



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

AFMA position statement: How AFMA considers the social aspects of the ecologically sustainable development principles in the management of Commonwealth Fisheries (March 2019)

Introduction

Under legislation¹, AFMA is required to pursue managing Commonwealth fisheries in a manner consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development (ESD). These principles arose from the [National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development](#) which was endorsed by all Australian jurisdictions in 1992. It defines the goal of ESD as: 'development that improves the total quality of life, both now and in the future, in a way that maintains the ecological processes on which life depends.'

The principles of ESD in AFMA's legislation incorporate three pillars - ecological, economic and social. AFMA has addressed these pillars in that order as this is regarded by government, through its policy settings, as the best way to maximise the benefits to all three. AFMA's approach has strongly focussed on ecological sustainability and having robust frameworks in place such as total allowable catches, individual transferable quotas, harvest strategies and ecological risk assessments. Over recent years, AFMA has also focussed more on its economic objective, particularly maximising net economic returns and maximum economic yield targets, and is developing improved economic performance measures and collecting more economic data. With these two areas progressing well, AFMA is now turning its attention to the social aspects referred to in the principles of ESD.

AFMA is carefully considering how it incorporates the social aspects of ESD into its decision making and has developed this position statement to assist stakeholder understanding.

This statement reflects current thinking on how AFMA incorporates the social aspects of ESD into fisheries management, and also brings in consideration of recreational and Indigenous interests. The statement presents AFMA's approach to the social aspects of ESD under four themes (see below).

A list of actions to contribute to the themes in the statement is at Attachment A. These actions will be monitored and reported on. AFMA expects the statement, themes and actions to evolve over time to reflect changing stakeholder and government expectations along with emerging market and consumer requirements.

Social components of AFMA's ESD objective

The ESD principles in AFMA's legislation² that relate to social aspects in particular are:

"decision making processes should effectively integrate both long-term and short-term economic, environmental, social and equity considerations;" and

"the principle of intergenerational equity – that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations."

¹ Under the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991* and the *Fisheries Management Act 1991*, AFMA must pursue the objective of "ensuring that the exploitation of fishery resources and the carrying on of any related activities are conducted in a manner consistent with the principles of ecologically sustainable development" (FMA S3(1)(b); FAA S6(1)(b)).

² A new legislative objective has recently been added that requires AFMA to take account of the interests of commercial, recreational and Indigenous fishers in its decision making. Accountability to these stakeholders, as well as the broader community, is consistent with AFMA pursuing the social aspects of the ESD principles.

Themes

This position statement draws upon four themes to demonstrate how AFMA contributes to the social aspects of ESD and is embedding the above principles into our fisheries management.

Theme 1: AFMA manages Commonwealth fisheries resources for the benefit of all Australians both now and into the future.

Sustainable fisheries provide a secure supply of seafood now and into the future. Australian fisheries management is recognised as amongst the most effective in the world^{3,4}. AFMA has fishery management systems in place to help ensure long-term ecological sustainability of both commercial species and the broader marine environment. These include [AFMA's ecological risk management framework](#), AFMA's [bycatch strategies](#) developed to be consistent with the *Commonwealth Fisheries Bycatch Policy* and, [harvest strategies](#) developed under the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy*. AFMA aims to continually improve these processes and our ability to maintain healthy marine ecosystems. Apart from access to seafood, this supports a range of community benefits including recreational fishing and Indigenous cultural fishing to tourism, amenity and community confidence that fisheries are sustainable.

Understanding and adapting to the impacts of environmental changes (including climate change) on fisheries and marine habitats and their cumulative effects provide a further challenge for AFMA in better ensuring benefits from our fisheries are there for future generations.

AFMA also seeks to maximise the net economic returns to the Australian community from the management of Commonwealth fisheries. Maximising economic returns supports a profitable harvesting sector along with flow-on benefits to the community such as employment, economic contributions to other business activities and export contributions to Australia's terms of trade.

Consistent with Offshore Constitutional Settlement (OCS) arrangements, AFMA does not manage the recreational and Indigenous fishing sectors in Commonwealth waters managed under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991*. However AFMA takes into account recreational and Indigenous interests when making fishery management decisions for Commonwealth commercial fisheries.

Theme 2: AFMA takes into account the interests of commercial, recreational and Indigenous fishers and other relevant stakeholders in our evidence-based decision-making. We work in partnership with our stakeholders and encourage them to share responsibility for fisheries management where appropriate.

AFMA has a partnership approach with stakeholders. Key engagement forums include management advisory committees (MACs) and resource assessment groups (RAGs), which provide advice and recommendations to the AFMA Commission on the management of Commonwealth fisheries. Members of these committees and

³ The report "A comparative assessment of biodiversity, fisheries, and aquaculture in 53 countries' Exclusive Economic Zone" ranked Australian fisheries management 2nd of the 53 countries for Sustainability First.
<https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/facultyresearchandpublications/52383/items/1.0074742>

⁴ The scientific journal article "Strong fisheries management and governance positively impact ecosystem status" assessed the ecosystem status of 27 fisheries from around the world relative to two key governance metrics: management effectiveness and governance quality. Australia's Southern and Eastern Scalefish and Shark Fishery was ranked in the top three ecosystems with the best performing scores.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/faf.12184>

groups provide a range of expertise and are drawn from scientists, economists, commercial fishers, recreational fishers, conservation groups, state and territory governments, and AFMA fishery managers. Following recent changes to AFMA legislation, AFMA will be strengthening recreational and Indigenous fishers' membership on relevant MACs and RAGs, participating in capacity building, and consulting widely about how to better engage with recreational and Indigenous fishers.

As well as MACs and RAGs, AFMA engages stakeholders through expert working groups, public consultations, public meetings, port visits, and meetings with industry associations, environmental groups and recreational fishers. Stakeholder feedback is taken into consideration in the Commission's decision-making process.

Increasingly, AFMA is providing additional [website information](#), [news stories](#) and [social media](#) on the impacts of its operations with opportunities for stakeholders to comment and contribute their views.

AFMA has developed co-management arrangements in several fisheries to promote more cost-effective management, marine stewardship and use of industry knowledge and expertise. We will continue to investigate opportunities to facilitate co-management where appropriate including encouraging voluntary compliance by operators rather than having to take enforcement action against conscious non-compliance.

Theme 3: AFMA respects the values, culture and diversity of stakeholders.

AFMA is aware that there are a range of views about fisheries management amongst stakeholders. While not all expectations can be met, we actively engage with a diverse range of stakeholders through a broad range of channels and forums, including public meetings, social media and advisory groups. In addition, regular formal [stakeholder surveys](#) provide feedback on AFMA's performance and identify areas for improvement⁵.

In dealing with a diversity of values and expectations, AFMA is committed to maintaining stakeholder trust. Our culture is founded on engaging appropriately with stakeholders, delivering impartial and responsive management, ensuring our advice is accurate and timely, and that our decisions are made with integrity. [AFMA's Client Service Charter](#) is our public commitment to delivering against these values.

Theme 4: AFMA pursues transparency and accountability to the Australian community in managing fisheries.

Documenting and making information available about AFMA's fishery management processes, decisions and performance enable stakeholders and the broader community to better understand our activities and engage with us about their expectations in an informative manner.

A summary of the key decisions made by the AFMA Commission at each of its meetings is reported on the AFMA website. AFMA intends to continually improve the information about the Commission's decisions to assist stakeholders' understanding of those decisions.

AFMA makes publicly available documents such as our operational, compliance and fisheries management policies, including AFMA's Ecological Risk Management Guide, ecological risk assessments, fishery management strategies, harvest strategies, bycatch strategies and protected species interaction reports, minutes from MACs, RAGs and expert group meetings, and scientific stock assessments that we use to set catch limits. AFMA also publishes aggregated fisheries catch data on data.gov.au.

⁵ Our most recent survey in March 2017 highlighted a particular strength was the positive perception of AFMA officers as approachable, knowledgeable and responsive.

AFMA's public performance reporting framework, including our [Annual Report and Annual Performance Statement](#), provides clear measures of our achievements as a basis for community appraisal. The environmental sustainability of the Commonwealth fisheries managed by AFMA is independently assessed in reports such as '[assessments of Commonwealth fisheries](#)' under the EPBC Act, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences [Fishery Status Reports](#) and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation [Status of Australian Fish Stocks](#) Reports.

The sustainability of a number of Commonwealth fisheries has also been independently certified by third parties against internationally-recognised and scientifically robust standards for ecological sustainability and effective management.

[Review of the statement](#)

This statement will be reviewed at least every 5 years, and more frequently as required.