

## ENVIRONMENT UPDATE 9

### **1. Proposed amendment to schedule 4 of the *Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1984***

The Minister for Environment has proposed an amendment to schedule 4 of the *Wildlife Protection (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Act 1984* to remove the general exemption of fish species from export regulations.

Environment Australia circulated, for comment, a draft set of principles, objectives and criteria for the ecological assessment of commercial fisheries. A number of fisheries, scientific, industry and conservation organisations provided comments on the draft criteria. In addition, officers from Environment Australia recently met with a working group of Standing Committee to discuss the draft criteria approach.

In general, the comments received by EA indicated support for the broader objective of a set of standards for sustainable fisheries, however there was strong opposition to the use of export regulations as a means of pursuing sustainability. The comments also indicated that the draft criteria was out of reach for most fisheries such that 'the bar was being set too high'.

Environment Australia and AFMA have commenced a road test of the Northern Prawn and Southern Squid Jig fisheries against the draft criteria. So far the road test has proved extremely useful in terms of identifying criteria which are not appropriate and suggesting modified criteria. The process has also allowed for a broad consideration of the ways in which different fisheries are managing for sustainability.

AFMA and the relevant MACs will be finalising the preparation of the 'road test' reports in order for EA to prepare a mock assessment report. Once these reports are finalised they will be available for information.

Environment Australia is in the process of briefing the Minister for Environment on the comments received on the draft criteria and a determination on the process for implementing ecological assessment of commercial fisheries.

### **2. Marine Protected Areas**

#### **a) Macquarie Island**

The Minister for Environment announced on November 1999 the declaration of stage 1 of a marine reserve in waters around Macquarie Island. The reserve includes two managed areas i) a highly protected zone (5.8 million hectares) in which fishing and mineral and petroleum exploration will be prohibited and ii) a species/habitat management zone (10.4 million hectares) in which limited commercial fishing may be permitted but will be primarily used for scientific research and environmental monitoring.

Following development of a management plan for stage 1 Environment Australia intends to consider additional areas for protection (stage 2 of the reserve). - hilary

#### **b) Solitary Islands, NSW**

In 1991, NSW declared a marine park in the area of the Solitary Islands (an areas stretching 70km north from Coffs Harbour to the Sandon River). In 1993 the Commonwealth Department of Environment (now known as Environment Australia) declared a marine reserve in Commonwealth waters, adjacent to the NSW declared park. The Commonwealth component extends seaward from the 3 nautical mile baseline to the 50 metre isobath.

Environment Australia and NSW are currently preparing a joint issues and options paper for management of the Solitary Islands Marine Reserve for public comment.

AFMA has identified four Commonwealth managed fisheries which currently have access to the area and may wish to be involved in discussions on management arrangements in a marine reserve in the area. These fisheries are the Southern Squid Jig, Jack Mackerel, Eastern Tuna and Billfish and three purse seiners in the South East Non-trawl fishery.

AFMA will shortly be seeking input from the relevant MACs and operators on whether they wish to be closely involved in the planning process, including the options and issues paper and a draft plan of management which is to be prepared in 2000.

#### **c) Ningaloo Reef Marine Park**

Ningaloo Reef Marine Park, near Exmouth Gulf in Western Australia, was declared in 1987 and includes State and Commonwealth waters. The existing State and Commonwealth Management Plans for marine park will be reviewed shortly. Environment Australia and the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management manage the park and have prepared a "have your say" brochure which invites comments on aspects of park management. AFMA has sought comments from relevant MACs, however individuals with an interest in the Commonwealth waters of Ningaloo Marine Park may forward comments to Ms Lesley Hodges, Marine Protected Areas, Environment Australia, GPO Box 787, CANBERRA ACT 2601 by 18 December 1999.

#### **d) Mermaid Reef**

The Mermaid Reef National Nature Reserve, one of three reefs in the Rowley Shoals off north west Western Australia, was declared in 1991. Environment Australia recently circulated for comment a draft of the first Plan of Management for the reserve. Two AFMA managed fisheries, the West Coast Tuna and Billfish Fishery and the North West Slope Trawl Fishery, include the area of Mermaid Reef.

AFMA sought comment on the draft plan from the relevant MACs and incorporated the comments in a response to Environment Australia. The main points raised in the response related to the potential for longlines to drift into the reserve and the need to consider pelagic longlining in the broader context of objectives of different categories of marine protected areas.

### **3. National and Commonwealth Bycatch Policies**

The National Bycatch Policy, endorsed by State/Territory and Commonwealth fisheries ministers was released in October 1999. The Commonwealth Policy is expected to be released in early December 1999.

AFMA has finalised bycatch action plans for the Northern Prawn and Torres Strait Prawn fisheries and has commenced development of Bycatch Action Plans for all major fisheries. AFMA expects bycatch action plans for all major fisheries to be completed within 12 months.

The AFMA Board Environment Committee will be considering all bycatch action plans before being finalised.

### **4. Threat Abatement Plan for the Bycatch of Seabirds during oceanic longline operations (TAP)**

The Minister for Environment has expressed strong concerns over the delay in the implementation of the regulations and pilot observer program required under the TAP.

The AFMA Board Environment Committee will be considering, at its meeting on 29 November 1999, a number of issues relating to the funding and design of the pilot observer program.

### **5. Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999**

The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC) will come into effect in July 1999. AFMA is currently seeking clarification from EA on the provisions for bycatch of protected species during commercial fishing and the accreditation process for Commonwealth fisheries management plans.

Environment Australia will shortly be circulating draft guidelines for conducting strategic assessments for public comment.

### **6. Oceans Policy**

At its October meeting the AFMA Board endorsed an Environment Committee recommendation that a committee be established within AFMA to coordinate fisheries input to the development of the South East Regional Marine Plan.

It is proposed that the membership of the committee will encompass all fisheries with an interest in the area of the South East Region (roughly from Eden, NSW to the VIC/SA border). It was also agreed that fifty per cent of the funding will be sought from Environment Australia with the remaining fifty per cent to be apportioned through the levy base.

AFMA will shortly be seeking relevant MAC view's on membership and draft terms of reference for the committee, before seeking AFMA Board endorsement and part funding from Environment Australia.

## **7. Indian Ocean Regional Conference on Turtle Conservation and Management**

Environment Australia hosted an Indian Ocean regional workshop on turtle conservation and management, in Perth from 19-22 October 1999.

The workshop was attended by representatives from over 20 countries.

The meeting discussed a number of issues relating to turtle conservation and management and agreed on the need to develop an 'Indian Ocean and South East Asian Regional Agreement on the Conservation and Management of Marine Turtles and their Habitats'.

Environment Australia will be preparing the draft text of an instrument for further negotiations in the first quarter of 2000. It is envisaged the agreement will cover issues such as fisheries bycatch, indigenous and commercial harvest and encourage the exchange of information and technology throughout the Region.

## **8. Recovery Plans for grey nurse and great white sharks**

AFMA recently participated in working groups to develop recovery plans for grey nurse and great white sharks following the listing of the two species on the *Endangered Species Protection Act 1992*. Environment Australia is currently incorporating the outcomes of working group discussions into the draft recovery plans for the two shark species and AFMA and other working group participants will shortly have the opportunity to provide further input prior to the draft plans being circulated for public comment.

## **9. 2000 release of offshore petroleum exploration areas**

The Department of Industry, Science and Resources (ISR) recently released details of the offshore areas they are considering to release for petroleum exploration next year. AFMA is currently seeking MAC and CC comments on the areas proposed for release and will be providing consolidated comments to ISR by 10 December 1999. Once finalised the new exploration acreage will be available for competitive bidding and exploration permits providing exclusive rights to undertake exploration activities, including seismic surveys and drilling in defined areas, may be issued during the course of 2000.

**Environment Section  
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