



**Australian Government**

**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

# **Environment Update 24**

**AFMA Environment Policy Section  
May 2005**



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## Assessment reports

AFMA has devoted significant resources to meeting the export and strategic assessment requirements for all Commonwealth managed fisheries under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Through the assessment process, AFMA is also seeking accreditation of fisheries under Part 13 of the EPBC Act, which relates to interactions with protected species.

AFMA prepares the assessment reports for each fishery in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries* to address the EPBC Act requirements.

Copies of assessment reports are available from AFMA's website ([www.afma.gov.au](http://www.afma.gov.au)) or by contacting AFMA's Environment Policy Section (details at the end of Environment Update).

### Assessments completed by the Minister for the Environment and Heritage

- Heard Island and McDonald Islands Fishery
- Bass Strait Scallop Fishery
- Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery
- Northern Prawn Fishery
- Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery
- Coral Sea Fishery
- Southern Squid Jig Fishery
- Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery
- Western Trawl Fisheries
- Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery (managed by the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority)

### Assessment reports submitted to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage

- Small Pelagic Fishery
- Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery
- Skipjack Tuna Fishery
- Torres Strait Prawn Trawl Fishery

### Assessment report drafted and public comment sought - to be submitted to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage

- Torres Strait Finfish Fishery
- Torres Strait Sea Cucumber Fishery

### Drafting under way

- Macquarie Island Fishery

### Terms of Reference to be released for public comment

- New and Exploratory Fisheries in the CCAMLR Region
- Informally Managed Fishing Permits
- Torres Strait Pearl Shell Fishery
- Torres Strait Trochus Fishery
- Torres Strait Crab Fishery

Assessments of Commonwealth fisheries are based on fishery specific Terms of Reference (TOR). The TORs for the above fisheries will be available for public comment on 1 June 2005 and will close on Monday 4 July 2005. Copies of the TORs can be obtained at [www.afma.gov.au](http://www.afma.gov.au) or by contacting Cate Coddington (AFMA Environment Section [cate.coddington@afma.gov.au](mailto:cate.coddington@afma.gov.au) or on (02) 6272 4208).

## **Review of strategic assessments**

The Wildlife Trade Operation for the Bass Strait Scallop Fishery expires on 22 April 2006. This will be the first AFMA-managed fishery to require reassessment. AFMA and the Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) are presently discussing the form this and future reassessments will take.

For further information on assessment reports please contact Paul Ryan, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 5266.

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## **Natural Heritage Trust (NHT)**

AFMA has been granted \$2.71 million over three years through the Australian Government NHT fund for its "Establishing Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management" project. Environment Update 23 outlined what had been achieved in the first year of this project.

So far in the second year of the project, a number of the activities have progressed. These include:

- Supporting improvements to the ecological risk assessment methodology and initial application to two fisheries (see next article);
- Review and updating of the AFMA observer manuals to ensure accuracy and relevance of information collected, particularly bycatch information;
- Initial trialling of electronic video equipment in a couple of fisheries to assess the effectiveness of these in collecting fisheries bycatch information;
- Strategic ecosystem data plans for an additional 3 fisheries were discussed with the relevant resource assessment group; and
- The engagement of fisheries liaison officers and a new communications officer to improve AFMA's communication and extension services.

For more information on the "Establishing Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management" Project, please contact Tim Smith, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 5631.

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## **Ecological Risk Assessments for Commonwealth Fisheries**

AFMA and CSIRO have been undertaking the Ecological Risk Assessment for Commonwealth Fisheries (ERACF) Project since 2001. The key component of this project is to undertake an ecological risk assessment (ERA) for each fishery. These assessments will be an integral part of future AFMA fisheries management. Environment Update 23 outlined the two phases of the project.

### **Phase II assessments:**

Progress with phase two has continued with CSIRO undertaking a number of methodology modifications to improve the risk assessments. These changes are currently being tested to ensure the results obtained are accurate and the assessments are determining the actual risk posed by fishing. CSIRO has also applied the updated methodology to two AFMA fisheries (the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery and the Bass Strait Scallop Fishery). However, given the methodology is still to be finalised, both of these assessments will require further fine tuning before being finalised.

## **Risk Management Framework:**

The ecological risk management (ERM) framework has been further refined through discussions at the AFMA Board Environment Committee. The framework has also been discussed with senior managers of the Department of the Environment and Heritage to allow for the ERM framework to underpin to fishery environmental reporting requirements.

A fact sheet outlining the ecological risk assessments and ERM framework was released to all AFMA MACs in April 2005. This fact sheet provides an outline of the ERM framework and how it is expected it will interact with current fisheries environmental reporting.

For more information on any aspect of the ERAs or the ERACF Project, please contact Tim Smith, AFMA ERA project officer, on (02) 6272 5631.

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## **Bycatch action plans (BAPs)**

### **Review of BAPs**

The *Commonwealth Policy on Fisheries Bycatch* commits AFMA to review BAPs every two years. AFMA has finalised the BAPs for major Commonwealth Fisheries with the exception of the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF). The SESSF BAP combines the South East Trawl, Gillnet, Hook and Trap and Great Australian Bight Fisheries BAPs into one BAP. AFMA expects to seek public comments on the draft SESSF BAP in mid 2005.

There are also two new bycatch action plans being prepared. The Torres Strait Finfish BAP was released for public comment in April 2005, and comments were due by Monday 9 May 2005. The Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF) BAP was released for public comment in September – October 2004. Comments were considered by the first meeting of the Small Pelagics Fishery MAC in April 2005.

Copies of BAPs are available from the AFMA website at [www.afma.gov.au](http://www.afma.gov.au). Alternatively, they may be obtained by contacting Cate Coddington, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 4208 or by email to [cate.coddington@afma.gov.au](mailto:cate.coddington@afma.gov.au).

### **Finalised BAPs**

- Northern Prawn Fishery
- Antarctic Fisheries
- Bass Strait Scallop Fishery
- Southern Squid Jig Fishery
- Tuna longline and minor line fisheries
- Tuna Purse Seine Fishery
- Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (awaiting printing)

### **Public comment sought - awaiting final approval**

- Small Pelagic Fishery
- Torres Strait Finfish Fishery

### **BAPs being drafted - awaiting approval for release for public comment**

- Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery

For further information on BAPs please contact Cliff Lloyd, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 4432.

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# Oceans Policy

## Regional marine planning and the National Oceans Office

The National Oceans Office (NOO) has been incorporated into the Marine Division within DEH, but most staff remain based in Tasmania.

In the Northern Regional Marine Planning area, the Northern Planning Advisory Committee (NPAC), a non-government stakeholder forum, has submitted the *Northern Planning Advisory Committee Discussion Paper* to the NOO to be considered by government. This discussion paper is designed to provide information to the NOO and other stakeholders on issues in the Northern marine region.

The NOO has also commenced work in the South-West Regional Marine Plan area, including gathering information from AFMA in relation to the location of existing fisheries closures in the area.

## High seas governance

Over the past few years there has been increasing discussion on the issue of high seas governance, including the use of marine protected areas and the proposal for a moratorium on trawling on seamounts. The issue was discussed at the United Nations open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and Law of the Sea (UNICPOLOS) in 2004 and will again be on the agenda at the next meeting, which commences in New York on 6 June 2005.

The DEH is coordinating briefing for UNICPOLOS. While high seas governance and biodiversity will be the major focus of discussions, other issues that are likely to arise include a possible proposal to implement a moratorium on industrial high seas longline fishing to address overfishing and bycatch concerns. Australia is addressing the problem of bycatch internationally by strongly promoting the adoption of the international instruments and mandates of regional fisheries management organisations.

Australia is currently developing a whole of government position on high seas biodiversity governance and this work will continue beyond the current UNICPOLOS process.

For further information on high seas governance and oceans policy please contact Paul Ryan, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 5266.

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## Marine protected areas

### Marine protected areas in the south-east region

The process for identification of areas to be designated marine protected Areas (MPAs) in the south-east regional marine planning area is continuing. DEH already has two candidate MPAs in the Zeehan and Murray areas and this year will consult with stakeholders further to determine zoning and management arrangements for these areas.

DEH is also seeking more proposed MPAs for the remaining broad areas of interest (BAOI) within the SE region through industry and multi-stakeholder meetings.

The candidate and future MPAs in the SE region will be assessed to see where any multiple use zones could be placed without compromising the conservation values of the areas. This assessment will use both the Fishing Risk Assessment (FRA) and a socio-economic impact assessment.

## **DEH Fishing Risk Assessment method to support MPA development**

To assist in determining what fishing methods will be permitted in multiple use MPAs, DEH has developed a MPA-specific FRA project. A key component of the FRA is the establishment of an expert-based technical working group. The technical working group includes scientists and experts from the fishing industry. The technical working group convened from 2 to 5 May 2005 to prepare preliminary FRA results. These results have now been released for stakeholder comment (by 8 June 2005), during which time AFMA will consult with MACs. The technical working group will reconvene to consider any stakeholder comments received. A final report will be provided to DEH at the end of June 2005.

For more information on the FRA contact Joanna Fisher at DEH (02) 6274 2804 or [joanna.fisher@deh.gov.au](mailto:joanna.fisher@deh.gov.au)

## **Fishing Industry Input**

The Fishing industry can provide input into the MPA process. This is coordinated through Fiona Curly. Fiona can be contacted on 0419 678 139.

## **Updated marine protected area management plans**

The management of Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve is the responsibility of the Australian Antarctic Division within DEH. A Draft Management Plan for the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Marine Reserve was released for public comment until 4 May 2005. AFMA sought input from SOUTHMAC on the draft management plan during this period.

Although the public comment phase is over, the Draft Management Plan is available from the Australian Antarctic Division web site. The current management plan for the Territory of Heard Island and McDonald Islands, the Heard Island Wilderness Reserve Management Plan, will remain in force until the new plan is finalised.

The Great Australian Bight Marine Park (Commonwealth Waters) is a Commonwealth reserve adjacent to the South Australian State Park. A revised management plan for this marine protected area has been released called *The Great Australian Bight Marine Park (Commonwealth Waters) – Management Plan 2005 – 2012*, which came into effect on 17 May 2005. Copies of the plan are available at [www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/gab/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/mpa/gab/index.html) or by contacting the Department of Environment and Heritage on 1800 803 772.

## **International Marine Protected Area Congress**

The first International Marine Protected Area Congress (IMPAC 1) will be held in Australia this year from 23-28 October 2005. AFMA is a partner of IMPAC 1 and will send officers to attend the congress. IMPAC 1 has been deliberately designed to bring together the proponents of marine protected areas and the proponents of marine closures for enhancing sustainability of fisheries.

Amongst the objectives for the congress are: to develop a blueprint for partnerships between managers, local communities, indigenous people and industry to ensure that marine ecosystems are sustained into the future; to provide examples of best practice MPAs; and address future issues effecting MPAs and possible solutions to manage these issues. More information can be obtained at: [www.impacongress.org](http://www.impacongress.org).

For further information on marine protected areas please contact Amanda Parr, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 5228.

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# Marine turtles

## Outcomes of Turtle MOU meeting

The Third Meeting of the Signatory States and the Indian Ocean South-East Asian (IOSEA) Advisory Committee was held in Bangkok from 29 to 31 March 2005. Australia, as a Signatory State, submitted its annual report to the meeting. This provided a good basis for reviewing strengths and weaknesses in implementation and reporting.

There were two resolutions adopted by the meeting.

- 1) **Resolution 3.1 Urging the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and its member states to address marine turtle by-catch within the IOSEA Region.** This resolution called on the IOTC to collect and report turtle by-catch through observer programmes and other appropriate and reliable methods and to develop and implement appropriate combinations of hook design, type of bait, depth, gear specifications and fishing practices in order to minimise by-catch and mortality of marine turtles. The resolution also offered to collaborate with the IOTC on the type of data that should be collected and ways that fisheries could assist in the conservation of marine turtles. The intensification of collaboration of the IOSEA and the IOTC included consideration of an MOU and reciprocal representation in meetings.
- 2) **Resolution 3.2 Policies for fisheries and coastal development activities in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia in the aftermath of the tsunami of 26 December 2004.** This resolution called on organisations working in the region to ensure that sustainable practices are adopted in the re-establishment of fisheries, particularly in regard to minimising the by-catch of marine turtles and impacts on their habitats and the protection of marine turtles and the habitats through adequate and careful zoning and long term planning in coastal development.

## Indian Ocean – South East Asia (IOSEA) Year of the Turtle 2006

The third meeting confirmed its intention to proceed with a coordinated region-wide campaign in 2006. The campaign will promote broad turtle conservation themes, and is expected to include local, national and international activities. There was an enthusiastic and encouraging response from Signatory States, non-governmental organisations and others in attendance.

More details on the IOSEA can be found on the website ([www.ioseaturtles.org](http://www.ioseaturtles.org)) .

If you have any ideas for a fisheries contribution to the Year of the Turtle please contact Cliff Lloyd, AFMA Environment Policy Section, on (02) 6272 4432

## FAO Technical Guidelines

The FAO Technical Consultation on Sea Turtles Conservation and Fisheries held in Bangkok, Thailand from 29 November to 2 December 2004 reached agreement on a useful set of Guidelines to Reduce Sea Turtle Mortality in Fishing Operations. The guidelines were tabled at the twenty-sixth session of the FAO Committee on Fisheries (COFI) in Rome in March 2005.

The final guidelines have been posted on the FAO website (<http://www.fao.org>): (FAO Fisheries Report No. 765 FIRM/R765(En). For further information on the FAO conference, please contact Cliff Lloyd, AFMA Environment Policy Section, on (02) 6272 4423.

## National Turtle Recovery Group meeting

The third meeting of the National Turtle Recovery Group was held in Canberra on 18 May 2005. The team has been formed by DEH to monitor the implementation of the *Recovery Plan for Marine Turtles in Australia*, which was released by DEH in July 2003.

## MACC Turtle and Dugong Taskforce

The Marine and Coastal Committee (MACC) of the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee has established a taskforce on marine turtle and dugong populations. The group will engage key members of the community, particularly Indigenous groups and scientists, in the development of a national approach to the sustainable harvest of dugong and marine turtles. AFMA's Executive Manager Fisheries is a member of the taskforce. The taskforce is expected to report to the MACC by mid 2005.

Following informal consultation with some indigenous community representatives, the taskforce developed the draft "Sustainable and legal Indigenous harvest of Marine Turtles and Dugongs in Australia – a national approach" at its third meeting in February 2005. This draft was released for a period of public consultation which has been extended to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005. A copy of the draft can be downloaded at:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/species/turtles/national-approach.html>

For further information on marine turtles please contact Cliff Lloyd, AFMA Environment Policy Section, on (02) 6272 4432.

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## Nominations under EPBC Act

DEH has received a number of nominations under the EPBC Act relevant to marine species and fisheries. Recent nominations, for which the public comment period has closed, are:

- **Eastern gemfish (*Rexea solandri*)** as "endangered",
- **Harrison's dogfish (*Centrophorus harrisoni*)** as "endangered",
- **Southern bluefin tuna (*Thunnus maccoyii*)** (SBT) as "endangered",
- **Orange roughy (*Hoplostethus atlanticus*)** as "endangered",
- **Endeavour dogfish (*Centrophorus moluccensis*)** as "vulnerable",
- **Southern dogfish (*Centrophorus uyato*)** as "vulnerable", and
- **School Shark (*Galeorhinus galeus*)** as "vulnerable".

AFMA, the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Bureau of Rural Sciences lodged a joint submission on the seven nominations. The joint submission and all public comments will be considered by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee which will provide advice to the Australian Government Minister for the Environment and Heritage.

The **Australian sea lion (*Neophoca cinerea*)** was listed as 'vulnerable' under the EPBC Act on 14 February 2005.

**Demersal trawl and Danish seine fishing** has been nominated as a key threat to assemblages of sharks (elasmobranchs) and fish (teleosts) inhabiting the continental shelf and upper continental slope of eastern Australia under the key threatening process provisions of the EPBC Act. DEH has not yet sought public comments on the nomination.

Information on nominations under the EPBC Act is available on DEH's website at: <http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/nominations/index.html>

For further information on nominations under the EPBC Act, please contact Cliff Lloyd AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 4432

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## Seals

### Industry-based program to monitor seal interactions in the South East Trawl Fishery (SETF)

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) has approved a South East Trawl Fishery Industry Association project: "An industry-based program to monitor seal interaction in the SETF". The project is being run by Dr Ian Knuckey. It is funded by the FRDC and NHT. It will:

- Provide fishers with relevant information on the biology and conservation of seals to help raise industry awareness and encourage increased reporting of seal-fishery interactions.
- Ensure that Industry is familiar with and applies its Code of Conduct especially in reducing incidental seal bycatch and mortality.
- Establish a robust-industry-based monitoring program that provides spatial and temporal information on the level of seal-fishery interactions.
- Develop, trial and report on options to validate the data collection and reporting system in quantifying the extent of seal interactions.

### National seal strategy group

The National Seal Strategy Group (NSSG) is a small government working group, established by the Marine and Coastal Committee (MACC) of the Natural Resource Management Standing Committee which identified the need to address the emerging national issue of human and seal interactions.

The NSSG is examining existing and emerging seal-human interaction issues with the view to developing strategies to mitigate adverse impacts on seal populations and on industries with particular reference to fisheries, aquaculture and eco-tourism. The NSSG has met four times and is currently drafting a strategy and finalising a report which assesses interactions between humans and seals which is anticipated for release for public consultation later this year. Paul Ryan and Cliff Lloyd (Environment Policy Section) are members of the NSSG.

For further information on seal issues please contact Cliff Lloyd AFMA Environmental Policy Section on (02) 6272 4432

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## Sharks

### Whale Shark Recovery plan finalised

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage recently released the new recovery plan for whale sharks. Whale sharks are already protected in Australian waters and are listed as both vulnerable and migratory under environmental legislation. A copy of the recovery plan is available online at:

<http://www.deh.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened/publications/recovery/whale-shark/index.html>

### Shark-Implementation and Review Committee (SIRC)

The SIRC will meet for a second time later this year to discuss how Australia's National Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks (Shark-plan) is being implemented. Along with other agencies and departments, AFMA will report on how it is meeting the actions prescribed to it under the Shark plan.

Copies of the plan are available from <http://www.daff.gov.au/sharkplan> or by writing to Shark Secretariat, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, GPO Box 858 Canberra ACT 2601.

For further information on shark issues please contact Amanda Parr, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 4258.

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## Dolphins

The incidental catch of 17 dolphins during three separate incidents in late 2004 led to an investigation into potential dolphin mitigation measures for Zone A of the Small Pelagic Fishery and the establishment of a group to provide specific input in finalising the Small Pelagic Fishery Bycatch Action Plan.

The Small Pelagic Fishery Cetacean Mitigation Working Group met in April 2005. The group discussed:

- the interim management arrangements;
- the risk of interactions with cetaceans in the fishery;
- potential mitigation measures; and
- the strategic management approach.

The outcomes of the first meeting of the Cetacean Mitigation Working Group and the final report of the incidental catch of dolphins (during October and November) in Zone A of the Small Pelagic Fishery mentioned in the last environment update can be found at:

<http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries/pelagic/meetings/default.php>

Interim management arrangements have been implemented and adopted as operational protocols. To minimise interactions fishers are actively avoiding areas with dolphins. A high level of observer coverage was applied between November 2004 and April 2005.

The use of a static camera for monitoring catches of all protected species is being trialed. This is providing 100% digital coverage of all catch brought to the deck. In addition, there will be an observer on board for 1 of every 5 fishing trips.

The group considered mitigations measures for the Small Pelagic Fishery drawing from domestic and international experience. It was decided that exclusion devices were the best consideration at this time. Further monitoring and research will occur.

The above and further recommendations will be incorporated into the Bycatch Action Plan (BAP). The BAP will include the observer strategy, excluder devices, protocols for minimising interactions with cetaceans, under-water camera work to observe interactions and behaviour. The group will reconvene to review the cetacean mitigation strategy as required.

Further incidental captures of dolphins in the Small Pelagic Fishery occurred in late April and early May. In accordance with the agreed protocol of the Cetacean Mitigation Working Group these were reported and the Working Group has recently reconvened to review the strategy.

For further information on dolphins, please contact Steve Bolton, Manager Small Pelagic Fishery, on (02) 6272 5451.

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# Sea birds

## Threat Abatement Plan

The incidental catch (or bycatch) of seabirds during oceanic longline fishing operations was listed as a key threatening process on 24 July 1995. As required under Commonwealth legislation (now the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 - EPBC Act), a Threat Abatement Plan for the Incidental Catch (or Bycatch) of Seabirds During Oceanic Longline Fishing Operations was prepared and approved by the Minister for the Environment on 2 August 1998. The Threat Abatement Plan (TAP) expired in August 2003, necessitating a review under subsection 279(2) of the EPBC Act. The provisions of the current TAP continue to apply to all Commonwealth fisheries until such time as the new TAP is in place.

A new threat abatement plan (2005) has been drafted as a result of that review. It has been prepared to meet the requirements of the EPBC Act and to coordinate national action to alleviate the impact of longline fishing activities on seabirds in Australian waters. The TAP team is presently finalising the document for consideration by the Threatened Species Scientific Committee prior to release for public comment in June 2005.

For further information on the seabirds please contact Paul Ryan, AFMA Environment Policy Section on (02) 6272 5266.

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## Environment Policy Section contacts

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