

**NORMAC 55 Final Minutes
12 & 13th November 2003
Darwin**

Attendance List

Members

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 (12 th November only)
Jim Gillespie	State Government observer
Annie Jarrett	Executive Officer

Advisors

Cathy Dichmont	CSIRO
Peter Jackson	Industry
Iain Smith	Industry
Mike O'Brien	Industry
Theresa Lowe	Industry (12 th November only)
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

The Chairman opened the meeting at 8.35am and welcomed members, advisers and observers. Mr. Richey requested that advisers and observers follow usual meeting protocols and request permission to speak through a NORMAC member or through the Chair if they wanted to contribute to discussions.

It was noted that apologies had been submitted by Mr. Les Lowe, Dr. Ian Poiner and Mrs. Margaret Tailby.

The Chairman advised that the meeting would take place in two parts, commencing with the procedural items of the agenda followed by the presentations on the effort trade-off options. Following that, NORMAC would adjourn and NPFIO would commence its consideration of the options. Members were advised that NORMAC would reconvene the following day at an agreed time to formally discuss that item and the rest of the agenda items. (*note: the draft minutes reflect the order of the agenda, not the order of discussions*). Attendees were reminded that the annual public meeting of NORMAC was scheduled to take place at 9.00am on Thursday 13th November and all NORMAC members were requested to be in attendance.

The chairman sought comments on the proposed agenda. Additional items were proposed for discussion as follows:

Crew Accreditation Scheme

Proposal from Mr. Bill Passey seeking a change to the fish trawl boundaries within the NPF

The NPF/FRDC MOU

An update on Coburg marine Park

The need to reduce NPF management costs

An invitation to Mr. Hegerl to speak at a conference.

The Chairman reminded members that the AFMA policy paper on MACs and the CAC Act required members to declare their interests in relation to the MAC and/or specific agenda items. The interests of members were declared as follows:

Stuart Richey – Member of the Australian Maritime College Council (AMC), FRDC Board Member

The specific commercial interests of the industry members of NORMAC were recorded as follows:

Efrem Gamba-	A shareholding in a company holding 10 B Class SFRs and a number of gear SFRs; and a holder with a direct interest in gear SFRs
George Raptis-	Shareholder in 20 Class B's and a number of gear SFRs

David Carter-

CEO of a company holding 8 Class B SFRs and a number of gear SFRs; shareholder in a vessel operating in the NPF

Ean Casey– shareholder in 1 B class SFR and a number of gear SFRs

Resolution:

That NORMAC adopts the agenda as amended

Item 2 Correspondence

NORMAC noted the inward and outward correspondence received since the last meeting, noting that 3 additional items of correspondence had been received since the agenda papers were circulated. It was noted that all correspondence had been circulated to members and had been dealt with.

Resolution:

That the inwards and outwards correspondence be noted.

Item 3 Record of NORMAC 54

The Chairman sought comments on the draft record of NORMAC 54, noting that members had had two opportunities to provide comments on the draft minutes. No further comments were received.

Resolution:

That NORMAC approves the draft record of NORMAC 54

Item 4 Action Arising

NORMAC considered the Action Arising, noting that the final draft NPF Code of Conduct would be provided to the next meeting.

It was noted that discussions had been initiated between the NORMAC REC, FRDC and Seafood Services Australia regarding options for preparing and implementing an environmental management strategy for the NPF.

The Chairman advised he had been invited to meet with the new head of National Oceans Office, Mr. Max Kitchell on 1 December 2003 and he would advise NORMAC of the outcome of the meeting.

Concerns were raised that AFMA did not attend the Coburg Marine Park meeting and that, given the agreement of NORMAC 54 to participate in the planning process, the Coburg Marine Park Board and NT Fisheries were offended by the lack of representation by the NPF. It was noted that Ean Casey had been nominated by NORMAC 54 to attend the meeting but that the meeting had been rescheduled a number of times which prevented him from doing so. The AFMA member advised

that AFMA had been inconvenienced a number of times in the past when meetings were rescheduled at very little notice and that it was both cost prohibitive and an inefficient use of staff time to attend the meetings. It was agreed that if AFMA is unable to attend the Coburg meetings NORMAC will need to decide on alternative representation. It was agreed to revisit the issue under 'Other Business'.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the status of Action Arising from NORMAC 54

Item 5 Confirmation of Out of Session Items including Teleconference

NORMAC noted that a number of items had been considered out of session. NORMAC reconfirmed the out of session decisions taken in relation to the items, including the approved minutes of the teleconference of 16 September 2003.

Mike O'Brien expressed concern about the procedure undertaken for addressing strategic assessment. He indicated that a lot of work had been undertaken by industry, the REC and the NPFAG in preparing the report and that the time allowed for responding to the report was insufficient given the importance of the issues. Mr. O'Brien was of the view that industry and NORMAC had been left out of the loop at a critical time and that its advice should have been sought before AFMA and EA agreed to the draft recommendations.

The AFMA member responded advising that EA had instructed AFMA not to circulate the earlier document and that AFMA had done a lot of work to achieve the final draft recommendations. Mr. Gillespie indicated that he felt NORMAC had been treated quite favourably as none of the stakeholders in Queensland fisheries had had an opportunity to comment on the recommendations made on those fisheries. NORMAC agreed the important thing was to ensure that the agreed recommendations were implemented in a timely fashion after certification had been granted.

Resolution:

That NORMAC reconfirms the decisions in relation to the out of session items addressed since NORMAC 54

Item 6 Action Arising from NORMAC Tele-conference

NORMAC noted that all actions arising from the teleconference had been completed.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the Action Arising from the teleconference

Item 7 AFMA management Report

The AFMA manager congratulated NORMAC on its achievements in being granted Certificates of Merit at Seafood Direction 2003 for the NPF Bycatch Action Plan and introduction of bycatch reduction technologies. NORMAC expressed appreciation to

Peter Pownall for developing and submitting the applications which resulted in this notable achievement.

NORMAC was informed that AFMA's Data Manager has left and this position has not been filled. As a result progress on changes to the data confidentiality policy is not as advanced as was expected. The data section, in consultation with the management section, are in the process of drafting a letter to all current NPF operators to assess wider industry views on NORMAC's proposed changes to the data confidentiality policy.

The AFMA Manager advised that nine vessels were registered with AFMA to lodge electronic logbook reports for the 2004 tiger prawn season. It was noted that trouble with electronic signatures had been encountered and some of data is not coming through in complete form. Complete information is being received from only one vessel. Those boats which aren't sending full data are completing paper logs. Concern was expressed about the possibility of loss of data though computer crashes etc. NORMAC recognized there was a need to continue to have back up data either on disc or paper logs to ensure critical catch and effort information is not lost.

NORMAC was advised that as of 23 October 2003 less than 45% of logbooks had been returned for the first week of September and that logbooks for the entire month of September should have been submitted by 14 October.

The timely submission of logbooks is critical to the development of NPF Data Summaries and that delays in receiving these log sheets will result in delays in the production of the annual summary reports. All NORMAC members were asked to remind SFR holders and skippers of the importance of timely logbook submission.

The AFMA Manager advised that copies of the new draft NPF log books including the reintroduced size grade data were available for comment. The Chair of the NPFAG advised she would like the opportunity to review the drafts before the new logs go to print.

NORMAC was advised that an NPF Compliance patrol recently detected a number of NPF vessels that had inaccurately tagged nets, or nets with a headrope length that did not match the vessels nominated gear SFRs. While most of these breaches were of a minor nature, it highlighted the need for SFR holders to pay attention to ensuring their SFRs, Net Tags and Net measurements all correspond. NORMAC was reminded that the review of the Compliance Operational Plan which resulted in considerable cost savings was based on self-regulation within the industry and if breaches continued to be detected then AFMA would consider reverting to the previous compliance system.

AFMA Management advised that concerns had been raised about effort being directed at red legged banana prawns when fishing was taking place outside of the JBG closure line. A review of the log book data indicated that the fishing effort was being directed at grooved tigers, not banana prawns.

NORMAC was advised that at its October meeting the AFMA Board accepted the amended Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) recommendations in relation to the NPF Strategic Assessment as agreed by the AFMA Environment Committee and NORMAC. Minor amendments to the original recommendations had been developed between NORMAC and DEH representatives, and amended by the AFMA Environment Committee. It was noted that the AFMA Chair has recently

written to the Minister for Environment and Heritage, providing the amended recommendations for his consideration and it is anticipated that the NPF will shortly receive a 5 year exemption/accreditation under the EPBC Act.

Other items in the report related to staffing, petroleum exploration and the ban on taking of shark in Queensland.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

**Items 8 & 9 Effort Trade-Offs/Options for Increasing Fishing Time/
AFMA Analysis of Management Costs of Options**

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 possibility of implementing a two tiered system of gear units which would allow operators to choose whether they fished a short or longer season, subject to the amount of gear they towed. AFMA Management also provided advice on the administrative changes and costs involved in implementing the proposals considered.

Following the presentations by AFMA and Dr. Venables, NORMAC adjourned at 11.00 am to allow NPFIO to discuss the options.

NORMAC reconvened at 9.30am Thursday 13th November and re-commenced discussions on Items 8 & 9. 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, particularly Dr. Venables and the industry members who submitted proposals for their work.

NORMAC then 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 resolved to accept the proposal to amend the opening and closing dates for the 2004 banana prawn season to 15th April and 27th May respectively. It was also agreed that it would be appropriate 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.

NORMAC agreed that, as a courtesy, comments would be sought within the next 24 hours from Mr. Raptis, Mr Lowe and Dr. Poiner on the proposal to amend the season dates.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC unanimously agrees to the proposal to amend the opening and closing dates for the 2004 banana prawn season to 15th April and 27th May respectively

That NORMAC agrees 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

That the NORMAC EO seek comments from Mr. Raptis, Mr. Lowe & Dr. Poiner on the proposal to amend the 2004 banana prawn season dates

Item 10 AFMA Cost Recovery Policy

NORMAC considered a discussion paper from AFMA on cost recovery, noting that the MACs were advised in September 2003 that the Department of Finance and Administration (DOFA) had instructed AFMA to undertake a review of the cost recovery policy for Commonwealth fisheries. At that time, AFMA circulated background information including the original cost recovery policy dated March 1994 and a paper entitled "Commonwealth Cost Recovery Guidelines for Regulatory Agencies".

NORMAC was advised that whilst a full cost analysis of the proposals in the AFMA discussion paper had not been undertaken by AFMA, it appeared that the proposals were unlikely to result in increased costs to the NPF. However AFMA advised that DOFA did not support the proposals put forward by AFMA at this stage. Concern was expressed by industry that, if the MACs supported the AFMA approach, the government may impose the increases proposed in the paper, as well as impose increased cost recovery on other cost centres.

NORMAC noted that the Commonwealth Fisheries Association was meeting with AFMA on this issue and was preparing a submission for consideration under the review. NORMAC agreed to await the outcome of the advice from CFA and that, when received, the chairman of the Management Cost Committee and the NORMAC EA would prepare a response for NORMAC's consideration.

Resolution:

That, upon receipt of advice from the CFA, the Chairman of the NPF Management Costs Committee and the NORMAC EO will prepare a response to the AFMA discussion paper on cost recovery for consideration by NORMAC

Item 11 Review of Performance against NPF Strategic Plan

The NPF Strategic Plan 2001-2006 developed by NORMAC was approved by the AFMA Board and implemented in 2001. NORMAC 55 was provided with a brief analysis of the Plan against its performance objectives at its meeting in June 2003. It was noted that whilst the analysis indicated that NORMAC is primarily on target in addressing the priorities identified in the Plan, there were three areas which required considerable attention. These were the development of an EMS for the fishery, improvements in BRD technology, and the development of a communications policy and all of these issues were currently being focused on.

In September 2003, the AFMA Board wrote to NORMAC indicating that it had held a strategic planning workshop in July 2003 to consider AFMA's direction over the next ten years. The workshop drew on outcomes of the Commonwealth Fisheries Policy Review and an internal review of Board performance.

The Board identified three key areas to improve AFMA's performance :

- **Better relationships and communications** to improve Board and AFMA Management's capacity to ensure stakeholder views are adequately considered in setting directions and making decisions.
- **Clearer goals and more predictability** which would assist industry to manage investment decisions and keep pace with change
- **A more strategic Board** to set directions and establish policies across Commonwealth fisheries.

Dr. Craik advised that the Board was seeking NORMAC's input and advice, initially drawing on a summary prepared by the Board to develop a Directions Statement covering goals, priorities and responsibilities of stakeholders for the NPF.

It was generally agreed that the 'future directions' identified by the Board were consistent with the NPF Strategic Plan 2001 - 2006. However some areas were redundant and some areas were not included. NORMAC agreed that it would be useful to include a 'what will NORMAC do' section in the statement. NORMAC resolved that a small sub-committee would review the paper with assistance from the NORMAC EO and a new draft would be circulated for out of session consideration.

Recommendation:

That a new draft 'Future Directions' would be prepared by a sub-committee comprised of Eddie Hegerl, Jim Gillespie & David Carter and assisted by the NORMAC EO and circulated for out of session consideration

Item 12 Other Business

Crew Accreditation Scheme

AFMA Management submitted 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. It was proposed that the program would 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 were proposed to be covered by the program included sea snake handling techniques, protected species identification and reporting, bycatch limits/size limits, marine debris issues and closures. AFMA Management hoped that 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. NORMAC agreed that the implementation of the program was 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.

It was proposed that crew members participating in the program would 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 would be requested to encourage their crews to undertake the

program. It was hoped that a high proportion of the fleet would participate in this program and that SFR holders would voluntarily seek to employ crew who would be accredited under the program.

NORMAC supported the proposal, noting that it would increase management costs by approximately \$8000. Given that the program was consistent with the recommendations emanating from the NPF Strategic Assessment, NORMAC agreed that AFMA Management should initiate discussions with Margaret Tailby with a view to seeking some funding for the project from Environment Australia. It was agreed that the proposed curriculum for the program should be sent to the NORMAC REC for review prior to being finalized.

NORMAC / FRDC MOU

NORMAC noted advice that discussions were being held with the Torres Strait fishers and there is a possibility that the Torres Strait would be contributing to FRDC in the future. It was noted that if this occurred it would affect the FRDC MOU. NORMAC agreed to monitor the situation.

Coburg Marine Park

NORMAC was advised that a meeting of the Coburg Marine Park Board was taking place on Friday 14th November and that it was possible that the Board would make a decision to commence the draft plan in relation to the sea. If this occurred it was expected that the Board would write to NORMAC with a full proposal. It was noted that the next consultative meeting for Corburg was scheduled to take place in February or March next year. NORMAC agreed that Ean Casey would attend the meeting to put forward industry's views however an AFMA representative would also attend if available.

Environmental Meeting

Eddie Hegerl advised that he had been invited to attend a meeting to discuss whether or not a RAMSAR site would be declared in the southern Gulf of Carpentaria. It was noted that the area was a key site of international importance due to the migratory birds. The meeting would address the issues of mangroves, southern gulf catchments and migratory birds. NORMAC noted that under the RAMSAR convention, if a wetland supports a major commercial fishery, that is a reason in itself for a RAMSAR site to be declared and that the interests of NPF and migratory birds could result in a site being declared. This would be of benefit to the NPF in protecting important fishery habitats against future development. Dr. Neil Lonergan indicated he would be happy to contribute to discussions on this matter and would liaise with Eddie Hegerl on the development of any submissions required during the process.

Operating Costs

George Raptis raised concerns about the commercial viability of the NPF resulting from poor market conditions and exchange rates. Mr. Raptis indicated there was a need to send a clear message to AFMA that management costs have to be kept to a minimum. The AFMA member advised that the cost of managing the NPF against GVP was much cheaper than the majority of Commonwealth fisheries. NORMAC noted that the NPF Management Costs Committee had recently been successful in reducing management costs in relation to surveillance and compliance and that the budget was reviewed each year to see where savings could be made.

GOC Fin Fish Boundary

NORMAC considered a proposal put forward by Mr. Bill Passey seeking an amendment to the boundary of the Fin Fish fishery with the NPF. It was noted that the original purpose of the boundary lines was to prevent interactions between fin fish and prawn trawlers. Other issues which need to be taken in to account in considering the proposal were the impacts of fin fish trawling on sensitive areas such as sea grass beds.

NORMAC recommended, that to ensure there are no negative interactions between the fisheries the existing boundary line of 25 miles offshore would be retained, the East/West line should be moved to 15 degrees S in Queensland waters and that steaming tracks into Karumba and Weipa should be provided for. It was agreed that the current net mesh restrictions for fish trawlers should remain in force, and that the operator should be required to use a VMS. Some discussion took place on whether the operator should also use a TED but it was noted that such an approach could have a negative impact on fish catches. NORMAC recommended that the Joint Authority responsible for managing the fin fish fishery be advised that NPF had implemented stringent controls to avoid impacts of prawn trawling on turtles. It was imperative that any interactions with turtles also be avoided by the fish trawl operator and appropriate measures to ensure this occurs should be implemented.

Aboriginal Land

NORMAC noted advice from Iain Smith that crew from NPF trawlers had been reported going ashore on North East Island. NORMAC members were reminded that fishers need a permit to go on aboriginal land and this should be brought to the attention of skippers and crew.

USA Certification

The AFMA member advised that representatives of the United States government were scheduled to come to Australia to do a re- inspection of the Northern Prawn Fishery to ascertain whether or not the certification to allow the NPF to export prawns to the US will be left in place. Ms Stone sought advice on whether it would be useful for the group to bring a US based BRD expert with them to participate in BRD workshops with a view to improving industry knowledge of the devices. AFMA Management was requested to prepare a costing on the proposal for NORMAC's out of session consideration.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC supports the implementation of the proposed crew accreditation scheme to be held in conjunction with the skippers briefing each year

That AFMA Management seek some funding for the project from the Department of Environment and Heritage.

That the NORMAC REC review the proposed curriculum for the crew accreditation program prior to it being finalized

That AFMA Management prepare a costing on the proposal to bring a BRD expert from the US to Australia to participate in BRD workshops for NORMAC's out of session consideration.

That Ean Casey will represent NPF industry at the Coburg Marine Park meetings in March 2004 and an AFMA member will attend if possible

That AFMA Management advise the Joint Authority responsible for managing fish trawling within the NPF of the outcome of NORMAC's consideration of the Passey proposal

NORMAC resolved that the next meeting would take place in Fremantle on 10 June 2004.

The meeting closed at 11.30