



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Response to Ministerial Direction – Coral Sea Fishery

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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.

Many of the requirements from the Ministerial Direction are already being implemented in the various sectors of the Coral Sea Fishery (CSF) but some will need review or enhancement to fully comply. However, the major issue is the requirement to use TAC/ITQ based fishery management.

Consultation in the CSF currently involves an annual stakeholder meeting, rather than a formal MAC process. To fully implement the Minister's Direction will require more frequent meetings to meet specified timeframes.

The primary elements of the Direction and the *Future Operating Environment* as they apply to the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery are described below.

Implement the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy (HSP) by 2007– There is very limited understanding of the dynamics of the various fish species in the CSF, so limited entry has been a key precautionary measure to ensure that catches are at sustainable levels. However, the CSF continues to face economic challenges and the available research information will be reviewed in light of the harvest strategy approach outlined in the Minister's 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 Minister's 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. Although TACs apply to the take of 2 key sea cucumber species, the remainder of the fishery is managed using input controls and will therefore need to be reviewed.

Review the use of boat SFRs and boat permits by 2010 – AFMA will commence this review in 2006/7. The CSF currently has a limited entry policy and fishing permits under a Statement of Management Arrangements. These arrangements will be reviewed to enable any outcomes to be implemented by 2010.

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

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



Minimise the incentives for discarding – The Minister’s Direction to AFMA requires incentives for discarding to be minimised by factoring discards into TACs.

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.

Manage the broader environmental impacts of fishing, including minimising interactions with threatened and protected species – The Ecological Risk Assessment for the CSF will be completed by June 2006 and used to develop and implement necessary management responses and future research.

Enhance monitoring activities – The Minister’s 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 cameras to complement existing observer programs and a move to administrative rather than prosecution based penalties. VMS is currently widely used throughout the fishery, and will become a requirement for all operators (including those in the aquarium hand collection sector).

The CSF presently has an ad-hoc minimal coverage of vessels by scientific observers who record information on interactions with protected species. There is a need for increased verification of catch and effort data as well as reliable data on bycatch and discards.

Future observer coverage and electronic monitoring in Commonwealth fisheries

- 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 Minister's 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..

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 operators in the aquarium hand collection sector that do not have VMS will be required to fit suitable VMS units by 1 July 2007.

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.



Independent surveys by 1 January 2007 – Fishery observers have been used on a routine basis (providing 25% coverage in the auto longline, demersal finfish trap and trawl sectors) and on an opportunistic basis in the other sectors (non auto longline and hand collection sectors). A source of funding and program for fishery independent surveys will need to be developed prior to January 2007.

Spatial closures – There are no spatial closures in the CSF (apart from DEH managed MPAs). The usefulness of spatial closures will be reconsidered as one of the elements of an appropriate harvest strategy for the fishery and in light of the ERA outcomes.

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