



## Reducing bycatch

AFMA's challenge is to reduce bycatch and interactions with protected species

Bycatch, that part of the catch which is either discarded or isn't caught but interacts with fishing gear, is a major problem facing commercial fisheries worldwide.

AFMA works with commercial fishers and scientists to improve bycatch management and minimise fishing interactions with bycatch species. Our challenge is to ensure that the non-target portion of the catch is minimised.

The Australian Government released the *Commonwealth Policy on Fisheries Bycatch* in 2000, which commits AFMA to bycatch reduction, improved protection for vulnerable/threatened species and minimising any adverse impacts of bycatch on the marine environment. AFMA has developed bycatch action plans for each of the major fisheries and uses various management tools to ensure fishing practices have the least possible impact on non-target species.

For example, the use of turtle excluder devices is mandatory in the Northern Prawn Fishery, there are restrictions on the daylight setting of longlines in the East Coast Tuna and Billfish Fishery (to minimise seabird interactions) while in the Heard and Macdonald Islands Fishery boats are prohibited from discharging any offal (to help minimise interactions with marine mammals and seabirds).



→ Diving seabirds like albatross are at risk of being caught in fishing gear.



### Protected species

Bycatch is of particular concern where protected species are involved.

Currently all marine turtles, seabirds, whales and dolphins, seals and sea snakes are protected under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*. AFMA is implementing specific strategies to minimise the possibility of taking these vulnerable species in fisheries. The Authority is also involved in programs managed by Environment Australia to recover populations of vulnerable and endangered species, such as marine turtles, albatrosses and petrels.

Together with stringent regulations to reduce interactions, AFMA works with the fishing industry to introduce new fishing techniques, such as bycatch reduction devices which allow baited hooks to be set underwater, out of reach and sight of seabirds, and putting heavier weights on the lines so they sink faster.