

**NORTHERN PRAWN FISHERY MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
NORMAC**

CHAIRMAN: Mr. Stuart Richey

PO Box 7051 CANBERRA MAIL CENTRE ACT 2610

14 November 2003

Dr. Wendy Craik,
Chairperson,
Australian Fisheries Management Authority,
PO Box 7051,
CANBERRA MAIL CENTRE ACT 2610

Dear Wendy,

It is my pleasure to provide the AFMA Board with a summary of the key outcomes of NORMAC 55 which took place in Darwin on 12 & 13 November 2003. The main items on the agenda were future strategies for increasing fishing time and proposed changes to the timing of the 2004 banana prawn season, consideration of the AFMA discussion paper on cost recovery and the Board's 'Future Directions' for the NPF. The NORMAC Annual Public Meeting was also held in conjunction with NORMAC 55, and my report to the Public Meeting is attached.

Future Strategies for Increasing Fishing Time

At NORMAC 54's request, the NPFAG provided advice on possible options available for increasing fishing time/tonnage in the future, including advice on the relationship between fishing time and headrope length. The FAG work also included an analysis of how much gear reduction would be required to result in increased fishing times, whilst maintaining the stock rebuilding targets for tiger prawns; and options for extending the banana prawn season through the use of night time trawling bans and protection for the brown tiger stocks through spatial closures. Dr. Bill Venables presented the outcome of the FAG work to NORMAC. AFMA Management provided advice on the administrative changes and costs involved in implementing the proposals considered.

Following the presentations by AFMA and Dr. Venables, NORMAC adjourned to allow NPFIO to discuss the options. When NORMAC reconvened, industry members advised that economic hardships were being experienced in the fishery and that the 2001-2002 ABARE Financial Status reports of the NPF did not reflect the real situation. Exchange rates and poor market conditions are resulting in the fishery being considerably less economically efficient than the reports indicated. However given the complexities involved in the options under consideration, industry members recommended that NORMAC did not progress any of the options at this time. NORMAC accepted this advice and expressed appreciation to the NPFAG, Dr. Venables and the industry members who submitted proposals for their work.

Proposed Changes to the timing of the 2004 Banana Prawn Season

NORMAC considered a proposal from NPFIO to defer the opening and closing dates of the 2004 banana prawn season by two weeks, which would result in an amended opening date of 15th April and a closing date of 27th May. The rationale behind the proposal was to improve the profitability of the fishery. NORMAC noted that market prices and demand for smaller prawns was an issue of concern and that deferring the opening of the season would allow the prawns to grow to a larger size, thus resulting in better prices being received.

It was noted that a study undertaken by Dr. Ian Somers during the 1990's indicated that, from an economic point of view, using a long term range the optimal opening date for banana prawns was 15th April. It was generally agreed that the price differential between small and larger prawns in current times was much larger than in the 1990's, which further supported the findings of Dr. Somers and increased the rationale for a later opening.

NORMAC was advised that industry members of NORMAC were generally supportive of the proposal provided that it was effort neutral on tiger prawns and that CSIRO had been requested to provide NORMAC with advice on this issue.

Dr. Venables advised NORMAC that he had run a simulation model on the proposal and that it would have no negative impacts on brown tiger prawns. This was because under the proposal, the fishing pattern was only being shifted forward two weeks and extra fishing time was not being added. Mrs. Dichmont indicated that the proposal would actually be a benefit to brown tiger prawns as the later opening date would result in the prawns being left in the water two weeks longer.

NORMAC noted that the proposed change in the season dates would not affect the January survey but may affect the August survey slightly, however this could be addressed in the stock assessment process.

NORMAC unanimously agreed to the proposal to amend the opening and closing dates for the 2004 banana prawn season to 15th April and 27th May respectively. NORMAC agreed to review the outcome of the decision at the end of 2004 to ascertain whether the decision had achieved the economic benefits expected and to ensure it did not increase effort on tiger prawns.

AFMA Cost Recovery Discussion Paper

NORMAC received the discussion paper from AFMA on cost recovery, noting that MAC comments were due in early December. NORMAC expressed concern about the short time frame in which the review would take place but were advised by AFMA that the timetable had been set by DOFA, not AFMA.

NORMAC noted that the Commonwealth Fisheries Association was meeting with AFMA and had agreed to circulate the outcome of those discussions to the Chair of the NPF Management Costs Committee. NORMAC agreed that the NPF Management Costs committee, with assistance from the NORMAC Executive Officer, would

prepare a response to the discussion paper for NORMAC's out of session consideration.

NPF 'Future Directions'

NORMAC considered the advice from AFMA on the 'Future Directions' working paper for the NPF. NORMAC noted that this was generally consistent with the NPF Strategic Plan however there were some areas on which NORMAC wished to provide further input. A small sub-committee has been established to prepare a response on this issue which I will provide to you before December 3 as requested.

Crew Accreditation Scheme.

NORMAC endorsed a proposal to implement a voluntary crew member environmental awareness program in the NPF for mates, engineers, deckhands and cooks who work on the back deck of NPF trawlers. The program will take place in conjunction with the regular skipper's briefings in Darwin, Brisbane and Cairns prior to the commencement of the banana season, which provide an excellent forum to present issues relevant to the NPF.

Issues which will be covered by the program will include sea snake handling techniques, protected species identification and reporting, bycatch limits/ size limits, marine debris issues and closures. By improving the understanding of the rules that apply in the fishery, there is an increased expectation of voluntary compliance with the rules within the fleet. The implementation of the program is also consistent with the recommendation arising from the NPF strategic assessment that AFMA should develop and implement an education program for industry to increase awareness of the importance of sea snake protection, promote sensible handling techniques and improve species identification.

Crewmembers participating in this program will receive a certificate of accreditation that can be kept current by being updated every second or third year. Although some NPF SFR holders already run their own familiarization courses, all operators will be requested to encourage their crews to undertake the program. In future years it is hoped that a high proportion of the fleet will participate in this program and that SFR holders will voluntarily seek to employ crew who have been accredited under this program.

Other issues which were discussed at the meeting included a request for NORMAC's support for an amendment to the access line for fish trawling in the area of the NPF, issues relating to the proposed Coburg Marine Park, and the status of the NPF/FRDC MOU.

Yours sincerely,

Stuart Richey
NORMAC Chairman

NORMAC 55 Attendance List

Stuart Richey	Chairman
Trysh Stone	AFMA Member
Eddie Hegerl	Conservation Member
David Carter	Industry Member
Efrem Gamba	Industry Member
Ean Casey	Industry Member
George Raptis	Industry Member
Annie Jarrett	Executive Officer
Jim Gillespie	– State Government observer

Advisors

Cathy Dichmont	CSIRO
Peter Jackson	Industry
Iain Smith	Industry
Mike O'Brien	Industry
Theresa Lowe	Industry
Clayton Nelson	Industry
Ryan Murphy	AFMA

Invited Guests

Bill Venables

Observers

Rick Hale
Tony La Macchia
John Palmer
Christian Pike
John Hodge
Robert Rose
June Rose
Ted Norton
Cynthia Hoschke
Noel Hoschke
Bo Jensen
Ian boot
Bert Boschetti
Brian Corbett
Col James
Louise Deacon- Casey
Tony Theil
Neil Lonergan
Alistair Bain