

**Australian Government****Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

REF: MS25-000296

8 September 2025

The Hon Julie Collins MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Minister.Collins@aff.gov.au

Dear Minister Collins

Thank you for your letter of 2 September 2025 outlining your expectations for how the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) will contribute to the Government's priorities and regulatory reform agenda in the management of Commonwealth fisheries. This Regulator Statement of Intent (SOI) outlines how I will respond to those expectations as the Accountable Authority for AFMA. I will ensure that this SOI is available on the AFMA website alongside your Statement of Expectations (SOE), and the letter from the Treasurer and Finance Minister of 4 July 2025, and my letter of response of 1 August 2025.

I have consulted the AFMA Commission and can assure you of AFMA's commitment to meeting your expectations in a manner consistent with our broader regulatory responsibilities as described in our legislation, as well as our governance and reporting.

Our purpose, strategic direction and delivery of statutory objectives

As the Australian Government regulator tasked with managing Australia's Commonwealth fisheries, our purpose is to pursue the ecologically sustainable development of Commonwealth fisheries for the benefit of the Australian community.

We aim to deliver ecologically sustainable and economically efficient Commonwealth fisheries, through understanding and monitoring Australia's marine living resources and regulating and monitoring commercial fishing, including domestic licensing and deterrence of illegal fishing.

In keeping with your expectations, AFMA will actively pursue our purpose and strategic direction through a lens of supporting productivity and, where possible, minimising undue regulatory burden.

Fisheries performance is being challenged by a combination of factors, some of which are beyond the control of the fishing industry and AFMA as the regulator. There are significant operating pressures on the commercial fishing industry and AFMA's costs have seen a substantial increase. This has created dual problems of affordability concerns for regulated entities and limited resources for investment in innovation, including that required to meet such challenges as contemporising fisheries management to climate change impacts and complying with cybersecurity requirements to protect fisheries data and systems. I intend to work with you and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) through the Portfolio Charging Review to ensure AFMA is appropriately resourced to meet the challenges outlined in your SOE.



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Statement of Intent

- AFMA's regulatory obligations are delivered in accordance with the principles of best practice regulation as outlined in *Resource Management Guide 128 – Regulator Performance* (RMG 128) as contextualised below. This includes responding to independent reviews in a way that addresses underlying issues and improves effectiveness and efficiency.
- AFMA is committed to fulfilling its regulatory functions in a way that upholds the sustainability of Commonwealth fisheries and the environment while balancing the need to facilitate an efficient fishing industry that is not unduly prevented from increasing productivity through unnecessary or inflexible regulation. To achieve this, we will respond proactively to the call in your SOE to rapidly identify opportunities to support productivity, including through regulatory rationalisation, technology uptake and red-tape reduction.
- AFMA is committed to ensuring its regulatory processes remain adaptive, effective and efficient. Where appropriate, AFMA considers improvements to processes and implements alternative methods of ensuring compliance (such as education or information campaigns) to reduce the regulatory burden and costs to stakeholders.
- AFMA will continue working with other Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) agencies to more fully integrate Torres Strait Traditional Inhabitant knowledge and advice into advisory and decision-making processes, including to guide AFMA's regulatory responses across PZJA fisheries.
- AFMA is committed to engaging meaningfully with the Commonwealth Fisheries Association as well as the relevant State and Northern Territory fisheries agencies to achieve AFMA's objectives and deliver outcomes for the Commonwealth fishing industry.
- AFMA operates with transparency and accountability. The AFMA Commission remains committed to ensuring that its work is based on full consideration of advice received through AFMA Management and our Resource Assessment Groups and Management Advisory Committees, and that its decisions are explained to relevant stakeholders.
- AFMA will ensure it conducts its operations and regulates in a manner that is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances impacting the sector.

Regulator Best Practice Principles

AFMA remains committed to regulatory best practice in accordance with RMG 128. Key activities relevant to each best practice principle are highlighted below. These are built into our Corporate and Annual Operational Plan and will be reported against in our Annual Report.

Continuous improvement and building trust

Our primary area of focus for improvement in the immediate future is completing our data transformation program, which has involved major digital and data investments given a significant technology debt and infrastructure cybersecurity exposure that AFMA had accrued over time. Successful completion of these complex information technology uplifts and data transformation are essential to safeguard and support AFMA's regulatory performance including through greater confidence, accessibility and use by third parties of AFMA's considerable data holdings.



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A further program of work underway is the upgrade and expansion of our electronic monitoring program. This program will provide greater assurance in the accuracy of data provided by fishers, detection and reporting of protected species interactions, offer cost efficiencies in some fisheries and allow for considered regulatory flexibility in others. This work includes exploration of the potential for artificial intelligence to streamline – and reduce the associated costs of – current data collection mechanisms.

At the same time, we are implementing a continuous review of our regulatory process, including how we monitor and enforce fisheries and how we explicitly account for the current and projected impacts of climate change and non-fisheries competition for the marine estate into our decision making.

Lastly, we remain committed to ensuring that our corporate and business systems and functions meet government standards for performance and reporting to provide public confidence in our deployment of public resources.

Risk based and data driven

The impact of climate change is now the largest area of risk for many Commonwealth fisheries. Observation and modelling show substantial effects on the productivity, distribution and resilience of many Commonwealth commercial species, mainly with negative outcomes. AFMA will continue working collaboratively with DAFF and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water on the existing review of the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy and Bycatch Policy. While AFMA will continue to pursue its legislative objectives, including ensuring the long-term sustainability of harvested fish stocks, our focus will also be on:

- Seeking policy recognition that non-fisheries changes on some fish stocks are equal to, or greater than, fisheries impacts. This means that fisheries management actions may have limited impact on preventing decline or effecting recovery in some circumstances while having significant, negative impacts on industry's productivity.
- Ensuring that the reduced risk posed by smaller fleets, strengthened monitoring and reduced footprints is adequately recognised and accounted for in whole-of-government policy settings.

In that regard, I welcome the commitment in your SOE to ensuring that policy and legislation governing AFMA remain effective and fit for purpose.

Collaboration and engagement

Many Australian fisheries and fisheries agencies are facing similar pressures such as rising management costs, declining fleets and fishery dependent data and the changing environment. AFMA will work directly with state and territory fisheries agencies to develop more formal and mutually-beneficial cooperation arrangements that will increase our collective ability to address these issues, including leading efforts to reduce duplication of common functions between jurisdictions.

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AFMA will also remain a committed partner with Maritime Border Command in addressing the ongoing issue of illegal foreign fishing and will deploy our resources (new and existing) to add maximum value to the whole of government effort.

We will continue to seek avenues to improve the quality of our engagement with the Commonwealth Fisheries Association, as well as with other representative bodies. Relatedly, AFMA will continue its efforts to expand our formal co-management agreements with stakeholders, primarily industry associations, which have proven to be a successful avenue to increase meaningful collaboration, improve policy and regulatory outcomes and, in some cases, reduce management costs.

AFMA will engage your office and ensure that progress against meeting your expectations is discussed when the Commission Chair and I meet with you.

Strategic Outlook

AFMA is actively reviewing the strategic outlook for Commonwealth fisheries to ensure that our posture remains fit-for-purpose. Noting many of the challenges outlined above, this includes continually considering opportunities for cost reduction and efficiency but also identifying opportunities for AFMA to expand our role such as, where appropriate, to consider additional regulatory remit or consider greater service delivery to other fisheries agencies. I look forward to working with you on the outcomes of that process.

Yours sincerely

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

Wez Norris
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Fisheries Management Authority