

Commission meeting

The Commission convened for its 87th meeting in Melbourne, Victoria on 8-9 March 2023.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Commission convened its annual public meeting as required under the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991*. The meeting was publicised through media release and AFMA's social media presence, with options to participate in person or virtually. A copy of the presentation that was delivered by the CEO is available on the [AFMA website](#).

The meeting was well attended by Commonwealth fishing industry participants and representatives, but there was no participation from other stakeholder groups or the general public.

The Commission also met with the board and members of the Commonwealth Fisheries Association (CFA) for the first time in several years. The discussion provided an excellent opportunity for the Commission to hear industry issues directly, and to inform CFA members of AFMA priorities and emerging issues. All participants agreed that the meeting was valuable and should be regularised.

Discussions covered a range of key issues including policy reviews, strategic thinking, cost effectiveness of fisheries management, the ITQ inquiry, the review of the RAG and MAC framework, and the data transformation and electronic monitoring projects.

The main issue discussed was that a combination of a number of internal and external pressures on both industry and AFMA is resulting in unprecedented pressure on the operational ability and economic viability of many fisheries. Issues such as the competition for marine space (windfarms, marine parks, fishing, aquaculture etc), increased cost of doing business (inflation, freight costs, crew availability etc) and environmental changes (primarily climate change related) were all identified and discussed.

Update on Commonwealth Trawl Sector

The Commission noted that the buyback of trawl boat SFRs was underway, and that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry expected it to be complete by 1 May 2023 to coincide with the new fishing season and the commencement of the new trawl closures and Danish seine gear restrictions.

Economics Working Group (EWG)

The Commission discussed the future role of the EWG, noting that it had not met for some time and that membership appointments had since expired. The Commission had concerns that the EWG had not been fully effective under its previous constitution for a number of reasons.

The Commission did not confirm how it would like to receive economic advice in the future. In the interim, it resolved to trial a workshop format consisting of the nominal EWG members to discuss:

- a. How to include economic advice in the consultative process and to meet with the consultants conducting the RAG and MAC review.
- b. Providing economic insights to the consultants reviewing the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy.
- c. Consider the study conducted by Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Science (ABARES) on the Heard Island and McDonald Islands Fishery net economic return (NER).

Setting 2023/24 TACs for the South Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF)

The Commission noted and discussed the detailed advice provided by the relevant Resource Assessment Groups (RAGs) and the South East Management Advisory Committee (SEMAC), as well as additional information and analysis provided by AFMA Management on key species of interest.

The Commission agreed to TACs for each of the SESSF stocks as detailed in Attachment 1. Most of these decisions are consistent with the advice received from SEMAC. Stocks where the Commission's decision departs from the SEMAC advice, or where additional considerations are noteworthy are:

- a. Bight redfish – while the Commission supported the recommended TAC, it agreed that AFMA Management work with the RAG to recognise the conflicts between CPUE and the FIS results in providing more precautionary advice; and suggested conducting a species composition analysis to understand any shifts in the species distribution.
- b. Jackass morwong – The Commission agreed to a TAC of 50 tonnes (10 tonnes less than the SEMAC recommendation) in recognition of the need to continue to constrain catch to contribute to rebuilding.
- c. Gummy shark – The Commission supported the recommendation to maintain the TAC at 1,672 tonnes and endorsed the proposal for the Southern Shark Industry Alliance to develop industry-based arrangements to shift effort from the Bass Strait component of the stock. AFMA Management was tasked to work with SSIA on the specifics of these arrangements. While the Commission noted some risk that catch in Bass Strait could exceed the RBC there, it was confident in industry's ability to self-regulate based on other similar examples in the SESSF, such as on pink ling and snapper.
- d. School shark – The Commission noted with concern that its decision to increase the school shark TAC to 250 tonnes in 2022/23 had not resulted in a decrease in discarding – with greater catch levels retained and similar quantities discarded. Given this, and the ongoing risk of exceeding the total mortality threshold for this rebuilding species, the Commission agreed to set the TAC at 225 tonnes (25 tonnes less than the SEMAC recommendation).

School shark live release

The Commission considered the SSIA request to remove the requirement for live school shark to be released as well as advice from SharkRAG and SEMAC and additional analysis from AFMA Management. The Commission noted cautious support from the RAG and MAC for removing the requirement. However, the additional analysis of discarding data in logbooks casts doubt as to the overall magnitude of this issue, with no clear trend that discards are being driven the rule. As with the TAC setting discussion, the Commission also noted the ongoing status of this stock as rebuilding and Conservation Dependent and the need to ensure rigor and caution in any changes to its management.

The Commission agreed to retain the rule while additional targeting analyses are considered. However, the Commission agreed that the stock assessment should incorporate the best estimate of survivability of release live shark to remove the perceived “double penalty” effect where industry are forced to release them, but they are counted as fishing mortality anyway.

Setting 2023/24 TACs for the Small Pelagics Fishery (SPF)

The Commission considered the advice from SPFRAG and SEMAC for TACs. The Commission supported all recommendations from SEMAC, as follows:

	TAC (t)	Overcatch %	Undercatch %	Determined Weight (kg)
Australian Sardine	8,060	10	10	2,000
Blue Mackerel east	11,610	10	10	2,000
Blue Mackerel west	3,240	10	10	2,000
Jack Mackerel east	18,720	10	10	2,000
Jack Mackerel west	2,100	10	10	2,000
Redbait east	5,380	10	10	2,000
Redbait west	6,680	10	10	2,000

Overcatch and undercatch in the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF)

Noting that TACs have already been set for key WTBF species, the Commission considered and supported all recommendations from Tropical Tuna MAC for under and overcatch as follows:

	Overcatch %	Undercatch %	Determined Weight (t)
Bigeye tuna	10	10	2
Broadbill swordfish	10	10	2
Striped marlin	10	10	2
Yellowfin tuna	10	10	2

Other items

The Commission considered and progressed a range of other items and ongoing business, including:

- The climate change adaptation program
- Development of a fisheries management policy on co-management
- The independent review of MACs and RAGs
- The Data Transformation and Electronic Monitoring Program
- Domestic and Foreign Compliance Programs

The Commission extends its thanks and appreciation to all industry participants, as well as members and contributors to all MACs and RAGs that help inform its decisions.

The next Commission meeting was agreed to be held in Canberra on 10-11 May 2023



Helen Kroger
Chairman

Attachment A – Agreed SESSF TACs

Quota Species	TAC (t)	Overcatch %	Undercatch %	Determined Weight (kg)
Alfonsino	1,017	10	10	2,000
Bight redfish	959	10	10	2,000
Blue-eye trevalla	238	10	10	2,000
Blue grenadier	17,084	10	10	2,000
Blue warehou	30	0	0	2,000
Deepwater flathead	1,238	10	10	2,000
Deepwater shark basket (east)	24	10	10	2,000
Deepwater shark basket (west)	235	10	10	2,000
Elephant fish	114	10	10	2,000
Flathead	2,333	10	10	2,000
Gemfish (eastern)	100	0	0	2,000
Gemfish (western)	180	10	10	2,000
Gummy shark	1,672	10	10	2,000
Jackass morwong	50	0	0	2,000
John dory	60	0	0	2,000
Mirror dory	121	10	10	2,000
Ocean perch	318	10	10	2,000
Orange roughy (Albany & Esperance)	50	0	0	2,000
Orange roughy (Cascade Plateau)	397	10	10	2,000
Orange roughy (Eastern)	975	10	100	2,000
Orange roughy (Southern)	105	0	0	2,000
Orange roughy (Western)	60	0	0	2,000
Oreo (smooth cascade)	150	10	10	2,000
Oreo (smooth other)	90	10	10	2,000
Oreo (basket)	137	10	10	2,000
Pink ling	1,565	10	10	2,000
Redfish	30	0	0	2,000
Ribaldo	393	10	10	2,000
Royal red prawn	628	10	10	2,000
Sawshark	525	10	10	2,000
School shark	225	0	0	2,000
School whiting	914	10	10	2,000
Silver trevally	25	0	0	2,000
Silver warehou	350	10	10	2,000
Non-Quota Species	TAC (t)	Overcatch %	Undercatch %	Determined Weight (kg)
Boarfish (E)	200	N/A	N/A	N/A
Orange roughy (E)	50	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hagfish	80	N/A	N/A	N/A