



Chair's Summary

Northern Australian Fisheries Committee Meeting

31 October 2013 – Port Lincoln

Background

The Northern Australian Fisheries Committee (NAFC) met in Port Lincoln on Thursday 31st October 2013. Attendees are listed in [Attachment A](#). The meeting provided an opportunity for members to update the Committee on key management and policy developments relevant to State and Commonwealth northern fisheries, review outstanding action items, and to discuss a number of specific issues including:

- The NAFC Strategic Plan
- The proposal to combine Annual Joint Authority Reports
- The proposed Science Review of Northern Shark stocks in waters relevant to WA
- An update on illegal foreign fishing
- The Northern Territory Offshore Net and Line Review
- Northern Territory reef fish closure areas; and
- The development of a single jurisdiction red snapper fishery for the Gulf of Carpentaria

General updates

The **Western Australia** member provided an update of relevant fisheries policy and management developments in WA.

Of key interest was the drafting of a new Aquatic Resources Management Act (ARMA) and the release of a draft harvest strategy policy for stakeholder comment. The Department has also prioritised resources to support the State Government's response to shark hazard.

There have been a number of developments in the West Coast Rock Lobster fishery, including the implementation of Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) management, an increased focus on addressing whale interactions (to assist accreditation under the EPBC Act) and the rollout of "Fisheye", an electronic licensing and reporting system.

Other important developments included the implementation of the Western Australian (WA) Government's Marine Stewardship Council initiative (with all fisheries going through pre-assessment); a new project to develop investment-ready aquaculture zones; and the completion of a State-wide boat based recreational fishing survey.

The **Northern Territory** member provided an update of relevant fisheries policy and management developments in the NT. The NT Government currently has a number of reviews planned or in progress, including reviews of the full Fisheries Act (focussing on biosecurity, marine ranger program and licensing issues as well as reducing red tape), the Offshore Net and Line Fishery Management Arrangements and a review of the mud crab fishery.



There were also two key fishery papers out for comment, the first describing a proposed resource sharing framework (closing 31 October 2013) and second describing fishing closures aimed at addressing golden snapper and jewfish sustainability in the Coastal Line Fishery, with positive initial stakeholder responses for both proposals. The member also noted a number of key developments relating to Indigenous issues in NT fisheries, including: progression of Blue Mud Bay negotiations with the Northern Land Council, with four “land trust” agreements now in place with five key fishing areas remaining; a commitment to continued funding of the marine ranger program (including amending the Act to acknowledge their role) and the planned amendment of Aboriginal coastal licenses to amend gear restrictions and allow further fisheries development. Finally, the NT member noted the development of the small pelagic fishery and the effects of the poor 2012/13 wet season on the barramundi and crab fisheries.

The **Queensland** member noted that after the start of the new government in 2012, the Deputy Director General became responsible for fisheries and forestry and there has been a 40% reduction in fisheries staff (with flow on implications for achieving government objectives) and regulation reduction targets of 17% have been put in place. Election commitments made by the new government include a review of the crab and line fisheries, an internal fee review, and a commitment to develop a directions strategy for fisheries.

A number of developments in Torres Strait (TS) fisheries were noted. In the Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) fishery, the recent buyback had limited success and some input controls have been removed. The reformed TRL working group will progress a management plan for the fishery. Regarding the High Court Native Title Sea Claim decision (7 August 2013) there remain a number of key implications to be clarified. The TS Finfish Fishery has now moved to quota and traditional ownership is 100%. In the TS Prawn Fishery, effort levels remain low and a push to stimulate effort in the fishery (by allowing larger boats or gear relaxation) has been opposed by traditional owners, who wish to increase the fishery benefits to the communities.

The **Department of Agriculture** (DoA) member noted that the new Commonwealth Government has appointed Parliamentary Secretary Colbeck to the fisheries and forestry portfolios. Relevant election commitments include the development of national commercial and recreational peak bodies, a national aquaculture strategy, red-tape reduction and the recognition of Ocean Watch as an NGO body. The Bycatch, Harvest Strategy and Borthwick reviews are complete, with DoA awaiting further advice on how to proceed under the new government.

The **Australian Fisheries Management Authority** (AFMA) member informed the Committee that the AFMA Commission membership is due to expire in February 2014. Fishery specific developments include the setting of a three year total allowable catch (TAC) for Southern Bluefin Tuna and the first surveillance audit for the Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF) under its accreditation by the Marine Stewardship Council. The decision whether or not to introduce individual transferable quotas in the NPF was pending. Negotiations with Western Australia on Offshore Constitutional Settlement arrangements continue, regarding the boundaries of the North West Slope and the Western Deepwater Trawl Fisheries.

NAFC Strategic Plan

Members discussed the NAFC Strategic Plan and agreed that updates to the Plan would include social licence to operate, red-tape reduction and indigenous fishing considerations in Section 3 (Possible Landscape 2022) and any progress against Sections 4 and 5 (Long and Medium term strategies). Further ideas to be considered included Governance and Planning – Regulatory Streamlining being conducted



across all jurisdictions, compliance collaboration, alignment of stock status reporting, consideration of NT case studies of low cost management of small scale fisheries and finally, the potential for single jurisdiction coordination of Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) data.

Update on combining Annual Joint Authority (JA) Reports

Members were supportive of the proposal from AFMA under which the annual Joint Authority (JA) reports would be 'signed off' by the JA deputies at the annual meetings (in an effort to streamline the process). Following this, the Commonwealth Minister is still required to table the reports to both houses of Federal Parliament.

Science Review of Northern Shark stocks in waters relevant to WA

An independent Science Review of Northern Shark stocks in waters relevant to WA is planned for 2014. The review is aimed at an assessment of available information and provision of advice on a possible sustainable take of shark species in the waters off the north of WA or, alternatively, advice on additional information requirements or processes to allow a reasonable estimate of a sustainable take to be made.

AFMA Update on illegal foreign fishing

AFMA provided an update on illegal foreign fishing. Key developments included a substantial decline in apprehension rates since 2005-06, with aerial surveillance still an effective activity while patrol boats responses are dependent upon asset disposition and competing priorities. AFMA has been heavily involved in helping adjacent jurisdictions (Indonesia, Timor Leste and PNG) to develop their enforcement capabilities, while negotiations are also progressing between Indonesia and the Commonwealth regarding more effective management of jointly managed stocks in the MOU box. AFMA noted that the South Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement (SIOFA) and the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (SPRFMO) have come into force and Australia will focus on helping SIOFA develop Rules of Procedure and helping both organisations develop bottom fishing conservation and management measures.

Northern Territory Offshore Net and Line Fishery (OLNF) Review

Pending procurement, this review aims to create a future vision for the fishery and identify and address underlying policy and management issues in the ONLF, including the potential for development, reducing administrative 'red tape' and regulatory burden on industry.

Reef fish closure areas in the Northern Territory

Following extensive community education and consultation, NT fisheries are proposing to firstly, close a number reef areas that are home to healthy stocks to help re-build a range of recreationally important species (e.g. golden snapper) and secondly, change possession limits for most species. AFMA and NT fisheries will work together to ensure closure impacts upon the NPF are minimised. The public comment period closed on 15 November 2013.

Development of a single jurisdiction red snapper fishery for the Gulf of Carpentaria

At the 2013 NAFC meeting, members provided in principle support for the development of a single joint authority management framework for the Gulf of Carpentaria (GoC) to accommodate management of shared stocks for consideration by NAFC. This included the development of a harvest strategy framework for Red snappers (and associated finfish) in the GoC. QLD noted that the issue is politically sensitive in QLD



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due to different stakeholder interests. A step wise process for formalising the proposal and progressing to consultation with stakeholders and Ministers was agreed. Members noted that a precautionary approach might involve putting in place arrangements for one or two species initially, as a trial, before expanding.



Attachment A

Attendees

Name	Organisation
Nick Rayns (Chair)	Australian Fisheries Management Authority
Heather Brayford	Department of Fisheries, Western Australia
Lindsay Joll	Department of Fisheries, Western Australia
Tim Karlov	Department of Agriculture, Commonwealth
Andrew Thwaites	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Queensland
Eddie Jebreen	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Queensland
Ian Curnow	Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Northern Territory
Bryan Macdonald	Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Northern Territory
Katie Scutt (Executive Officer)	Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Apologies were noted from Scott Spencer, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Queensland and Steve Bolton, Australian Fisheries Management Authority.