



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



Response to Ministerial Direction – Antarctic Fisheries

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In December 2005 the Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation issued a Direction to AFMA to take immediate action in all Commonwealth fisheries to cease overfishing and recover overfished stocks, avoid stocks becoming overfished in future and manage the broader environmental impacts of fishing. AFMA responded to the Ministerial Direction¹ with the document *Future Operating Environment for Commonwealth Fisheries*².

The Ministerial Direction has a limited impact on the management of Antarctic fisheries, as there are currently measures in place which address most of the key issues. The primary elements of the Direction and the *Future Operating Environment* as they apply to Antarctic fisheries are described below.

Implement the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy (HSP) by 2007 – Noting that for internationally-managed fisheries to which Australia is a party (such as the Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery and the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Fishery) the relevant international agreement will prevail where it includes an acceptable scientific process for setting sustainable catch levels. In such fora, Australia will advocate its domestic policy settings as an example of best practice.

The Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) Fishery falls within the jurisdiction of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). The Macquarie Island Toothfish (MIT) Fishery is managed consistently with arrangements adopted by CCAMLR.

The fish stocks in the HIMI and MIT fisheries are not considered to be subject to overfishing or overfished, and undertake regular stock assessments with agreed harvest strategies. The harvest strategies implemented for the fisheries are considered to be an appropriate scientific response to the Direction.

AFMA is participating in an expert review of the HSP which will report to the Minister by 30 June 2006.

Managing fisheries using output controls by 2010 – Following the Ministerial Direction to implement output controls in Commonwealth managed fisheries, AFMA is committed to begin the review of those fisheries not under TAC/ITQ management in 2006/7. AFMA will engage an external consultant to undertake the review and work with relevant MACs.

The HIMI and MIT fisheries are already output managed with total allowable catches being set annually for target and bycatch species.

¹ http://www.mffc.gov.au/releases/2005/afma_directions.pdf

² http://www.afma.gov.au/information/newsroom/securing_the_future.htm



Review the use of boat SFRs – AFMA will commence this review in 2006/07 using an external consultant to work with relevant MACs.

There are no boat SFRs in Antarctic fisheries. The use of minimum quota holdings is the mechanism which limits vessel numbers.

Minimise the incentives for discarding – The Ministerial Direction to AFMA requires incentives for discarding to be minimised by factoring discards into TAC setting.

AFMA's *Future Operating Environment* document sets out AFMA's objectives in relation to managing discards:

- discarding of species subject to a total allowable catch limit or quota management will be illegal in all Commonwealth fisheries by 2007.
- assess and implement measures to significantly reduce bycatch in all Commonwealth fisheries, with the goal to halve it by 2008.

AFMA will shortly issue all MACs with guidelines to address bycatch. MACs will be asked to respond indicating how they will achieve the bycatch reduction targets set out in the guidelines.

For Antarctic fisheries all bycatch are subject to catch limits and discarding is not permitted.

Some species can be tagged and released, and others such as sleeper sharks and live skates and rays returned to the sea. SouthMAC will need to consider this issue and provide advice to the Board, particularly in relation to skates and rays. Other measures such as 'move-on' provisions address bycatch issues for non target species.

Manage the broader environmental impacts of fishing, including minimising interactions with threatened and protected species – Minimal interactions occur with seabirds and marine mammals in Antarctic fisheries. A range of mitigation measures have been adopted for trawl and longline operations which have proved to be effective, including a no offal discharge requirement.

Enhance monitoring activities – The Ministerial Direction requires that AFMA enhance the monitoring of fishing activity, for example through increased use of vessel monitoring systems (VMS) with daily reporting, on-board cameras, and observers.

AFMA's *Future Operating Environment* commits to making VMS compulsory in all Commonwealth fisheries, the use of on-board catch-monitoring cameras to complement existing observer programs and a move to administrative rather than prosecution based penalties.

To comply with the Ministerial Direction and Future Operating Environment the fishery will need to review its need for observer and related monitoring programs. These



programs are an integral part of a sound Harvest Strategy Framework and in the management of ecological risks in Commonwealth fisheries. They can be used for:

- measuring any discard and bycatch,
- validating logbook information,
- identifying fishing interactions with rare, threatened, endangered and protected species and informing management options to address these,
- implementing scientific programs, and
- monitoring compliance with fishery regulations.

The design of an observer program should:

- apply to all vessels participating in a fishery and allow for unobstructed collection of required data,
- be representative of the identified components,
- ensure a level of coverage that is sufficient to produce statistically robust estimates, and
- as far as possible, sample fishing activities randomly.

Electronic monitoring solutions (E-monitoring) will be pursued by AFMA in order to reduce costs and improve data quantity and quality. E-monitoring includes monitoring fishing operations using vessel mounted camera systems and sensors, fishing position using VMS and catch against quota holdings using electronic quota monitoring.

Compliance and Licensing – Consistent with the Ministerial Direction, including that many fisheries will be moving to quota management over the next 4 years, AFMA will be changing some of the ways it does business with the fishing industry to ensure there is a high level of integrity in fishery management arrangements and efficient administrative systems. Key initiatives are:

E-licensing to provide on-line access to licensing entitlements held by fishers within 3 years. It will enable industry to self-service licensing and quota transactions and reduce the long-term costs to AFMA and industry.

Improved quota monitoring to ensure that catch does not exceed TAC and those individuals who exceed their entitlements do not devalue the investments of other quota holders.

Progressively move to monthly quota reconciliation for all fisheries to ensure that quota is closely monitored and fishers can reconcile as soon as possible after any overcatch occurs. Implementation of quarterly quota reconciliation in the SESSF will be the first step in 2006.

VMS will be rolled out to the entire fleet. Changes to the VMS are required to meet the increased obligations arising from placing VMS on all the fleet. Those fisheries



that do not have VMS will be required to fit suitable VMS units by 1 July 2007. Further information on VMS requirements will be provided in the next few months.

Administrative penalties will be increasingly used to improve the cost- effectiveness of compliance. The policy and legal requirements for this will be developed over the next 2 years with full implementation in 2008.

Given many fisheries will be moving to TAC/ITQ management over the next 4 years AFMA will be working with MACs to develop consistent management frameworks to reduce long-term costs.

All vessels in Antarctic fisheries use ICVMS and are required to carry two observers on each voyage. The use of on-board cameras has been successfully trialed for demersal longline operations in the HIMI Fishery.

Independent surveys by 1 January 2007 – In the HIMI Fishery the stock assessments for the target species, Patagonian toothfish and mackerel icefish, are based on the data obtained from an annual random stratified trawl survey. This is a fishery independent survey.

For the MIT Fishery, CSIRO undertake a fishery independent tag based stock assessment. While this is not a survey the data collected for the assessments is independent of the Fishery.

Spatial closures – The fishing zones around HIMI and Macquarie Island have significant marine protected areas, which are representative of the marine ecosystems in the area. The HIMI Marine Reserve covers 65,000 km² and the Macquarie Island Marine Park comprises one third of the Australian fishing zone around Macquarie Island.

