

Northern Territory Fisheries Joint Authority

Annual Report

for the Year Ended 31 December 1994

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FISHERIES ACT 1952 (CWLTH)

NORTHERN TERRITORY FISHERIES JOINT AUTHORITY

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY FISHERIES
JOINT AUTHORITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 1994

PRESENTED TO PARLIAMENT PURSUANT TO
SECTION 12G OF THE ACT



Hon David Beddall, MP
Minister for Resources,
Chairman of the Northern
Territory Fisheries Joint
Authority,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Hon Mick Palmer, MLA
Northern Territory Minister
for Primary Industry and
Fisheries,
Member of the Northern
Territory Fisheries Joint
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1. INTRODUCTION

This is the seventh Annual Report for the Northern Territory Fisheries Joint Authority (NTFJA). Consistent with s. 12G of the *Fisheries Act 1952* (Cwlth), this Report presents details of the activities of the NTFJA and the condition of the Northern Territory Pearl Oyster Fishery, which was, in 1994, the only fishery managed by the NTFJA. The period covered dates from 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1994.

2. BACKGROUND

Under the "Arrangement between the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory in Relation to the Pearl Oyster Fishery" gazetted on 14 April 1988, the Northern Territory Pearl Oyster Fishery is managed by the NTFJA in accordance with the *Fisheries Act 1988* (NT).

The Northern Territory Pearl Industry Development Plan came into effect in 1988 but had, by 1993, been replaced by the NT Pearl Fishery Management Plan. This Plan in 1994 was supported by a number of decisions of the NTFJA.^(A)

3. THE NTFJA AND ITS MEMBERS

The NTFJA was established on 14 February 1983 under Commonwealth legislation relating to cooperation with the States and Northern Territory in the management of fisheries (s. 12D of the Commonwealth *Fisheries Act*).

Its members during 1994 were:

- the Hon David Beddall MP, Minister for Resources, holding portfolio responsibility for Commonwealth fisheries (Chair);
- the Hon Mike Reed, MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries (to 18 July 1994); and
- the Hon Mick Palmer, MLA, Northern Territory Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries.

The Secretary of the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, Mr Peter Blake, served as Secretary of the NTFJA during 1994.

^(A) Further historical information and details can be obtained from the Annual Reports of the NTFJA for the years 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1992 and 1993.

4. FUNCTIONS OF THE NTFJA

Under Northern Territory law, the NTFJA has the following functions in respect of the Pearl Oyster Fishery:

- (1) to keep constantly under consideration the condition of the Fishery;
- (2) to formulate policies and plans for the management of the Fishery;
- (3) to exercise powers conferred on it by the Northern Territory *Fisheries Act*; and
- (4) to co-operate and consult with other authorities, including other Joint Authorities within the meaning of the Commonwealth *Fisheries Act*, in matters of common concern.

5. POWERS OF THE NTFJA

Except where foreign boats are involved, the NTFJA may exercise the following powers in respect of the Northern Territory Pearl Oyster Fishery:

- (1) the issue, renewal, cancellation and suspension of licences;
- (2) the establishment of conditions on licences; and
- (3) the preparation of Management Plans and the establishment of Fishery Advisory Committees.

These powers have been delegated to the Director of Fisheries of the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries.

6. MEETINGS OF THE NTFJA

The NTFJA did not meet from 1 January 1994 to 31 December 1994. All decisions were confirmed by correspondence and the records of decisions are included at ANNEX A.

7. ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The Northern Territory Pearl Industry Advisory Committee (NTPIAC) was established in 1988. During the period of this report, the NTPIAC consisted of one representative from each of the licensees and one representative from each of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries. The Director of Fisheries of the Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, Mr Darryl Grey, was appointed Chairman and Mr Nick Paspaley was re-appointed Deputy Chairman, both to 30 June 1995. A list of the members is included at ANNEX B.

The NTPIAC met once during the reporting period. NTPIAC 9 was held on 3 June 1994. Scientific advice was coordinated and provided to the NTPIAC by the Fisheries Division, Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries.

8. CONDITION OF THE FISHERY

Biological data on the pearl oyster stocks of this fishery are limited. Historical records suggest that a continued conservative approach to utilisation is necessary until a greater understanding is achieved about the distribution of the resource and its annual recruitment processes.

The licensing year for this fishery ends on 30 June. During the first licensing year ended 30 June 1989, 75 per cent of the annual allocated catch (AAC) was taken, mostly from the western pearling grounds around Flat Top and Forty Mile Banks.

During the second licensing year ended 30 June 1990, 68 per cent of the AAC was taken, again primarily from the western fishing grounds.

During the third licensing year ended 30 June 1991, 62 per cent of the AAC was taken. The ratio of culture to mother-of-pearl oysters harvested increased. This trend was primarily a reflection of a decision taken by most licensees to target oysters to be used for culturing rather than an indication that the overall ratio of culture to mother-of-pearl oysters on the grounds has changed significantly as a result of harvesting activities.

A number of factors resulted in the failure of licensees to harvest all of the AAC during the first three licensing years. These included time spent locating pearl oyster beds in Northern Territory waters, a shortage of vessels available at the appropriate time to harvest the AAC and continuing negotiations with the Northern Territory Government to secure pearl farm leases prior to shell being harvested.

During the fourth licensing year ended 30 June 1992, 58 per cent of the AAC for the year was taken. This drop in total take followed the trend set in the previous years when licensees targeted primarily live shell for culture and took little mother-of-pearl. The ratio of mother-of-pearl to live shell taken was 20:80 in comparison to the first licensing year when the ratio was 65:35.

During the fifth licensing year ended 30 June 1993, 41 percent of the annual allocation of pearl oysters was taken.

A separate mother-of-pearl only allocation was introduced in 1992. In 1993, 23 percent of this was taken by the active licensees.

During the 1994 licensing year, only 20 percent of the annual allocation of pearl oysters was taken. None of the mother-of-pearl allocation was harvested.

As in 1993, this year the drop in total take can also be attributed to licensees' concerns about diving safety when collecting oysters in the deeper waters off the Northern Territory and a move to produce oysters for culture from a pearl hatchery established in Darwin in substitution for the wildstock harvest.

9. ANNUAL ALLOCATED CATCH

The current AAC has been set taking into consideration the need for more detailed scientific advice on the abundance of the resource. For the licensing year ended 30 June 1995, the AAC was set at 120 000 shells.

The Joint Authority decided that, for the 1994-95 licensing year, an additional total of 40 000 pearl oysters may continue to be taken from the fishery as a special mother-of-pearl quota. Any part of this quota may be taken by each licensee, but fishing by all licensees for this allocation must cease as soon as the 40 000 target is reached.

The decision to reduce this additional quota to 20 000 oysters during the 1993-94 licensing year was reversed by decision of the Joint Authority on advice from the Advisory Committee. This latter decision retained the mother-of-pearl annual allocation at 40 000 for 1993-94.

The purpose of the additional quota has been to encourage the clearing of mother-of-pearl oysters from a number of areas of seabed to enable an accurate assessment to be made of recruitment levels to the cleared areas.

10. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

In accordance with a 1988 decision of the NTFJA, there is provision for charges and cost recovery to be levied on licensees in respect of individual quota holdings exceeding 10 000 shells. However, only licence and vessel registration fees have been collected.

ANNEX A

**RECORDS OF DECISIONS OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY
FISHERIES JOINT AUTHORITY**

1 JANUARY 1994 TO 31 DECEMBER 1994

For the licensing year 1 July 1994 to 30 June 1995, Mr Darryl Grey be appointed to the position of Chairman of the NTPIAC and Mr Nicholas Paspaley be re-appointed to the position of Deputy-Chairman.

The total number of pearl oysters to be taken from the Fishery for the 1994-95 licensing year to remain at 120,000.

Within the recommended total take from the Fishery of 120,000, the following licence allocations be approved:

Arrow Pearl Company	20,000
Paspaley Pearl Company	40,000
South Sea Pearl Company	20,000
Tiwi Pearls Pty Ltd	20,000
Toomebridge Pty Ltd	20,000

The 1992-93 allocation of the additional 40,000 pearl oysters from the Fishery to be taken for mother-of-pearl by any of the licensees, remain at 40,000 for the 1994-95 licensing year.

ANNEX B

**NORTHERN TERRITORY PEARL INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEMBERSHIP - 1 JANUARY 1993 TO 30 JUNE 1994**

CHAIRMAN

Mr P Blake (Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries)

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN

Mr N Paspaley (Industry)

MEMBERS

Vacant (Australian Fisheries Management Authority)

Mr D Grey (Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries)

Mr S Arrow (Industry)

Mr K Male (Industry)

Mr A Garraway (Industry)

Mr P Jamvold (Industry)

SECRETARY

Mrs R Lea (Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries)

ANNEX B

**NORTHERN TERRITORY PEARL INDUSTRY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEMBERSHIP - 1 JULY 1994 AND TO 30 JUNE 1995**

CHAIRMAN

Mr D Grey (Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries)

DEPUTY CHAIRMAN AND MEMBER

Mr N Paspaley (Industry)

MEMBERS

Vacant (Australian Fisheries Management Authority)

Mr P Herden (Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries)

Mr S Arrow (Industry)

Mr K Male (Industry)

Mr A Garraway (Industry)

Mr G Lucas (Industry)

SECRETARY

Mrs R Lea (Northern Territory Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries)

