

Ron Dempster Award

Nathan Johnston 2020



Nathan Johnston's contribution to the enhancement of recreational fishing has been nothing short of outstanding. Nathans Introduction to the Queensland Sportfishers was through the Keppel Bay Sportfishing Club. His passion for recreational fishing soon became evident through his involvement on the executive of his local club. Shortly after he soon joined the Queensland executive as President from 2015 -2019 and is currently the Vice President. Nathans passion for the sport and the fishery goes beyond his club achievements. It is his ethos and a greater part of his personality. Many would consider these achievements alone to support his lifetime commitment to Recreational Fishing and the health and wellbeing of the fishery.

Nathan has a passion for promoting a deep understanding of water ways and has continually sort to educate himself and others. With over 20 years understanding of aquatic ecosystems as a bachelor qualified scientist, he has used this foundation to effectively communicate and enlighten others of the modern issues and concerns of the recreational angler and the environment. Nathan has participated in numerous groups and committees, television and podcast appearances, written insightful articles for magazine Fish and Boat as well as several other published works. With his leadership he has helped to influence those in the industry to make insightful and ethical decisions.

In 2015 there was movement on the books to dissolve the ANSA Queensland organisation. At the same time Info Fish had transitioned into a commercial enterprise abandoning their sportfishing roots whilst acquiring the intellectual property and several member clubs with them. It was then that Nathan showed exemplary leadership skills and commitment to sportfishing by taking the reins of the ANSA Qld branch and breathing life back into the organisation.

Nathan led the stabilisation and rebuilding Of Qld Branch and has restored its credibility with the National Body as well as Queensland Fisheries and the fishing media. For many who were with ANSA Qld at the time, we were well aware of the seriousness of the situation and how close we came to dissolution. Nathan showed great resilience and stayed focussed on the plan he had developed through some very trying moments.

With the support of a new committee he set about re-engineering and rebranding the organisation by modernising its processes and procedures, resetting its goals, stabilising its finances and structures and creating a strong communication program through the website, Facebook and email. Clubs and club members now receive more pertinent information than ever before and are able to use social media to share and learn. We have embraced the "fishing for fun" concept that Nathan pioneered and he has changed the culture from talking about fishing into going fishing- even at state executive meetings!

Under Nathans leadership we have re-established a monitoring and tagging program that has ethical standards at its core and has many thousands of entries. The establishment of web-based lodgement, storage and reporting has been successful and the recent release of "Fishamon" has strengthened the state executive's commitment to embrace technology.

Nathan was instrumental in the Nets Out Queensland program and was recognised as the face and voice of the Fitzroy Basin section. He was involved at every level and met with the different tiers of politicians, commercial fishers, media and local residents. The Nets Out program has been extremely successful and particularly so in the case of the Rockhampton area. The Fitzroy River is now a quintessential destination for anglers both locally and afar, gaining interests overseas. It is providing considerable economic stimulus to the local economy and its future seems limitless.

In 2018 Nathan took up a voluntary position on the East Coast Inshore Working group, as part of the review. The East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery review was created by the Queensland Government and tasked with establishing ways to better manage a shared commercial and recreational fishery. The group discussed management strategies for many iconic recreational species. A variety of options were presented and discussed by the working group including; regional zoning and closures, review of commercial take quotas and recreational possession limits and mechanisms to tackle black-marketing. To help the working group engage with a wider group of fishers, Nathan created and administered the Queensland East Coast Recreational Fishing Advocates group on Facebook.

The groups aim was to provide current volunteer recreational fishing delegates on the east coast inshore working group with an avenue to circulate information and discuss some of the fisheries reform options being considered for the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery. The group has completed its work but to due to the slow political process Qld fishers are not able to have the full benefit realised.

He has recently purchased the Guided Fishing Downunder Charter business from John Haenke and is negotiating the steep learning curve of being a self-employed small business owner. Congratulations on what must have been an absorbing and demanding career change in the most difficult economic and social challenges since the great depression.

Nathan has devoted an extraordinary amount of time and energy in pursuing his passion for fishing. He could have easily just done it for himself, however as Nathan continues to constantly develop and improve, he inspires others around him to do so as well. To our gratitude he has invested his life into making recreational fishing a better sport for all.

Thank you from your Sportfishing Family

Author - Brendan Moore

