



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



Response to Ministerial Direction – Southern Bluefin Tuna 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 measures required by the Direction are already in place in the Fishery, however some are not and others may need further consideration.

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

Implement the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy (HSP) by 2007– The Direction states that for internationally managed fisheries the relevant international agreement will prevail where it includes an acceptable scientific process for setting sustainable catch levels. The SBT Fishery essentially meets this criterion.

Over recent years the CCSBT scientific committee has developed a number of Management Procedures (Harvest Strategies) applicable to the global SBT Fishery. In October 2005 the CCSBT agreed on a preferred management procedure for adoption but this has not yet been implemented. The SBT Fishery is currently overfished and subject to overfishing and the preferred management procedure is seeking to address this.

The Ministerial Direction also requires that Australia now advocate its domestic policy setting arrangements, based on the current '20/40' harvest strategy, as an example of best practice at the CCSBT.

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. AFMA will engage an external consultant to undertake the review and work with relevant MACs.

The SBT Fishery is currently an output managed fishery managed using SFRs that equate to quota units. Therefore this element of the Direction has been met by the fishery.

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 and boat permits by 2010 – AFMA will commence this review in 2006/7 using an external consultant to work with relevant MACs.

As there are no Boat SFR's in the SBT Fishery this will have no effect on the SBT 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.

Manage the broader environmental impacts of fishing, including minimising interactions with threatened and protected species

Although the purse seine sector of the SBT Fishery has minimal recorded interactions, there is a need to progress actions required under the purse seine Bycatch Action Plan and to finalise the SBT ERA and develop mechanisms to minimise interactions with species identified as high risk.

The broader environmental impacts of fishing in the longline sector of the SBT Fishery will be addressed as part of the implementation of the Ministerial Direction in the ETBF and the WTBF.

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.

While there is a requirement for the use of VMS in the SBT fishery most vessels have sought an exemption to this requirement. These exemptions will be reviewed in light of the Ministerial Direction.



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, as is already in place in the SBT fishery, 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 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. This may result in some changes to the way that the SBT fishery is administered.

Independent surveys by 1 January 2007 – The SBT Fishery has independent surveys including aerial surveys of the GAB, acoustic surveys off WA and extensive tagging programs that should meet the requirements of the Direction.

Spatial closures

There are currently no spatial closures in the main catching areas of the Australian SBT Fishery. Australia has proposed spatial closures of the SBT spawning ground to the CCSBT however to date these have not been agreed.

