Public call for research priorities for AFMA funding in 2026–27
Summary of Scopes

Fishery	Research priority scope
Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF)	Daily Egg Production Method Survey (DEPM) (Redbait East)
Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery (MITF)	Stock assessment and management advice for the MITF
Eastern Tuna Billfish Fishery (ETBF) / Western Tuna Billfish Fishery (WTBF)	Scientific advice for Tropical Tuna and Billfish fisheries
Southern Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery (SESSF)	Ageing of SESSF quota species for three years (ending 30 June 2029).
	Stock assessments and data services for SESSF species for three years (ending 30 June 2029)
	Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) for selected SESSF sectors / gear types
	Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) testing of a novel Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR) based approach to determine stock status and set the bycatch Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for school shark

PRIORITY SCOPES

Project title	Daily Egg Production Method (DEPM) survey (Redbait East)
Project need	Total Allowable Catches (TACs) are set for seven stocks in the Small Pelagic Fishery. TACs are directly informed by biomass estimates derived from Daily Egg Production Method (DEPM) surveys that are undertaken at five-year intervals or longer. In accordance with the SPF Harvest Strategy, the Redbait East stock will drop to Tier 2 in 2026–27, which results in a reduction to the Total Allowable Catch for Redbait East. To return the stock to Tier 1 in 2027–28, a DEPM survey needs to be undertaken in 2026–27. Further, stocks that are of commercial value or those that have not been surveyed for more than five years are prioritised in the SPF.
Desired outcomes	The objective of the DEPM survey is to estimate the spawning biomass of the Redbait East stock to underpin the determination of Recommended Biological Catches (RBC) using the agreed SPF Harvest Strategy.
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Project title	**Stock assessment and management advice for the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery**
Project need	The project will continue the work of previous projects in understanding the status and dynamics of the Patagonian Toothfish population surrounding Macquarie Island. The continuing assessment of the status of the population has been identified as an essential priority research area in the sub-Antarctic fisheries research plan. This project will also build on the previous project focused on Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and alternative management frameworks (to be delivered in the first half of 2026) by providing Total Allowable Catch (TAC) advice based on the approach agreed or the results / outcomes of that project. This proposal seeks funding to build upon the existing stock assessment and management strategy framework and continue the stock assessment cycle for a further two years.
Desired outcomes	1. To provide an updated assessment of the stock status of Patagonian Toothfish at Macquarie Island to the Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group (SARAG) in the next scheduled assessment year (2027, currently on biennial basis). 2. To provide the SARAG with updated TAC recommendations, via application of the management procedure or Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic and Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) harvest control rule (whichever is current following consideration of research results in early 2026). 3. To continue monitoring the stock through the long-running mark-recapture program.
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Project title	Scientific advice for Tropical Tuna and Billfish fisheries
Project need	This is a long-standing research priority that produces essential data analyses that informs Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group (TTRAG) and Tropical Tuna Management Advisory Committee (TTMAC) advice and supports the management of the ETBF and WTBF.
Desired outcomes	1. In line with the ETBF multi-season Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) setting procedure for tropical tunas, the WTBF multi-season TACC setting procedure, and harvest strategies for broadbill swordfish and striped marlin in the ETBF, provide relevant data analysis and advice to support the AFMA Commission decision on the TACC of quota species in the ETBF and WTBF. a. The following indicator reports are to be provided to AFMA and TTRAG: i. A summary of catch and effort information (since 1998) for Australian longline fishing operations in the ETBF and the WTBF ii. A summary of the size distributions for tuna and billfish (since 1998) in the ETBF and WTBF, using data collected through the Size Monitoring Project. iii. Standardised CPUE indices for quota species in the ETBF (since 1998) iv. Annual catch by fleet and fishing method in the southwest Pacific (summarising the proportion of catch taken by the ETBF relative to total catch in the southwest Pacific Ocean) and in the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) Convention Area (summarising the proportion of catch taken by the WTBF relative to total catch in the IOTC Area) v. Annual summary of fishery indicators, including stock status, for ETBF and WTBF quota species. b. In consultation with TTRAG, ongoing CPUE standardisation method development is to be undertaken and reported to AFMA. 2. Prepare the necessary data and apply harvest strategies used to recommend TACCs for broadbill swordfish and striped marlin in the ETBF. Provide a report to AFMA and TTRAG detailing this work and outcomes. 3. Provide data and advice to support Australia's engagement at the relevant scientific meetings on the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and Western Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) in line with priorities agreed with AFMA, and provide feedback to AFMA and, as required to TTRAG and TTMAC. 4. Update the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) of harvest strategy options for striped marlin in the ETBF.
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Project title	Ageing of SESSF quota species for three years (ending 30 June 2029)
Project need	Age data are a critical component of Tier 1 assessments for a range of SESSF stocks. These include Bight Redfish, Blue Grenadier, Deepwater Flathead, Flathead, Gummy Shark, eastern zone Orange Roughy, Pink Ling, School Shark, School Whiting and Silver Warehou. Age data is also required for use in data-limited assessments of other species / stocks including the Orange Rough stocks in the Cascade, Great Australia Bight, and western zones and Silver Trevally.
Desired outcomes	Age estimates for SESSF stocks (described in the Project Need) to support Tier 1 and data-limited assessments in the 2027, 2028 and 2029 calendar years.
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Project title	**Stock assessments and data services for SESSF species for three years (ending 30 June 2029)**
Project need	AFMA Management provides recommendations to the AFMA Commission regarding Total Allowable Catches (TACs) for quota species in the SESSF based on the outcomes of stock assessments. The key outputs are estimates of biomass (or a proxy) and Recommended Biological Catches (RBCs). Stock assessments and the provision of data services to support this work are critical to the effective management of the SESSF stocks.
Desired outcomes	During the period of 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2029 deliver: • 9 x Tier 1 stock assessments • 1 x Tier 1 update (School Whiting) • 6 x Dynamic Tier 4 assessments • 1 x conventional Tier 4 assessment • CPUE standardisations and data summaries in 2026 and 2028 • Data processing for 2028 only • Contingency costings for potential assessments of up to two trigger species. **Different vendors are encouraged to apply for components of this work.**
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Project title	Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) for selected SESSF sectors/gears
Project need	AFMA's approach to Ecological risk management strategies (revised September 2024) recommends that updates to ERAs for Commonwealth fisheries/sectors are considered by Resource Assessment Groups (RAGs) and Management Advisory Committees (MACs) on a five-year cycle. AFMA has developed an indicative schedule of re-assessment for ERAs on Commonwealth fisheries/sectors and assessments for several sectors within the SESSF are scheduled for 2026–27.
Desired outcomes	Pending deliberations by relevant RAGs and MACs, undertake up to five ERAs on: • Commonwealth Trawl Sector (CTS) – otter trawl • CTS - Danish seine • Gillnet Hook and Trap (GHaT) – shark/scalefish manual longline • GHaT – shark/scalefish auto longline • GHaT – shark gillnet
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Project title	**MSE testing of a novel SPR-based approach to determine stock status and set the bycatch TAC for School Shark**
Project need	Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) Project No. 2022-006 developed Harvest Control Rules (HCRs) based on the Spawning Potential Ratio (SPR) – a widely accepted biological metric for defining target and limit reference points. These SPR-based HCRs are compatible with Close Kin Mark Recapture (CKMR) assessments and do not rely on B_0 (Bessel-Browne et al., 2025). SPR-based approaches have also been successfully applied to a range of species with life history traits similar to School Shark. To further address stakeholder concerns about applying HCRs without reducing recommended catches at low population sizes, the FRDC Project introduced a novel method for estimating $B_{unfished}$, the theoretical biomass the population could attain under current productivity conditions in the absence of fishing. This metric can be used instead of B_0 to develop biological reference points and is essential for aligning HCRs with the requirements of the Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy. This novel approach will investigate SPR-based HCRs using CKMR assessment outputs. While Project No. 2022-006 successfully developed generic CKMR-compatible HCRs and a method for estimating $B_{unfished}$, these tools have not yet undergone Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) testing to determine an appropriate target SPR specific to School Shark. Given the that applying SPR-based HCR to CKMR assessment outputs is a novel approach, conducting this evaluation is a critical next step to ensure the rigor of the approach and ultimately, the long-term sustainability of the stock.
Desired outcomes	Develop MSE tested SPR-based reference points and a HCR for School Shark to replace outdated B_0-based benchmarks using the outputs from the CKMR assessment. Evaluate appropriate stock recruitment relationships for School Shark that can be used to determine the stock status given current productivity. Establish a credible and defensible basis for setting a TAC. Provide the necessary information to AFMA to support the update of the School Shark Rebuilding Plan, including stock status relative to reference points.
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