

Commission meeting

The Commission convened for its 89th meeting in Fremantle, Western Australia on 05-06 July 2023.

National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority (NOPSEMA)

The Commission met with the CEO and senior representatives from NOPSEMA. The discussion was an opportunity to share perspectives about issues related to consultation between the offshore wind sector and the fishing industry. NOPSEMA representatives presented an overview of the process underpinning the planning, design and implementation of offshore marine projects; and drew the Commission's attention to the latest edition of The Regulator magazine as well as the June 2023 publication 'Offshore renewables and interactions with fisheries', both of which include references to consultative processes with fisheries stakeholders with the aim of providing further clarity around these.

South East Trawl Fishery closure update

The Commission noted that the new closures and associated gear changes had commenced in the fishery on 1 May 2023. The Commission noted with appreciation that there had been no cases of potential non-compliance with the closures since that time and acknowledged the efforts of both AFMA Management and the fishing industry.

Data, stock assessment and harvest strategy in the Southern and Eastern Shark and Scalefish Fishery (SESSF)

The Commission noted significant concerns from the SESSF Resource Assessment Group (SESSFRAG) around the ongoing validity of the primary inputs to many SESSF stock assessments and the sustainability and affordability of the existing harvest strategy framework. The Commission recognised the validity of those concerns and noted that there are a number of key actions that AFMA has taken over the past three years to address them, including seeking SESSFRAG advice on solutions as early as 2020.

Separately, the Commission also considered proposals from AFMA Management to reprioritise and rationalise stock assessments in the SESSF. The work sets a foundation on which AFMA can bring together outcomes from several ongoing research projects relating to the SESSF and the Commission noted how the work may tie in with broader objectives such as the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy Review and Climate Change Adaptation. The purpose of this work was to:

- Reduce the annual expenditure on routine data analysis and stock assessments (which may be of decreasing value) to allow investment in more accurate and enduring indices of abundance.
- Reduce workload and demand on RAGs to facilitate consideration of strategic research and assessment opportunities.
- Pave the way for multi-species harvest strategy approaches that are adaptable to the size and risk of the fisheries.
- Better cater for environmental change and climate impacts on stocks and the fishery.

The Commission approved a revised schedule of key stock assessments for 2024 and 2025, which will free up approximately \$ 500,000 over two years to be invested in new methods and approaches to assessment as described above.

The Commission also supported options presented by AFMA Management to further amend the forward schedule of assessments from 2026 onwards to continue this work and allow for the implementation of a multi-species harvest strategy that will build on the results of the current FRDC project.

AFMA Chairman's Summary – 89th meeting

The Commission agreed to write to SESSFRAG, CSIRO, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the South East Trawl Fishery Industry Association to explain these decisions and to seek advice and participation in their further development, including through a series of workshops in late 2023 and early 2024.

Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF)

The Commission considered a recommendation from the Northern Prawn Fisheries Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC) to reduce effort in the tiger prawn season by 10-20% through a reduction in season length. The recommendation from NORMAC, supported by the Northern Prawn Fishery Industry (NPF), was based on ongoing concerns about stock status compared to the maximum economic yield (MEY) target reference point.

The Commission noted that the recommendation is similar to the 2022 arrangements and supported NORMAC and NPF continuing current work to evaluate the drivers of stock concerns in the bioeconomic model. In the meantime, the Commission agreed to give effect to the reduction in TAE by closing the tiger prawn season on 10 November 2023. The Commission noted that industry continued to face difficult economic conditions and took this into account when supporting NORMAC's recommendations.

The Commission also considered proposed amendments to the NPF Management Plan, including removing the requirement for a minimum number of gear Statutory Fishing Rights (SFRs) to be held on each boat SFR. While noting that this amendment had been supported by the Commission in 2016 and again in 2022, the Commission discussed the minimum holding requirement in the context of the decisions in 2022 and 2023 to reduce the tiger prawn season length and the risks of latent effort in the fishery.

Noting that NORMAC and NPF will be considering issues related to the bioeconomic model for the fishery to inform future TAE setting, the Commission approved the Management Plan amendment 'in principle' but agreed to consider it further after additional consultation with NPF.

Economics Working Group (EWG)

The Commission noted the successful convening of a workshop of the previous members of the EWG to consider the MAC and RAG review, review of the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy and a method for estimating Net Economic Returns in fisheries with data confidentiality issues.

The Commission agreed to reconstitute the EWG as a standing committee to convene on an 'as needs' basis to consider economic issues that are either non-fishery specific or cross-fishery. The Commission agreed that the AFMA CEO will write to former EWG members inviting them to be reappointed on this basis.

Stakeholder Engagement

The Commission met with Western Australian-based industry stakeholders and discussed a range of issues relevant to Commonwealth fisheries, including competition for the marine space ("spatial squeeze"); cumulative impacts on fisheries; regulatory changes; availability of crew and vessel capacity; Australia's role and position in international fisheries; and the security of Statutory Fishing Rights. While many of the issues discussed were beyond AFMA's remit, Commissioners expressed deep appreciation to participants for sharing their perspective and insight. The Commission agreed that continuing to promote and support sustainable Commonwealth fisheries was essential to achieving AFMA's economic objective.

The Commission also considered and discussed the written industry update reports from NPF, the Scallop Fishermen's Association of Tasmania Inc., the Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association, Tuna Australia and the Great Australian Bight Industry Association. The Commission again emphasised appreciation and the value it places on these regular reports from industry associations.

Review of AFMA Consultative Structures (MACs and RAGs)

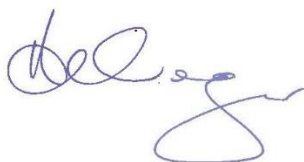
The Commission considered the final draft report of the MAC and RAG review and discussed it with the review team. The Commission generally agreed that the findings of the review reflected positively on the current consultative and advisory processes and functions, while also providing suggestions for improvement.

The Commission directed AFMA Management to prepare a short-term action plan to address the immediate priority improvements (focused on improved communications, managing conflicts of interest and administration), while a number of longer-term proposals are considered further.

The Commission extends its thanks and appreciation to all those who gave their time to participate in the review.

Next meeting of the AFMA Commission

The Commission agreed to hold the next meeting (13-14 September) in Port Lincoln, South Australia, which provides an opportunity to engage with stakeholders in the Great Australian Bight Trawl and Southern Bluefin Tuna Fisheries.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Kroger', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Helen Kroger

Chairman