

**NORMAC 56 Final Minutes
17/18 June 2004
Fremantle**

Attendance List

Members

Stuart Richey	Chairman
Trysh Stone	AFMA Member
Eddie Hegerl	Conservation Member
Ian Poiner	Scientific Member
David Carter	Industry Member
Efrem Gamba	Industry Member
Ean Casey	Industry Member
George Raptis	Industry Member
Margaret Tailby	EA Permanent Observer
Jim Gillespie	State Government observer
Annie Jarrett	Executive Officer

Advisors

Cathy Dichmont	CSIRO
Andrew Prendegast	Industry
Iain Smith	Industry
Mike O'Brien	Industry
Theresa Lowe	Industry
Mike Grant	Industry
Wade Whitelaw	AFMA

Apology

Les Lowe

Invited Guests

Dr. Tom Kompas

Observers

Les Roberts
Alex Fry
Rueben Gregor
Janet Bishop
Rob Grant
Dave Brewer

Tony Gofton
John Palmer
Norm Peovitis
Robert Rose
June Rose
Cynthia Hoschke
Noel Hoschke
Bo Jensen
Ted Norton
Mrs Norton
Ian Boot
Bert Boschetti
Greg Ferguson
Richard Elvin
Martin Exel
Murray France
Manuel Perez
Steve Wylie
Clayton Nelson
Rob Grant
Nick Caputi
Graeme Baudains
Errol Sporer
Mervi Kangas
Peter Zachnich
Steve Hand
Craig Warne

Welcome

The Chairman opened the meeting at 8.35am and welcomed members, advisers and observers. An apology was received from Les Lowe who was unable to travel due to ill health. It was noted that the Chairman had agreed that Theresa Lowe would provide views to the meeting on behalf of Les but that Les would be contacted by telephone to partake in resolutions of major importance.

The Chairman advised that an apology had been sent from the AFMA Chair as a conflict in meeting dates prevented an AFMA Board member from attending the meeting of NORMAC 56 however the AFMA Managing Director of Fisheries, Les Roberts would be attending the meeting later in the day. The chairman reminded members that Peter Pownall, who had a long association with the NPF and the fishing industry in general, passed away in late May. NORMAC observed one minutes silence as a mark of respect for Peter.

The meeting also expressed its sympathy to Wade Whitelaw whose father passed away the previous week.

The Chairman congratulated Dr. Ian Poiner on his appointment as Director of Australian Institute of Marine Science, Townsville.

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. The chairman indicated that this was not required during the open forum sessions which would take place on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning for discussion on items 11, 12 & 13. All attendees were encouraged to participate in these sessions.

Members were also reminded of their responsibilities under AFMA's legislation and were requested to consider issues in the best interests of the fishery, not themselves.

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: 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

Ean Casey: Shareholder in 1 B class SFR and a number of gear SFRs

Les Lowe: Shareholder in 4 Class B SFRs and a number of gear SFRs

Item 1 Adoption of Agenda

Comments were sought on the proposed agenda. The meeting agreed to address the items in order of the agenda until representatives of the Coburg Marine Park Board attended the meeting at 9.30. Item 6.1 would be deferred until Les Roberts arrived.

Following lunch, items 12 and 11 would be discussed in that order. Item 9 would be deferred until the following day. The report provided by National Oceans Office was added as a new item 15.a

Resolution:

That the agenda be adopted as amended

Item 2 Correspondence

NORMAC noted the NORMAC correspondence as reported. It was agreed that the letter from the AFMA Chair emailed on 15 June 2004 should be added to the inward correspondence list.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the correspondence

Item 3 Record of NORMAC Special Planning Meeting January 2004

The Chairman sought comments on the record of the Special Planning Meeting which took place in Brisbane on 29 January 2004.

It was noted that Les Lowe had been omitted from the attendance list.

Dr. Poiner indicated he had received a number of requests for copies of the NORMAC presentation to the AFMA Board in February 2004. NORMAC agreed that the presentation should be made available to interested parties.

David Carter indicated that he was no longer a holder of SFRs and that his interest was limited to being Managing Director of a company holding Class A & Class B SFRs. Theresa Lowe indicated that Les Lowe held in interest in 4, not 5 Class B SFRs.

Resolution:

That the final draft minutes as amended be adopted as the true and correct record of the NORMAC Special Meeting January 2004

Action Arising

NORMAC noted that it had been agreed at the Special Meeting of NORMAC to review the impacts of the decision to amend the 2004 banana prawn season dates at the end of 2004 to ascertain whether this decision had achieved the economic benefits expected and to ensure it did not increase effort on tiger prawns. NORMAC agreed that the NPFAG should be requested to undertake this review and provide advice to NORMAC. This information would be taken into account when NORMAC determines the 2005 banana prawn season dates.

NORMAC queried the status of the data confidentiality policy for the NPF and AFMA management agreed to advise NORMAC accordingly.

NORMAC agreed to remove items in relation to crew accreditation program funding, fish trawl boundaries and the independent review of the power series project from the action sheet.

Theresa Lowe requested the action item in relation to a paper to be provided by her to be carried over to the next meeting.

Eddie Hegerl indicated he had not attended the Southern Gulf Boards and Wetlands forum meeting but gave an undertaking to obtain and circulate a written report on the meeting to all NORMAC members.

AFMA Management apologised for the oversight in circulating the FRDC paper on MAC obligations to members and agreed to do so.

Dr. Poiner and David Carter provided a brief report on the meeting between the AFMA Board and NORMAC representatives which took place in February 2004, indicating it was an extremely positive process. The three main issues discussed were the possibility of MACs having a greater degree of self management, Program based R & D funding and the economic concerns in the fishery.

It was noted that the issue of MAC chairs being privy to AFMA Board papers on MAC recommendations would probably be discussed at the MAC Chair/ EO meeting with the AFMA in July.

Resolution:

That the status of action arising be noted

Item 5 Confirmation of Out of session Items

NORMAC noted that a number of items had been considered out of session. NORMAC reconfirmed its approval of the items previously approved, noting that some items required further resolution at this meeting.

Resolution:

That NORMAC reconfirms its approval of the items previously approved, noting that some items required further resolution at this meeting.

Item 6 AFMA Management report

NORMAC was advised that the NPF Manager attended the Cobourg Fishery Management Area Advisory Committee (CFMAAC) meeting at Cobourg on 27 April 2004. The Manager presented information to the meeting on the recent accreditation of the NPF under the EPBC Act, the NPF Bycatch Action Plan, the Crew Accreditation Program and various other projects which are in place to ensure that the NPF is managed in an ecologically sustainable manner.

It was also stressed at the meeting that NORMAC requires rational argument as to why areas of the Marine Park should be closed to trawling by NPF fishers. CFMAAC indicated they wanted the opportunity to negotiate with NORMAC on a number of issues including:

- NPF bycatch washing up on the shore,
- the feeling that prawn trawling is ecologically damaging to the Marine Park and
- general lack of knowledge/data re the effects of prawn trawling in the area.

Some options that were discussed include:

- closing the area on a rotational basis i.e. open one year, closed the next;
- development of a Code of Practice which would assist in decreasing the amount of bycatch washing up on the beach;
- focussing observer coverage in the area to increase data holdings.

NORMAC noted that this issue was the subject of a separate agenda item and that representatives of the Coburg Marine Park Board were attending NORMAC 56 to discuss the issues.

NORMAC noted that AFMA has requested catch and effort data from the States and Territory to progress complementary management arrangements for squid in northern Australia as agreed at the Northern Australian Fisheries Management Workshop at Darwin in August 2003. When received the data will be compiled and forwarded to the States and Territory to facilitate further discussion.

NORMAC noted that AFMA Management is progressing the amendment to the NPF Management Plan to clarify the 'Area of the Northern Prawn Fishery'. The amendment is being sent out for public comment. Once the public comment phase is completed the outcomes will be provided to NORMAC out-of-session for consideration. Responses to both processes will then be provided to the Board for approval. This process is expected to be finalised by the end of August.

NORMAC 55 was informed that there is some confusion regarding what comprises 'waters internal to the state', and how they should be managed. AFMA management have requested the States and NT to close their internal waters to the taking of prawns, bugs, scallops and scampi by all methods other than haul nets until other management arrangements can be discussed. The States and Territory were also requested to define their 'internal waters'. AFMA is currently awaiting responses from the NT and WA on the issue.

AFMA Management advised that the Blue Mud Bay native title claim is being heard in August-September 2004 with a decision expected in 2005. NORMAC noted that the Australian Government Solicitor is developing its defence and it is likely that this will be a historic case in the context Native Title claims.

AFMA Management advised that the pre-season briefings and crew accreditation programs (CAP) were carried out prior to the beginning of the season in Cairns, Brisbane and Darwin. A total of 12 CAP briefings were held with more than 220 crew participating. Overall there was a fair amount of enthusiasm and appreciation by participating crews. AFMA management expressed their appreciation for the efforts that companies made to facilitate these meetings. This work linked up effectively with skipper pre-season briefings and provided a cheap and effective forum to provide information to skippers and crews which allowed the program to come in under the agreed budget of \$8000. NORMAC noted that WWF had attended some of the meetings in Darwin and indicated their support for the initiative

AFMA Management advised that the Threatened Species Scientific Committee (DEH) is assessing the status of green sawfish for listing as endangered. AFMA has been invited to comment on the status of green sawfish and provide any additional information that may assist the Committee. CSIRO is completing a project on the species that may assist DEH to assess the green sawfish status. AFMA have requested DEH to delay consideration of the application for listing until this report is finalised. AFMA Management have also requested FAG and REC input.

The NP14 log book was provided to all vessels prior to the commencement of the banana season. The main change to the log was the requirement to complete gear details, size gradings and information on interactions with protected species. These changes were explained at skipper briefings, CAP briefings and in the Information Book.

NORMAC noted that the level of returns of log books had been reasonably high by May however more than 50% of missing log book sheets were from trawlers owned by NORMAC industry members. In addition over half of the returned logs required follow up by AFMA management to obtain missing information. This is a cost to NPF SFR holders. Industry members of NORMAC agreed to reiterate the importance of returning complete log books in a timely fashion to their skippers to ensure that data summaries can be completed quickly and cost effectively.

AFMA Management advised that a total of 26 vessels are registered to send e-logs. At least five of these vessels pulled out after registration, mainly due to technical issues. It was noted that AFMA had received e-log reports from 7 vessels. One vessel has sent 3 reports by e-mail. The rest have been submitted by disc.

NORMAC was advised that Richard McLoughlin had been appointed as AFMA's new Managing Director. NORMAC noted that Mr. McLoughlin had held the position of Executive Director of Fisheries Victoria for 6 years where he was responsible for administration of the Victorian *Fisheries Act* including all commercial, recreational, aquaculture and fishery habitat issues for both marine and fresh waters. He had spent 12 years with the CSIRO Division of Fisheries and Oceanography conducting research and assessment work on the fisheries of Northern Australian southeast Australia, including the scallop, shark and southeast trawl fisheries. NORMAC noted that the Chair of AFMA had resigned and would be finalising her position with AFMA in mid August.

The NPF Manager advised that all NORMAC appointments expire in September 2004 and that AFMA will initiate the process to seek nominations for NORMAC in due course.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 6.1 Finance

In discussions on NPF Budgets for 2004/05, the Chairman of the NORMAC Management Costs Committee reiterated concerns previously raised with AFMA that

the application of CRIS to FAG costs will result in a greater component of FAG costs being funded by industry than in the past. AFMA Management provided advice on the background to the Cost Recovery Review and indicated that the CRIS had been very favourable to the budget with the overall industry contribution decreasing by 2%.

Mr. Gamba expressed concern that the NORMAC Costs Committee Terms of Reference did not include approval of FAG budgets. Concern was expressed that the change in practice which required the approval of FAG costs by the MACs is inappropriate as it has the potential to compromise the independence of the FAG activities and potential funding for FAGs.

The AFMA Member indicated that AFMA is aware of sensitivities in this area but believed that the MACs should be involved in approval of FAG budgets as much of the work undertaken by the FAGs is driven by the MACs. AFMA Management undertook to provide advice to NORMAC on the nature of the relationship between the Costs Committee and the FAGs and budget setting responsibilities for the future.

Resolutions:

That AFMA Management will provide advice to NORMAC and the NORMAC Management Costs committee on the relationship between the Costs Committee and the NPFAG in terms for budget setting processes

Item 6.2 Amendments to NPF Directions on Bycatch Limits

NORMAC received a paper from AFMA Management seeking support for amendments to AFMA's 'Directions' and changes to SFR conditions in relation to bycatch limits. AFMA Management indicated that fillets appeared to be the preferred method for retained fish taken as bycatch in the NPF. It was suggested that trip limits for bycatch species cannot be easily observed or enforced when fish are retained in any processed form other than gilled and gutted fish, due to the lack of legislated conversion factors.

The AFMA member advised that AFMA's Compliance Section had communicated the need for current catch limits to be expressed in terms of whole weight if conversion factors are to be introduced. Conversion calculations will be easier for all parties concerned if the limit is expressed in terms of whole weight rather than gilled and gutted weight. AFMA Management indicated that conversion factors would be useful as they would give operators maximum flexibility for processing fish by allowing the retention of any combination of fillets, whole fish, gilled and gutted fish and headed and gutted fish. They would also enable operators and compliance personnel to observe and enforce trip limits, irrespective of how the fish have been processed.

NORMAC noted that the Queensland State Government has legislated conversion factors for these species, being $W = GG \times 1.1$; $W = F \times 2.6$; $W = HG \times 1.4$: where W is whole weight, GG is gilled and gutted weight, F is fillet weight and HG is headed and gutted weight.

It was noted that to remain consistent with Queensland and to ensure that the MOU between the Commonwealth and Queensland is not contravened, other conversion factors had not been considered. Any deviation from Queensland legislation would require additional consultation with Queensland. NORMAC supported the introduction of the proposed conversion factors.

AFMA Management indicated that compliance concerns also exist when fish are processed and packed as skin-off mixed fillets they are not readily identifiable. AFMA was seeking industry cooperation to package the fish species separately and to leave the skin on. AFMA indicated this could be legislated through a condition on the SFR.

NORMAC sought advice on the level of non-compliance in relation to fish bycatch limits from Mr. Alex Fry, AFMA Compliance Section. Mr. Fry advised that the Compliance Section did not see this as major issue as there had only been two suspicious cases in last five years and therefore Compliance did not want to put a lot of time and resources into the issue. NORMAC did not support the AFMA proposal.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC approves the adoption into AFMA ‘Directions’ of the conversion factors described for the species names in Part 1 of the Schedule

NORMAC did not approve recommendation 16 which sought the approval of changes to SFR conditions to facilitate compliance

(Note: the AFMA member did not agree with this decision)

Item 6.3 Data Plan

AFMA Management provided a draft Data Plan and advised that AFMA was seeking comments on the draft with a view to finalizing the Plan in the current financial year. It was noted that there may be some overlap between the development of the NPF EMS and that the finalized data plan should be made available to NORMAC and the REC.

AFMA agreed to confirm that the draft data plan was consistent with national and international standards currently being developed by others eg the Australian Marine Data Group.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC members note the development of the draft data plan and the request for comments on the draft plan to be provided to the NPF Manager prior to 30 June 2004

Item 7 Coburg Marine Park

NORMAC 56 received a presentation on the proposed zoning plan for the Coburg Marine Park made by Mr. John Christophsen, Chairman of the Coburg Marine Park

Board. NORMAC noted that the Coburg Marine Park is a unique area of particular importance to the preservation of wetlands and bird wildlife, and that the objective of Park managers is to have a self-managed Park which would be the first of its kind in Australia. Mr. Christophsen again sought the co-operation of NORMAC to collaborate on the proposed zoning plan, in particular, to consider whether it is appropriate to extend closures to trawling in some areas of the Park.

Concerns were expressed by Mr. Christophsen regarding reports of bycatch from NPF trawlers washing up on shore, and the feeling that prawn trawling is ecologically damaging to the Marine Park. Mr. Christophsen suggested a range of possible options which may address these concerns including closing the area on a rotational basis i.e. open one year, closed the next; the development of a Code of Practice which would assist in decreasing the amount of bycatch washing up on the beach; and focussing observer coverage in the area to increase data holdings.

A number of queries were raised by Eddie Hegerl in relation to the rationale behind some of the proposed zones. It was agreed that it was unlikely that the approach in relation to observers would provide rigorous data however NORMAC agreed that the bycatch issue would be addressed in the NPF Code of Conduct.

NORMAC reaffirmed its commitment to a representative areas program approach but expressed reservations about MPA's being implemented in the Coburg Marine Park in isolation to other processes such as those being implemented through National Oceans Office and DEH. However NORMAC recognized that there are sensitivities in relation to the area which should be given consideration.

In recognition of this, NORMAC agreed to extend the boundary of the existing Port Essington Protected Area Closure to the southern boundary of the Coburg Marine Park Multiple Use A Zone for the purpose of separation of conflicting users. NORMAC agreed that extension of this closure is to be implemented for the commencement of the 2005 banana prawn season. It was agreed that the change to this boundary will be effected through AFMA 'Directions' in due course.

Industry members indicated that it was important that trawlers continue to have the facility to moor and transship the area of the extended closure.

NORMAC requested AFMA Management to provide the Coburg Marine Park Board with NPF catch and effort data and other relevant information to inform the Board of the extent of commercial fishing by NPF operators in the area, and to overcome any lack of understanding of the nature and impacts of trawling.

The chairman thanked the presenters and invited them to join the group for morning tea.

Resolutions:

That, for the purpose of separation of conflicting users, NORMAC resolves to extend the boundary of the Port Essington protected area closure to the southern boundary of the area Multiple Use A for implementation in the 2005 season

That when this closure is implemented provision needs to be made to allow NPF operators to moor their vessels and transship the area

That AFMA Management is requested to provide the Coburg Marine Park Board with NPF catch and effort to inform the Board of the extent of commercial fishing by NPF operators in the area and to provide relevant information to the Coburg Marine Park Board to overcome the lack of understanding of the nature and impacts of trawling

Item 8 Compliance Risk Assessment

Alex Fry, AFMA provided a verbal outline on the proposed compliance plan for the NPF and the risk assessment process which had been undertaken in developing the Plan. NORMAC noted that in the view of AFMA the risks haven't changed and the proposed compliance plan was based largely on current plan. There was very little change in the cost of the proposed program, although some costs had been reshuffled. Mr. Fry advised that AFMA was in the process of reviewing their service agreements with the various enforcement agencies and working with them to ensure they understand their obligations as service providers to AFMA.

Queries were raised in relation to the integrity of the VMS program as it was reported that operators were turning VMS off without detection from AFMA. NPF industry queried how vessels transiting the NPF on the way to the Kimberley prawn fishery during the NPF closure were being monitored to ensure that they were not fishing during the closure. Mr. Fry agreed to investigate both of the issues.

Mr. Fry indicated that some mothershipping companies had refused to carry enforcement officers who were also police officers during the banana prawn season. This was because they held the view they were losing money as trawlers avoided going to motherships where the officers were more interested in detecting civil breaches than fisheries breaches. NORMAC noted that the use of motherships to carry enforcement officers was integral to reducing surveillance costs and it was agreed that industry organizations would take this matter up with the relevant companies.

NORMAC thanked Mr. Fry for his presentation and the work undertaken by the Compliance Section in developing the draft compliance Plan.

Resolution:

That NORMAC endorses the 2004/05 NPF Compliance Plan and budget

Item 9 Report on TED/BRD sub-committee

NORMAC received a report from the NORMAC TED/BRD sub-committee noting that a meeting of the committee had been held on Wednesday 16 July at which the function and scope of the sub-committee had been reviewed. It is felt that while TEDs have been implemented successfully into the fishery there is the need for the subcommittee to expand its scope to address other environmental and/or technical fishing issues that are not covered in other NORMAC forums.

NORMAC approved the Sub-committee's recommendation to expand the subcommittee's scope to include:

- i) looking at and understanding fishing gear, and the impacts that the operation of that gear has on bycatch and the environment (benthos and non-bycatch included); and
- ii) developing gear to reduce the impacts of fishing on all bycatch species and environmental interactions; and
- iii) behaving as an implementation group, that enacts change and addresses the policy and strategic directions that arise from the REC and NORMAC.

NORMAC agreed that the Committee be renamed the Fishing Impacts Solutions Working Group (FISWG) and approved the recommendation that its membership be broadened to include a benthic trawl specialist.

It was noted that in 2003 the TED&BRD Subcommittee recommended to NORMAC 54 (June 2004) that codend skirt lengths be restricted to an attachment point no further than 60 meshes from the codend drawstrings. At the time it was proposed that the requirement should come into force for the 2004 second season to coincide with the banning of the Bigeye. NORMAC 54 endorsed those recommendations.

NORMAC 56 approved a new recommendation from the sub-committee that the codend skirt should be no longer than 60 meshes. The purpose of the recommendation was to simply compliance operations and to reduce any confusion regarding the distance of the attachment point from drawstrings and any variation in the overhang of skirts.

NORMAC approved the subcommittee recommendation that AFMA Management develop and circulate a "BRD performance assessment sheet" together with an explanatory note advising of the purpose of the Assessment sheet. It was agreed that the completion of this sheet by operators should be voluntary. AFMA Management agreed to provide the reporting sheet and explanatory notes to operators prior to the start of the 2004 tiger prawn season.

NORMAC noted industry concerns regarding the potential to lose substantial quantities of banana prawns as all approved BRDs are now located in the codend behind the TED. This mainly occurs with large catches. NORMAC noted that more research is needed into alternative BRDs that are forward of the TED and codend to minimise prawn losses. It was noted that the Committee is developing a proposal for funding for a gear technologist to assist industry with the development and trialling of new and improved BRDs.

NORMAC noted advice that a reduction in daylight (dawn/dusk) fishing hours has the potential to significantly reduce bycatch volume in the NPF. To date minimal action has been taken to progress an effective method of bycatch reduction in the NPF. Existing data does not adequately define bycatch levels during the dawn/dusk period due to bias in the limited available data. The subcommittee suggested it may be feasible to carry out such research with minimal cost by attaching it to the existing CSIRO prawn survey and/or requesting Crew Member Observers quantify bycatch levels from the try gear over relevant fishing hours. NORMAC supported the development of a proposal by the Committee.

The Committee advised that the FRDC funded Bycatch Monitoring Project will conclude in 2005. This project assesses the cost effectiveness, scientific robustness and acceptability of five methods for monitoring bycatch in the NPF. At the end of this project the 'best' option or combination of options will be recommended for use as a Long-term Bycatch Monitoring Program (LTBMP) in the NPF. NORMAC committed to implementing an ongoing LTBMP in its last Bycatch Action Plan and this was taken into account in the strategic assessment. NORMAC noted the requirement to continue to fund an ongoing LTBMP after completion of the FRDC project in the 2005/2006 financial year.

NORMAC noted that the high costs involved in designing new BRDs may have the impact of reducing industry incentive and innovation in BRD development. To overcome this NORMAC agreed that the Committee should develop proposals for funding to develop and test new BRD devices including the 'Fish Box'. NORMAC noted that the Committee had also agreed to develop a national award to provide incentive for industry and that Mike O'Brien volunteered to contact appropriate organisations to seek funding for the incentive program.

NORMAC noted the existence of an International Smart Gear Competition which provided a \$25,000 reward for new BRD designs and agreed that industry should be informed of this competition.

The Committee advised NORMAC that as all approved BRDs are now located in the codend, that there is a need for as much information as possible to be provided to operators to assist them in maximising BRD performance. It was noted that TED workshops were very effective in assisting TED performance and recommended a similar process for BRDs. It was recommended that the workshop should be industry driven, with an international flavour to encourage input and advice on BRDs from all trawl fisheries, not just prawn trawl fisheries. NORMAC endorsed the proposal for funding to be sought from FRDC for the proposed Workshop.

The Sub-committee expressed concerns about the failure of the sea snake project to be funded in the last round of FRDC funding. It was noted that as a result of recommendations arising from Strategic Assessment, it will be necessary to verify exclusion of the species from BRDs, and the impact of fishing on sea snake species. It was noted that the Crew Member Observer Program may be utilised to provide some of the required information, however additional analysis is required that quantifies the impact of fishing on sea snakes and/or upgrade the risk assessment. NORMAC endorsed the proposal that funding should be sought for this work through an upgraded risk assessment.

NORMAC noted that AFMA had received correspondence from the US stating that Australia should legislate TED specifications in line with US requirements. The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry advised the US that Australia is accomplishing the objectives of the US requirements without legislating and believes that a voluntary approach achieves better outcomes.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 10 Research & Environment Sub-Committee Report

NORMAC received a report from the NORMAC Research & Environment Sub-committee noting that two of the NORMAC high priority projects were supported for funding (i.e. 2004/022 - Bringing economic analysis and stock assessment together in the NPF: a framework for a biological and economically sustainable fishery; and, 2004/024 – Variation in banana prawn catches at Weipa: a comprehensive regional study) but the other two other high priority projects (i.e. 2004/023 - Benthic characterization of the NPF: building a knowledge base for ecosystem sustainability; 2004/062 - Assessing the impact of fishing mortality on sea snake populations in Australia's northern prawn trawl fisheries - Northern Prawn Fishery and Queensland east coast) were not funded.

The REC advised this will be a challenge for the fishery given the recommendations arising from strategic assessment and the pressures associated with NOO's regional marine planning. NORMAC will need to review the outcomes over the next few weeks and decide on a strategy to go forward. This may include an additional FRDC/NPF MOU fund application early in 04/05 (possibly July for a January start date). The REC is submitting a FRDC/NPF MOU fund application in June to support the development of the NPF EMS and MSC pre-assessment as this will start in August 2004. The failure of funding for the benthic characterisation project is also a problem as NORMAC has helped negotiated large commitments of resources from DEH, NOO and CSIRO for the project but they were dependent on the FRDC contribution. CSIRO has indicated that they will continue with the project but it will need to be scaled back to reflect the lack of FRDC funds.

NORMAC noted that two other projects were supported which are of immediate relevance to NORMAC as follows:

Project 2004/304 - The First National Prawn Fisheries Conference which is scheduled to take place in Cairns on 29 November 2004. It was noted that David Carter had recently appointed to the organising committee and that NORMAC should decide on the form of our engagement in the conference. NORMAC noted that the Conference clashes with the Asian Fisheries Conference however it was agreed that members would attend if possible.

Project 2004/060 (An investigation of two methods to reduce the benthic impact of prawn trawling) was also supported and this was a medium priority for NORMAC. The challenge for this project will be to get broader industry sign on to the project.

NORMAC noted advice from the Sub-committee in relation to the status of the NPF/FRDC MOU funds. NORMAC agreed to use some of the MOU funds to meet the shortfall in the funding for the 2003 NPF surveys as per the recommendation. The AFMA member advised that the FRDC is entering into discussions with Torres Strait on whether the Torres Straits will contribute to FRDC which is agreed may affect the NPF in the longer term. It was noted that in addition to the shortfall in funding for the NPF at sea-monitoring project, there were also some areas of the project which were underdeveloped, and which would require additional funding to be found. Dr. Poiner

indicated that as there were still some developmental aspects of the project, CSIRO would continue to provide some funding.

The REC provided a **DRAFT CONFIDENTIAL** final report on the Century Zinc roadstead monitoring noting that the report is currently under review by Dr David Parry, Charles Darwin University, Darwin NT. NORMAC noted the content of the report and agreed that the monitoring program in place for the Century Zinc roadstead does not need to be undertaken annually. It agreed that this should be done every three years in the future. NORMAC agreed that the contents of the report should be signed off by Pasminco, and that NORMAC and Pasminco should determine how the release of the data should be handled.

The REC Chair advised that FRDC will be considering a proposal at the FRDC August Board meeting to fund a 6-12 month position to scope, develop and implement a NPF EMS including MSC certification pre-assessment.. It is proposed to locate the person at the SSA offices at Hamilton, Brisbane. This will be done in collaboration with AFMA, Seafood Services Australia, and the AFFA EMS National Pilot Plan. Previously NORMAC agreed to defer the development of the EMS until the strategic assessment SA was completed. With the completion of the SA it was noted the development of the EMS is a key task of the REC for 2004.

NORMAC approved the research priority areas proposed by the REC for the Northern Prawn Fishery for 2004/05. It was noted that these priorities will be taken into account by researchers planning to develop applications for research funding from AFMA, FRRF, FRDC, NPF/FRDC MOU and other funding agencies for 2003. NORMAC noted that with the development of the proposed NPF/FRDC Research Framework Agreement the process will change and there will not be an annual call for proposals in the future. Dr. Poiner provided a verbal update on the proposed program based research approach, indicating that the steering group was close to bringing recommendations to the various groups for consideration.

NORMAC agreed to the proposed change of Principle Investigator for the NPF FRDC/MOU Project 2002/120 - *The effects of trawling on seabed fauna in the Northern Prawn Fishery* from Dr. Hill to Mick Haywood.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 11 Report on Economics of the Fishery – Open Forum

(EO's Note: due to the complexity of discussions on the day, the record of this item is recorded under 2 sections being (1) Economics/Adjustment and (2) Removal of 2 net restriction.

The resolutions pertaining to each of the above issues are contained within the relevant sections, rather than at the end of Item 11.)

Section 1: Economics/Adjustment

The Chairman reminded the meeting that at the Special meeting of NORMAC in January 2004, it had been agreed to undertake urgent action to address the economic issues impacting on the fishery as follows:

- a) to commission an economic modelling study to determine the optimal level of return to the fishery as a whole, noting the need to consult with economic experts to determine the scope and parameters of this study
- b) determine from the results of this study approximately how many, if any, boats should be removed from the fishery
- c) taking into account the economic advice, seek advice from CSIRO and the FAG to determine whether the proposed number of boats (ie that resulting from the study) is sufficient to result in a 7 month fishing season, and if not how many additional boats would need to be removed
- d) agree on the preferred option for reducing the number of vessels being either a buy back or gear reduction.

NORMAC noted that approaches had been made by the Raptis organisation to the Minister for Commonwealth Fisheries, Senator Ian MacDonald on the possibility of government assistance to underwrite a buy back scheme for the fishery. Mr. O'Brien reported that as a result of that meeting, he did not believe that a buy back scheme was an option.

The Chairman advised that a bio-economic model for the NPF had been developed by Dr. Tom Kompas (ANU, ABARE) who was in attendance to present the findings of the modeling work. The NPF Assessment Group had been presented with the preliminary report on the model in March 2004. (The following is a summary of the presentation by Dr. Kompas):

The basic components of the NPF bio-economic model presented at NORMAC 56 are:

- An annual model, based on tiger prawns (brown and grooved) and endeavour prawns.
- No spatial dimension, with average price over grades and year.
- Calibrated to small, medium and large boats.
- Data: Stock-recruitment parameters (CSIRO); Fishing power series (NPFAG); Standard boat measures (CSIRO); Catch and effort (AFMA); Price and cost, e.g., fuel, capital, gear, crew, etc. (ABARE survey data).

The biological component included in this model is based on the NPF brown/grooved tiger and endeavour prawn stock recruitment relationship models. The model assumes that there is no effort creep beyond 2003. In consideration of the different economic parameters with respect to vessel size, the model considers three classes of vessels: small, medium and large.

The model considers uncertainty around the stock recruitment relationships, catch rates and fishing power, therefore producing an optimal economic yield of 5,800-7,000 (adjusted) fishing days. This equates to approximately 65 trawlers fishing for 93 days. (in 2003, 91 trawlers fished for 9605 days) NORMAC noted that even when the average price for prawns used in the model (\$18.50) was adjusted up to \$21.00 per kg, this only resulted in a slight increase in boat numbers or fishing days (Refer slide number 21).

It was noted that larger harvests generate extra revenue but larger harvests and diminished stocks increase the costs of fishing. The model shows that in order to achieve higher catch per unit effort, the fishery needs a resource which is much greater than Smsy. Given that the fishery is currently at or just below Smsy, fishing effort needs to be reduced to achieve Maximum Economic Yield (MEY).

The conclusion of the model is that there are currently too many fishing days in the fishery with too many vessels chasing too few prawns. There were 9605 tiger prawn fishing days in 2003. Dr. Kompas indicated that, based on the model, a reduction in fishing effort of at least 30% would be required to achieve MEY.

Considerable discussion took place on AFMA's economic efficiency objective and the definition of economic efficiency. Dr. Kompas indicated that economic efficiency is commonly defined as "An effort and catch level that maximizes profits or fishery returns, creating the largest sustainable difference between total revenues and the total costs of fishing". This is known as maximum economic yield (MEY).

For the purpose of addressing the economic problems in the fishery, all members of NORMAC present at the meeting resolved, in the short term, to adopt the target reference point of MEY based on the parameters incorporated into the Kompas bio-economic model for the NPF 2004

(Note: Industry member Les Lowe, because of illness, was unable to attend the meeting and did not comment on this resolution however the NPFQTA adviser indicated at the meeting that she did not support this target)

The majority of NORMAC members agreed that the bio-economic study clearly showed that the fishery is well short of achieving MEY and that effort reduction is required in the fishery to pursue AFMA's economic efficiency objective. The quantum of the level of reduction proposed by members varied from between 0 and 40%. Three industry members indicated that, whilst there were personal preferences for various levels of reduction, they had agreed to a compromise of a 25% reduction. The AFMA, scientific and conservation members all noted that a 25% reduction would not achieve MEY based on the parameters used in the model, however in the spirit of compromise they supported the industry proposal for a 25% reduction. Two industry members of the MAC did not support reduction at any level (see below).

In considering options for implementing effort reduction, options such as gear/time units and ITQs were discussed. It was noted that both of these options may provide efficiency gains and flexibility to operators as they would be able to trade either quota

or fishing days (depending on which regime was adopted) to maximize their utilization of the fishery.

However the AFMA member advised that the gear unit system is the only mechanism available through which adjustment could be implemented in the short term. Any change to management regimes such as ITQs or time/gear units would require an extensive industry consultation process on alternative management options, an amendment to the NPF Management Plan to implement the preferred option and another strategic assessment. AFMA Management indicated it was unlikely that this process would be completed in less than 1 year and could possibly take longer.

The NPF(Qld)TA adviser indicated that there are a number of operators wanting to withdraw from the fishery but that they should not be forced out through a gear unit reduction without compensation. NORMAC noted that operators withdrawing from the fishery would be compensated through the sale of SFRs in the open market. A cornerstone of having a management system based on tradable fishing rights is so that market forces would make the question of government compensation unnecessary. In response to claims that the unit price was too low to provide proper compensation due to the short fishing seasons, Dr. Kompas advised that asset prices depend on the profitability of the fishery, not the length of time fished. If there is a projection that the profitability of the fishery will improve, the asset value will rise.

Concerns were raised by the NPF(Qld) TA adviser that proper consultation on the bio-economic model had not occurred, that economic issues were new to the management of the fishery, and that a decision on the need for adjustment should be delayed until alternative advice on the economics of the fishery could be sought. She indicated that operators had the right to know in advance what the proposed change in management is to entail, and that appropriate time must be given to those people who are to bear the impact of the proposed change so that they can consider the proposal, and if thought desirable, give alternative fact/arguments to amend or oppose the proposal

NORMAC members were reminded that concerns about the economic downturn in the fishery had been on the table for some time and were specifically discussed at NORMAC 54 (Brisbane June 2003), NORMAC 55 (November 2003 Darwin) and at the special meeting of NORMAC (Brisbane January 2004). It was agreed at the 2004 Special Meeting that an economic study would be undertaken; and that decisions on the need for adjustment, and the quantum and method of any required adjustment would be taken at NORMAC 56 in June 2004.

Advice to this effect was included in the Chairs report of the Special Meeting to all SFR holders on 5 February 2004, and in the agenda papers of NORMAC 56 which were circulated to all MAC members and advisers.

In considering whether a decision on the question of adjustment should be delayed, NORMAC noted that this was not the first time economic restructuring had been implemented in the NPF and that NORMAC had sought the economic advice of Dr. Kompas for the express purpose of making a decision on adjustment at NORMAC 56.

The majority of members agreed that there were no benefits in further delaying a decision and that, to pursue AFMA's legislative objectives and to provide certainty to industry, the MAC had a responsibility to act on the advice it had received at this meeting.

Resolution:

That having taken account all of the issues raised, three industry members, the scientific member, the AFMA member and the conservation member of the MAC resolved that, for the purpose of pursuing AFMA's economic objectives, a 25% reduction in gear be implemented through the gear unit system prior to the start of the 2005 season

Ean Casey, Industry MAC member, did not support the proposal for the following reasons:

- he believes the figures quoted and used in the model to be very questionable
- he considered that SFR holders need to be further consulted on the economic advice
- he believed that there other options that should be explored for adjustment rather than a straight 25% cut in gear

Les Lowe, Industry Member, who provided his views to the chairman by telephone did not support the proposal for the following reasons:

- he is totally against any surrender or reduction
- biologically the fishery is okay
- that with this decision AFMA will be taking wealth from one part of the industry and giving it to another
- that the area of the fishery can't adequately be covered with 90 boats now and that prawns are not being caught because of this

NORMAC noted that, whilst not voting members, the two permanent observers from DEH & the Queensland State Government supported the resolution.

(2) Removal of 2 Net Restrictions

Discussion took place on a proposal to remove the current 2 net restrictions and give operators the option of towing other gear configurations. It was agreed that, given the tiger prawn stock rebuilding strategy was on target, this option should be explored provided it did not result in any increase in fishing effort. To achieve this, it was agreed that a translation formula would have to be developed to ensure that any translation from twin gear to other gear configurations would be effort neutral.

NORMAC noted that removal of the two net restriction would be consistent with AFMA's economic efficiency objective. It was also agreed that this approach should stimulate SFR trading and may result in the removal of additional vessels from the fishery as operators suspended gear units to take up the option of towing other gear configurations.

NORMAC agreed that in the short term it was likely that quad gear will be the configuration chosen by operators who wished to avail themselves of this option, and that AFMA should commission the development of a translation formula based on twin gear to quad gear. NORMAC would need to reconsider the development of other translation formulae if operators subsequently applied to use other than twin or quad gear.

The EA permanent observer indicated her support for the quad gear option provided that the use of quad gear in the fishery did not result in any additional negative ecological impacts.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC unanimously resolved that, for the purpose of pursuing AFMA's economic objectives by providing flexibility for operators to operate with least costs, the 2 net restriction be removed and that operators have the option of towing different gear types subject to the development of a translation formula to ensure effort neutrality, and data to indicate that other gear types do not have any additional negative ecological impacts

That NORMAC notes that, subject to Board approval, AFMA will progress the necessary amendments to the legislation to give effect to this decision as quickly as possible but that the timing will be subject to development of the translation formula

(Note: Industry member Les Lowe indicated his supported for this recommendation to the Chairman via telephone)

Item 12 2003 Tiger Prawn Stock Assessment

The NPFAG Chair Mrs Dichmont gave a presentation on the 2003 tiger prawn stock assessment. NORMAC noted that there was no major change to the methodology used in this year's assessment compared to that produced in 2003 but that as full vessel characteristic data was not available this year, a full fishing power analysis for 2003 was not undertaken. It was noted that the assessment therefore assumed that there was no fishing power change between 2002 and 2003.

NORMAC noted that the FAG had considered a new and separate source of information, the recruitment surveys (January 2003 and 2004) and spawning surveys (August 2002 and 2003). Although the January 2004 survey may provide information on this year's recruitment, the survey series is too short at present to be included in the assessment itself.

The FAG's assessment indicated that, due to increased recruitment in recent years, neither the grooved nor brown tiger prawn stock is considered to be over-exploited. Although grooved tiger prawns have not yet reached the agreed NORMAC target, the assessment indicated that the target has been attained for brown tiger prawns in 2003. As a result, it may be possible to increase effort on brown tiger prawns as long as this change is effort neutral on grooved tiger prawns.

The NPFAG advised that there is a concern that the Recruitment survey indices from January 2004 suggests that recruitment of tiger prawns this year may be poor relative to 2003. The estimated 2003 brown tiger prawn recruitment from the assessment was above that expected from the stock recruitment relationship i.e. above average. There is therefore a need for caution in determining whether effort should be increased on brown tiger prawns.

However, given the potential that effort may be increased slightly on brown tiger prawns, the FAG noted that NORMAC had not identified appropriate target and limit reference points once the agreed 2006 target has been reached. For this reason, the FAG was unable to indicate the size of the potential increase in effort that would be sustainable and consistent with such reference points. The FAG recommended that NORMAC explicitly identify its medium to long term objectives and the resultant target and limit reference points prior to any increase in effort. The FAG pointed out that EMSY is not an appropriate target and that effort should be below this value.

The FAG indicated that the bio-economic study of the NPF tiger prawn fishery provided a direction to solve the current economic crisis in this fishery. The FAG recommended that NORMAC and AFMA consider the economic advice as it should also be consistent with resource sustainability.

NORMAC noted that a problem had been identified with the 2002 data used in last year's assessment. However the FAG supported the conclusions of the 2003 assessment as those conclusions were robust and did not change when the problem was rectified. It was noted that the FAG would not have been able to recommend any increase in effort on brown or grooved tiger prawns last year even with the changes made to the assessment.

The FAG chair indicated that a factor contributing to the error was that there was very little time available for the assessment to be prepared last year. The assessment process should ensure that an appropriate timeline is available in the future. The specific problem in 2003 has been addressed and a process has been put in place to prevent this error re-occurring.

The NPFAG provided an assessment on the NPF king prawn fishery however this matter was not discussed at this meeting and will be considered at NORMAC 57.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 13 Future Management Options - Open forum

In accordance with a request from the AFMA Board resulting from various proposals being submitted to AFMA by SFR holders, NORMAC considered a discussion paper from AFMA Management on alternative management regimes for the fishery. It was noted that it had been some years since NORMAC last reviewed management options and that improvements in technology and scientific information had been made in that time.

The AFMA member advised NORMAC that the Commonwealth Government Fisheries policy states that output controls are the preferred management approach and if another approach is adopted, the Board must demonstrate why the alternative management regime is more appropriate. AFMA management indicated that the ideal situation for the fishery is to have management arrangements that allow for autonomous adjustment, with each individual operator being able to respond to changing economic and stock conditions, and that a management system that allows industry to react to changes on a real time basis without the need for government intervention is AFMA's preference.

Brief discussion took place on various options including ITQs, gear/time units (outlined by Michael O'Brien) and the existing gear unit system. NORMAC noted that given the move to eco-system based management, many fisheries are now being managed through a combination of both input and output controls.

Some industry members of NORMAC expressed particular concern on the proposal of ITQs as a management option for the NPF. The main issues raised against this option were inability to determine TACs, particularly for banana prawns, cost of administration and enforcement, and potential for high grading and discarding. It was noted that allocation is likely to be an issue in any move to a new system.

NORMAC noted that any change in management systems will have implications for NPF stock assessments and these needed to be taken into account. The chair of the NPFAG recommended that any alternative approaches to management should be effort neutral on both species of tiger prawns. Consideration should also be given to separating the tiger and banana prawn fisheries to ensure that there is no targeting of tiger prawns in the first fishing season. It was noted that the fishing power calculations will be very important in a change to any new system and that AMFA will need to keep track of gear changes. It will also be essential that the monitoring surveys continue and there will be a need to retain some of the spatial and temporal closures under any new system.

NORMAC agreed that it was not an easy task to assess the options and resolved to form a working group to undertake this and report its findings to the next NORMAC meeting. Any preferred management alternatives will then form the basis for discussions at an industry wide workshop in July 2005.

The options identified by NORMAC for review are:

- Gear units
- Gear time units
- Tradeable Boat days
- ITQs

However, it was agreed that the Chair would invite all SFRs holders to submit options for consideration by the working group. NORMAC agreed that alternative management options should be assessed against the following criteria:

- Be able to pursue AFMA's legislative objectives
- Provide for autonomous adjustment on a fishery and vessel level

- Flexibility/tradability
- Effective control on effort/catch
- Cost effective implementation

NORMAC agreed that the working group would be comprised of AFMA Management, Annie Jarrett, Efrem Gamba, Theresa Lowe, Mike O'Brien and Cathy Dichmont. Specialist advice in relation to ITQs would be sought from Tom Kompas and ABARE as required. It was also agreed that information on the use of quota management for short lived species in other countries would be sourced as background information for this study.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC appoint the working group as agreed to assess management options for the NPF

That the working group will report to the first meeting of NORMAC in 2005

That, subject to the recommendations of the working group, an industry workshop to discuss the options will be held in Cairns in July 2005

Item 14 Update on Code of conduct

NORMAC received a report on the status of the Draft Code of Conduct. It was agreed that the document should be targeted at industry and printed in an appropriate format. NORMAC noted that there were a number of omissions in the document which needed attention and agreed that an additional reference needed to be included to the minimization by industry of bycatch washing up on beaches.

NORMAC agreed that the NORMAC EO will finalise the document taking account of comments received. The Communications sub-committee will be responsible for determining the final design layout of the document and identification of an appropriate public relations release strategy later in the year.

NORMAC agreed that the final document will be formally dedicated to Peter Pownall for his contributions to the development of the document and the management of the NPF in general over many years.

Resolutions:

That NORMAC notes the report

That the NORMAC EO finalise the document

That the Communications Committee determine the design layout and an appropriate PR strategy for the release of the document later in the year

That the NPF Code of Conduct be formally dedicated to Peter Pownall

Item 15 Communications Report

David Carter gave a brief outline of the success of the public relations event which took place in Darwin prior to the opening of the banana prawn season. It was noted that the event successfully highlighted the good work being done in the NPF, particularly relating to environmental issues. NORMAC expressed its appreciation to Ean Casey for the use of his trawler and to the AFMA team for their efforts in Darwin. Margaret Tailby requested NORMAC to note that accreditation of the fishery by the Environment Minister was not for being an ecologically sustainable fishery, but for being an ecologically sustainably managed fishery.

NORMAC noted that following the success of the Darwin PR event, discussions had been held with AFMA as to the best way of maximizing PR exposure for the NPF in the future. NORMAC considered a draft strategy prepared by Michael Paralin (AFMA's Communications Section) with input from David Carter and the NORMAC EO. The draft strategy is based on the NORMAC communications budget of \$20,000 (collected through the NPF levy base) with an additional contribution of \$5000 from AFMA and is proposed for a trial basis of one year. The strategy is based primarily on the approach of keeping the achievements of the NPF continually in the public arena through a dedicated media campaign.

The intent of the communication strategy is:

- To improve awareness amongst target audiences of the sustainable management of the Northern Prawn Fishery.
- To promote a sense of pride and confidence within AFMA and NPF operators about the fishery's environmental achievements.

NORMAC noted that any communications activity funded through the NPF levy base must be based on promoting the NPF and its management in accordance with AFMA's legislation (eg promoting the partnership approach, sustainable management etc etc) and cannot focus on specific product promotion.

Resolution:

That NORMAC approves the strategy and budget as proposed

Item 15 (a) National Oceans Office Report

NORMAC noted the receipt of a report from the National Oceans Office on the Northern Marine Planning program noting that the Australian, Queensland and Northern Territory Governments jointly scoped a regional marine planning process for the Northern Planning Area. The Scoping Phase involved substantial information collection and collation, as well as extensive consultation including stakeholder workshops in Darwin and Cairns in September 2003 (attended by Mike O'Brien, Ian Poiner and Les Lowe on behalf of NORMAC).

The Scoping Phase has culminated in a Scoping Report for the Northern Planning Area which was being prepared by the Australian, Queensland and Northern Territory Governments and is due for public release in early July 2004. At the end of the

Scoping Phase, Queensland and Northern Territory officials indicated that while they wish to remain formally engaged, their jurisdictions are unlikely to continue the formal partnership characterised by the Scoping Phase. NOO is currently waiting for confirmation of this position. Regardless of their level of engagement, the planning process will continue to take an ecosystem-based management approach to issues.

The National Oceans Ministerial Board has agreed a final Northern Regional Marine Plan should be released by the end of 2005 with the expectation that a draft Plan will be released in the second quarter of 2005, followed by a substantial public comment period.

The Scoping Report currently under consideration by the Chair of the National Oceans Ministerial Board includes a proposal to establish a Northern Planning Advisory Committee (NPAC) which will be sectoral-based to provide advice to the Oceans Board of Management. The committee will comprise of:

- 1 Independent Chair
- 1 Independent science advisor
- 9 sectoral representatives (conservation; commercial fishing; community; Indigenous; local government; ports; recreational fishing; resource extraction and shipping; and tourism)
- 3 observers – one each from the Queensland, Northern Territory and Australian Governments
- Secretariat support by the National Oceans Office.

NPAC's advice will not be considered to necessarily reflect the views of the organisations or sectors represented and will not be considered to be binding on governments or sectoral interests.

The report stated that this proposal minimises the difficulties associated with limiting representation to one person per sector by:

- Carefully selecting an appropriate representative
- Providing support for the representative to consult with the broader sector
- Not regarding any advice from NPAC as necessarily reflecting the views of a sector/organisation
- Providing a substantial public consultation period (currently proposing 3 months) following release of the draft Plan

The report included the terms of reference for the NCAP. NORMAC was advised that Iain Smith had been invited to join the NPAC. NORMAC was pleased that Iain Smith had been offered membership on the Committee but expressed concern that the NPAC did not have a representative from NORMAC. The Chairman indicated that he had held at least 2 meetings with both Max Kitchell and Steve Jackson at which it had been agreed that NORMAC would be represented in all the consultative mechanisms established for the Northern Section. The NOO recognized that the seafood industry is the largest stakeholder in the area and the Northern Prawn fishery is the largest fishery.

NORMAC discussed the fact that approaches had been made for data relating to the NPF and agreed that NOO should be referred to the appropriate agencies for this data.

It would be important to know how the data was going to be used before it was provided to NOO.

NORMAC reconfirmed its commitment to the process but expressed concern that it was unlikely that the process could be robust given the time frames proposed. NORMAC remains committed to a representative areas program but reiterated this must be scientifically based, not iconic. It was agreed that a critical part of the process will be to identify candidate areas for the Northern Zone so that they have the potential to benefit both fisheries and biodiversity.

Resolution:

That the Chairman write to Max Kitchell seeking membership as a representative of Commonwealth fisheries on the NCAP in accordance with the undertaking given by NOO that NORMAC would be included in any consultative processes established for the Northern Section

Item 16 Update on Closures Review Project

NORMAC received an update on the status of the Closures Review project, noting that a review of historical data to document the reasons why closures were established, the time that they were instigated and the process that led to their establishment had been undertaken. The information obtained from the review has been gathered in a systematic way. The results of the review are currently being compiled and will be entered into an ORACLE database.

The historical information is currently being used to develop criteria that classify the different types of closures in the NPF. These criteria will form the basis of protocols to be used to review, modify or establish closures in the future. It was noted that the information compiled in the review may also be taken into account in the development of MPA's in the fishery.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 17 Report on Ghost Netting Workshop

NORMAC received a report from the Ghost Net forum held in Karumba on 15-18 May 2004. The forum was an initiative of the NGRMG and was funded through Commonwealth & State government National Heritage Trust funds. The aim of the forum was to address ways in which communities around the Gulf of Carpentaria may monitor and establish the extent of the ghost net problem in the GOC and to reduce the impact of discarded nets on marine wildlife and on coastal environments.

Invitations to the forum were sent to all Gulf communities in the Northern Territory and Queensland, including to NORMAC. Michael O'Brien was scheduled to attend on behalf of NORMAC but due to unforeseen circumstances could not do so. Phil Robson and the manager of the A Raptis & Sons Karumba facility attended the forum.

NORMAC noted that funding opportunities are being investigated by NGRMG to implement the outcomes of the forum. It was agreed that NORMAC and NPF operators should continue to participate in this project as it develops.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 18 Report from AFMA Strategic Planning Meeting

NORMAC received a brief report from Stuart Richey who had attended a strategic planning meeting with the AFMA Board on 5 April 2004. It was noted that some 63 recommendations came out of the discussions which AFMA was in the process of addressing.

Resolution:

That NORMAC notes the report

Item 19 Other Business/Next Meeting

2004 Tiger prawn season dates

NORMAC considered a request for the tiger prawn fishing season to be brought back two weeks into August, given the advice from the NPFAG that the brown target prawns had recovered to the 2006 target and that some increase in effort on brown tiger prawns may be possible provided effort on grooved tiger prawns did not increase.

It was proposed that such a move would be in accordance with AFMA's economic efficiency objective as this would allow fishing in one of the most productive fishing periods and that from a marketing perspective there are benefits in bringing the tiger prawn fishing season forward.

NORMAC noted that the pursuit of MEY as the target means that fishing effort must be effort neutral or less, and that the proposal to bring the fishing season forward was not effort neutral as the fishing effort of a day in August is much greater than that of a day in November. The chair of the NPFAG also advised that the January survey results indicate that recruitment to the fishery may be lower than in 2004 and caution should be exercised. The NPFAG advised against increasing effort on tiger prawns at this time.

NORMAC noted that the decision to recommend the 25% reduction in gear for implementation prior to the commencement of the 2005 season was based on economics, not biological sustainability and that the current tiger prawn fishing season dates are an impediment to economic efficiency. NORMAC agreed that if it is trying maximize economic efficiency, restrictions that impede this need to be looked at. NORMAC agreed that subject to vessels leaving the fishery as a result of a decision to implement a 25% reduction before the start of the 2005 season, there should be scope for changing fishing times for the 2005 year.

A number of SFR holders expressed frustration that NORMAC was not willing to change the season dates given the sacrifices which had been made by industry to rebuild the tiger prawn stocks to current levels.

NORMAC was sympathetic to the proposal but could not agree to change the timing of the season due to concerns resulting from the January surveys about low recruitment pointing to a poor tiger prawn season in 2004. NORMAC unanimously agreed that it would review the timing of the tiger prawn season in 2005.

Resolution:

That NORMAC unanimously agrees to review the timing of the tiger prawn season in 2005

The meeting considered what action could be taken to recognize the contributions made to the fishing industry and in particular to NORMAC and the NPF by Peter Pownall. It was noted that obituaries would be placed in the various fishing magazines including the AFMA News, and that the NPF Code of Conduct would be formally dedicated to Peter. It was proposed that the proposed prize for BRD design should be named as the Peter Pownall Trophy. All members agreed this was appropriate.

NORMAC noted that it has requested the NPFAG to review the impacts of the decision to amend the 2004 banana prawn season dates to ascertain whether that decision achieved the economic benefits expected and to ensure it had not increased effort on tiger prawns. NORMAC will take account of this advice when determining the 2005 banana prawn season dates early next year. NORMAC agreed to include advice in the Chairs summary that the decision on the 2005 banana prawn season dates will be made in late January/ early February and that the date of the NORMAC meeting will be set when the date of the February Board meeting is known. NORMAC agreed the venue for that meeting would be Brisbane.

The Chairman indicated that future MAC meetings should include a new item on the agenda being an industry report on the economic state of the fishery. He proposed that industry members could provide information to the EO to form the basis of a report to the MAC. The NORMAC EO indicated she was concerned at preparing such a report based on anecdotal information which may be taken out of context in external decision making processes. It was agreed that industry members would provide a verbal report on their views of the fishery to the MAC for information each meeting.

NORMAC noted that the AFMA Board had been advised in February 2004 that NORMAC would develop a detailed plan for the adoption of a co-management framework in the NPF over the next 12 months. NORMAC gave an undertaking to report to the Board on its progress in early 2005. It was noted that in addition to the fishery possibly undergoing another adjustment process (subject to the outcome of Board consideration of NORMAC's recommendations to implement a 25% reduction in gear prior to the 2005 banana prawn season) NORMAC will be reviewing future management options for the fishery, developing an Environmental Management System, working with NOO on the Northern Section Marine Planning process and developing and implementing a communications strategy.

NORMAC agreed that those projects have greater priority and agreed to seek the agreement of the Board to delay the development of the co-management framework in the short term. NORMAC agreed that it would appoint a sub-committee to commence work on this project at its next meeting.

Trysh Stone reminded members that this may be the last meeting of NORMAC under current appointments and thanked everyone for their contributions to NORMAC and to the management of the NPF. She indicated that AFMA Management recognized that being a MAC member was a difficult job and reminded members that many notable achievements had been made in the last three years. The chairman reiterated the comments made by Ms Stone and thanked everyone for the contributions during the term of the MAC. The meeting closed at 4.00pm.