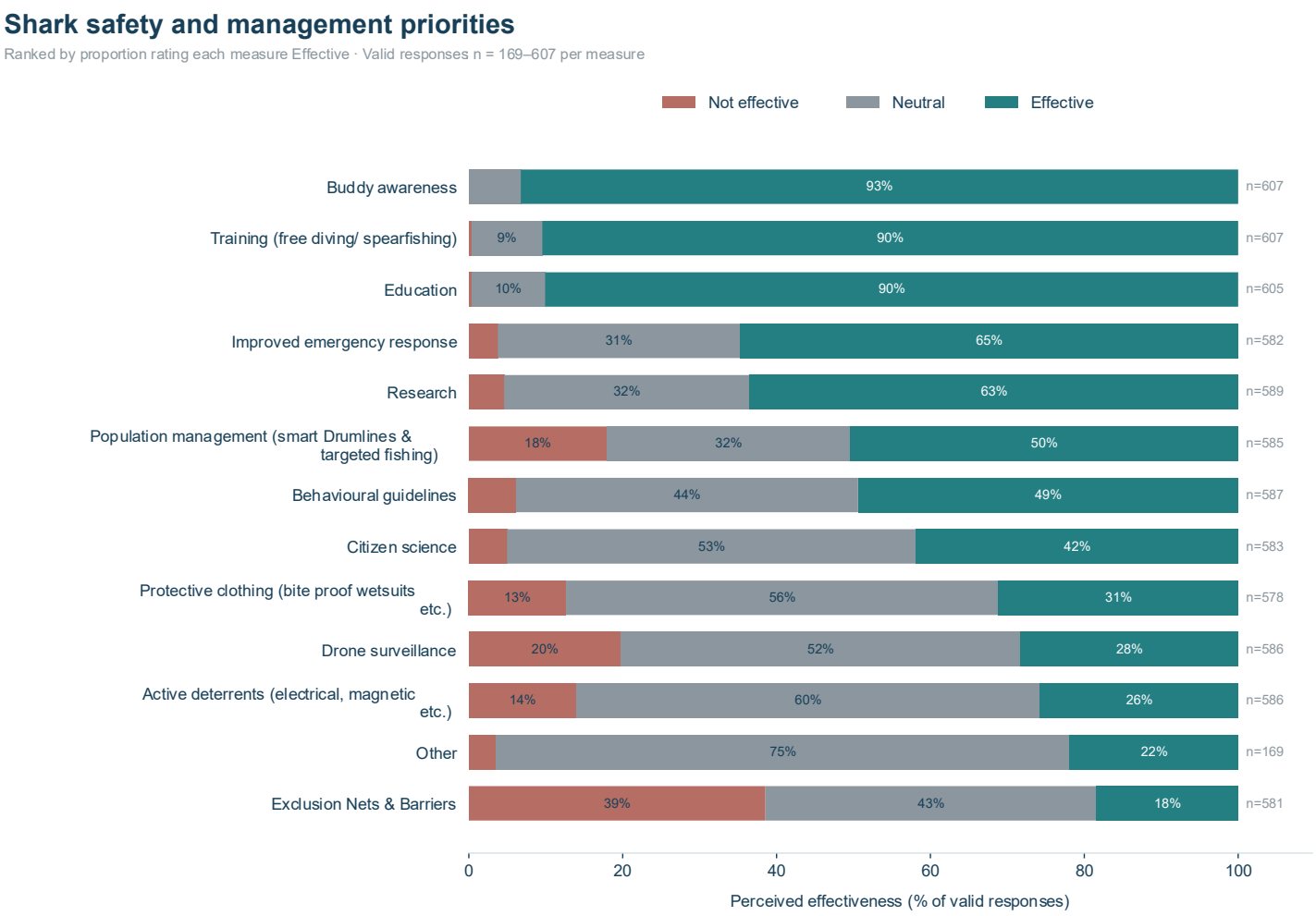
Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These findings provide insight into the types of incidents encountered within the community and the importance of practical safety knowledge.

They should not be interpreted as population-wide accident rates, and personally experienced and witnessed incidents must be distinguished to avoid double counting.

7.6 Safety and Management Priorities

Respondents assessed a range of proposed measures intended to improve spearfishing safety and the management of shark-related risks.



The findings provide guidance on the measures respondents consider most important and may assist representative organisations, training providers and researchers in identifying priorities for further work.

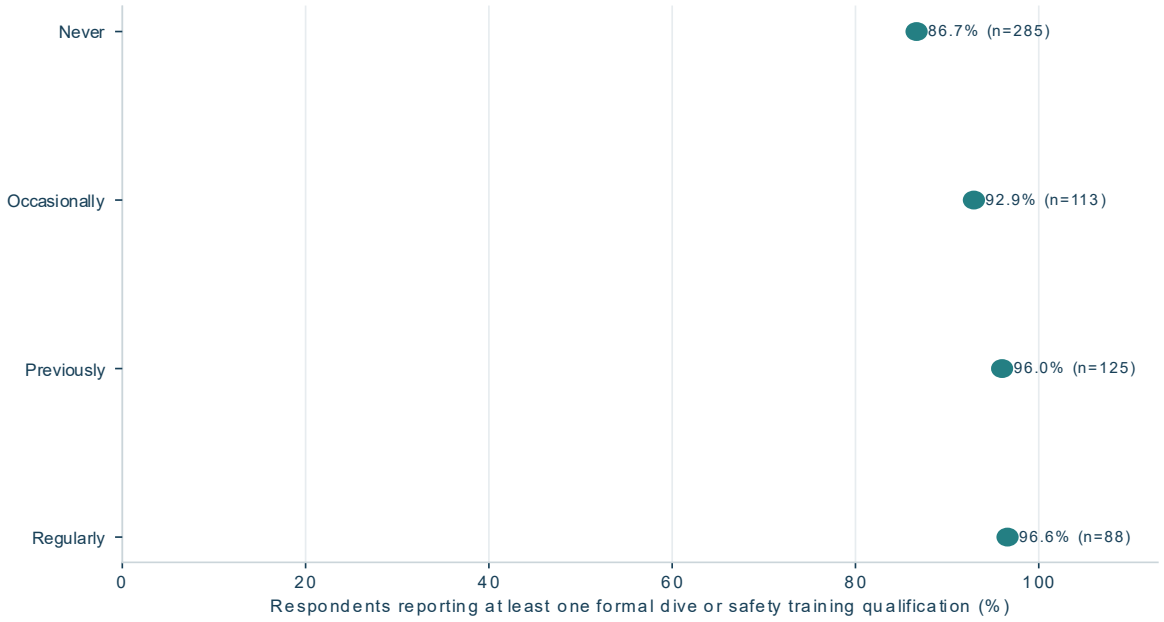
7.7 Training, Competition and Buddy Practices

The survey also examined relationships between formal training, competition participation and the use of the buddy system.

Respondents involved in organised competition generally reported higher levels of formal safety training than those who had never competed.

Safety training by competition participation

Valid responses: n = 611

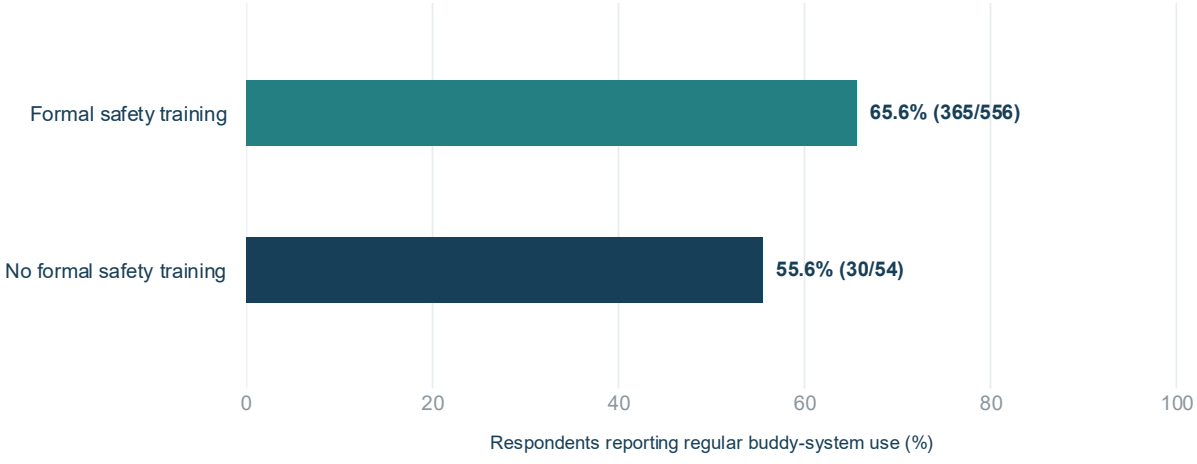


Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Formal safety training was also associated with more consistent buddy-system use, with respondents who had undertaken training reporting higher levels of consistent buddy-system use than those without formal training.

Regular buddy-system use by safety training

Valid responses: n = 610 | Always or most of the time



Difference: 10.1 percentage points higher among formally trained respondents.

Training includes freediving, spearfishing, SCUBA, first aid, CPR or oxygen courses; boat licence alone excluded

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

Although these relationships do not establish causation, they reinforce the potential value of accessible training, organised participation and mentoring in promoting safer diving practices.

WHAT THIS MEANS

Respondents with formal diving and spearfishing safety training reported more consistent buddy-system use. This supports further investigation of the relationship between training and safety practices, while recognising that the survey does not establish causation.

7.8 Opportunities for Improvement

The findings identify opportunities to strengthen safety education, particularly in breath-hold diving, buddy practices, first aid, oxygen administration, emergency response and the management of marine-life risks.

Clubs, competitions, experienced spearfishers and specialist training providers can contribute to sharing this knowledge, including with the substantial number of participants outside formal organisations.

The survey also highlights opportunities for spearfishers to contribute to scientific research through structured citizen-science programs.

Together, these findings demonstrate the value of building upon the experience, knowledge and willingness to participate already present within Australia's spearfishing community.

8. Challenges and Organisational Priorities

The survey examined the principal challenges facing recreational spearfishing in Australia and the priorities respondents believe should guide representative organisations.

The findings highlight concerns about access, regulation, shark interactions and public understanding, together with strong support for advocacy, education, safety and research.

8.1 Challenges Facing Spearfishing

Loss of access to traditional spearfishing areas emerged as the most frequently identified challenge nationally. Other prominent concerns included shark interactions, marine park closures, excessive regulation, public perceptions and environmental degradation.

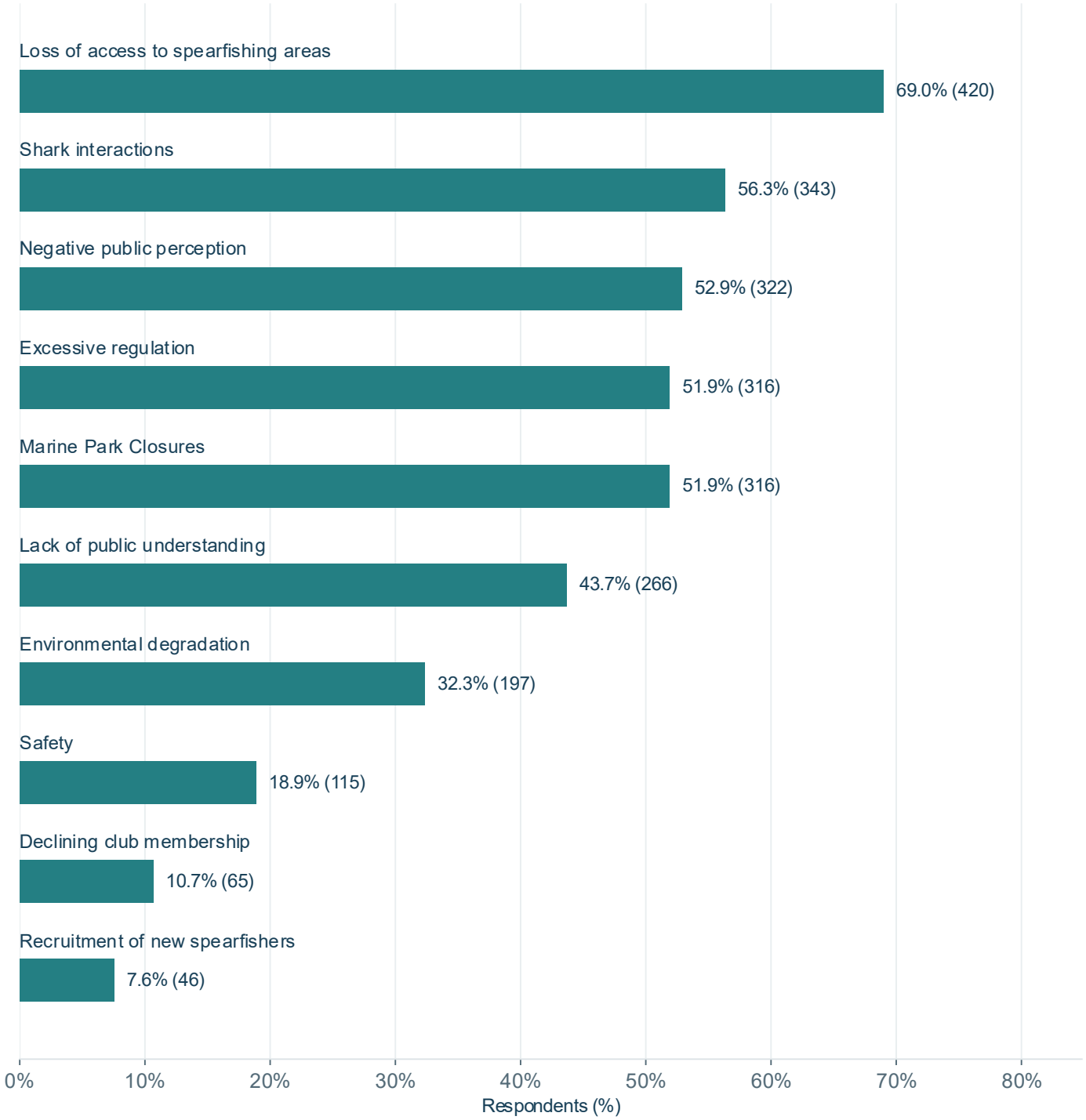
'Stop changing all the rules and closing everything down with no science'

69%

Identify loss of access to spearfishing areas as a major challenge

Greatest challenges facing spearfishing

Percentage of respondents • n = 609 • Multiple answers permitted



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

WHAT THIS MEANS

Access to suitable fishing areas is a central concern for respondents. Decisions affecting spearfishing access should be supported by sound evidence, proportionate to their objectives and informed by meaningful consultation with affected participants.

These concerns reflect the importance respondents place on maintaining opportunities to participate in spearfishing while supporting responsible and sustainable management of marine resources.

In particular, concerns about access and regulation should not necessarily be interpreted as opposition to marine conservation. Rather, they reinforce the importance of transparent, evidence-based and proportionate management that recognises the characteristics of spearfishing.

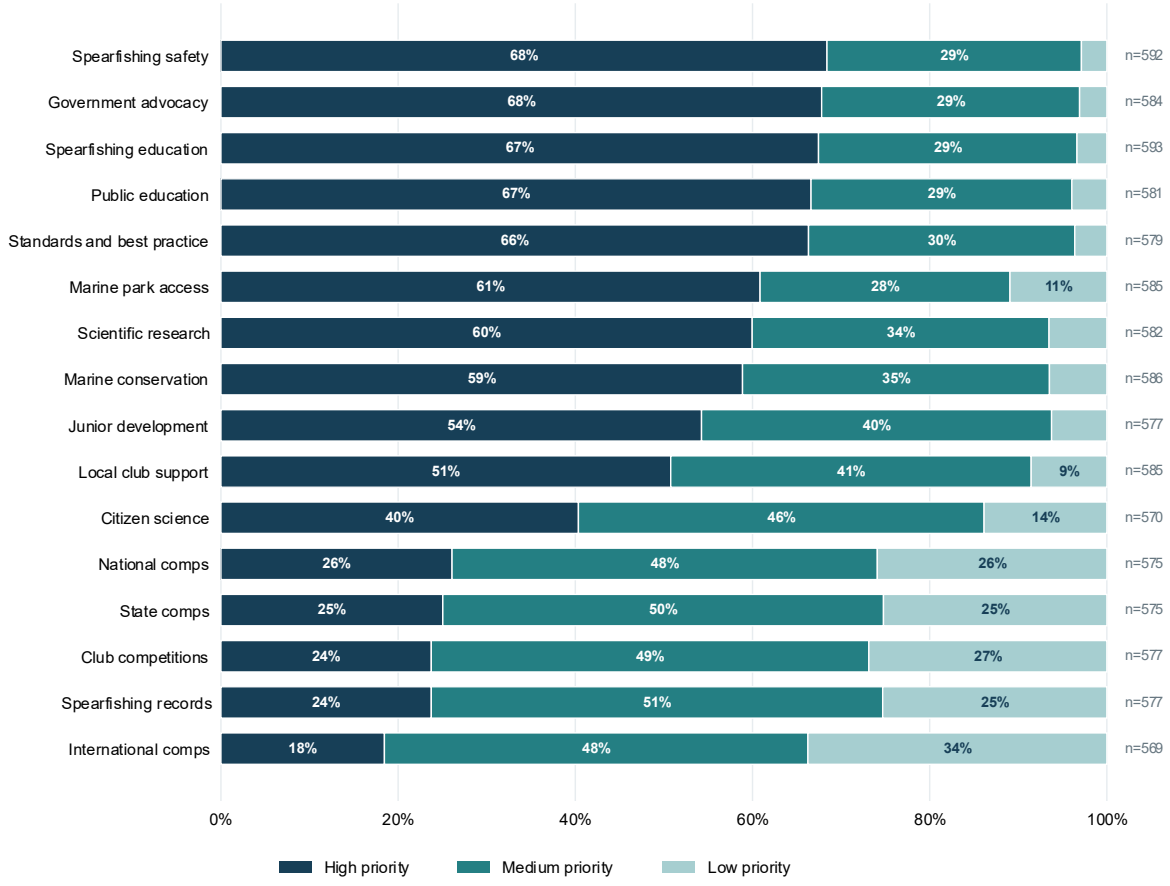
8.2 Priorities for Representative Organisations

Respondents identified a broad range of priorities for spearfishing organisations, extending well beyond the traditional roles of organising competitions and representing club members.

Government advocacy, public education, safety, research, conservation and the protection of access emerged as important areas for organisational activity.

Priorities for representative organisations

Ranked by the proportion rating each activity High priority



Percentages calculated from valid responses for each activity ; sample sizes vary by item.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

WHAT THIS MEANS

Respondents expect representative organisations to do more than organise competitions. Advocacy, access, education, safety and engagement with government are important priorities, reinforcing the need to represent both club members and independent spearfishers.

The findings demonstrate the importance of effective representation at both State and national levels, including engagement with governments, fisheries agencies, marine park authorities and researchers.

Given the substantial proportion of spearfishers who participate outside formal clubs and organisations, effective representation should also seek to engage the broader community.

'Spearfishers have first hand knowledge of the environments we fish, often ranging across multiple states. These observations should be used to inform government decisions. A spearfishing peak body should be a stakeholder at the table.'

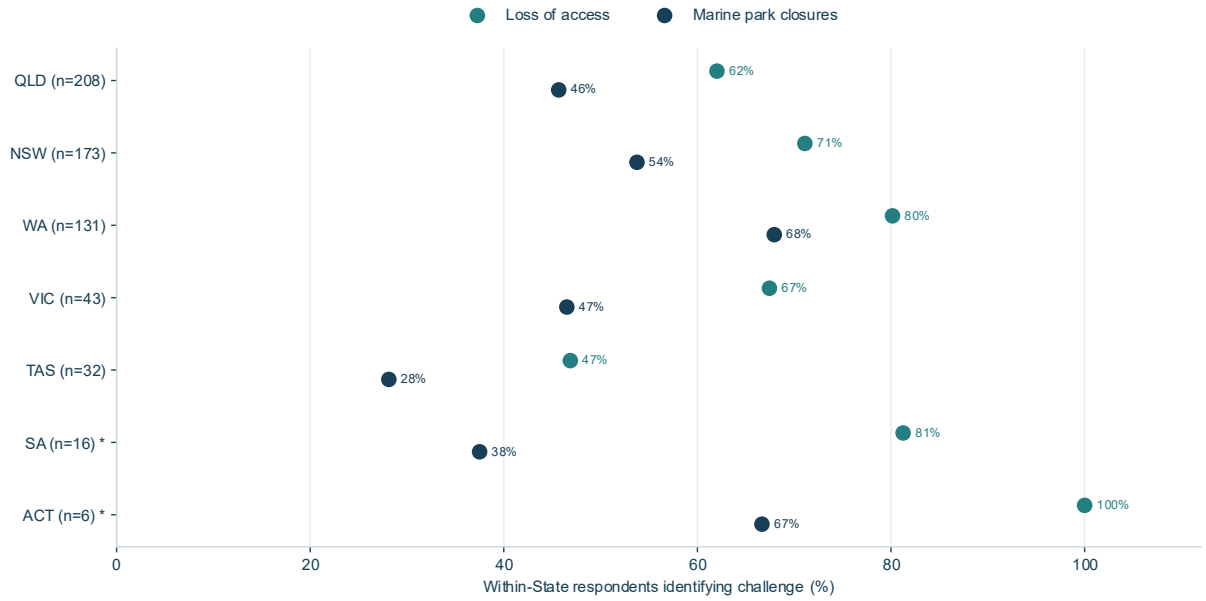
8.3 Regional Differences in Access Concerns

Concerns about access and marine park closures varied between jurisdictions, with particularly strong concerns expressed by respondents in Western Australia and New South Wales.

'The government needs to listen to the people in the water not the politicians behind a desk'

Marine park access concerns by State

Valid responses: n = 609



Measures are separate and may overlap . * Small State sample (n < 20); interpret percentages cautiously .

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These differences reflect the importance of regional circumstances when considering fisheries and marine park management.

> ***'It's a sustainable and healthy pastime, it's critical that Australians are allowed to continue their responsible pastimes. Restricting access only services to hurt people's mental health and community cohesion. I have no issues with responsible bag limits but blanket closures alienate all of us.'***

The findings reinforce the need for meaningful consultation with affected participants and management decisions that are supported by appropriate evidence and take account of the practical characteristics of spearfishing.

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

8.4 Implications for the Future

The survey identifies clear expectations for representative organisations to advocate for fair access, improve public understanding, strengthen safety education and support scientific research and conservation.

These priorities provide a practical basis for future organisational planning and constructive engagement with governments and marine-management agencies.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that respondents seek both the protection of opportunities to participate and the responsible management of the marine environment.

9. Outlook, Clubs and Future Engagement

The survey examined respondents' confidence in the future of Australian spearfishing, their perceptions of changing participation opportunities, the role of clubs and their willingness to remain engaged with the wider community.

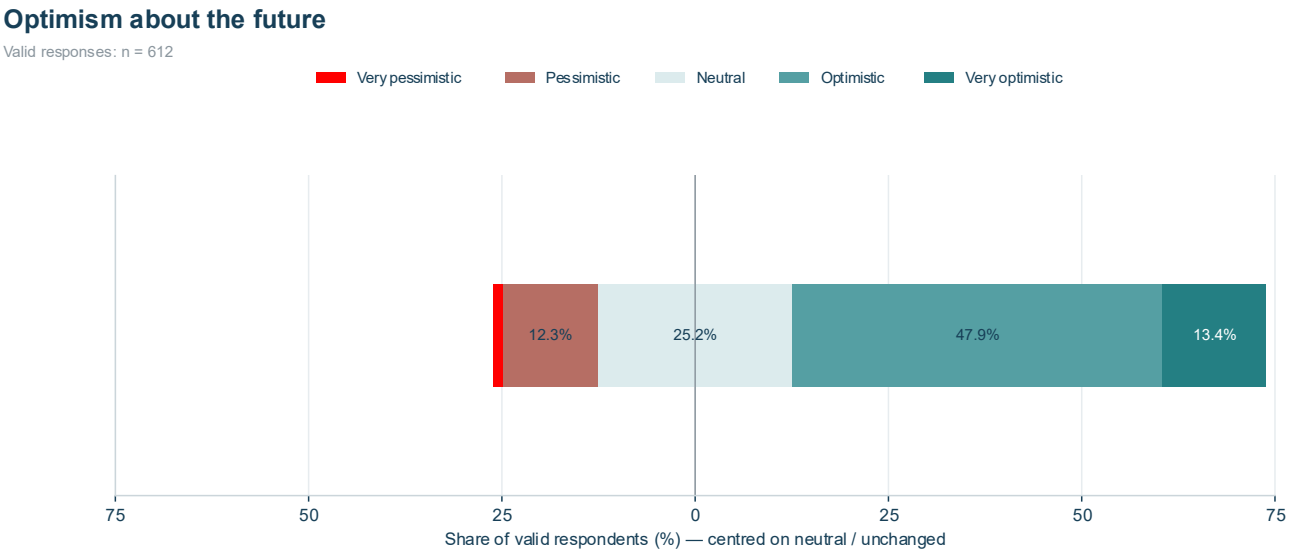
Despite significant challenges, the findings reveal a community that remains broadly optimistic about its future.

9.1 Outlook for Australian Spearfishing

Most respondents expressed optimism about the future of spearfishing, notwithstanding concerns about access, regulation, shark interactions and public understanding.

61.3%

Are optimistic about the future of Australian spearfishing



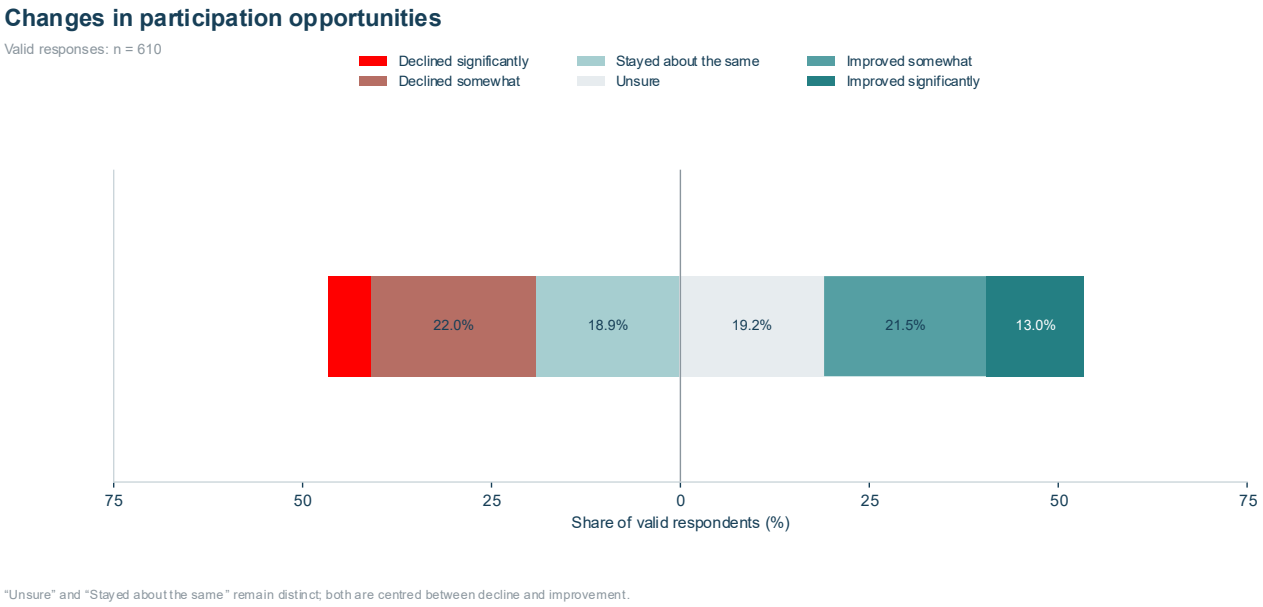
Five original response categories retained; neutral responses centred on zero .

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

This optimism is encouraging, particularly given the challenges identified elsewhere in the survey. It suggests that respondents generally see opportunities to strengthen and develop the activity rather than regarding its decline as inevitable.

9.2 Changes in Participation Opportunities

Respondents expressed mixed views about whether opportunities to participate in spearfishing had improved or declined over the preceding decade.



"Unsure" and "Stayed about the same" remain distinct; both are centred between decline and improvement.

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

An important distinction emerges between confidence in the future and perceptions of past change. Respondents may remain optimistic while also believing that access or participation opportunities have deteriorated.

Long-term participants were particularly likely to report declining opportunities, with approximately 47% of respondents who had been spearfishing for more than 20 years reporting a decline.

9.3 The Role of Spearfishing Clubs

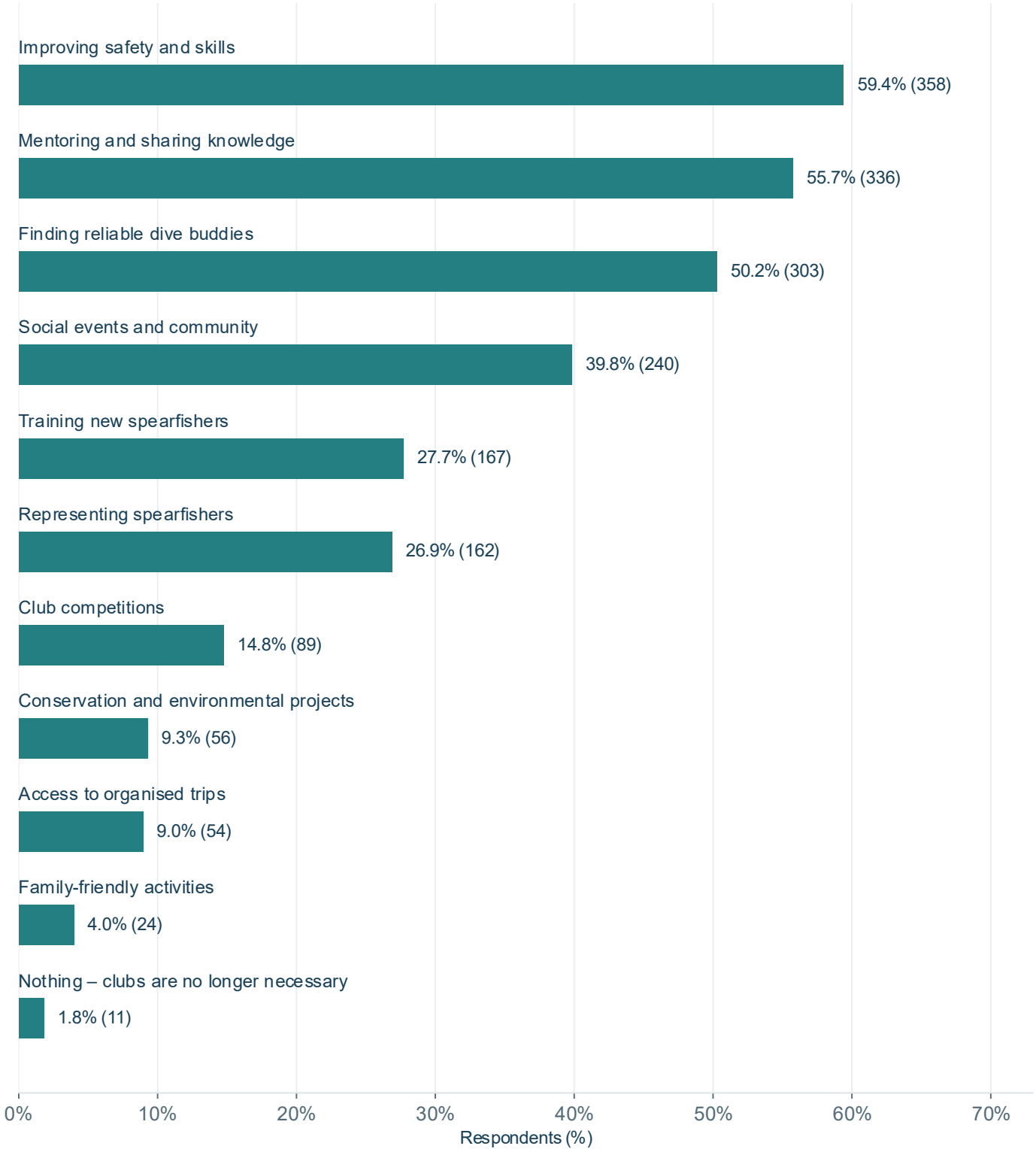
Spearfishing clubs have traditionally provided opportunities for organised competition, social activities and community participation.

The survey demonstrates that respondents also place considerable importance on safety, education, mentoring, sharing knowledge and finding reliable dive buddies.

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

Most important roles of spearfishing clubs

Percentage of respondents • n = 603 • Multiple answers permitted



Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

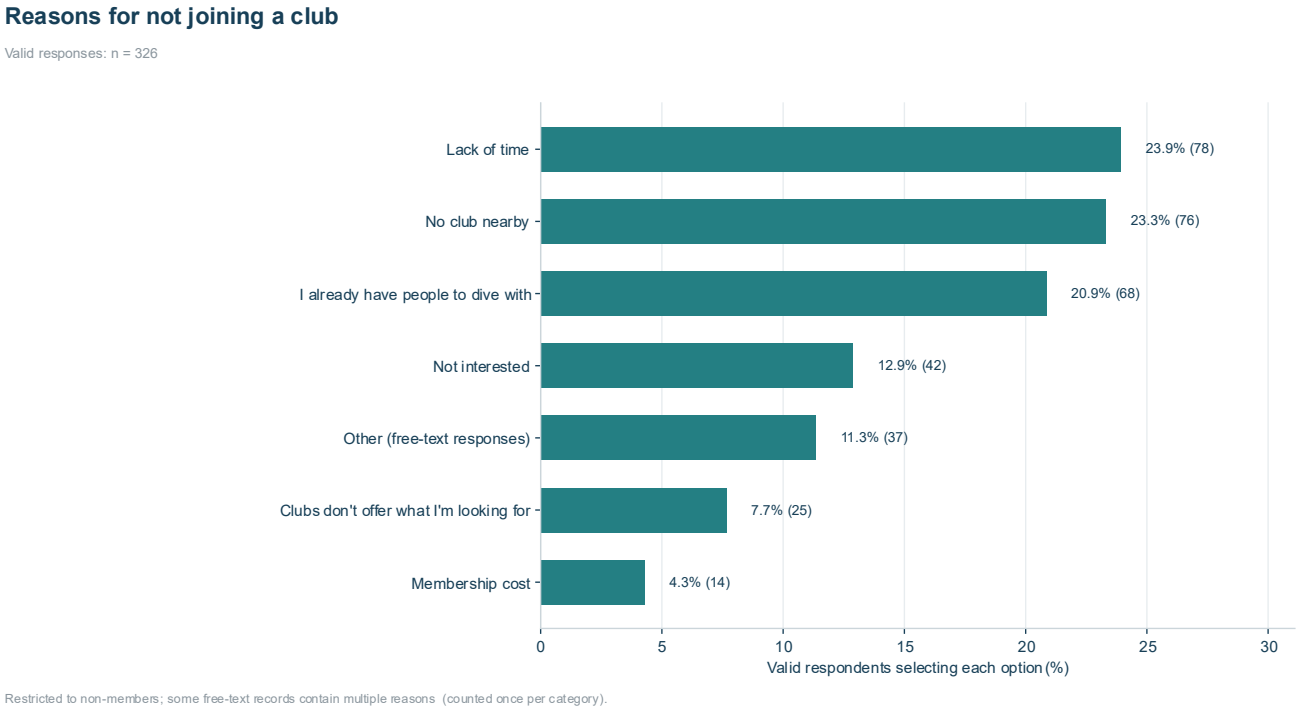
These broader functions are particularly important in supporting new participants and transferring practical knowledge between generations of spearfishers.

Competition remains a valued activity, but the contribution of clubs extends well beyond competitive participation.

9.4 Barriers to Club Membership

A substantial proportion of Australian spearfishers participate independently of formal clubs and representative organisations.

The survey examined the reasons respondents do not join clubs, providing insight into the barriers to membership and opportunities to improve engagement.



These findings may assist clubs in considering how their activities, membership arrangements and communication can better serve the broader spearfishing community.

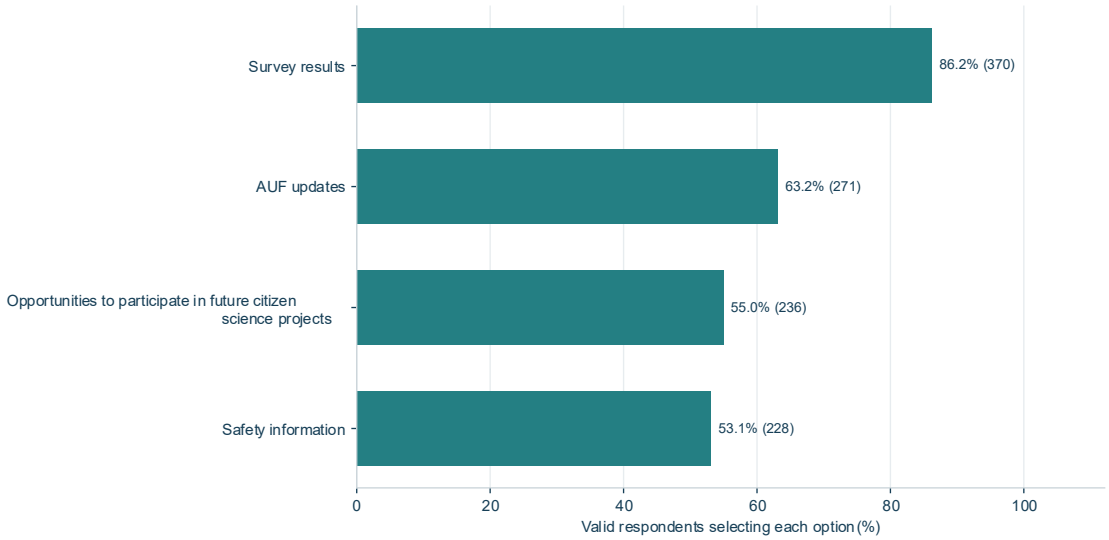
9.5 Future Engagement

The survey also examined respondents' interest in receiving information and participating in future activities, including opportunities associated with spearfishing organisations, research and community initiatives.

> ***'The positive impacts - selectivity, only take what you need, health and fitness, connecting with nature - would love to see more women in the community'***

Future engagement

Valid responses: n = 429



Multiple selections permitted; percentages use respondents with a valid answer

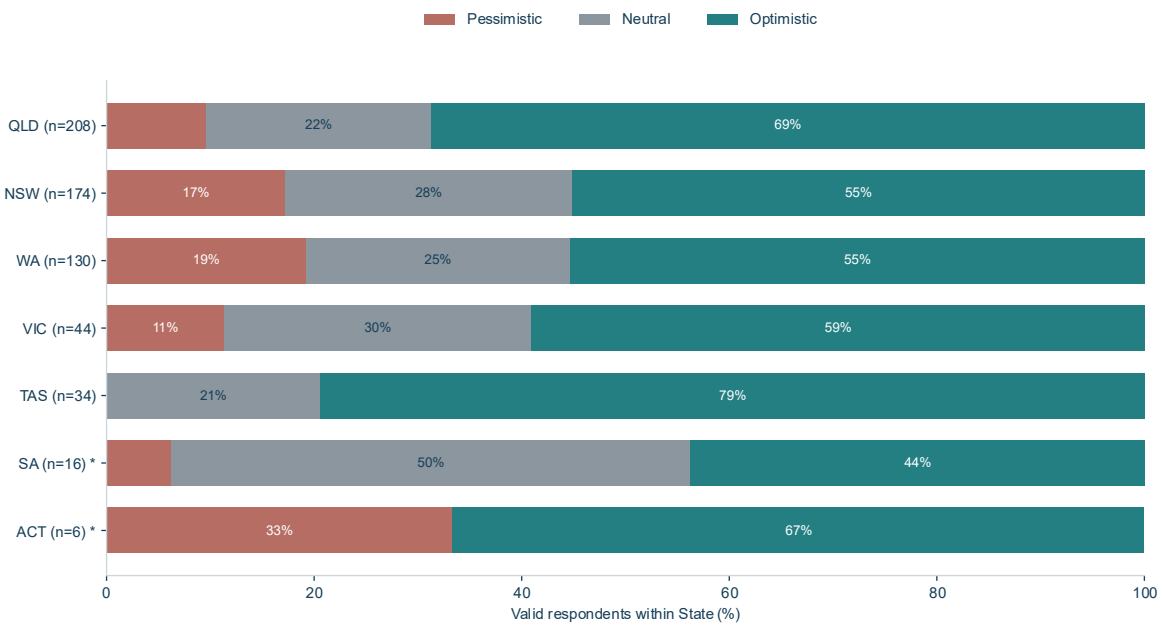
The results provide a basis for strengthening communication and developing opportunities for participation beyond existing club and organisational membership.

9.6 Regional Differences in Optimism

Confidence in the future of spearfishing varied between jurisdictions, reflecting differences in the experiences and challenges identified throughout the survey.

Optimism by State

Valid responses: n = 612



Very optimistic/optimistic and very pessimistic/pessimistic combined. * Small sample (n < 20).

Source: National Spearfishing Survey 2026

These differences reinforce the importance of recognising regional circumstances while pursuing common national objectives for safety, access, education and representation.

Lack of time may also reflect the perceived value of club membership relative to the commitment involved. Experienced spearfishers who already have established diving partners, practical knowledge and access to information may see less benefit in joining a club, particularly where club activities are primarily competition-focused. These are possible explanations for the responses rather than conclusions established by the survey.

9.7 Looking Forward

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

Clubs and representative organisations have opportunities to strengthen their relevance through mentoring, safety education, community engagement and effective advocacy, including among spearfishers who do not participate in formal organisations.

The findings provide a foundation for constructive engagement between spearfishers, governments, researchers and marine-management agencies.

Ultimately, respondents want a future in which spearfishing remains accessible, safe, sustainable and valued for its broader contribution to Australian recreational and community life.

10. Conclusions and Recommendations

10.1 Conclusions

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 provides a substantial body of information concerning the experiences, motivations and priorities of Australia's recreational spearfishing community.

Drawing upon 616 voluntary responses, the survey reveals an experienced and engaged community whose participation extends considerably beyond the harvesting of fish.

Five principal conclusions emerge.

1. Spearfishing provides significant recreational, social and personal benefits.

Respondents identified recreation, sustainable seafood, physical fitness, mental wellbeing, friendships and connection with nature as important benefits of participation. Some 94.0% agreed that spearfishing strengthened their connection with nature, while 91.2% reported an increased appreciation of marine conservation.

2. Spearfishing contributes to economic activity and community participation.

Respondents reported expenditure on equipment, boats, fuel, maintenance, travel and associated services, demonstrating the activity's connections with marine industries and coastal communities. Some 88.6% had introduced another person to spearfishing, illustrating its role in encouraging participation and passing on skills and experience.

While the survey identifies substantial expenditure among respondents, its voluntary and self-selected sample does not provide a reliable basis for estimating the total economic contribution of spearfishing nationally.

3. Shark interactions represent a significant concern, particularly in some regions.

Respondents reported considerable variation in shark sightings, depredation and interference with spearfishing across Australia. These experiences were particularly prominent among Queensland respondents.

The findings provide a useful basis for further research into shark interactions and practical risk reduction. However, reported experiences and perceptions should not be interpreted as independently verified evidence of changes in shark populations or behaviour.

4. Access, safety and effective representation are important priorities.

Loss of access to spearfishing areas was identified as a major challenge by 69.0% of respondents. Shark interactions, marine park restrictions and regulatory issues were also prominent concerns.

The findings highlight the importance of transparent and evidence-based management, meaningful consultation, accessible safety education and effective engagement between spearfishers and decision-makers.

5. The community remains optimistic about its future.

Despite the challenges identified, 61.3% of respondents were optimistic or very optimistic about the future of Australian spearfishing.

Respondents also demonstrated considerable interest in education, mentoring, responsible fishing practices, marine conservation and opportunities to contribute to research and environmental monitoring.

Taken together, the findings provide a valuable evidence base for spearfishers, clubs, representative organisations, researchers, businesses and governments.

The survey was not designed to establish statistically representative national estimates or advocate predetermined policy outcomes. Its principal purpose was to document the experiences and priorities of respondents and make that information available to those with an interest in the future of spearfishing.

10.2 Recommendations

The findings of the National Spearfishing Survey 2026 support eight recommendations for strengthening the future of Australian recreational spearfishing.

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

1. Protect fair and evidence-based access

Marine park and fisheries management decisions affecting spearfishing should be transparent, evidence-based and proportionate to the objectives being pursued. The selective nature of spearfishing and its particular methods of participation should be recognised, with meaningful consultation when access restrictions are proposed or reviewed.

2. Strengthen representation and coordination

Greater cooperation between representative organisations, clubs and independent spearfishers should be encouraged to improve advocacy and engagement with governments. Shared priorities should be identified, while recognising that effective cooperation does not require agreement on every issue or changes to existing organisational structures.

3. Improve public understanding of spearfishing

Public education should promote a better understanding of selective harvest, responsible fishing practices and the recreational, social, environmental and economic contributions of spearfishing. Improved understanding can support more informed public discussion and policy decisions.

4. Expand safety education and training

Accessible spearfishing-specific safety education should be encouraged, particularly in relation to breath-hold diving, buddy practices, first aid, CPR, emergency preparedness, boating safety and marine-life risks. Education and mentoring opportunities should extend to both organised and independent spearfishers.

5. Improve research into shark interactions

Further research should examine the frequency, circumstances and geographic distribution of shark encounters and depredation. Research should distinguish reported experiences and perceptions from scientifically established changes in shark abundance or behaviour, while investigating practical measures to reduce risk.

6. Strengthen clubs, mentoring and participation pathways

Clubs should be encouraged to expand opportunities for education, mentoring, junior development and recreational participation. Particular attention should be given to supporting newer spearfishers and helping participants establish safe and reliable diving partnerships.

7. Expand citizen-science and research partnerships

Opportunities should be explored for spearfishers to contribute observations and practical knowledge to appropriately designed marine research and environmental monitoring programs. Potential areas include species observations, shark interactions, habitat condition and environmental change.

8. Recognise the broader value of spearfishing

The recreational, social, health, environmental and economic contributions of spearfishing should be recognised in marine-management and public-policy discussions. Its value should not be assessed solely by the number or weight of fish harvested, but considered alongside legitimate conservation and fisheries-management objectives.

10.3 Proposed SMART Implementation Framework

The recommendations provide a basis for practical action. To assist stakeholders who wish to pursue them, a staged implementation framework is proposed using the SMART principles of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound objectives.

The framework is indicative and voluntary. It does not establish an implementation programme on behalf of the AUF or any other organisation, nor does it assign responsibilities or commit resources. Individual organisations, clubs, researchers and other stakeholders may adopt, adapt or independently pursue initiatives relevant to their interests and capacity.

The proposed stages and measures are intended to assist planning and provide a basis for evaluating progress where stakeholders elect to undertake coordinated action.

Stage 1: Engagement and priority setting (0–6 months)

Objective: Distribute the survey findings, encourage stakeholder engagement and identify a limited number of shared priorities capable of practical implementation.

Proposed measures:

- Publish and distribute the survey findings.
- Invite feedback from national and state representative organisations, clubs, independent spearfishers and relevant researchers.
- Identify at least three priority areas for potential coordinated action.
- Identify organisations or individuals interested in contributing to specific initiatives.

Stage 2: Planning and partnership development (6–12 months)

Objective: Develop practical implementation proposals for at least two priority initiatives, identifying potential participants, responsibilities, resources and measures of success.

Proposed measures:

- Prepare implementation proposals for at least two initiatives.
- Identify interested organisations, individuals or research partners.
- Establish achievable milestones and methods for measuring progress.
- Identify any funding, expertise or other resources required.

Potential initiatives include improved safety education, coordinated engagement on access issues, shark-interaction research and citizen-science partnerships.

Stage 3: Implementation and monitoring (12–24 months)

Objective: Seek to commence at least two agreed initiatives and establish a process for monitoring their progress.

Proposed measures:

- Seek to commence at least two initiatives supported by willing participants.
- Document activities undertaken and participation achieved.
- Assess progress against agreed milestones.
- Identify practical obstacles and opportunities for improvement.

Stage 4: Evaluation and future planning (24–36 months)

Objective: Evaluate the outcomes of initiatives undertaken and identify priorities for continued improvement.

Proposed measures:

- Prepare a summary of progress against the original objectives.
- Identify completed initiatives, continuing activities and outstanding priorities.
- Review the effectiveness of stakeholder cooperation where applicable.
- Consider a subsequent National Spearfishing Survey using consistent core questions to measure changes over time.

The proposed timeframes and measures are indicative and may be adjusted to reflect the capacity and priorities of participating stakeholders. Not every recommendation requires coordinated national implementation, and individual initiatives may be progressed independently.

The framework is intended to demonstrate how the survey findings could inform practical action, rather than prescribe how the spearfishing community or its representative organisations should proceed.

10.4 Looking Forward

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 provides an important starting point for understanding Australia's recreational spearfishing community.

Drawing upon 616 voluntary responses, it identifies significant challenges, but also substantial opportunities for improved representation, education, research and collaboration.

The survey should not be interpreted as statistically representative of all Australian spearfishers. Nevertheless, it provides valuable evidence concerning the experiences, attitudes and priorities of those who participated.

The recommendations and proposed implementation framework illustrate how these findings might inform future initiatives. Whether and how they are pursued is a matter for the organisations, clubs, researchers, businesses, individuals and other stakeholders who choose to use the information.

Progress need not depend upon any single organisation or initiative. Meaningful improvements can be achieved through cooperation on shared priorities, targeted projects and the contributions of individuals and organisations acting independently or collaboratively.

Future surveys could build upon this work by tracking changes in participation, safety practices, access concerns, community attitudes and emerging challenges. Retaining consistent core questions would also allow more meaningful comparisons over time.

A further national spearfishing survey in 2031 could provide an opportunity to assess changes over time and build upon the findings of the 2026 survey.

Spearfishers, scientists, businesses, governments and community organisations are encouraged to collaborate in communicating and further examining the survey findings to improve understanding of Australia's recreational spearfishing community.

Ultimately, the survey demonstrates that respondents want a future in which spearfishing remains accessible, safe, responsible and sustainable. They want their contributions recognised, their experiences considered in management decisions and meaningful opportunities for future generations to participate.

The value of this survey lies not only in what it reveals about Australian spearfishers today, but also in the opportunities it provides for others to use that information to help shape the future of the activity.

Appendices

The following appendices provide supporting information concerning the methodology, respondent sample and interpretation of the National Spearfishing Survey 2026.

Appendix A — Survey Methodology

A.1 Purpose and Scope

The National Spearfishing Survey 2026 was developed to improve understanding of Australia's recreational spearfishing community, including participation, motivations, economic contribution, safety, sustainability, shark interactions, access, clubs and future priorities.

The survey was intended to inform discussion among spearfishers, representative organisations, researchers, governments and marine-management agencies.

A.2 Survey Design and Distribution

The survey was conducted online using Microsoft Forms between 1 September and 31 October 2026.

Participation was voluntary and open to Australian spearfishers regardless of club membership or competition involvement.

The survey was promoted nationally through spearfishing organisations, clubs, social media groups and individual participants, with particular efforts to reach independent spearfishers.

The questionnaire included single-choice and multiple-choice questions, rating scales, expenditure and participation categories, and optional written responses.

A.3 Analysis

The final dataset comprised 616 responses.

Results were analysed nationally and through selected comparisons involving State or Territory, experience, membership, competition participation and safety training.

Percentages were generally calculated using the number of valid responses to each question. Optional written responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes.

A.4 Limitations

The survey used voluntary, self-selected participation rather than random sampling. Its findings therefore describe respondents and should not be treated as statistically representative of all Australian spearfishers.

Spearfishers who are more actively engaged in the activity, including club members and those participating in online spearfishing communities, may have been more likely to respond. This could result in greater representation of experienced and engaged spearfishers within the sample, potentially influencing findings concerning club membership, participation and attitudes. The extent of any such bias cannot be determined from the survey.

Responses were self-reported and were not independently verified. Some questions involved recollection of past experiences, while some geographic and demographic groups contained relatively few respondents.

Comparisons between groups are descriptive and do not establish causal relationships.

The survey was not designed to assess fish stocks, estimate shark populations or produce a national economic-impact estimate.

Appendix B — Response Numbers and Sample Profile

B.1 Final Responses

The survey received 616 responses from across Australia, including participants with varying levels of experience and involvement in recreational and organised spearfishing.

B.2 Geographic Distribution

State or Territory	Responses	Share
Queensland	208	33.8%
New South Wales	175	28.4%
Western Australia	132	21.4%
Victoria	44	7.1%
Tasmania	34	5.5%
South Australia	17	2.8%
ACT	6	1.0%
Total	616	100.0%

Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia accounted for most responses. National findings are therefore influenced particularly by respondents from those States.

B.3 Valid Response Numbers

Not all respondents answered every question. Selected valid response numbers are provided below.

Survey question	Valid responses
Motivations for spearfishing	615
Greatest challenges	609
Shark sightings	615
Shark depredation	613
Formal safety training	611
Buddy-system practices	613
Changes in participation opportunities	610
Optimism about the future	612

Appendix C — Data Notes and Definitions

C.1 Percentages and Multiple Responses

Unless otherwise stated, percentages are based on valid responses to the relevant question and rounded to one decimal place.

For questions permitting multiple selections, percentages generally represent the proportion of respondents selecting each option. Totals may therefore exceed 100%.

C.2 Geographic and Participation Comparisons

State comparisons are based on respondents' recorded State or Territory of residence. Small samples should be interpreted cautiously.

Experience categories follow the questionnaire: less than one year, 1–5 years, 6–10 years, 11–20 years, 21–30 years and more than 30 years.

Membership comparisons distinguish club and Australian Underwater Federation membership. Competition categories distinguish regular, occasional, former and non-competitors.

C.3 Derived Measures

Some analyses combine response categories or derive additional measures from recorded answers.

These include combined optimism categories, consistent buddy-system use, expenditure thresholds and selected comparisons of shark interactions.

Estimated expenditure attributable to spearfishing is based on assumptions applied to reported expenditure and boat-use categories. These estimates are indicative and should not be interpreted as verified individual expenditure or national economic totals.

C.4 Qualitative Responses

Optional written responses were reviewed to identify recurring themes and provide context to the quantitative findings.

These responses represent individual experiences and opinions. They were not used to establish statistically representative measures of community attitudes.

C.5 Privacy and Further Research

Results are presented in aggregated form. Personal contact details and identifying respondent information are not published.

The survey provides a baseline for future research into Australian spearfishing. Repeating core questions, improving geographic coverage and developing more representative sampling methods would strengthen comparisons over time.

The underlying dataset should be retained for future analysis, subject to appropriate privacy protections.

Appendix D — National Spearfishing Survey 2026 Questionnaire

The complete questionnaire used in the National Spearfishing Survey 2026 is reproduced below to support transparency, future research and the development of comparable surveys in other countries.

The questionnaire may provide a useful framework for spearfishing organisations, researchers and fisheries-management agencies seeking to examine recreational spearfishing participation, economic contribution, environmental attitudes, safety practices and management priorities.

Organisations wishing to replicate the survey are encouraged to retain the core questions and response categories wherever practicable to facilitate comparisons between countries and over time. Questions concerning fisheries regulations, marine parks, shark interactions and other regional circumstances may require adaptation to local conditions.

Reproduced from the original Microsoft Forms questionnaire. Questions retain their original numbering. For matrix questions, each listed statement was rated using the scale shown.

About you

1. Which Australian State or Territory do you primarily live in?

a. NSW b. QLD c. VIC d. SA e. WA f. TAS g. NT h. ACT

2. Age

a. Under 18 b. 18 - 24 c. 25 - 34 d. 35 - 44 e. 45 - 54 f. 55 - 64 g. 65+

3. Gender

a. Female b. Male c. Non-binary d. Prefer not to say

4. How many years have you been spearfishing?

a. Less than 1 year b. 1 - 5 c. 6 - 10 d. 11 - 20 e. 21 - 30 f. More than 30

5. Which best describes your current membership? Are you:

a. AUF member b. Club member c. Both d. Neither

Participation

6. Which types of spearfishing do you participate in? (Tick all)

a. Shore diving b. Boat diving c. Reef diving d. Bluewater diving e. Freshwater spearfishing f. Competition g. Other

7. Approximately how many days do you spearfish each year?

a. Less than 5 b. 5 - 10 c. 10 - 20 d. 21 - 40 e. 41 - 80 f. More than 80

8. Which broad groups of species do you primarily target? (Select up to three.)

a. Pelagic fish, such as Spanish mackerel, yellowtail kingfish, tuna and cobia b. Tropical reef fish, such as coral trout, emperors, cod and tuskfish c. Temperate reef fish, such as snapper, morwong, drummer and groper d. Estuary and inshore fish, such as flathead, bream and mulloway e. Freshwater fish f. Crustaceans, such as lobster and crayfish g. Molluscs, such as abalone and scallops h. Other

9. When deciding whether to harvest a fish or other seafood while spearfishing, how important is sustainability?

a. Not important b. Neutral c. Important

10. Which statement best describes you?

a. I don't mind whether I catch anything – I enjoy the experience. b. Catching some seafood is a bonus. c. I usually hope to bring home enough seafood for a meal. d. I usually expect a good catch. e. I am often disappointed if I don't catch much.

11. Have you competed in organised spearfishing competitions?

a. Regularly b. Occasionally c. Previously d. Never

12. Approximately how far do you travel from your home to the location where you launch your boat or enter the water for a typical day trip?

a. Less than 10 km b. 10-25 km c. 26-50 km d. 51-100 km e. 101-200 km f. More than 200 km

13. On a typical boat dive, how far do you travel by boat from the launch point to your dive site?

a. Shore dive only b. Less than 10 km c. 10-25 km d. 26-50 km e. 51-100 km f. More than 100 km

14. Have you travelled interstate to spearfish during the past 12 months?

a. Yes b. No

15. Have you travelled overseas to spearfish during the past five years?

a. Yes b. No

16. How many other people do you normally dive with?

a. None b. 1 c. 2-3 others d. 4 or more

17. Approximately how many people have you introduced to spearfishing?

a. None b. 1 - 2 c. 3 - 5 d. More than 5

18. Which members of your family also participate in spearfishing? (Select all that apply.)

a. Partner / spouse b. Children c. Parents d. Siblings e. Other family members f. None

Economic contribution

19. Capital investment * — Approximately what is the current replacement value of your spearfishing equipment (excluding boats, vehicles and trailers)?

a. Less than $1000 b. $1,000–$2,499 c. $2,500–$4,999 d. $5,000–$9,999 e. $10,000–$19,999 f. $20,000–$39,999 g. $40,000 or more

20. Major assets — Which of the following do you own or regularly use for spearfishing? (Select all that apply.)

a. Boat b. Personal watercraft (jet ski) c. Boat trailer d. 4WD or off-road vehicle e. Electric trolling motor (e.g. Minn Kota) f. Kayak g. Fish finder / GPS h. EPIRB / PLB i. Other

21. What is the combined approx. current value of all boats / trailers / personal watercraft (jet skis) you own and use for spearfishing?

a. I do not own a boat or personal watercraft b. Less than $10,000 c. $10,000–$24,999 d. $25,000–$49,999 e. $50,000–$99,999 f. $100,000–$199,999 g. $200,000–$399,999 h. $400,000 or more

22. Boat operating costs — Approximately how much do you spend each year operating your boat for spearfishing? (Include fuel, servicing, maintenance, insurance, registration and storage / hardstand / marina fees.)

a. I do not use a boat for spearfishing b. Less than $500 c. $500-$999 d. $1,000-$2,499 e. $2,500-$4,999 f. $5,000-$9,999 g. $10,000-$19,999 h. $20,000 or more

23. Approximately what percentage of your boat(s) use is attributable to spearfishing?

a. Less than 10% b. 10–25% c. 26–50% d. 51–75% e. 76–90% f. More than 90%

24. Equipment purchases — Approximately how much have you spent on spearfishing equipment during the past 12 months?

a. Less than $250 b. $250–$499 c. $500–$999 d. $1,000–$1,999 e. $2,000–$4,999 f. $5,000–$9,999 g. $10,000 or more

25. Typical day trip — Approximately how much do you personally spend on a typical spearfishing day trip? (Include your share of vehicle fuel, boat fuel, food and drinks). Exclude equipment purchases.)

a. Less than $25 b. $25-$49 c. $50-$99 d. $100-$199 e. $200-$299 f. $300 or more

26. Compared with your other recreational activities, how significant is your expenditure on spearfishing?

a. Spearfishing is by far my largest recreational expense b. Spearfishing is my largest recreational expense c. Spearfishing is one of several major recreational expenses d. Spearfishing is a moderate recreational expense e. Spearfishing is a minor recreational expense f. I have very little recreational expenditure

27. Which statement best describes how you purchase spearfishing equipment?

a. I prefer to support Australian retailers and Australian manufacturers whenever possible. b. I prefer to support Australian retailers but have no preference regarding where equipment is manufactured. c. I have no particular preference. d. I mainly purchase from overseas retailers or manufacturers. e. Other

Why we spearfish

28. Why do you spearfish? (Tick all)

a. Sustainable seafood b. Recreation and enjoyment c. Mental wellbeing d. Physical fitness e. Spending time with family f. Spending time with friends g. Adventure and exploration h. Challenge and personal achievement i. Connecting with nature j. Other

29. Please indicate your level of agreement

Rating scale: Disagree / Neutral / Agree

a. Spearfishing has improved my physical health b. Spearfishing benefits my mental wellbeing c. Spearfishing helps me manage stress d. Spearfishing strengthens my connection with nature e. Spearfishing has helped me build lasting friendships f. Spearfishing has strengthened my family relationships g. Spearfishing gives me a greater appreciation of marine conservation h. Spearfishing encourages me to live a healthier lifestyle i. Spearfishing is an important part of my identity j. I would find it difficult to give up spearfishing

Shark encounters and citizen science

30. Approximately how often do you see one or more sharks while spearfishing?

a. Never b. Rarely (less than 10% of dives) c. Occasionally (10–25% of dives) d. Sometimes (26–50% of dives) e. Often (51–75% of dives) f. Very often (76–90% of dives) g. Almost every dive (more than 90% of dives)

31. Approximately what proportion of your spearfishing dives are negatively affected by shark interactions? — Examples include ending a dive early, changing location, losing or abandoning a fish, or otherwise altering your diving behaviour. Note that shark interactions such as whale sharks, first observation or usual species can also be very positive interactions.

a. Never (0%) b. Rarely (less than 10%) c. Occasionally (10–25%) d. Sometimes (26–50%) e. Often (51–75%) f. Very often (76–90%) g. Almost every dive (more than 90%)

32. Which shark species have you encountered during the past 12 months? (Tick all)

a. Great White (Carcharodon carcharias) b. Tiger Shark (Galeocerdo cuvier) c. Bull Shark (Carcharhinus leucas) d. Bronze Whaler (Carcharhinus brachyurus) e. Dusky Whaler Shark (Carcharhinus obscurus) f. Grey Nurse shark (Carcharias taurus) g. Grey Reef Shark (Carcharhinus amblyrhynchos) h. Whitetip Reef Shark (Triaenodon obesus) i. Blacktip Reef Shark (Carcharhinus melanopterus) j. Silvertip Shark (Carcharhinus albimarginatus) k. Oceanic Whitetip Shark (Carcharhinus longimanus) l. Tawny Nurse Shark (Nebrius ferrugineus) m. Wobbegong (Orectolobus spp.) n. Hammerhead Shark (Sphyrna spp.) o. Mako Shark (Isurus spp.) p. Broadnose Sevengill Shark (Notorynchus cepedianus) q. Port Jackson Shark (Heterodontus portusjacksoni) r. Shovelnose Ray / Shark (Aptychotrema spp.) s. Unknown / Not sure t. Other

33. During the past 12 months, which of the following shark interactions have you personally experienced while spearfishing? (Select all that apply.)

a. Shark sighting b. Shark following or circling you c. Shark depredation (taking or damaging a fish) d. Shark making physical contact with your equipment e. Shark biting your equipment f. Shark making physical contact with you g. Shark biting you h. Have not encountered a shark i. Other

34. How would you describe the behaviour of the shark during your most serious interaction in the past 12 months?

a. Indifferent (showed little or no interest) b. Curious (investigated but remained non-threatening) c. Persistent (repeatedly followed, circled or returned) d. Aggressive (repeated close approaches, physical contact or biting behaviour) e. Have not encountered a shark f. Unable to say g. Other

35. Approximately how many shark depredation events have you experienced during the past 12 months? — For this survey, a shark depredation event is where you observe, or reasonably believe, that a shark has removed, damaged or attempted to take a fish before you could recover it.

a. None b. 1-2 c. 3-5 d. 6-10 e. More than 10

36. If you have been spearfishing for more than 10 years, how have your shark interactions changed compared with when you first started?

a. Become much less frequent b. Become somewhat less frequent c. Stayed about the same d. Become somewhat more frequent e. Become much more frequent f. Unsure g. I have been spearfishing for less than 10 years

37. Based on your experience, what works (best practice) to manage safe shark interactions while spearfishing? — Please rate each strategy based on your own experience.

Rating scale: Not effective / Neutral / Effective

a. Dive with a buddy (inc. back to back) b. Move to shallower water or closer to shore c. Return to the boat or exit the water d. Change dive location e. Stay close to reef or structure f. Maintain visual contact with the shark g. Stay calm and avoid sudden movements h. Strike or slap the water or make noise (shout) i. Store fish in a boat float or boat j. Shark eye deterrent (on mask or suit) k. Remove fish from the water as quickly as possible l. Avoid

spearing large fish m. Avoid areas with known shark activity n. Avoid diving in poor visibility o. Avoid diving at dawn or dusk p. Carry a shark deterrent device q. Remain vertical in the water r. poking shark with the speargun tip s. kill shark (e.g. powerhead) t. other

38. If you answered 'other' to the above question or have specific comments on best practice please provide more detail

Open-text response.

39. Which citizen science programs have you contributed shark observations to? (Select all that apply.)

a. Australian Shark Incident Database b. iNaturalist c. Qld Fishing 2.0 (Qld) d. Eye on the reef (Qld) e. Spot a shark (Grey nurse) f. Dorsal g. I have not contributed shark observations h. Other

Safety

40. Have you completed any formal spearfishing, freediving or dive safety training? (Select all that apply.)

a. Spearfishing safety course b. Freediving course c. SCUBA certification (e.g. PADI, SSI, NAUI, CMAS) d. First aid certification e. CPR certification f. Oxygen administration course g. Boat licence h. Marine safety course i. Marine Radio Operator's Certificate (VHF) j. None of the above k. Other

41. Do you normally use the buddy system while spearfishing? — The buddy system means diving one-up, one-down, with your buddy actively monitoring you while you are underwater.

a. Always b. Most of the time c. Sometimes d. Rarely e. Never

42. Which safety equipment do you normally carry? (Tick all)

a. Dive flag / float b. Knife c. Quick-release weight belt d. PLB/ EPIRB e. VHF marine radio f. Mobile phone in a waterproof case g. GPS h. Satellite communication device (e.g. Garmin inReach) i. First aid kit j. Tourniquet and bandages k. Emergency oxygen l. Shark deterrent device m. Dive computer/watch n. Surface signalling device (safety sausage or signal mirror) o. Whistle or other audible signalling device p. Other

43. Which of the following best describes how you normally spearfish?

a. Shore diving with a reel gun (no float) b. Shore diving with a floatline and float c. Boat diving with a reel gun (no float) d. Boat diving with a floatline and float e. Other

44. How do you most commonly carry your catch while spearfishing?

a. Attached to a diver-towed float b. Stored within a boat float c. Stored immediately in the boat d. Carried by the diver (e.g. by hand or attached to a belt/stringer) e. Other

45. For each of the following safety incidents, please indicate whether you have personally experienced it or witnessed it involving another spearfisher.

Response columns: Personally / Witnessed

a. Shallow water blackout b. Samba (loss of motor control) c. Entanglement d. Speargun injury e. Boat strike or near miss f. Lost or separated diver g. Serious shark incident h. Serious marine animal injury (other than shark) i. Rock-hopping injury j. Other serious injury requiring medical treatment

46. How effective do you believe each of the following measures would be in improving spearfishing safety?

Rating scale: Not effective / Neutral / Effective

a. Education b. Training (free diving/ spearfishing) c. Buddy awareness d. Citizen science e. Active deterrents (electrical, magnetic etc.) f. Drone surveillance g. Behavioural guidelines h. Research i. Improved emergency response j. Exclusion Nets & Barriers k. Protective clothing (bite proof wetsuits etc.) l. Population management (smart Drumlines & targeted fishing) m. Other

Future of spearfishing

47. What are the greatest challenges facing spearfishing? (Tick the top 3)

a. Marine Park Closures b. Loss of access to spearfishing areas c. Negative public perception d. Shark interactions e. Safety f. Excessive regulation g. Environmental degradation h. Lack of public understanding i. Declining club membership j. Recruitment of new spearfishers k. Other

48. Which of the following should be the AUF's highest priorities?

Rating scale: Low / Medium / High

a. Government advocacy b. Marine park access c. Spearfishing safety d. Spearfishing education e. Local club support f. Club competitions g. State comps h. National comps i. International comps j. Spearfishing records k. Junior development l. Scientific research m. Citizen science n. Marine conservation o. Public education p. Standards and best practice

49. Overall, are you optimistic about the future of spearfishing in Australia?

a. Very optimistic b. Optimistic c. Neutral d. Pessimistic e. Very pessimistic

50. Do you believe the opportunities to participate in spearfishing in Australia have changed during the past 10 years?

a. Improved significantly b. Improved somewhat c. Stayed about the same d. Declined somewhat e. Declined significantly f. Unsure

51. What do you think is the most important role of spearfishing clubs today? (Select up to three.)

a. Finding reliable dive buddies b. Improving safety and skills c. Training new spearfishers d. Social events and community e. Club competitions f. Access to organised trips g. Mentoring and sharing knowledge h. Representing spearfishers i. Family-friendly activities j. Conservation and environmental projects k. Nothing – clubs are no longer necessary l. Other

52. If you are not currently a member of a spearfishing club, what is the main reason?

a. No club nearby b. Not interested c. Lack of time d. Membership cost e. I already have people to dive with f. I learn everything I need online g. Clubs don't offer what I'm looking for h. I am a club member i. Other

Stay connected and final comments

53. Would you like to receive: (Tick all)

a. AUF updates b. Survey results c. Safety information d. Opportunities to participate in future citizen science projects

54. Want to win $1,000 worth of spearfishing gear? Enter your name and email address below (optional).

Open-text response.

55. Is there anything you would like governments, researchers or the wider Australian community to better understand about spearfishing? Open-text response.