

NAFC STRATEGIC PLAN

1. INTRODUCTION

The Northern Australian Fisheries Committee (NAFC) is a government officials group representing the Western Australian, Northern Territory, Queensland and Commonwealth agencies responsible for the management of commercial fishing. NAFC meets on an annual basis to consider shared issues of fisheries management, research and compliance across Northern Australia. The most recent meeting of NAFC was held in Canberra on 7 December 2012.

The terms of reference for NAFC are to:

- facilitate the sustainable management of northern fish stocks;
- promote cohesive, efficient and cost effective management;
- promote, where appropriate, the development of an ecosystem-based approach to management and allow for adaptive management;
- ensure clarity and transparency in arrangements;
- promote user friendly management to reduce administration and compliance costs for fishers; and
- undertake regular reviews of the management arrangements in light of developments in fisheries, fisheries management, scientific data and ecosystem influences.

Inter-sessional work on priority tasks is undertaken by the Northern Australian Fisheries Managers (NAFM) group. This group operates by reference from NAFC and consists of fisheries managers and scientists from the abovementioned jurisdictions.

2. STRATEGIC PLAN

The NAFC Strategic Plan provides a vision of the success to be achieved in northern fisheries management by 2022. Underpinning this vision, NAFC has identified a series of shorter-term objectives and strategies for achieving these objectives, both for the current year and over the next five years.

In the short term, NAFC's priorities are the finalisation and implementation of a Harvest Strategy Framework for Red Snappers, the development of a more strategic approach to the management of shark, engagement in the development of Marine Bioregional Planning process and ongoing review of the Joint Authority arrangements. Over the medium to long term, NAFC plans to focus on broader priorities in fisheries management (e.g. the full application of harvest strategies), research (e.g. a strategic approach to improving shark stock assessments) and compliance (e.g. ensuring that compliance is adequately addressed in Harvest Strategies and MPAs).

The Strategic Plan does not commit governments to particular courses of action. However, it provides officers across jurisdictions with a common focus for the sustainable development of our northern fisheries. The Plan is a living document and is to be reviewed at the annual NAFC meeting.

3. POSSIBLE LANDSCAPE BY 2022

What will our fisheries be like by 2022? As fisheries managers, what are the key variables that we need to take into account in framing our Plans? Below is NAFC's attempt to predict key elements of the possible future landscape facing fisheries managers.

Ecosystem based Fisheries Management is implemented

By 2022, Ecosystem Based Fisheries Management (EBFM) will have been implemented for some time and we will have approximately 8-10 years of relevant data. We will be able to assess the efficiency of EBFM. Is it working well and achieving desired outcomes?

Representative areas of fisheries set aside for biodiversity conservation and to manage fishery risks

Continued conservation efforts in the north will set aside representative portions of State, Territory and Commonwealth fisheries. What will be the impacts to production/effort/catches/profits distribution? And what will be the remaining use of the fishing habitats/space?

Industry may be a niche provider of high quality wild caught products in a sea of aquaculture production

Industry may be a “niche provider of wild caught products in a sea of aquaculture” - aquaculture being a major supplier of seafood. Wild caught product prices may be very high- and unaffordable for many in the general community. Aquaculture could be a major industry in northern Australia? Niche opportunities may also expand in middle class Asian markets.

Fuel (diesel) and other input costs will be expensive and alternatives have been found

Fuel costs: Will these be even higher in the future? Will this lead to re-configuring of the fleet, the use of different gear (to minimize fuel consumption) or will different power sources lead to the emergence of completely different issues for fleets? For example: shorter/longer trips at sea, more processing at sea, more frozen fish to markets, sail vessels, floating platforms? Other costs such as freezer gas will also be more expensive seeing a change in how boats operate and store produce.

Management based on both ecological sustainability and maximising returns

Fisheries managers aim to manage fisheries in ways which both ensure the sustainability of the resource and assist industry to maximize profits.

Recreational fishing basis of a major industry

Recreational fishing will be a major industry (compared to commercial), with resource sharing a normal feature of resource management. Allocation of finfish stock to the Recreational sector will generate community benefit. Governments will have more input on where resources are allocated to achieve maximum community benefit and to boost regional economies.

Explicit resource sharing arrangements between user groups are in place

Arrangements will be in place for sharing fish resources between commercial, recreational and indigenous users. The catch by all user groups will need to be explicitly taken into account in managing the resource.

Enhanced regional fisheries co-operation

Australia works closely with its near neighbours to promote regional fisheries cooperation. Regular bilateral meetings are held to address issues such as: shared stocks management, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, and fisheries and aquaculture development. Australia also has a number of bilateral agreements or arrangements with neighbouring countries to ensure the sustainable use of shared resources.

Climate change as an issue – lots of questions

A CSIRO study released in October 2008 reports that the overall impact of climate change “will pose some very significant risks to the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture in Australia”. Australia will need to assess and monitor impacts from climate change and adapt current fishing practices to cope with climate variation.

Indigenous Development

There will be increased participation by indigenous Australians across all levels of fisheries including management, research (including incorporation of traditional knowledge) and the fishing industry. There will be increased recognition of ‘primacy’ right of customary fishing and its importance for community health and culture.

Social licence to operate

Community and stakeholder acceptance of commercial fisheries activities (i.e. “social licence”) will be improved through greater industry and government outreach, engagement and education of stakeholders and the general public regarding the benefits of wild harvest fisheries and reporting on the management of fisheries towards environmental and economic objectives.

Red tape reduction

Government agencies will have continued the current focus of simplifying and increasing the efficiency of management and administrative regulations and processes both internally and with respect to industry and other stakeholders. Reductions in red tape might include simplified legislation, simplified environmental approvals processes and reduced regulatory burden on recreational and commercial fishers.

4. WHAT ARE OUR SHORT TERM STRATEGIES?

In pursuit of the above objectives, the short term strategies that will be pursued by NAFC are set out below.

i) Management of the Shark Fishery

Strategy	Progress
NAFC will accord a high priority to the sustainable management of the northern shark stocks/fishery.	In progress – considered a high priority by NAFC and a standard agenda item to discuss management issues and developments.
NAFM to work to develop a complementary harvest strategy framework for managing northern shark stocks/fisheries.	[To be updated]
QLD and NT will identify any management and research to address identified risks on a priority basis.	QLD is working to finalise its current research priorities and will then discuss these with other states including the NT. NT has identified risks and a stakeholder based advisory group is currently developing a management framework to address priority research required and will share these with NAFC members once available.
QLD and NT will provide advice on the outcomes of the above to NAFM for consideration and advice on costings and time frames on relevant research.	[To be updated]
WA will engage with the Commonwealth on the future of the WANCSF and any consideration of a similar process for the WANCSF will depend on the outcomes of the JA’s decision on the future of the WANCSF.	WA is undertaking an independent science review of northern shark stocks, ahead of any further discussions with the Commonwealth about future management.

NAFC will adopt a more strategic approach to the management of northern shark fisheries (noting the actions identified in Shark Plan II)	WA - Updates will be provided as they become available. NT – will provide updates to development of management frameworks when available.
Improve shark stock assessments based around a more strategic approach to the management of northern shark fisheries	QLD is currently completing a stock assessment of QLD east coast shark stocks and will discuss these results in the context of GOC fisheries with the NT on completion.

ii) Harvest Strategy Framework for Red Snappers

Strategy	Progress
Finalise the development of a Harvest Strategy Framework for Red Snapper (Lujanid) species in the Australian jurisdiction	In progress – Led by NT in development of a single management framework in the Gulf of Carpentaria
Harvest Strategy framework for Red snappers to be adopted by NAFC members as soon as opportunities arise.	Updates provided regularly to NAFC and assistance provided where possible
Implementation of the Harvest strategy framework to be a standing agenda item at future NAFC meetings.	Ongoing

iii) Standardised mitigation measures for marine mammals and Threatened Endangered and protected Species (TEPs)

Strategy	Progress
Investigate current mitigation measures for marine mammal and TEP interactions across all Australian gillnet fisheries.	–Joint research proposal developed by Prof Steve Kenelly (2014/007: “Scoping mitigation measures for Threatened, Endangered and Protected (TEP) species interactions in gillnet fisheries in northern Australia”). Funding not yet secured. Subject to further consideration by NAFC in late 2014. QLD also has programs to monitor and mitigate TEPs interaction in all of its other fisheries. NT supports further research in this area and has teps interaction mitigation measures and appropriate reporting

	mechanisms in place for all NT fisheries
Consider an independent research project to formalise and publish information on TEP interactions and mitigation strategies.	Joint research proposal developed (2014/007: "Scoping mitigation measures for Threatened, Endangered and Protected (TEP) species interactions in gillnet fisheries in northern Australia"). Funding not yet secured. Subject to further consideration by NAFC in late 2014. QLD is currently determining research priorities including those for TEPS interactions.
Look into options for standardising management approaches where appropriate across gillnet fisheries in the short term and consider applying to other fishing methods in the future.	QLD will continue to discuss options for standard management approaches for multijurisdictional gill net fisheries.

iv) Governance and planning

Strategy	Progress
Develop/consider governance and institutional structures that balance jurisdictional needs and marine ecosystem requirements.	QLD is constantly reviewing its corporate governance and fisheries management governance arrangements in line with this objective.
Full engagement in developing MPAs and regional marine plans.	WA - Ongoing QLD DAFF is engaging as appropriate and as required in discussions around MPA's and opportunities for regional management. NT – Ongoing engagement as required
Engage as part of the Primary Industries Standing Committees Research, Development & Extension framework to identify research priorities and opportunities for collaboration.	WA – Ongoing QLD DAFF remains committed to this. NT - Ongoing
Build northern coastal surveillance and enforcement capacity (e.g. VMS and information sharing with other jurisdictions).	QLD – ongoing NT - Ongoing

5. WHAT ARE OUR MEDIUM TERM STRATEGIES?

Broad strategies that will be further developed and further refined over time are set out below.

i) Future Management

Strategy	Progress
Investigate and apply more consistent approaches to bycatch management strategies across all northern fisheries.	QLD - ongoing
Full application of Harvest Strategies	QLD is continually reviewing fisheries management governance arrangements NT is developing harvest strategy frameworks including operational decision rules for its key fisheries (as resources permit).
Strategies to minimise bycatch	QLD - Ongoing in all Qld fisheries
Support Commonwealth in engaging with neighbouring countries on matters of common interest, e.g. IUU fishing. Consider how State jurisdictions can support and engage with the Commonwealth.	Noticeable reduction in apprehensions for IUU fishing with a focus now on prevention and international engagement and relationship building.
Fisheries capacity building in indigenous communities	Ongoing

ii) Research

Strategy	Progress
Better understand the impacts of IUU fishing on northern fish stocks	[To be updated]
Work towards full and sustainable utilisation of the red snapper fishery	In progress - this is currently being led by NT in developing a single management framework for management of red snapper in the Gulf of Carpentaria
Develop ecosystem models for the northern Australia marine environment	QLD - Not at the top of QLD priorities

iii) Compliance

Strategy	Progress
Conduct fishery based compliance risk assessments and investigate options for sharing this information across jurisdictions	Risk assessments conducted within jurisdictions with the focus now on how to share this information and utilise available resources.

Ensure compliance is adequately addressed in development of harvest strategies, MPAs and in reducing discards & bycatch

QLD - Ongoing across a range of QLD government departments

NT - Ongoing