



Back to Toronto anglers baffled by sudden fishing ban on waterfront

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Jayne Poisson

Taro Murata was just 6 years old the first time he cast a line off the dock beside Toronto's ferry terminal.

As an inner-city teen, he would fish nearly every day after classes, catching pike and bass with his buddies.

"It kept me out of trouble," said the now 34-year-old, who turned his passion into a [business](#) offering guided fishing tours in and around the GTA.

For Murata, the city's recent decision to put up No Fishing signs along the inner harbour is particularly puzzling.

"It's crazy, I tell you. I don't get it," he said Monday, while winding line onto a reel.

The 20-odd signs, posted along nearly two kilometres of city-owned waterfront — from Sherbourne St. to the edge of Marilyn Bell Park — were put up on Friday by the city's parks, forestry and recreation department in accordance with a city bylaw stipulating that a sign should tell people where they can't fish.

James Dann, manager of Waterfront Parks, said about half a dozen complaints about public safety in recent years led to the new rule.

For instance, one elderly couple felt inconvenienced by someone casting a line while they were trying to walk past. In another, a rowboat got tangled up with a fishing line. No one has been hurt yet, said Dann.

Local anglers — of which there are an estimated 10,000 — are reeling. They say they've been fishing along the waterfront for decades with no problems.

Murata points out that people cycling or rollerblading along the waterfront can just as easily cause problems, and there's no ban on their pastimes.

"I've seen nothing but respect out here," he said, adding he and other anglers are well aware of who and what is around them when they cast.

On Monday, bystanders along the waterfront didn't seem too worried about anyone fishing. "Let them fish," said Fran Lando, an area resident for 18 years.

City councillor Paula Fletcher said she's shocked by the new rule, especially considering the timing.

She has put forth a motion to designate as much of the waterfront as possible a fishing zone. It's set to go before executive council on Tuesday and then onto city council in July.

The department's decision to put up the signs before committee or council dealt with the issue has "gone way too far," said Fletcher. As well, it was based on too few complaints.

"What's really troubling is that there was no consultation with the anglers. There's a large fishing community in the city of Toronto, and there was no attempt to do any outreach and have that conversation," she said.

"Shoreline fishing is a long-standing recreational sport, something we should be encouraging, not discouraging."



Longtime angler Taro Murata is not happy with the No Fishing sign along the inner harbour near the ferry docks. He can't understand why the city suddenly no longer wants anyone wishing there.

Pawel Dwulit/Toronto Star.

A patchwork of property ownership along the harbour walls, as well two conflicting bylaws, make it difficult for anglers and authorities alike to figure out where fishing is allowed.

The land is owned variously by the city, the Toronto Port Authority, the Harbourfront Centre, Ontario Place and a variety of private companies. Each has different rules.

In March, [local angler David Chong](#) was told by a police marine unit that it was illegal to fish at Ontario Place. The park later said it has no policy on fishing.

On Monday, Harbourfront Centre's director of operations Helder Melo said he is looking at certain areas on his property to designate as fishing spots.

Dann, the Waterfront Parks manager, pointed out that much of the city's waterfront in the east end (like the Scarborough Bluffs) and west end (like High Park's Grenadier Pond) are open to anglers. There's just too much action going on downtown, he said.

The way Murata tells it, being able to fish so close to home was what made the sport so accessible to him growing up. He worries that some would-be anglers may not be able to afford to subway fare.

"(The inner harbour) is just a really accessible place to fish, especially for kids and families," he said.

The rules could change once the issue goes to the executive committee and then to council.

"If council tells us otherwise, we can remove the signs within an hour," said Dann.