



Rationale for the independent AFMA Commission's decision to determine pair trawling as an approved method under the *Small Pelagic Fishery Management Plan 2009*.

The Commission considered whether to determine midwater pair trawling as an approved method in the SPF for an initial 18 month period. The Commission noted that while a specific application to pair trawl had been received by AFMA, it had been asked to determine pair trawling as a method and not consider and approve a specific application.

The Commission approved the determination of midwater pair trawling as an approved method for an 18 month period contingent on the implementation of a dolphin mitigation strategy for the SPF which incorporates pair trawling and subject to the following conditions:

1. A sampling regime of 50 randomly selected fish of each commercial species from each shot to monitor age composition of the catch and changes in growth patterns;
2. Electronic monitoring on each vessel and an observer present for the first 10 trips, alternating between vessels each trip if hauling is switched between vessels, and subsequently as directed by AFMA;
3. Requirement for pair trawling operations to have an AFMA approved vessel management plan (VMP) that contains these general conditions and any additional specific conditions;
4. Closures consistent with the current SPF mid-water trawl, Australian Sea Lion and Coorong Dolphin closures;
5. The following arrangements to mitigate marine mammal and seabird interactions:
 - a) Fur seals: use of an marine mammal excluder device and use of net bindings during net deployment;
 - b) Seabirds: no discharge of biological material while fishing gear is in the water, use of tori lines or bird bafflers over warp wires and nets are cleaned of 'stickers' and other material prior to deployment; and
 - c) Dolphins: inclusion of pair trawling operations within the SPF Dolphin Mitigation Strategy.
6. Australian Sardine must not be retained within Western Australian or South Australian waters using the pair trawl method. A 100 tonne cumulative bycatch trigger for discards of Australian Sardine applies in waters off Western Australia. The same applies to waters off South Australia. This trigger limit applies for the duration of the fishing season (1 May – 30 April each year). If this trigger is reached in either the Western Australian or South Australian management zone (extending from the coastline to the 130 metre depth contour) the relevant zone will be closed to fishing for the duration of the fishing season, pending formal review of the catch by AFMA.

In making its decision, the Commission considered the potential risks posed by midwater pair trawling and how each of those risks would be mitigated under AFMA's management framework.

In relation to target species, the Commission recognised that Total Allowable Catches, set under the harvest strategy and subject to monitoring and compliance, mitigated risk to these species in the SPF.

In relation to protected species, the Commission noted:

- the potential for dolphin interactions when using the midwater pair trawling method. To mitigate the risk of unacceptable levels of dolphin interactions, the Commission made its approval of the method subject to the implementation of a dolphin mitigation strategy for the SPF which incorporates pair trawling
- the risk to seabirds of warp strikes would be mitigated through the use of proven seabird mitigation measures including no offal discharge to avoid attracting birds to the boat¹ and the use of 'tori lines' or 'baffles'.
- the risk of fur seal interactions will be reduced through the requirement to use a marine mammal excluder device
- the risk to Australian Sea Lions is mitigated by spatial management measures.

The Commission noted the Scientific Panel's advice that there is a low risk of localised depletion for SPF stocks due to the high mobility and rapid re-distribution of these species. Extensive dietary analyses and ecosystem modelling in Australian waters has shown that predator species are not highly dependent on SPF species and have a high capacity to switch prey. For these reasons, and the adoption of the revised harvest strategy which had been ecologically and economically tested, the Commission considered that fishing in the SPF would not negatively impact on recreational fishing, regardless of the method.

The Commission noted that the pair trawling method would be subject to a high level of monitoring, including through the use of electronic monitoring during the 18 month trial of the method.

The Commission considered comments received through the consultation process, including the public consultation period. One of the key concerns raised by stakeholders was that pair trawling had been banned in European waters. The Commission noted that the ban had been implemented for midwater pair trawling for sea bass in the south west territorial waters of the United Kingdom inside 12 nautical miles. The Commission understands that the level of cetacean bycatch in that fishery posed a threat to dolphin populations. Other stakeholder concerns were considered and are adequately addressed by the conditions.

¹ No offal discharge while fishing gear is in the water.