



Australian Government  
Australian Fisheries Management Authority



## Important Information

REGARDING FISHING ON THE HIGH SEAS

To fish on the high seas with an Australian vessel, a current high seas permit or a Commonwealth fishing concession that explicitly provides access to the high seas is required.

Recently the Australian Government agreed in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to improve the management of high-seas bottom fishing activities. This agreement means that AFMA now has to attach new conditions to any Australian high seas fishing permits granted.

In past years, fishing permits to access non-tuna resources in the high seas have been granted on an open access basis, with few restrictions on the area, fishing method or the nature of the fishing activity that could be undertaken. This was done on an interim basis as the waters to which these permits gave access were not under the mandate of any regional fisheries management organisation nor were any measures agreed with other countries with respect to how fishing should be conducted in these areas. This situation has changed over the past 12 months, with the Australian Government taking an active role in international efforts to introduce management measures for high seas bottom fishing.

There has been growing international attention on the need to strengthen management provisions relating to bottom fishing on the high seas. The UNGA Resolution on Sustainable Fisheries of December 2006 (the UNGA Resolution) responded to this by setting out a range of actions that flag States should take – collectively or unilaterally – by certain dates. The Australian Government endorsed the outcomes of the UNGA Resolution. More recently, Australia was party to a regional agreement to establish interim measures in high seas waters south of the Equator in the Pacific Ocean prior to the establishment of a South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation. These measures are largely based on the actions contained in the UNGA Resolution. Australia is also a signatory to the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA), which, while not yet in force, is also likely to agree similar interim measures relating to bottom fishing in the near future.

This new approach by the Australian Government and the subsequent agreements reached with other countries means that from 1 January 2008 there are major changes to the manner in which AFMA grants and manages non-tuna high seas fishing permits. Changes include:

1. a requirement for more detailed permit applications, including fuller descriptions of proposed fishing gear, area of operations/ proposed operation, species to be targeted, and intended timing and duration of fishing

2. mandatory 100% observer coverage on all fishing permits allowing trawling and a minimum 10% observer coverage on all fishing permits allowing non-trawl methods
3. the area of waters under high seas permits will be limited to those under SIOFA and the new agreement for the South Pacific
4. fishing activity will be restricted to areas previously fished, with all other areas closed to fishing – this will initially apply in the South Pacific Ocean until 2010 and is likely to be introduced into the Indian Ocean during 2008

Also, during 2008 further requirements will be introduced such as:

5. a requirement to move 5 nautical miles from an area where evidence of vulnerable marine ecosystems is encountered
6. more detailed reporting requirements with respect to non-target species and the habitats fished

The above changes will result in additional costs being borne by operators. With respect to the costs of observers arising from point 2, these costs will be attributed between government and industry depending on the nature of the fishing trip undertaken.

In order to give effect to the changes outlined above and Australia's obligations on the high seas, AFMA will only be able to consider the grant of a fishing permit for the high seas on the basis of a detailed application.

You should also be aware that discussions about management of bottom fishing in the high seas are ongoing at the international and regional levels. This means that the conditions on any high seas fishing permits granted may be varied during the year in response to outcomes from these negotiations.

**If you have any further queries regarding access to the high seas, please contact AFMA Licensing on 1300 723 621.**

