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FINAL EDITION OF AFMA UPDATE FOR 2004

Welcome to our last edition of the AFMA Update newsletter for this year.

The Board, Management and all staff of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority would like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a safe and happy Christmas and New Year. We look forward to getting back in touch with you after Christmas, to let you know what is in store for 2005.

APPRECIATION FROM TONY RUNDLE, CHAIRMAN

Thank you to all who made the time to attend the AFMA public Meeting at Ulladulla on Friday 26 November. The Board appreciated the constructive and open way industry members presented their issues and views, both in the meeting and over lunch.

The Board understands the very difficult commercial circumstances facing all sectors of the fishing industry at the present time. Clearly, rising fuel prices and import competition in the market place are having a significant impact. In the export sector, the rising exchange rate has also heavily impacted on returns to industry. We also appreciate that AFMA management costs are an important consideration and will continue to do all that is possible to minimise these costs.

Clearly the key issue for all industry members was the need for structural adjustment in fisheries in Southern and Eastern Australia. AFMA recognises the need for this adjustment, both from a resource sustainability and economic performance perspective. We will continue to support all approaches that will achieve the necessary adjustment. I understand that SETFIA is currently developing a restructuring proposal for government to consider.

In relation to management impacts on the East Coast Longline fleet, the severity of the local impacts of the restricted access arrangements in winter to control catches of Southern Bluefin Tuna was well understood by Board members. AFMA is bound by international obligations in relation to SBT, but we will continue to work with industry to develop measures that achieve the objectives and minimise impact on local fishers. Thank you again for your attendance and contribution.

PORT VISITS IN SOUTHERN FISHERIES

AFMA visits have been happening this week at key ports in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery. The purpose of the visits is to explain the impending changes under the new Management Plan, which includes the Gillnet Hook and Trap, Great Australian Bight Trawl and South East Trawl Fisheries. Some of the key changes include the introduction of Statutory Fishing Rights from 1 January 2005, and no allowance for overcatch of scalefish species from this year into the next. Meetings have been taking place in NSW, VIC, TAS and SA from Wollongong right through to Port Lincoln. For more information about the SESS Management Plan changes, please contact Paula Shoulder, Senior Manager Southern Fisheries, on 1300 723 621.

RECONCILE YOUR QUOTA!

AFMA will be sending out details of the 2004 reconciliation process with another set of Quota Transaction Statements in the coming days. Warning notices were sent out earlier in November to all operators exceeding their quota, advising to immediately reconcile as there is **NO OVERCATCH FOR SCALEFISH SPECIES FROM 2004 OVER TO 2005**.

FRENCH-AUSTRALIAN SOUTHERN OCEAN COOPERATION

An AFMA Compliance officer has recently returned from a French Southern Ocean Navy Patrol, marking the first exchange of officers under the treaty between Australia and France on surveillance cooperation in the Southern Oceans. The Australian officers undertook surveillance operations and were authorised (subject to the approval of the Australian and French Governments) to undertake vessel apprehension in the Australian territory of Heard and McDonald Islands. The patrol did not encounter any Illegal Unreported Unregulated (IUU) vessels within the French or Australian EEZ's, although French intelligence indicated a number of possible IUU vessels transiting just outside the zones. The patrol provided a basis for future cooperation between the French and Australian Government in the Southern Oceans.

NEW RECORD FOR ILLEGAL APPREHENSIONS

To date this year, AFMA, with the ongoing cooperation of the Australian Customs Service and Australian Defence Force, has apprehended 154 Indonesian vessels and completed 111 legislative forfeitures. A total of 138 vessels were apprehended in 2003.

END OF TIGER PRAWN SEASON

AFMA staff visited Darwin from 1-5 December to greet all boats as they returned from fishing the tiger prawn season in the Northern Prawn Fishery. This was to debrief crew aboard boats involved in bycatch monitoring programs, as well as to encourage all returning skippers to complete and submit all remaining logbook entries. Overall, operators and crew gave positive feedback on their ability to collect bycatch samples and follow sampling instructions. Many thanks to all those involved, and we look forward to continuing these programs in 2005.

OPERATING HOURS OVER CHRISTMAS

Operators should be aware that the Licensing and Quota Management Section will be closed from 5.00pm, 23 December 2004 and reopening on 4 January 2005.

AFMA's Thursday Island Office would also like to advise the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula communities that the office will be closed from Monday 27 December and will reopen on Tuesday 4 January 2005. In case of an emergency, they can be contacted on mobile telephone number 0427 959 613.

SUSTAINABLE COMMONWEALTH FISHERIES

At a media event at the Sydney Fish Market last week, Minister for Fisheries and Conservation, Senator Ian Macdonald, announced that our Commonwealth fisheries "have passed the Government's test of sustainable management with flying colors". In 2000, a stringent strategic assessment process under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act was implemented to ensure that Australian seafood is sourced from sustainably managed fisheries.

Of the nine fisheries assessed so far, five have obtained the highest ranking and will be exempt from export restrictions for five years. Four have been assessed as having a sustainable impact although, as Wildlife Trade Operations, will be subject to another review in three years. Two management plans are currently being assessed by the Minister for Environment and a further two (where management plans are being reviewed) are under development. All Commonwealth fisheries now have export approvals or interim approvals in place.

HUNG JURY - VIARSA 1

The jury in the nine-week trial of five crew members of the *Viarsa 1* have been dismissed. The jury failed to reach a verdict after almost four days of deliberation. A Status Conference has now been scheduled for 31 January 2005. The *Viarsa 1* was apprehended in August 2003, after a 21 day, 3,900 nautical mile hot pursuit after being detected allegedly fishing illegally inside the Australian Fishing Zone in remote Antarctic waters of the Southern Ocean.

FISHERIES INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

Small to medium sized fishing operators in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery, the South East Trawl, and Gillnet, Hook and Trap Fishery are being encouraged to identify and help analyse the issues they will face over the next 5 to 10 years, and to suggest the types of activities that will assist them in managing these changing circumstances.

An industry and government Steering Committee has engaged independent consultants ACIL Tasman to carry out research, consultation and analysis to: identify potential challenges that could jeopardise competitiveness and viability of Australian fishing businesses and the broader fishing industry; identify opportunities to improve competitiveness and viability; and determine options that industry and government could consider to take advantage of the opportunities and respond to potential challenges. ACIL Tasman will draw on national and international fishing industry experiences and will focus at both the fishing operator and industry level. Consultations commenced in fishing regions on 3 December 2004. The meetings will be held various ports, and a schedule of port meetings has been sent to fishing operators and advertised in the local media. Industry input is vital for success of this initiative. Contact Peter Crowley, ACIL Tasman, (02) 6249 8055, or p.crowley@aciltasman.com.au.

A CHRISTMAS MESSAGE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN SEAFOOD INDUSTRY COUNCIL (ASIC)

ASIC wishes all engaged with our \$3b industry the very best for strong pre-Christmas sales and then a peaceful Christmas with family and friends. ASIC Chair Bob Pennington says the outlook for 2005 remains mixed, with supply of product remaining tight, production costs - notably fuel - high and the \$A near US80c. He says industry will continue to explore policies to help build a strong future. Mr Pennington says all American tariffs on our seafood are abolished from New Year's Day. "While none of these initiatives by themselves will solve our industry's cost price squeeze, they all help. We will continue to pursue every chance we have to secure a viable future for seafood in Australia," he says.

AFMA UPDATE FEEDBACK

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