



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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1 August 2025

The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP
Treasurer of Australia

Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher
Minister for Finance
Minister for the Public Service
Minister for Women

Dear Treasurer Chalmers and Minister Gallagher

Thank you for your letter of 4 July 2025 inviting the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) to contribute to the government's productivity agenda through regulatory reform. We welcome the opportunity to identify further actions AFMA can undertake to enhance the productivity of the Commonwealth commercial fishing industry such as through operational efficiencies, reducing regulatory duplication, and strengthening collaborative approaches. This will ensure AFMA remains responsive, effective, and well-positioned to support a productive and sustainable fisheries sector.

Recent Fisheries Regulatory Achievements

AFMA's long-standing partnership approach with industry has embedded a regulatory culture that actively pursues more efficient and innovative ways of conducting its business. This includes leveraging emerging technologies, reviewing our key management tools, contributing to policy reform, fostering cross-jurisdictional collaboration, and embracing co-management with industry. The AFMA Commission regularly reviews its key decisions at a macro level through the lens of regulatory burden, cost, and operational efficiency for the fishing industry to identify overall trends. Over the past six years there has been a persistent trend of reduced burden/cost and increases in operational efficiency.

For example, in 2024, AFMA initiated a major change in the monitoring and assessment arrangements in the Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery – Australia's largest Commonwealth-managed source of domestic seafood. Working with industry and scientists, we moved from a 'traditional', resource-intensive assessment cycle to a more adaptive approach, centred on a risk-based framework. This change reduced costs and unlocked capacity for strategic research. Importantly, it is supporting the transition to a more responsive and resilient harvest strategy that is better aligned to the evolving pressures of climate change, market dynamics, and stakeholder expectations.



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

AFMA is leveraging existing government investment in expanding our electronic monitoring program to change the way we achieve regulatory objectives. For example, working with industry, we have amended our regulations to allow vessels with on-board cameras to access some previously closed fishing grounds, thereby increasing revenue to businesses while maintaining assurance that protected species are not caught. We have also partnered with CSIRO to harness artificial intelligence to collect at-sea data, which will reduce reliance on human observers and deliver significant cost savings to industry.

Enabling environment for further regulatory improvement and productivity support

AFMA's regulatory functions interact heavily with several other agencies, including The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). Our ability to contribute to the productivity and reform agenda will be substantially facilitated – or limited – by policy and process settings overseen by those agencies.

The operational reality of most Commonwealth fisheries is characterised by smaller fleets, lower catch volumes, and more limited spatial access. Feedback from our peak industry body is that most of the increase in regulatory burden is non-AFMA related. AFMA sees two immediate opportunities in this that, if implemented, would magnify the effectiveness of the 'near-term regulatory reform' initiatives set out below.

First, AFMA sees significant opportunity for regulatory improvement through the current review of the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines* being led by DAFF. Updating the policy to better align with contemporary fishery dynamics and non-fisheries impacts in the marine environment would help stabilise industry's operating environment and enhance business planning as AFMA could further improve more efficient, risk-based management.

Secondly, AFMA considers that relatively minor changes to current approval processes under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) offer an avenue to reduce regulatory duplication and complexity, enabling resources to be reallocated to more productive areas. Specifically, detailed fishery-specific assessments and Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) approvals are currently undertaken by DCCEEW every three years for each of 20 fisheries. Given AFMA fisheries are relatively stable, managed under approved harvest strategies with supporting science, the timeframe for re-assessment could be extended from three years to five or seven years. Further, the number and nature of conditions arising from WTO assessments could be streamlined for those fisheries that have undergone rigorous, independent third-party assessments, such as Marine Stewardship Council.

These two initiatives alone would significantly reduce the administrative burden and cost placed on AFMA and duplication across Commonwealth agencies. Single touch regulation would mean that levies recovered from industry that AFMA currently expends on meeting WTO conditions and re-approval processes would be available to focus on further regulatory improvement programs, providing a more stable regulatory environment, allowing fishers to make better investment decisions to promote productivity and resilience.



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Near-term Regulatory Reforms

In consultation with our peak stakeholder body, AFMA has identified key initiatives to improve regulation and/or support productivity, noting that most have co-dependencies with other agencies, but we believe could be pursued within our existing budget and without compromising sustainability, which is key to the long-term viability of the fishing industry:

1. Digital and data capability – improving access to fisheries data by industry representative bodies and improving our internal systems and processes to create efficiencies and improve confidence in the information. This includes ongoing investment into artificial intelligence tools to reduce the cost of key monitoring programs to the fishing industry.
2. Recalibrating regulation to risk – including reviewing key fisheries management settings (gear restrictions, total allowable catches and spatial closures) against the reduced fishing footprint and the increased environmental protection provided through marine parks and potentially other restricted access areas such as offshore energy production.
3. Future-proofing science – reducing routine and low-risk species assessments to free up resources for more contemporary methods such as genetic techniques and broader ecosystem modelling, as well as integrating new data sets collected by other users of the marine environment.
4. Reducing jurisdictional overlap – reduce or remove the duplication that exists by virtue of the Commonwealth and each State/Territory having fisheries management responsibilities. This includes reviewing opportunities to harmonise management arrangements in key areas such as Bass Strait, allowing industry to undertake multi-jurisdiction fishing trips under a single set of regulations, and promoting opportunities for AFMA to provide services to other agencies to reduce cost and increase the consistency of regulation.
5. Work with DCCEEW on extension of EPBC Act approval timeframes and streamlining of WTO conditions for AFMA fisheries (as above).
6. Continue to pursue critical changes to the Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines through the ongoing review (as above).

While many of these initiatives would result in small bespoke improvements, their collective impact would be significant on both reducing management costs and increasing revenue to individual fishing businesses. Together, this should create conditions to facilitate investment, ultimately driving productivity and economic growth across the fisheries sector.

More ambitious Regulatory Reforms

Longer-term opportunities also exist, but have greater reliance on increased budget, legislative reform, or actions by others. These include:

1. More significant regulatory reforms – such as the simplification of licensing types and removing specificity around fishing gear would lead to much greater operational certainty and flexibility, but involves short-term disruption and litigation risks.



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

2. More significant jurisdictional reforms – single-jurisdiction management for each fishery/stock, but this is only possible with agreement of individual States and the Northern Territory.
3. Exploring further opportunities to use co-management agreements to delegate day-to-day management tasks and functions to key stakeholders (industry representative bodies).
4. Explore with DCCEEW further opportunities to realise single touch regulation by recognising AFMA's management and regulatory framework under EPBC Act approval processes.

The flow-on effects would be enhanced operational capability, improved service delivery, and greater value for both government and industry. Direct industry benefits would lie in operational certainty, reduced transaction cost with government and reduced regulatory burden.

AFMA is committed to contributing proactively and concretely to the government's call for productivity support and regulatory reform. We look forward to taking the initiatives described above forward with the Honourable Julie Collins MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and in partnership with other Commonwealth agencies and our stakeholders.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wez Norris'.

Wez Norris
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Fisheries Management Authority

CC: The Hon Julie Collins MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry