



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



Response to Ministerial Direction – Northern Prawn 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 NPF but some will need review or enhancement to fully comply. However, the major issue is the requirement to use TAC/ITQ based fishery management.

The primary elements of the Direction and the *Future Operating Environment* as they apply to the Northern Prawn Fishery are described below.

Implement the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy (HSP) by 2007– The NPF has a comprehensive stock assessment process and history of strategic decision making to ensure that catches of prawns are at sustainable levels. However, the NPF continues to face sustainability and profitability challenges, and its current assessment process 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.

The NPF industry is considering whether it will voluntarily come under TAC/ITQ management via the Australian government’s structural adjustment package, if this is not successful AFMA will work with NORMAC and industry to start examining the implementation of a TAC/ITQ later in 2006.

The introduction of TAC/ITQ management into the fishery will involve allocating ITQs (through use of an Allocation Advisory Panel), developing appropriate TACs, catch monitoring, compliance and management strategies and developing a new Management Plan for the fishery.

Review the use of boat SFRs and boat permits by 2010 – AFMA will commence this review in 2006/7. Boat SFRs are presently one of the management tools within

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

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



the NPF. The need for these will be reviewed by NPRAG and NORMAC, taking into consideration progress on implementing TAC/ITQ management in the fishery.

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.

Whilst the NPF has already significantly reduced the amount of bycatch in the fishery, specifically turtles and large organisms it will need to develop management methods and technologies to reduce bycatch.

Manage the broader environmental impacts of fishing, including minimising interactions with threatened and protected species – the NPF has introduced mandatory Turtle Exclusion Devices (TEDs) and Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs) into the fishery. This has reduced the catch of turtles and other large animals by more than 97%. Work is ongoing in reducing the bycatch of other species. To this effect NORMAC has a bycatch working group who develop relevant research priorities and projects.

The Ecological Risk Assessment for the NPF will be completed by June 2006 and will assist in further developing and implementing 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 catch-monitoring cameras to complement existing observer programs and a move to administrative rather than prosecution based penalties.

The NPF presently has a minimal coverage of vessels by scientific observers in addition to crew member 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 continue to be a requirement in the NPF and will be rolled out across all Commonwealth Fisheries.

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 – An integrated monitoring program involving two fishery independent surveys has been undertaken annually since 2002 and has NORMAC agreement to continue for at least 3 years (from June 2005).

Spatial closures – A comprehensive array of spatial and temporal closures is currently used in the NPF. The effectiveness of these closures will continue to be assessed and modifications made on an annual basis, regardless of whether input or output controls are the main management tool in future.

