**Fisheries Management Paper 14**

AFMA’s Approach to Ecological Risk Management

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# Acronyms and abbreviations

For the purposes of this Fisheries Management Paper:

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| **Acronym or abbreviation** | **Meaning** |
| **AFMA** | Australian Fisheries Management Authority |
| **BP** | Commonwealth Fisheries Bycatch Policy and Guidelines 2018 |
| **EPBC Act** | *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* |
| **ERA** | Ecological Risk Assessment |
| **ERAEF** | Ecological Risk Assessment for the Effects of Fishing |
| **ERM** | Ecological Risk Management |
| **ESD** | Ecologically Sustainable Development |
| **FAA** | *Fisheries Administration Act 1991* |
| **FMA** | *Fisheries Management Act 1991* |
| **FMF** | Fisheries Management Framework |
| **HSP** | Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines 2018 |

# Background

## Purpose

This paper sets out the Australian Fisheries Management Authority’s (AFMA’s) policy for undertaking Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) and administering Ecological Risk Management (ERM) in pursuit of its fishery management objectives, particularly Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD).

## Need

AFMA is responsible for the efficient management and sustainable use of Commonwealth fisheries on behalf of the Australian community. Commonwealth legislation requires that AFMA pursues ESD and, as one part of this, ensures the sustainability of species, populations, and ecosystems with which its fisheries interact.

AFMA operates under a range of legislative instruments including the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991* (FAA), the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* (FMA) and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Their implementation is supported by fisheries policies and guidelines, principally:

* The Commonwealth Fisheries Bycatch Policy and Guidelines (BP)
* The Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines (HSP), and
* Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries 2007.

AFMA pursues ecological sustainability through the implementation of:

* ERM which provides for ongoing monitoring and management of risks to ecological sustainability, and
* A scientific risk assessment process (within ERM) referred to as the Ecological Risk Assessment for the Effects of Fishing (ERAEF) to identify and quantify these risks to ecological sustainability.

A ‘Guide to AFMA’s Ecological Risk Management’ (the ERM Guide) has been developed to support this goal. The effective identification and management of the risks posed by fishing to the environment is a central issue for AFMA. Implementation of the ERM Guide will ensure that AFMA is able to mitigate the potential risks of not adequately pursuing its legislative objectives, losing industry and public credibility, and reducing net economic returns to the community.

# Policy

## Objectives

The primary ecological sustainability objectives that AFMA pursues via ERM are:

* To ensure that fishing (in Commonwealth commercial fisheries) does not reduce any commercial or bycatch species populations (that is, discrete biological units, commonly referred to as stocks in the BP and HSP) to or below a level at which the risk of recruitment impairment is unacceptably high
* Where such fishing impacts have occurred to rebuild species populations to above that level to the extent fisheries management is able to do so
* To minimise fishing-related impacts on general bycatch and EPBC Act-listed species by ensuring the exploitation of fisheries resources is consistent with the principles of ESD
* To ensure broader habitat security for non-living ecological components
* In pursuing these objectives AFMA applies the precautionary principle in particular the need to have regard to the impact of fishing activities on non-target species and the long-term sustainability of the marine environment.

## Scope

AFMA’s ERM (including ERAEF) assesses and manages the impacts and risks posed by Commonwealth fisheries to the following ecological components:

* Commercial species, including key commercial and byproduct species.
* Bycatch species, including general bycatch and EPBC Act-listed species.
* Habitats.
* Communities.

## Out of scope

As AFMA only has authority to manage Commonwealth fisheries, this policy only applies to those fisheries and ecological impacts under its jurisdiction. However, with respect to jointly managed fisheries (e.g. Torres Strait fisheries), it does articulate AFMA’s preferred approach. Where applicable, AFMA will seek to apply this policy in negotiating and implementing joint management arrangements such as in Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs). With respect to other non-Commonwealth fisheries, where possible, AFMA will consider impacts by these other fisheries and develop joint management responses with the relevant agencies.

## ERM policy

In pursuing its legislative objectives, AFMA has developed the ERM Guide (based on the ERAEF – a scientific methodology developed in association with CSIRO to identify and quantify risks posed by fishing to ecological sustainability).

The ERM Guide has been written with the objectives of other Commonwealth policies in mind (specifically the BP and HSP), however, the ERM Guide may need to be updated to reflect changes to these policies in the future.

## Outputs from the ERM Policy

ERM is one component of AFMA’s broader Fisheries Management Framework. ERAs will be completed for all Commonwealth fisheries in line with the requirements of the ERM Guide with the results incorporated into a Bycatch Strategy for each Commonwealth managed fishery.

## Policy review

This policy will be reviewed every five years, or more frequently as required.

## Policy approval

This policy was approved by the AFMA Commission on [date].