

fishing

future

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Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



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Fisheries status report

Plans in place to ensure sustainable fisheries ... p4



Value of Commonwealth fisheries

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Recruits undergo rigorous training ... p12

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COVER PHOTO

Fisher holding a pink ling. The yearly total allowable catch for pink ling has been reduced by 22% to 1,400 tonnes to allow the species to recover from fishing pressure. Photo by Richard Bennett.

Calendar of events

APRIL		
6-7	AFMA Board meeting	Hobart
13	Eastern Tuna Management Advisory Committee (ETMAC) Research, review and recommendation	Mooloolaba
14	Great Australian Bight Trawl Resource Assessment Group (GABRAG) meeting	Adelaide
14-15	Eastern Tuna Resource Assessment Group (ETRAG) meeting	Mooloolaba
15	Great Australian Bight Trawl Management Advisory Committee (GABMAC) meeting	Adelaide
18-19	Scallop Resources Assessment Group (ScallopRAG) meeting	Mooloolaba
19-20	Scallop Management Advisory Committee (ScallopMAC) meeting	Mooloolaba
21-26	15th International Pectinid Workshop	Mooloolaba
25-26	Western Tuna and Billfish Management Advisory Committee meeting	Freemantle
26-29	Southern and Western Tuna and Billfish MAC meeting	Freemantle
MAY		
19-20	AFMA Board meeting	Cairns

2005 International Pectinid Workshop

The 15th annual pectinid (scallop) workshop will be held at Mooloolaba, Queensland from 20-26 April 2005.

The workshop will focus on scallop biology, fisheries, aquaculture, economics and other related topics. Shellfish fishers, farmers, processors, and marketers, through to importers/exporters, biologists and fisheries managers are all invited to participate.

AFMA's Managing Director Richard McLoughlin will be opening the workshop and Scallop Fishery Manager, Dave Johnson, will be presenting a paper on the future management of the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop fishery.

Principal sponsors of the workshop include AFMA (through the Fisheries Resources Research Fund administered by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry), the Queensland Fisheries Service and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation.

For more information about the workshop, go to www.usc.edu.au/scallops2005 ■



Are you interested in becoming a Chair of one of our Management Advisory Committees?

AFMA is looking for suitably qualified people for the position of Chair of one or more of its Management Advisory Committees. MACs act as the primary liaison body between AFMA and those with an interest in Commonwealth fisheries, by providing advice on management arrangements, research, compliance and finance. Each MAC (there are currently 12) consists of up to nine members drawn from the commercial industry, fisheries management, environment and scientific communities, and state governments. The MAC Chair is the primary communication link between the fishery and the AFMA Board and plays a key role in ensuring effective discussion of

issues affecting each fishery and communicating recommendations to the AFMA Board.

If you have experience in fisheries or resource management, chairing meetings, excellent communication skills, and the ability to identify strategic objectives and facilitate their achievement, please contact Yvonne Zunic, Senior Management Officer, Communications and Planning, AFMA on telephone (02) 6272 3171 or email Yvonne.Zunic@afma.gov.au by Friday, 29 April 2005, for further information. ■

Meet AFMA's new graduates

AFMA HAS COMPLETED ITS ANNUAL GRADUATE PROGRAM SELECTION AND WE HAVE WELCOMED TWO NEW GRADUATES IN JANUARY 2005, MATTHEW STADLER AND NICOLE FLINT. WE ASKED THEM TO TELL US A BIT ABOUT THEMSELVES AND WHAT THEY HOPE TO ACHIEVE AS A GRADUATE WITH AFMA.

Matthew Stadler

I grew up in Perth and completed an honours degree in Marine Science at The University of Western Australia in 2000 where I studied reef fish using stereo-video cameras. Since graduating there I worked as a deckhand, skippered a vessel part-time for CSIRO, completed an internship for the Smithsonian Institute and worked in the mollusc section at Fisheries Western Australia. In 2004 I finished a Master's in Environmental Science and Management (University of California, Santa Barbara) where I focused on establishing collaborative fisheries monitoring and management projects for the newly established MPAs at the Channel Islands. This experience enlightened me as to how far ahead Australia is in many aspects of fisheries management and that we must continue to raise the standards if we are to succeed in sustaining marine ecosystems.

At AFMA I hope to develop my skills and increase my understanding of Australia's fisheries. The Graduate Program provides this opportunity by offering me experience and training in a variety of fisheries management disciplines.



Matthew Stadler

Nicole Flint

In 2001 I completed a Bachelor of Science with honours in marine biology at James Cook University in Townsville. My honours project investigated correlations in the abundance of commercially important larval fishes and their prey. I then went on to a PhD on the effects of poor water quality on tropical freshwater fish, including barramundi and sooty grunter, which will be submitted in the near future.

I have been keen to pursue a career in the fields of fish biology and fisheries management for as long as I can remember, having spent some years of my childhood living on a yacht in Queensland's coastal waters. I am excited by the opportunity to work at AFMA, to gain a greater understanding of the Australian fishing industry and to contribute to the sustainable management of our unique marine resources ■



Nicole Flint

BRS releases fisheries stock take

A STOCK TAKE OF COMMONWEALTH-MANAGED FISHERIES RELEASED IN MARCH IS A MIXED BAG BUT HAS SHOWN MANAGEMENT ACTION TAKEN FOR SOME SPECIES IN AUSTRALIAN WATERS OVER RECENT MONTHS WAS NEEDED.

The Bureau of Rural Sciences' (BRS) *Fishery Status Report* has provided an independent and comprehensive stock take of commercially harvested fish stocks.

The report provides Australians with an assessment of our fish stocks based on the latest available stock assessment in 2003, and is a vital part of ensuring healthy, productive and profitable fisheries for future generations.

The reports show that of the 74 species assessed, 17 are classified as overfished.

Of these:

- **Three are internationally managed fisheries** (Pacific Ocean Bigeye Tuna, Indian Ocean Bigeye Tuna and Southern Bluefin Tuna)

Australia shares in the management of these stocks with dozens of other countries. Minister for Fisheries, Ian Macdonald has just returned from meetings in Europe where the issues of overfishing in these areas and the need for all nations to make the tough decisions to ensure their future, was raised. By itself, Australia has no control over these stocks of highly migratory species and international action is required.

- **One is jointly managed with New Zealand** (South Tasman Rise Orange Roughy) A reduction in Total Allowable Catch (TAC) from 2,400 tonnes to 600 tonnes has occurred. The TAC will further reduce by 200 tonnes per year until the stock recovers.
- **Four are in the Torres Strait Protected Zone – jointly managed with the Queensland Government and the Torres Strait Islanders** (Three species of sea cucumber and tropical rock lobster).

All sea cucumber species – Black teatfish, Sandfish, Surf redfish – are effectively closed to commercial take, while fishing effort for rock lobster has been reduced by about 30 per cent over the past two years, and further restrictions are to apply from 2006.

- **Nine are managed by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority where steps have been taken to help the stocks recover:**

Blue Warehou – the total allowable catch (TAC) has been reduced by about 75 per cent over the past four years.

Eastern Gemfish – the fishery has been closed since the late 1990s with only an incidental bycatch TAC of 100 tonnes.

Pink Ling – the TAC has been reduced by over 20 per cent from January 2005.

South East Orange Roughy – the catch has been reduced from over 40,000 tonnes at the start of the last decade to 2,680 tonnes now across all zones in the south east fishery

Redfish – fishing has been reduced from 1,575 tonnes to 1,300 tonnes and fishers are now encouraged to use larger mesh in nets to reduce the catch of small fish.

Silver Trevally – management action has been taken in Commonwealth Waters and the Victorian and NSW Governments have been requested to introduce complementary arrangements.

School Shark – a recovery strategy was introduced in 2002 which sees this year's TAC reduced to 275 tonnes with projected further reductions.



Southern Scallop – minimum sizes have been increased in 2005 with flexibility to set a precautionary TAC

Coral Sea Black Teatfish – entry has been restricted to just two permits with each fisher limited to a TAC of 500kgs

Minister Macdonald said that much is being done to ensure the long-term survival of all fish species and the fishing communities that depend on them.

'AFMA has put in place management changes to help bring about the recovery of those species classed as overfished. These measures include a decision late last year to reduce catch limits for several species to allow stocks to be fished at a sustainable level or to recover from past fishing pressure.

'AFMA has also responded to other environmental concerns, including introducing action plans to reduce bycatch levels, and ecological risk assessments of its fisheries to help ensure the management practices for high-risk species are hitting the mark. All Commonwealth managed fisheries have been assessed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

'One of the success stories highlighted by the BRS report is that the Brown Tiger Prawn stock in the Northern Prawn Fishery, which was classed as overfished last year, has now been removed from the overfished category. I am confident that with the measures that have been, and will continue to be put in place, other species that are classed as overfished will also recover in the years ahead.

'Improvement won't happen over night, but tough decisions have been made and will continue to be made to ensure sustainability in the future. The nation's fish stocks are the basis of a \$2.2 billion industry and the Australian Government is determined to ensure their long-term sustainability.'

The BRS Fishery Status Report draws upon assessments by many sources including the Australian Government, state and consultant scientists, economists, fisheries managers, and stakeholders such as recreational anglers, commercial fishers and conservationists.

The report can be viewed at www.brs.gov.au/fish/status_report ■

Fisheries co-management at work in the Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery

AT A TIME WHEN MANY FISHERIES ARE STRUGGLING UNDER THE WEIGHT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENTS, MARINE PROTECTED AREAS, BYCATCH REDUCTIONS, QUOTA CUTS AND POOR ECONOMICS, THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION (GABIA) IS TAKING A LEAD ROLE IN MEETING THESE CHALLENGES HEAD ON.

BELOW WE HEAR FROM GABIA ABOUT WHAT THEY HAVE BEEN DOING.

The Great Australian Bight Industry Association (GABIA) includes the ten Statutory Fishing Right (SFR) holders in the Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery (GABTF) and they are making a big splash in the area of fisheries co-management.

In partnership with AFMA, the industry association has developed extensive fishery closures to protect vulnerable marine habitats and species; implemented and monitored strict catch limits for their main species; developed, funded and run a fishery independent survey of their main resources; and put in place a strategic research plan to underpin the development of under-utilised species in the fishery.

GABIA operators work in the remote waters between Kangaroo Island in South Australia and Cape Leeuwin in Western Australia, generally fishing for Bight redfish and deepwater flathead on the edge of the shelf, but they also target orange roughy during winter. Previously thought to be a marine desert in terms of fisheries, the Bight has seen many fishing ventures come and go over the last 50 years – the combination of remote fishing grounds, rough weather, long trips, low price species and large distances to markets has been unforgiving. Determination, exploration and a ‘steady as she goes’ approach to development of the fishery is now starting to reap rewards for those that have believed in the fishery and stuck at it.

The first Commonwealth fishery to operate under a formal AFMA Management Plan, the GABTF is a limited entry fishery with only ten SFRs, currently owned by six operators. The operators have no doubt that the strict limit on the number of licences at the outset has been a key factor in the emerging success of the fishery.

Wanting to be proactively involved in how their fishery would be managed, GABIA members put together a paper on future management options for their fishery in 2003. This has been developed with constructive input from AFMA management, and now sets the scene for the strategic development and management of the fishery. There are some impressive initiatives being put forward by GABIA.

In a workshop on strategic management of their fishery last year, GABIA members agreed to put in place extensive fishery closures of underwater features to provide habitat refuges for spawning orange roughy. These closures go hand-in-hand with quota limits on their preferred and established roughy fishing grounds and are in addition to closed areas associated with the Great Australian Bight Marine Protected Area – and large strip of water in the GABTF with benthic protection zone stretching from the coast to the 200 mile Australian Fishing Zone.

It was decided in 2003 that the fishery would be moving to quota management of the main species in the GABTF – Bight redfish, deepwater flathead and orange roughy. In most fisheries this

would bring on a huge ‘race for fish’. In the GABTF, however, GABIA members agreed to equal allocation of the resources and set upper catch limits that allowed them to develop the resources in a controlled manner so that an appropriate TAC could be implemented in 2006. Not only were industry involved in setting the catch limits, when catches of redfish ‘came on big’ early in 2004, causing AFMA concern that the limit would be breached and flooding the markets, industry implemented real-time monitoring and informal allocation of future catches. Together with a system of monthly reporting to AFMA, Industry showed that it could responsibly manage its own affairs and by the end of 2004 the integrity of the catch limits was maintained. Industry was now showing the true meaning of ‘co-management’.

During 2004, the industry took another big leap forward by agreeing to conduct its own fishery independent survey. Following on from a project on the feasibility of industry-based fishery independent surveys funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, GABIA has recently completed a stratified random survey of its shelf-break resources.

Principal Investigator of the project, Dr Ian Knuckey, is impressed. ‘These guys spent a year working through the design and feasibility of a fishery independent survey with me, and then just up and did it! They put their hands deep in their pockets, used their own vessels, built a dedicated survey net, and stuck exactly to the rigorous scientific design of the survey. They should be very proud of themselves.’ The money that industry dedicated to the survey was matched 80:20 by AFMA’s research fund for research of this nature. Dr Knuckey says that the information obtained from the survey is important in understanding the GABTF resources and critical to ongoing modelling and assessment of the status of the fish stocks.

Apart from undertaking the fishery independent survey in 2005, GABIA and AFMA are also putting in place strategic research and management plans for the development of underexploited upper slope and pelagic resources in the fishery.

‘To date the fishery has mainly concentrated on the traditional demersal shelf resources but deeper species such as grenadier, western gemfish, hapuku, ling as well as pelagic species have a big potential in this fishery’ says Michael Thomas, President of GABIA.

‘We are planning the controlled exploration and development of these resources only with pre-determined management measures in place and the sound backing of good research. GABIA has a good fishery here and we want to keep it that way’. Thomas sums up the feelings of all GABIA members, ‘We are all in it for the long haul and, at a time when trawling is really under the spotlight, we want to see the GABTF held up as success story and a good example of a world’s best practice fish-trawl fishery.’ ■

Australian fisheries production up, but returns down

AUSTRALIAN FISHERIES PRODUCTION ROSE BY 5% DURING 2003–04, BUT GROSS VALUE DROPPED BY THE SAME PERCENTAGE, ACCORDING TO THE LATEST PUBLICATION OF *AUSTRALIAN FISHERIES STATISTICS 2004*.

The report, released last month by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics (ABARE), contains information on the volume and value of production from all state and Commonwealth fisheries for the 3 years to 2003–04. It also contains a profile of Commonwealth and state fisheries, including the species, fishing method and number of licence holders.

Major trends for Commonwealth fisheries

ABARE reported that the total production of Commonwealth fisheries increased by 5% over the past three years to 267,000 tonnes. However, the value of those fisheries decreased 5% to 2.2 billion. ABARE puts this largely down to falling world prices resulting in lower prices for many species, and an appreciating Australian dollar in 2003–04.

The Northern Prawn Fishery continued to be Australia's most valuable Commonwealth fishery, valued at \$ 74 million in 2003–04. This represented a drop in gross value from almost \$83 million in 2002–03, despite a 9% increase in production.

Next was the South East Trawl fishery at \$54 million. According to ABARE, smaller harvests and lower average prices resulted in a drop from the \$66 million gross value of the previous year. The Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery came in at \$47 million, falling from \$66 million in 2003–04.



The Northern Prawn Fishery remains Australia's most valuable Commonwealth fishery

For a copy of the report, visit www.abareconomics.com ■

Total value of production of Commonwealth fisheries – From Australian Fisheries Statistics 2004, ABARE

COMMONWEALTH FISHERY	\$'000	\$'000
	2002–03	2003–04
Northern prawn	82,540	73,979
Torres Strait	36,666	29,138
South east trawl	65,734	54,107
Gillnet, hook and trap *	21,587	23,500
South Tasman Rise	455	367
Great Australian Bight	8,576	14,094
Eastern tuna and billfish – longline and minor line	67,913	46,832
Eastern skipjack tuna	0	1,494
Southern bluefin tuna	77,840	38,147
Bass Strait scallop	694	1,475
Southern and western tuna	19,998	8,252
Other fisheries **	32,842	46,065
Total	414,845	337,449
TOTAL VALUE ***	2,305,077	2,179,589

* An amalgamation of South east nontrawl and Southern shark fisheries as of 2002–03.

** Includes North west slope, Western deepwater, Southern squid, Jack mackerel, Macquarie Island, Coral Sea, Cocos and Christmas Islands, Heard and McDonald Islands, East coast deepwater, Victorian inshore trawl for 2000–01, and Norfolk Island fisheries.

*** Total value has been adjusted to allow for southern bluefin tuna caught in the Commonwealth southern bluefin tuna fishery, as an input to farms in South Australia. The report can be viewed online for free or a hard copy purchased from ABARE from their website at <http://www.abareconomics.com/>

A collaborative approach to bêche-de-mer

IN JANUARY 2005, AFMA AND CSIRO DIVISION OF MARINE RESEARCH VISITED THREE KEY COMMUNITIES IN EASTERN TORRES STRAIT TO CONDUCT A BÊCHE-DE-MER SUSTAINABILITY WORKSHOP AND TO PERFORM A SURVEY OF THE FISHERY.

Background of the fishery

The Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) fishery is an important commercial fishery to Torres Strait Islanders. Fishing for bêche-de-mer in Torres Strait is mainly by free diving from dinghies crewed by 2–3 fishers, or by hand collection along reefs at low tide.

The Bêche-de-mer fishery is particularly vulnerable to overharvesting and is therefore subject to a range of input and output controls. These controls aim to prevent overfishing while allowing Torres Strait Islanders to benefit from the use of sea cucumber stocks.

Sandfish (*Holothuria scabra*) on Warrior Reef provided the bulk of the early catches in this fishery, until a stock survey in 1998 found that the population was severely depleted and a prohibition on the harvest of this species was introduced.

Subsequent surveys in January 2000 and October 2002 found a small recovery, but the population was still considered heavily depleted. Since 1998, the fishery has mostly targeted black teatfish (*Holothuria whitmaei*), white teatfish (*Holothuria fuscogilva*) and surf redfish (*Actinopyga mauritiana*).

A survey in March 2002 found that black teatfish and surf redfish were also overexploited, and a prohibition on the harvest of these species was introduced in January 2003. Current fishing effort focuses on white teatfish, prickly redfish (*Thelenota ananas*) and to a lesser extent, several lower value species.



The Black teatfish is a highly valued species, prone to overharvesting. It is currently 'no-take' in Torres Strait. This photo was taken as part of a practical 'on the water' session to show how surveys are undertaken.

To ensure the future sustainability of sea cucumbers stocks throughout Torres Strait it is essential that Torres Strait Islanders are fully aware of the current knowledge, research methodologies and possible management strategies for the fishery.

Awareness and education

In a major education and awareness initiative, Sascha Taylor from AFMA Torres Strait Fisheries and Tim Skewes from CSIRO Marine Research Division recently conducted a series of two-day sustainability workshops in three communities in eastern Torres Strait. These included Masig (Yorke), Erub (Darnley) and Mer (Murray) Islands.

The workshop, funded by the Torres Strait Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), took place prior to the next scheduled bêche-de-mer survey in these waters.

A range of stakeholders including Torres Strait Islander traditional and commercial fishers, seafood buyers/processors and council members attended the workshops. The main objectives were to:

- outline the current management arrangements in the fishery;
- explain the principles of sustainable exploitation and illustrate sea cucumbers' susceptibility to overharvesting using examples from the Torres Strait sandfish and Queensland East coast black teatfish fisheries; and
- explain and demonstrate the processes/methodologies (sample design, field sampling and calculating Total Allowable Catches – TACs) used to survey bêche-de-mer stocks and assess the status of the stocks.

Survey of the fishery

Following the sustainability workshops, Tim Skewes and his CSIRO team, together with AFMA's Sascha Taylor, undertook a stock survey of the east Torres Strait fishery as part of the CRC Torres Strait project to assess the sustainability of the Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) Fishery.

The east Torres Strait survey was designed to assess the status of all commercial sea cucumber species, but with particular interest in the two species currently closed to fishing, black teatfish and surf redfish.

During the surveys, they collected more information on the fishery ecology of sea cucumbers and collected habitat data for comparison with previous years.

A report containing an analysis of the east Torres Strait survey data collected during the survey will be forwarded to AFMA in August 2005. The report will include an assessment of the stock recovery of black teatfish and surf redfish on east Torres Strait reefs and management recommendations for the east Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer (sea cucumber) fishery ■



AFMA and CSIRO Marine out conducting the sea cucumber survey.

Establishing Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management

AFMA IS TAKING AN ECOSYSTEM BASED FISHERIES APPROACH TO MANAGING ITS FISHERIES THROUGH ITS 'ESTABLISHING ECOSYSTEM BASED FISHERIES MANAGEMENT' (EBFM) PROJECT.

The three year EBFM project will run until mid 2006 and will provide benefits for the marine environment while assisting fisheries to be sustainable and productive into the future.

The EBFM project is funded through the Australian Government Natural Heritage Trust. In 2003 and 2004, the project supported the development of ecological risk assessments (ERAs) for Commonwealth fisheries and ecosystem data plans for three AFMA fisheries.

A range of activities are planned for the EBFM project during 2005 and 2006 and include:

- Continuing the ERAs for Commonwealth fisheries;
- Developing strategic ecosystem data plans for all AFMA fisheries;
- Enhancing AFMA data collections through increased data collection and management processes;
- Improving the extension and communication activities of AFMA, particularly in regard to bycatch and non-target issues;
- Assisting a number of fisheries investigate alternative management options; and
- Providing incentives for implementing actions/devices to reduce fishing impacts on bycatch and the marine environment.

For more information on the EBFM project and activities being undertaken, please contact Tim Smith, AFMA Environment Policy Section, on (02) 6272 5631 or Tim.Smith@afma.gov.au.



Revised Bycatch Action Plans for tuna fisheries

AFMA HAS RECENTLY COMPLETED REVISED BYCATCH ACTION PLANS (BAPS) FOR TUNA PURSE SEINE FISHERIES THAT TARGET SOUTHERN BLUEFIN TUNA AND SKIPJACK TUNA, AS WELL AS THOSE WHICH TARGET TUNA AND BILLFISH SPECIES IN LONGLINE AND MINOR LINE FISHERIES.

The BAPs outline the strategies and objectives in place to ensure that impacts of bycatch on ecosystems are sustainable. The plans aim to improve AFMA's understanding of bycatch issues for these fisheries, and to facilitate the development and implementation of strategies to mitigate the environmental impacts of these fisheries.

The Bycatch Action Plan for the Tuna purse seine fisheries deals primarily with the potential bycatch issues arising in the Skipjack tuna and Southern bluefin tuna fisheries, such as the potential for interactions with sharks. The BAP for the Tuna and Billfish Longline

and Minor Line fisheries deals with the potential for interactions with species such as seabirds, seals and turtles in the Eastern and Western Tuna and Billfish Fisheries using pelagic longline and minor line methods.

Both these Bycatch Action plans, and others in place, can be viewed on AFMA's website at:

<http://www.afma.gov.au/pubs/plans/baps/default.php>

Bycatch Action Plans were introduced for the majority of Commonwealth fisheries after March 2001 under the 2000 Commonwealth Policy on Fisheries Bycatch, which specifies that the BAPs must be reviewed every 2 years. AFMA is well underway in reviewing its Bycatch Action Plans.

AFMA also has a register of interest of people interested in Bycatch Action Plans. To be placed on this register and to be provided with copies of Bycatch Action Plans for public comment, please contact Cate Coddington in AFMA's Environment section on (02) 6272 4208 or email Cate.Coddington@afma.gov.au. Please indicate which Fisheries you are interested in ■

Government and industry rally to help tsunami-affected fishers

THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT IS COORDINATING ASSISTANCE FOR FISHING INDUSTRIES IN TSUNAMI-AFFECTED COUNTRIES BY WORKING WITH THE STATES AND THE FISHING INDUSTRY TO COLLECT FISHING GEAR AND EQUIPMENT, WHICH COMMERCIAL AND RECREATIONAL FISHERS AROUND THE COUNTRY HAVE OFFERED TO DONATE.

The Australian Government, through the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and Agriculture, has been participating in a stocktake of fishing and aquaculture equipment destroyed by the tsunami to determine what items are required in the disaster areas.

Recreational and commercial fishermen with surplus equipment have been asked to consider what can be given and then to register their equipment with a nominated agency. Then, as equipment is required, donors will be contacted so that delivery can be arranged.

10 locations where equipment for donation can be registered have now been announced. Offers can be logged through the following government and non-government agencies:

Primary Industries and Water TAS

Business, Industry and Resource Development NT

Fisheries WA

Primary Industries and Resources in SA

Primary Industries and Fisheries NSW

Primary Industries and Fisheries QLD

Primary Industries VIC

National Aquaculture Council

Australian Seafood Industry Council

Recfish West

Donation information should include the details of the equipment or gear, location and contact details of the donor.

Australia's overseas aid agency, AusAID, is in contact with the affected regions, and will work with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to match priority needs to the potential offers, and to facilitate distribution in the tsunami-affected countries. AusAID will contact the donor for gear that is needed, and will facilitate and fund freight costs, capped at a certain amount. Please contact any of the agencies or organisations above to register your interest or for more information ■

Nomination of Commonwealth species as threatened

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE IS ASSESSING WHETHER A NUMBER OF COMMERCIAL SPECIES CAUGHT BY COMMONWEALTH FISHERS SHOULD BE LISTED AS THREATENED SPECIES UNDER THE *ENVIRONMENT BIODIVERSITY AND CONSERVATION ACT 1999* (EPBC ACT).

The species nominated include:

Eastern gemfish (*Rexea solandri*)

Harrison's dogfish (*Centrophorus harrisoni*)

Endeavour dogfish (*Centrophorus moluccensis*)

Southern dogfish (*Centrophorus uyato*)

Orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*)

School Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*)

Southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*)

Eastern gemfish, orange roughy and School shark are all species currently taken as catch in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery. Southern bluefin tuna (SBT) is a migratory species which is widely distributed throughout waters of the southern oceans, including the Australian Fishing Zone. The key areas where SBT is caught are the Great Australian Bight and waters off south eastern Australia in the Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery.

Nominations for these species will be passed on from the Department of Environment and Heritage for assessment under the EPBC Act by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC). Once the Committee has conducted an assessment, its advice will



Eastern gemfish is just one Commonwealth species which has been nominated for listing as a threatened species

be forwarded to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage who will make the final decision on their listing.

It is expected that the assessment process should be completed and a decision made later in 2005.

More information about the nomination and assessment process for listing threatened species can be found on the Department of the Environment and Heritage's website at <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/flowchart.html>

A fact sheet and more information about what happens if a species is listed as threatened is also at: <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/fish-faq.html> ■

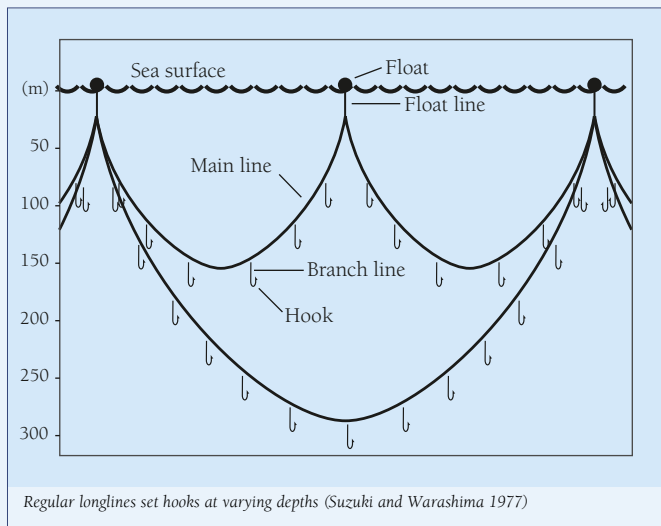
New deep setting longline technique

A NEW DEEP LINE SETTING TECHNIQUE HAS SHOWN PROMISING RESULTS FOR NOT ONLY REDUCING BYCATCH, BUT ALSO APPEARS TO ENHANCE THE CAPTURE OF TARGET SPECIES LIKE BIGEYE TUNA.

In a recent study funded by AFMA, the Secretariat of the Pacific Community conducted a project in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery to demonstrate that longlines can be set effectively at prescribed depths to below the zone where unwanted bycatch species are normally hooked.

A typical pelagic longline catches deep as well as shallow dwelling fish. Unfortunately some unwanted species may be caught on the shallowest hooks of a longline, even if the longline is targeting deeper species. Previous studies of turtle behaviour have indicated that there is a critical depth range of about 100 metres below the surface where turtle encounters with longlines happen most often. It has been suggested that setting the lines deeper may avoid catching turtles as well as other bycatch species.

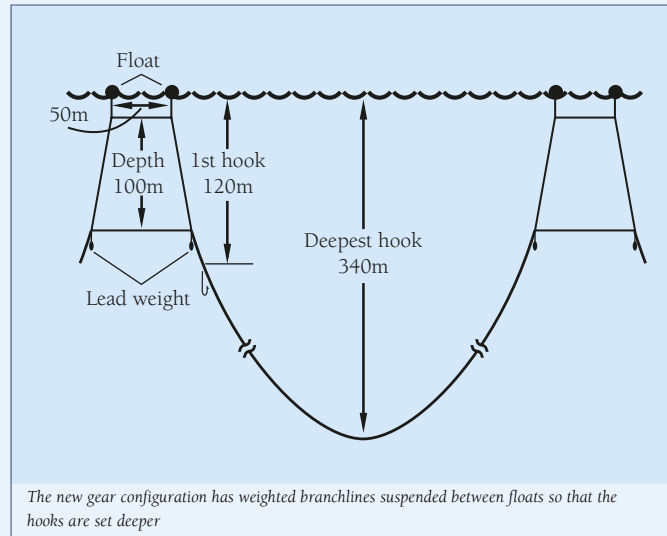
Most vessels targeting Bigeye tuna for instance, already set deep. However, normal setting practices leave a good proportion of hooks in shallow water where bycatch encounters still do occur.



The purpose of this deep setting project was to test a new method for setting monofilament longlines that sets all of the baited hooks at a prescribed range of depths, avoiding having any baited hooks in the critical top 100 metres.

Normally a 'basket' of longline gear (one section of mainline suspended between floats with normally 6 to 40 hooks attached to smaller branchlines) sags in a curve that fishes a range of depths from near the surface to about 300 metres deep. The new setting technique involved weighting the mainline in such a manner that the entire 'basket' fishes below the critical depth.

In order to set the longline deeper, the mainline was used as a supplementary floatline. In other words, the fishing portion of the



line was suspended between long sections of mainline that were weighted down at one end by 3kg weights and attached to floats at the other. (Simply weighting down a line will cause the line to collapse). To avoid tangles, the floats were set in pairs and separated by 50 metres of unbaited line.

On one vessel where the technique was trialed, 6,000 hooks were set, 2,420 using weighted gear, while 3,580 hooks were set using normal setting configuration. 17% more fish of all target species were caught- but was much better for the main target species. 42% more Bigeye tuna were caught using the weighted technique. Swordfish catch was almost identical for weighted and normal gear configurations. Hauling was actually easier than standard setting as the weights kept the line taut.

The deep setting technique proved to be successful, but not without a cost: more gear was needed (lead weights, more floats and floatlines, and more mainline), more time was spent on deck and fewer byproduct species were caught. However, the trial was considered successful as the longlines were set at prescribed depths, catches were unchanged or even enhanced, and the setting parameters were easily duplicated.

Though the results look very promising, the researchers believe that more testing is required to determine whether this new technique actually significantly or statistically reduces bycatch encounters (for turtles as well as for other bycatch species) and enhances capture of target species.

For a copy of the full research report on this project, log on to AFMA's website at <http://www.afma.gov.au/services/research/reports/default.php> ■

WA Tuna Fishermen taking steps to make a difference

By SeaNet

GENESIS AND EXODUS MAY CONJURE BIBLICAL IMAGES OF CREATION AND CHANGE, AND IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA, TWO FISHING VESSELS WHICH CARRY THESE NAMES ARE DOING JUST THAT.

The tuna longliners FV Genesis and FV Exodus are owned by Vinci Seafood Exporters and the skippers and crews of these boats have created and maintained changes in fishing practices that are making a real difference.

The vessels skippers Paul Copeland and Damien Lyon and their crew are working closely with SeaNet WA and Damien Trinder of Pelagic Fisheries Research and Compliance, to trial various forms of de-hooking and line cutting tools in the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery. The work follows on from a number of other sustainable fishing initiatives carried out by SeaNet WA in conjunction with WA researchers and the industry body, Tuna West.

By using this specialised de-hooking and line-cutting equipment, fishers can minimise the severity of interactions with non-target species. The equipment assists in reducing handling times for the removal of fishing gear, allowing for a rapid release.

Trials of the ARC line cutters and de-hookers began in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) where a grant from the Threatened Species Network funded the purchase and introduction of these tools.

These tools also increase the efficiency of day to day operations minimising handling and processing time of target species and



assisting in the rapid removal and retrieval of hooks. Safety is also improved through allowing fishers to remove hooks from a safe distance from potentially dangerous animals where there is the chance of a bite or stab injury.

The vessel Genesis is also involved in a tagging program for Broadbill Swordfish being conducted by CSIRO marine research in conjunction with AFMA and is currently leading the tally with a total of 71 fish tagged. This is a tremendous effort by the skipper and the crew considering the fact that no legal size limit exists for Broadbill Swordfish and all tagged animals have been returned from what would have been the commercial take for the vessel.

If you would like to know more about the de-hooking equipment, please contact WA SeaNet Extension Officer Carl Bevilacqua on 08 9492 8811, 0429 110 026 or email seanet@wafic.org.au.

Andy's travels

ANDY IS A LARGE OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLE THAT WAS TAGGED AND RELEASED IN THE SOUTHERN CORAL SEA IN DECEMBER 2004. AMAZINGLY, THE TURTLE'S MOVEMENTS OVER 4,000 KM INTO TASMAN WATERS HAVE BEEN TRACKED BY SATELLITE RADIO TRANSMITTER.

The Australian Government, through a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation grant and assistance from AFMA, is funding a 2-year project to train Australian longline fishers in methods to reduce the impact of their fishing operations on marine turtle populations. Although turtles are rarely caught in most Australian fisheries, some species are considered vulnerable, and the possibility for incidental interaction with turtle species is recognised.

The study, conducted by Principal Investigator Carolyn Robins for Bellidi Consultancy Pty Ltd, aims to educate fishers in issues concerning sea turtles and to train them in safe release and handling procedures, as well as providing important information to allow the development of improved bycatch mitigation, including improved gear and methods.

An integral part of this project is the gathering of data on the occurrence and distribution of turtles, with vital assistance from volunteers in the fishing industry to participate in the study. The plan is for a number of turtles captured by longline operations in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery, to be released safely and fitted



with radio tags for subsequent tracking using satellite technology. Andy was named after AFMA observer Andrew Bayne, who connected the satellite tag to his shell.

In Andy's case, the turtle was captured by superficial hooking on the flipper on 1 December 2004. Following successful removal of the hook on board the vessel, the turtle was measured and fitted with a Sirtrack 0.5 watt transmitter powered by 4 AA cell batteries.

The satellite telemetry so far shows that Andy, released from the participating vessel *Ocean Dawn* on 3 December 2004 over the Gifford seamount in the Coral Sea off Queensland, moved west into continental shelf waters and continued to move south along the NSW coast. By 31 January, ANDY had moved offshore into the Tasman Sea! He has travelled over 4,000 kilometres in a ten week period.

What is amazing is that previously it has not been thought that Olive Ridley turtles travel so far south. ■

Retrial for *Viarsa 1* crew

IN A BIZARRE SAGA, AND DESPITE FOUR DAYS OF DELIBERATIONS, THE JURY IN THE NINE-WEEK LONG TRIAL OF THE FIVE CREW MEMBERS OF ALLEGED ILLEGAL VESSEL *VIARSA 1* WAS DISMISSED IN DECEMBER 2004 AFTER FAILING TO REACH A VERDICT.

Viarsa 1's Uruguayan captain, Spanish first mate, two officers and another Chilean crew member all pleaded not guilty to using a foreign vessel for illegally fishing for Patagonian toothfish in the Southern Ocean waters around Heard and McDonald Island. The *Viarsa 1* was apprehended by Australian authorities on 7 August 2003 after a three-week pursuit in the remote Antarctic waters.



The hot pursuit of the *Viarsa 1* lasted 21 days and 3,900 nautical miles

On board the vessel was 97 tonnes of the valuable Patagonian toothfish and 92 tonnes of bait.

At the conclusion of the trial, after four days of deliberations, the jury reported that they were unable to reach a unanimous decision, required for a guilty verdict.

The foreman of the jury wrote a letter to the court after one particular member of the jury had refused to continue debate. After being reminded by the judge that each juror had an obligation to attempt to resolve the conflict and to participate fully in the decision-making process, the jury again indicated that it could not reach consensus on the matter, and the jury was dismissed.

The Perth District Court held a status conference on 31 January this year to determine whether a re-trial would be held. A new trial has now been set for 10 weeks commencing 5 September 2005 ■



The 97-tonne toothfish catch was sold at tender for over \$1 million, with the monies to be held until the conclusion of legal proceedings

Southern Ocean patrols training

SINCE JULY LAST YEAR, ABOUT 60 RECRUITS HAVE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A SPECIALIST SOUTHERN OCEAN TRAINING PROGRAM PROVIDED BY THE CUSTOMS SOUTHERN OCEAN MARITIME PATROL AND RESPONSE UNIT (SOMPRU).

The program is designed to equip the men and women who have put their hands up for the tough and potentially dangerous job of patrolling Australia's Antarctic waters for illegal fishers.

The recruits have been selected from a huge number of interested people from all sorts of backgrounds including the maritime industry, law enforcement and armed services.

The induction training takes around four months to complete and covers topics such as sea safety, tactical communications, use of force, personal search, investigation powers, law of the sea, and first aid. The recruits also receive special induction briefings from Customs, AFMA and the Australian Antarctic Division on issues specific to the Southern Ocean. Induction also includes a 6-day module covering techniques for working in confined spaces, climbing and height management, and the basics of ship construction and search.

State Fisheries Officers join the Customs Southern Ocean recruits for the final practical tactical boarding training, which is conducted in Fremantle. Using actual apprehended fishing vessels such as the illegal vessel *Maya V* currently berthed at Fremantle, the recruits take part in boarding scenarios, including night boardings.

Other crucial aspects of the training involve launching tenders from an Australian Customs vessel whilst underway, and role plays simulating varying levels of non-compliance that the recruits might expect to encounter from illegal fishers. Selected recruits also undertake 0.50 calibre machine gun training and all recruits must pass the high level of physical fitness testing essential to successfully graduate.

Only when they pass their gruelling specialist training period, are the recruits ready to be deployed as necessary on armed patrols in the Southern Ocean, such as aboard the new armed vessel *Oceanic Viking* now operational and engaged in patrols of the remote Heard and McDonald Islands region in the Antarctic ■



Southern ocean recruits get a briefing on board apprehended illegal vessel *Maya V*

New arrangements for illegal foreign fishers

FROM LATER THIS YEAR, SUSPECTED ILLEGAL FOREIGN FISHERS CAUGHT IN AUSTRALIA'S FISHING ZONE WILL BE TAKEN TO A NEW LAND-BASED FACILITY IN DARWIN AS THEY AWAIT PROSECUTION OR REPATRIATION.

The Federal Government announced in January that it is to establish a detention facility in Darwin to house suspected illegal foreign fishermen caught in Australian waters.

The Darwin facility will be the central location to accommodate persons in short taken in by patrol vessels to the four existing regional ports of Broome, Darwin, Gove and Thursday Island.

This new facility will be operated by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), and will accommodate fishers prior to repatriation to their home country or prosecution through the justice system.

As part of these new arrangements, a number of other changes will be introduced by AFMA, including:

- Establishing Gove, currently an ad hoc port, as a full time arrival point
- Establishing new land-based transitory accommodation at Horn Island in Torres Strait
- Improved standards of care for fishers
- New data storage and recognition systems for repeat offenders
- Establishing boat burning facilities for contracted disposal of vessels at each of the arrival points

Under the new arrangements, AFMA will provide full-time reception points for illegal foreign fishers at the four locations of Broome, Darwin, Gove and Thursday Island.



An apprehended vessel sits in Darwin harbour

When the new Darwin facility becomes operational, fishers brought into Darwin will be taken immediately to that facility. Fishers arriving at Gove or Broome will be detained on their boats for a short period until they can be transferred to the Darwin facility.

For fishers arriving in the Torres Strait, AFMA will establish and operate a transitory land-based accommodation facility at Horn Island. Fishers will be held for a short period in this accommodation until they can be transferred to the Darwin facility.

AFMA will also establish improved electronic data storage and retrieval systems to assist in the administration of the foreign compliance program. Part of this will be to develop a system to deliver positive, real time identification of repeat offenders.

AFMA will continue to be responsible for the disposal of illegal boats (those where the owner has not paid a bond for return of the vessel). AFMA plans to establish purpose-built boat burning facilities at Broome, Darwin, Gove and Horn Island.

All these changes and improvements aim to assist AFMA in continuing to deliver effective compliance activities in northern Australia ■

New AFMA office in Darwin

AFMA WILL ESTABLISH A NEW OFFICE IN DARWIN TO MANAGE ITS FOREIGN COMPLIANCE OPERATIONS.

The new office is another step in the Australian Government's ongoing commitment to combating illegal foreign fishing in Australian waters and provides AFMA with a greater capacity to manage new detention arrangements announced by the Government in January this year.

The Darwin office will accommodate AFMA fisheries officers and administrative support staff and will provide a central focus for AFMA's foreign compliance activities in Australia's northern waters and the Southern Ocean.

The new office will be used as a base for planning and conducting operations, for training fisheries officers and managing the detention, investigations and prosecutions of suspected illegal foreign fishers taken to Darwin, Broome, Perth, Thursday Island and Gove. On arrival in these ports, illegal fishers will be transferred to a land-based fisheries detention facility in Darwin, run by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

AFMA, with cooperation from the Australian Customs Service and Australian Defence Force, is apprehending record levels of foreign

fishing vessels, with 50 vessels apprehended in our northern waters to date this year. 161 foreign vessels were apprehended during 2004.

This means there is a growing need for a more coordinated response to illegal fishing- and a centralised office in close proximity to the busiest arrival ports of Darwin and Gove. The office, staffed by dedicated fisheries officers, will give AFMA the opportunity to best deliver an effective and efficient foreign compliance program.

A review of AFMA's foreign compliance services recommended that AFMA adopt a model of direct engagement of fisheries officers, rather than through the state and Northern Territory fisheries agencies as currently occurs.

AFMA believes that direct employment of foreign compliance services will deliver greater control over the recruitment and training of fisheries officers, improved consistency in procedures currently provided through arrangements with four separate state/territory jurisdictions, and greater flexibility in the allocation of resources to respond to priority areas.

AFMA expects the new office to be fully operational in early 2006. ■

French-Australian Southern Ocean Cooperation

A NEW TREATY IS NOW IN PLACE BETWEEN FRANCE AND AUSTRALIA ON SURVEILLANCE COOPERATION IN THE SOUTHERN OCEANS. THE TREATY WILL ASSIST BOTH COUNTRIES IN THE CRACKDOWN ON ILLEGAL FISHING IN THEIR TERRITORIAL WATERS.

John Davis, Manager of AFMA's Compliance Policy and Planning section, together with Damon Bailey, Commanding Officer National Marine Unit with the Australian Customs Service, late last year participated in a French Southern Ocean Navy Patrol which marked the first exchange of officers under the new cooperative treaty.

The two and a half month long patrol aboard the French Vessel FNWS *Albatros*, covered the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Crozet Island, Heard Island, Kerguelen Island, St Paul Island and Amsterdam Island.

During the patrol, the two Australian Officers undertook surveillance operations and were authorised, (subject to the approval of the Australian and French Governments), to undertake vessel apprehension in the Australian territory of Heard and McDonald Islands.

The officers were also encouraged to participate in daily training activities aboard the *Albatros*, including armed boarding, Illegal Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) vessel interrogation and detention.

The patrol did not encounter any IUU vessels within the French or the Australian zones, although information was received indicating a number of possible IUU vessels transited just outside the zones.



Commandant Pierre Talarmin Captain of the French Navy Warship *Albatros* (left) presents an award to AFMA for its contribution to the first French/Australian joint Southern Ocean Patrol. At right is John Davis, AFMA Manager Compliance Planning and Policy and Yvonne Zill Manager of the French Fisheries Surveillance and Marine Rescue Centre La Reunion.

The patrol, which provided a basis for the future cooperation between the French and Australian Government in the Southern Oceans, was marked with a special handing over of a plaque of appreciation and French flag from the French Commandant of the FNWS *Albatros*, Pierre Talarmin.

The French experience

Pierre Talarmin, Commandant of the French naval vessel, *Albatros*, has just recently returned from an exchange aboard the Australian Customs/ Fisheries patrol vessel *Oceanic Viking*. This followed the participation late last year in a similar exchange by Australian Fisheries and Customs officers aboard his French vessel. We asked Pierre about his experiences as well as his thoughts on the joint efforts to combat illegal fishing...

How many trips have you done with the *Albatros*?

The French patrol vessel *Albatros* has a principal and almost exclusive mission of the surveillance of the fishing area in the EEZ of the French Austral and Antarctic territories (TAAF). I have carried out six missions of approximately 50 days each on this ship.

What are some of the hardest things to overcome when patrolling in the Southern Ocean?

The difficulties facing a commanding officer on such a mission include:

- **the very significant distances:** it takes 6 days to join the EEZ of Kerguelen starting from la Réunion Island. This duration is to be taken into account if it is necessary to for instance to manage a personal injury of a crew member;
- **the very large area to be supervised:** the size of the EEZ of Kerguelen is equivalent to the surface of France. It takes approximately 32 days for the *Albatros* to cover the whole area; and
- **the weather, which is always bad in Kerguelen EEZ** (a depression every 48 hours, 280 days per year with winds higher than 40 Knots).

How would you describe your working conditions?

The working conditions on board are sometimes difficult and are closely related to the weather conditions. The southern austral winter is particularly difficult for the crew which must contend with the movements of the vessel (rolling and pitching), the watch rate, the necessary maintenance of the gears and engine, the training essential to our mission and the lack of sleep.

What are the most memorable experiences of your trips?

Despite the conditions, these patrols also bring enormous satisfaction. In the southern austral lands, it is the discovery of a hostile natural environment filled with animals and virgin and unexplored lands. Here more than anywhere else, you feel in contact with the sea and with nature. Regular anchorages in Kerguelen islands, also bring a rhythm to the mission, and are always one of the most unforgettable moments for the crew.

Why do you think that this cooperation is so important?

The cooperation is necessary for several reasons: To ensure a permanent presence so as not to let the illicit fishing vessels plunder our EEZs; to improve the patrols effectiveness by an exchange of information; to drive out the illicit fishing vessels by removing any possible refuge; and lastly, to share means of surveillance and actions in order to reduce the costs of this kind of operation.

We have convergent interests in the fight against illicit fishing in the great south, the Australians and the French. The implementation since 1 February 2005 of the treaty of cooperation between our two countries will increase our effectiveness in protecting our sovereignty in our respective EEZs ■

Seafood Directions 2005

THE SYDNEY FISH MARKET WILL THIS YEAR BE HOSTING AUSTRALIA'S PEAK SEAFOOD INDUSTRY CONFERENCE, SEAFOOD DIRECTIONS 2005. THE EVENT WILL BE HELD AT STAR CITY, SYDNEY, ON 12-14 SEPTEMBER 2005.



The conference, an initiative of the Australian Seafood Industry Council (ASIC) and sponsored by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC), will highlight the crucial issues affecting Australian seafood businesses and develop a course of action for a sustainable, resilient and profitable seafood industry in Australia. Over 500 delegates are expected to attend.

The conference program includes engaging debates, open forums and key speakers from national and international representatives. The theme of the conference is 'Netting Profits – Charting the Course for a Profitable Seafood Industry'. On the closing night of the conference there will be a gala dinner at Luna Park to present the 3rd Australian Seafood Industry Awards. AFMA will be holding a meeting with industry representatives in conjunction with the conference.

For more information on the Seafood Directions 2005 conference, award categories, nominations and sponsorship, visit www.seafooddirections.com or contact Louise Nock, Marketing Manager, Sydney Fish Markets on (02) 9004 1110

Launch of Seaweek 2005



Minister for Fisheries, Ian Macdonald dives with the sharks at Sea World

Minister for Fisheries, Senator Ian Macdonald, took a dive in the shark cage at Sea World on the Gold Coast earlier this month to highlight how important sharks are to our ocean's ecosystem.

As part of the launch, Minister Macdonald announced the Australian Government's commitment of \$270,000 funding from the Natural Heritage Trust Program to reduce the incidental capture of wildlife like sharks and seals. A National shark education and awareness strategy will also be launched to make people aware of the vulnerability of particular shark species and critical habitat areas.

The Minister added that Australia was one of the few countries that had so far completed a conservation plan for sharks, and that we intend ensuring that all species are at healthy and sustainable levels ■

Fines for shark fins and undersized, berried bugs

A Commonwealth fisher has been fined \$1,750 for possession of shark fins. On 23 January 2003 Mr Arthur Haseler's fishing vessel landed 170 shark fins (35.9kg), without the shark carcasses, in breach of Southern and Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery permit conditions. The defendant appeared in Fremantle Court of Petty Sessions and pleaded guilty to possession of shark fins. The proceeds from the sale of shark fin were ordered to be forfeited to the Commonwealth.

In another matter, a Northern Prawn fishing master, Mr Steven Edward Norton was found guilty of taking undersized and egg-bearing bugs, in breach of the *Fisheries Management Act 1991*. Investigations of the vessel in Cairns found 1,104 undersized bugs and 14 egg-bearing bugs, for which he was consequently fined \$9,000 total on the two counts, and forfeiture of the catch ■

THE AUSTRALIAN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY (AFMA) BOARD HELD ITS 117TH MEETING IN CANBERRA ON 28 FEB–1 MAR 2005. KEY OUTCOMES FROM THE BOARD MEETING ARE REPORTED BELOW.***

You can obtain more information about decisions affecting individual fisheries by going to <http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries/default.php>.

OUTLOOK FOR COMMONWEALTH FISHERIES

The Board discussed the current outlook for Commonwealth fisheries.

The Board recognised that there is currently a conjunction of significant issues facing Commonwealth fisheries. The prevailing economic conditions including rising fuel costs, rising Australian dollar, increased export and import competition coupled with the stressed nature of a number of Commonwealth fisheries is resulting in significant economic and environmental concerns.

Against this background, the Board remains committed to continuing with effective management measures to restore fisheries to an acceptable level of productivity.

The Board is also conscious of the need to ensure that management costs are minimised and opportunities for reducing the financial burden on industry, such as electronic business capabilities, are fully explored.

For more information, please contact Peter Witheridge, Executive Secretary on (02) 6272 5576 or Peter.Witheridge@afma.gov.au

MEETING WITH NORMAC

The Board met with the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC) as part of its regular annual meetings with Management Advisory Committees.

The MAC presented a briefing to the Board on the fishery's current status. MAC members highlighted the difficult economic conditions facing operators arising from increasing operating costs and competition from imported farmed prawns. The meeting also discussed the NORMAC recommendations to the Board as outlined in the following article.

FUTURE MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS IN THE NORTHERN PRAWN FISHERY

The Board considered the Chairman's summary from NORMAC 58 held in Brisbane on 16–17 February 2005.

In relation to the fishery season dates, the Board endorsed the NORMAC recommendation to commence the fishing season on 9 April 2005. The Board noted that around the 18th of March, NORMAC will provide a recommendation for the season closure date, following consideration of advice from the Northern Prawn Resource Assessment Group in relation to a proposed extension to the season.

The Board also agreed to the NORMAC recommendation of no further gear reductions in the fishery for other than biological/ecological reasons for the next five years subject to the implementation of the 25% gear reduction as planned.

In considering this recommendation, the Board noted that this will allow for a period of consolidation within the industry. The Board also noted that the fishery will continue progress towards the target of Maximum Economic Yield, and that NORMAC will continue its review of management arrangements for the fishery at the end of the 2006 second season.

In addition to this recommendation the Board noted other advice provided by NORMAC regarding MAC business and administrative actions. This includes the need to progress a modified gear unit system and a planned review of the second season fishery dates, with a view to reopening the fishery in August 2005.

For further information, please contact Wade Whitelaw, Manager, Northern Prawn Fishery on Ph: (02) 6272 5039 or wade.whitelaw@afma.gov.au

DRAFT BUDGET

In considering the draft budget, the Board recognised the difficult economic conditions currently facing the industry. The Board agreed that any fishery budget increases greater than 3% need to be closely considered by MACs and negotiated in terms of their priority and importance to the fishery. The Board agreed the draft budget be put to MACs for consultation and that AFMA Management further investigate areas of possible savings.

For further information, please contact Andrew Kettle, Senior Manager, Finance on Ph: (02) 6272 3260 or andrew.kettle@afma.gov.au

MAC APPOINTMENTS

The Board made the following appointments to Management Advisory Committees:

1. appointed members of Small Pelagic Fishery MAC for the period 28 February 2005 to 27 February 2008:

POSITION	NAME
AFMA Member	Steve BOLTON
Industry Member	Dennis BROWN
Industry Member	Terry ROMARO
Industry Member	Michael THOMAS
Industry Permanent Observer (Zone A)	Gerry GEEN
Recreational/Charter Fishing Member	Graham PIKE
Recreational/Charter Fishing Permanent observer	Brett CLEARY
Environment/Conservation Member	Jon BRYAN (Tasmanian Conservation Trust)
Research Member	James FINDLAY (BRS)
DEH Permanent Observer	Antonio MOZQUEIRA
State Government Permanent Observer	Sean SLOAN (South Australian Fisheries)

The Committee is chaired by Mary Lack.

2. appointed Mr Rodney Pearn as the Tasmanian State Government Permanent Observer on ScallopMAC for the period 1 March 2005–31 October 2006, in line with the rest of the MAC.
3. appointed:
 - a) Mr Steve Bolton as the AFMA Member on SETMAC,
 - b) Ms Paula Shoulder as the AFMA Member on GHATMAC and GABMAC, and
 - c) Mr Andrew Townley as the AFMA Member on SWTBMAC.

For further information, please contact Peter Witheridge, Executive Secretary, on Ph: (02) 6272 5576 or peter.witheridge@afma.gov.au

SOUTHERN SQUID JIG FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Board determined the Southern Squid Jig Fishery Management Plan 2005. Together with the Board's Squid Apportionment Policy, which was agreed in January 2005, the Squid Management Plan provides a transparent process capable of expanding the fishery in future years, while ensuring the sustainability of the resource.

For further information, please contact Dave Johnson, Manager, Southern Squid Jig Fishery on Ph: (02) 6272 3274 or dave.johnson@afma.gov.au

FOREIGN COMPLIANCE AND DETENTION ARRANGEMENTS

The AFMA Board noted the Government has funded AFMA to implement new detention arrangements for suspected illegal foreign fishers apprehended in the Australian Fishing Zone. The Board approved, in principle, a capital works and major expenditures program to implement the new detention arrangements for suspected illegal foreign fishers and a model of direct engagement by AFMA of fisheries officers to undertake all foreign compliance services.

For a related story, please see page 13 of this edition of Fishing Future.

For further information, please contact Paul Murphy, General Manager, Operations on Ph: (02) 6272 5052 or paul.murphy@afma.gov.au

MACQUARIE ISLAND TOOTHFISH FISHERY ADVISORY PANEL REPORT

The Board considered the second report from the Independent Advisory Panel (IAP) on the allocation of Statutory Fishing Rights (SFRs) in the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery and the submissions received on the earlier circulated report. The Board agreed to circulate the second report to stakeholders for any final comment before the Board makes a decision on allocation.

For more information please contact Ms Paula Shoulder, Senior Manager Southern Fisheries on Ph: (02) 6272 3250 or paula.shoulder@afma.gov.au

SOUTHMACHAIR'S REPORT

The Board noted the Chairman's summary from SouthMAC 21 held in Hobart on 18 November 2004. The Board agreed that the composition of the MAC revert back to include three industry members and one State Government member. The Board also agreed to the appointment of Mr Grant Pullen (currently State Government permanent observer) as a State Government Member to SouthMAC and to the appointment of Mr Rob Ferguson as the DEH permanent observer to replace Ms Wilkinson on SouthMAC.

The Board noted positive news reported to SouthMAC from Australian operators that the Government's enforcement activity was working to reduce pirate fishing in the HIMI Fishery.

For more information please contact Mr Peter Neave, Acting Manager Antarctic Fisheries on Ph: (02) 6272 5794 or peter.neave@afma.gov.au

SETMAC CHAIR'S REPORT

The MAC did not raise any matters for decision by the AFMA Board. SETMAC discussed and made progress on a range of current management issues, including:

- Development of spawning closures;
- Protection of gulper sharks;
- Transferability of blue eye trevalla quota;
- Danish seine logbook proposal;
- Commonwealth and Victorian Inshore Trawl issues;
- OCS arrangements with NSW;
- Usage of modified gear;
- SESSF management plan implications;
- Strategic research plan for the SETF;
- Seal interactions research project;
- Recovery species working group;
- Bycatch Action Plan;
- Threatened species nominations;
- Alternative management strategies project.

AFMA Management, SETMAC and associated groups will undertake further work on these issues, some of which are likely to be put to the Board for decision in the future.

Subsequent to SETMAC 88, SlopeFAG met on 16–17 December 2004, to identify areas where spawning aggregations of ling and blue grenadier are known to occur in the SESSF. SlopeFAG made recommendations on proposed voluntary closures of areas (locations and time of year) that would provide the greatest benefit in terms of protecting spawning aggregations.

Some participants at the SlopeFAG meeting expressed some reservations about the proposed closures (one for blue grenadier and four for ling), primarily in relation to the potential economic impacts on the commercial fishing industry, whether the closures would provide any significant benefits to the sustainability of the stocks and how such benefits could be quantified.

AFMA Management wrote to SETFIA and SEFA requesting that they consult with the broader fishing industry on the matter. As a result SETFIA and SEFA have written to all SET and GHAT operators to seek their input into the proposed voluntary closures.

For more information please contact Ms Paula Shoulder, Senior Manager Southern Fisheries on Ph: (02) 6272 3250 or paula.shoulder@afma.gov.au

GABMAC CHAIR'S REPORT

The Board considered the Chairman's Summary from GABMAC 3/2004, which was held in Canberra on 5 November 2004.

The Board endorsed, subject to advice from the SESS Resource Assessment Group and sub-groups, the following short term management arrangements to be implemented until quota management is introduced:

- a) continue with an upper limit trigger of 3,000t for deepwater flathead and 950t for Bight redfish for 2005 in the GABTF;
- b) continue with an upper limit trigger of 200t for orange roughy in the Eastern Statistical Zone, a 1,000t for Esperance and Albany Hills combined and an additional 800t for all other areas of the fishery in 2005;
- c) establish 'upper limit' triggers of 3,000t for gemfish, 3,500t for blue grenadier, 250t for ling, blue eye trevalla and hapuka in WA, 250t for ling, blue eye trevalla and hapuka in SA, 500kg a month for gulper sharks and 25t for deepwater sharks;
- d) adopt the staged approach for risk management in the fishery which involves increases in stock assessment costs with step-ups in harvest levels, and step-downs in harvest levels in the absence of scientific advice – noting that the current arrangements in place for deepwater flathead, Bight redfish and orange roughy would continue in 2005; and

The Board also agreed to seek to amend the *Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery Management Plan 2003 (SESSF Plan)* to provide for the allocation of SFRs for Bight redfish, deepwater flathead and orange roughy, and that the allocation of these rights be on an equal basis for all boat SFRs in the GABT sector.

For more information please contact Ms Paula Shoulder, Senior Manager Southern Fisheries on Ph: (02) 6272 3250 or paula.shoulder@afma.gov.au

SCALLOPMAC CHAIR'S REPORT

The Board noted the outcomes of the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery Management Advisory Committee's tenth meeting (ScallopMAC 10) and associated annual public meeting, held in Melbourne on 5–6 October 2004 and the outcomes of the eleventh meeting of ScallopMAC (ScallopMAC 11), held in Melbourne on 30 November 2004.

The Board agreed:

1. By resolution, to determine a total allowable catch (TAC) of 1,000 tonnes to apply from the start of the 2005 fishing season.
2. By resolution, to issue a direction to close an area of the fishery from 1 May 2005, the closed area having a northern boundary of 39 degrees 37.5 minutes south, an eastern boundary of 148 degrees 30 minutes east, a southern boundary of 39 degrees 56 minutes south, and a western boundary the outer limit of the coastal waters of Flinders Island;
3. That the Decision Rules for TAC setting will be as follows:
 - a) an initial, non-biologically based TAC will be set at a low level to allow exploration outside the known areas of the fishery without impacting detrimentally on sustainability [1,000 tonnes in 2005];
 - b) if another commercial bed of scallops is subsequently identified, an assessment of the available biomass and size composition of the bed will be made. This assessment will be made by AFMA in consultation with ScallopMAC and ScallopFAG in order to determine whether the bed should be opened to fishing and what alternative bed closures would be implemented;
4. That consistent with the Board's November 2004 decision and ScallopMAC's advice, ScallopMAC will continue for the remainder of its current term with four instead of five industry members.

For further information, please contact Dave Johnson, Manager, Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery on Ph: (02) 6272 3274 or dave.johnson@afma.gov.au

***** While care is taken to ensure the accuracy of information in this report, readers should not base business decisions or actions solely upon information contained within.**



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Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Enquiries

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