



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



Response to Ministerial Direction – Western Trawl Fisheries

Response to Ministerial Direction – Western Trawl Fisheries (North West Slope and Western Deepwater Trawl)

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.

Both the Western Deepwater Trawl and North West Slope fishery are limited entry fisheries that are presently managed under permit. WESTMAC covers both fisheries. Both fisheries target a range of fish and crustacean species.

The primary elements of the Direction and the *Future Operating Environment* as they apply to the Western Trawl Fisheries are described below.

Implement the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy (HSP) by 2007– the fisheries are presently managed under input controls. Harvest strategies for the fisheries have been discussed at WESTMAC. There is a need to further develop the HS for the fisheries with the intent to ensure that the exploitation rate of target stocks in any year will not exceed that giving the MSY. These strategies will be further refined by the fishery with the intent to amend management arrangements by December 2006.

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

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 western trawl fisheries are presently managed under input controls. AFMA and WESTMAC will prepare a plan for the implementation of ITQs for its main target species. The fisheries presently target a number of species which are spatially and temporally variable. Further research and analysis will be needed to support TAC/ITQ management.

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.

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

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



AFMA and WESTMAC will need to address the issue of phasing out boat permits by 2010. Initial discussions will focus on potentially developing a management plan for the fishery and how this plan would allocate fishing rights.

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. WESTMAC will need to address this issue as a high priority noting that the current level of bycatch in the fishery is high.

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

Any risks identified in the Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) will need to be addressed to ensure that the fisheries comply with this part of the Direction. Presently there is little information on broader environmental impacts in the fishery. This will need to be addressed.

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.

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.

All operators in the fishery 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.



Independent surveys by 1 January 2007 – this will be a challenge for both Western Trawl fisheries given their size and the diverse nature of the fisheries. Additional work will be required by WESTMAC to ensure the verification of catch and effort information in the fishery.

Spatial closures

Presently, bar the areas around the Rowley Shoals and Scott and Ashmore reefs, there are no fishery exclusion zones in the Western Trawl fisheries. AFMA and WESTMAC will need to consider the use of protected areas to assist in managing the fishery and associated habitats. The use of spatial closures will also be linked to the HSP and the outcomes of the ERA process.

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