

SPF Scientific Panel Stakeholder Forum: Independent Facilitator's Report

Australian Fisheries Management Authority
6 December 2017

1 Introduction

1.1 THIS REPORT

This report summarises the key points of discussion from the 6 December 2017 Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF) Stakeholder Forum, as observed by independent facilitator, Claire Flanagan-Smith. Claire is an Associate at RM Consulting Group Pty Ltd and is the author of this report. The role of the independent facilitator is to facilitate constructive and focussed conversations and then to provide a written report of key points of discussion and any outcomes at the forum¹.

1.2 BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) Commission established a Scientific Panel for the Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF). The SPF Scientific Panel provides scientific and economic advice on the status of fish stocks, species (target and non-target species), the impact of fishing on the marine environment, and application of the harvest strategy and harvest control rules adopted by the Commission for this fishery.

The SPF Scientific Panel is required to engage with stakeholders to ensure its advice to the Commission is sound, well-founded and takes account of stakeholders' views and experience. Stakeholder forums are the main avenue to capture stakeholder views and provide interested stakeholders with the opportunity to consider and discuss the scientific advice of the panel.

¹ AFMA (2015) *Acquiring scientific advice by the use of a Scientific Panel and Stakeholder Forums in the Small Pelagic Fishery*. September 2015, afma.gov.au

1.3 THE DECEMBER 2017 FORUM

Seventeen people attended the forum, five from the recreational fishing sector, one each from third party certification, Tasmanian state fisheries department, New South Wales state fisheries department and the balance made up of members of the Scientific Panel and AFMA. There were no representatives from either the commercial or environmental sectors at the forum, despite being invited.

2 Main discussion points

2.1 DISCUSSION SUMMARY

At the end of the forum, the independent facilitator gave the following summary of the main discussion points, developed in consultation with Scientific Panel Chair, Max Kitchell.

During the forum, several lines of inquiry were pursued. The key discussion of relevance to the Scientific Panel was about the spatial management arrangements. Forum participants recommended that the Scientific Panel reconsiders the spatial management arrangements from the perspective of the recreational fishing sector, in particular:

- What impact commercial SPF activities have on the re-aggregation / fill time / persistence of fish
- Reducing the current grid size to allow finer scale management
- Reviewing the 10% Total Allowable Catch (TAC) trigger proposed in the Panel's draft advice on spatial management arrangements. Specifically, considering whether it is low enough.
- Investigating the arrangements between recreational and commercial operators in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) as a model for SPF.

Other discussion points from the perspective of the recreational fishing sector that are relevant to AFMA, rather than the Scientific Panel include:

- Increased transparency – recreational representatives would like greater access to data and better understanding about what is and isn't available.
- The need for economic investigations into all fishing activities (including non-commercial) in this fishery. As pointed out by M/ Kitchell, this is outside the current Terms of Reference of the Scientific Panel. Some forum participants requested that AFMA consider adjusting the Panel's Terms of Reference.
- That AFMA play a role in facilitating agreements between the recreational sector and the Small Pelagic Fishery Industry Association (SPFIA).

2.2 DISCUSSION RELATING TO PANEL AND STAKEHOLDER PRESENTATIONS

The following presentations were made by forum participants. The slides used by speakers for their presentations have been made available by AFMA at <http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries/small-pelagic-fishery/small-pelagic-fishery-stakeholder-forum>.

ITEM 1 PRELIMINARIES

Please note that the independent facilitator's flight was delayed, so Max Kitchell, SPF Scientific Panel Chair ran the forum until Item 4. Mr Kitchell introduced the Small Pelagic Fishery Scientific Panel as:

- Mr Max Kitchell (Chair) – former Director National Oceans Office
- Associate Professor Tim Ward – Principal Scientist, South Australian Research and Development Institute
- Dr Jeremy Lyle – Senior Research Scientist, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies
- Mr Andrew Penney – Director Pisces Australis (Pty) Ltd
- Dr Sean Pascoe – Senior Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO Oceans and Atmosphere Flagship
- Ms Sally Weekes – AFMA Manager Small Pelagic Fishery
- Professor Caleb Gardener (invited expert) – Director, Sustainable Marine Research Collaboration Agreement, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies

ITEM 2 AFMA UPDATE

Small Pelagic Fishery update

Sally Weekes, AFMA Fishery Manager

S. Weekes provided an update on the management of the Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF)

- The Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Bycatch Policy – review ongoing – due for completion shortly.
- AFMA Bycatch Strategy – now available on the AFMA website.
- ERA (Ecological Risk Assessment) – AFMA is working with CSIRO to update the ERA for each Commonwealth fishery.
- Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill – in addition to the objectives AFMA must pursue, AFMA, in the performance of its functions, is to have regard to the objective of ensuring that the interests of commercial, recreational, and Indigenous fishers are taken into account.

S. Weekes also presented data for the 2016/17 SPF fishing season including:

- SPF catch vs TAC
- SPF effort by all methods
- Bycatch & discards (excluding protected species)
- Retained and discarded species by tonnage (all methods)
- Protected species interactions April 2016 – 30 June 2017.

Outcomes from last Panel forum

Max Kitchell, SPF Scientific Panel Chair

M. Kitchell provided a summary of the main issues raised by stakeholders at the last forum and the Panel's response.

ITEM 3 ANNUAL ASSESSMENT AND RBC ADVICE

DEPM survey results

A/Prof Tim Ward, SPF Scientific Panel member

Associate Professor Tim Ward presented an update on daily egg production method (DEPM) survey results. The full results are available on the aforementioned link.

The Key outcome of the most recent DEPM for Jack Mackerel (West) is a biomass estimate for this stock of 34 978 tonnes.

A summary of where the DEPMs are up to for the other stocks:

- DEPM spawning biomass estimates for Blue Mackerel (West) and Redbait (East) are dated
- DEPM spawning biomass estimate for Redbait (West) is currently being done
- Potential to get information of SPF species in eastern Great Australian Bight (GAB) from surveys for South Australian Sardine Fishery

Annual Assessment of SPF Stocks and RBC advice

Max Kitchell

M. Kitchell presented the outcomes of the annual assessment of SPF Stocks and recommended biological catch (RBC) advice:

SPECIES	RBC 2018-19 (TONNES)	RBD 2017-18 (TONNES)
Jack Mackerel East	Fourth season at Tier 1 18,937 tonnes	18,937 tonnes
Jack Mackerel West	First season at Tier 1 4,197 tonnes	930 tonnes
Blue Mackerel East	Third season at Tier 1 12,495 tonnes	12,495 tonnes
Blue Mackerel West	Second season at Tier 3 3,244 tonnes	3,244 tonnes
Australian Sardines East	Third season at Tier 1 9,915 tonnes	9,915 tonnes
Redbait East	Seventh season at Tier 2 3,444 tonnes	3,444 tonnes
Redbait West	Second season at Tier 3 825 tonnes	825 tonnes

ITEM 4 STAKEHOLDER PRESENTATIONS

AFMA & pair trawling in the Australian small pelagic fishery: a word of caution Graham Pike, recreational fishing advocate

Graham Pike presented concerns relating to AFMA's management and monitoring of pair trawling in the SPF, specifically: concern that AFMA is not being sufficiently transparent and public with data; improper referral by AFMA to the "low reputation" commercial industry lobby group SPFIA.

Recreational participants acknowledged the value of the Scientific Panel reporting against the issues considered from previous forums. They recommended that AFMA be as open as possible with data.

S. Weekes replied that there is currently no pair trawling in the fishery and that information for the fishery that is available, including bycatch, continues to be publically available. Some information that recreational fishers are interested in is not collected by AFMA. Forum participants noted that data not held by AFMA is hard to come by through commercial operators or SPFIA.

Discussion about the existence, and functionality or otherwise, of SPFIA lead to a recommendation from stakeholders that AFMA should play a role in facilitating agreements between the recreational sector and SPFIA.

After a great deal of discussion about the underlying reasons that the recreational fishers would like greater transparency, the group acknowledged that the primary issue is about user conflict, rather than concern about sustainability of the resource or ecosystem. The group acknowledged that the primary benefit of spatial management would be to help manage conflict between users, rather than mitigating perceived threats to the sustainability. Further discussion on that issue follows in Item 6.

ITEM 5 RESEARCH

Future research priorities & DEPM schedule Andrew Penney, SPF Scientific Panel member

Andrew Penney presented the following research priorities from the SPF Strategic Research Plan 2017-18 – 2021-22:

- Annual monitoring and assessment of the fishery remains a priority for 2019-20 – currently funded until 2018-19.
- Maintain the planned order of DEPM surveys: Blue mackerel west 2018-19 (last done Mar 2005); Redbait east 2019-20 (last done Oct 2006). Whether these proceed as planned will depend on fishing effort.
- AFMA Marine Mammal Working Group supported the inclusion of the SPF marine mammal research priority in the 2019-20 research plan. (Synthesise existing information on marine mammal interactions; develop reporting protocols for marine mammal interactions.)
- Additional priority agreed for 2019-20 to utilise information on other species collected during South Australian Sardine surveys, to better understand stock structure west of Kangaroo Island.

This presentation led to an acknowledgement by recreational fishers that the SPF has been developed based on science, rather than a commercial basis and that this should continue. Recreational fishing advocates would like AFMA and the Scientific Panel to include research into the economic costs and benefits of all fishing activities. As pointed out by M. Kitchell, this is outside the current Terms of Reference of the Scientific Panel. Some forum participants requested that AFMA consider adjusting the Panel's Terms of Reference, especially considering the recent amendment to the Commonwealth Fisheries Legislation that includes an additional objective to ensure the interests of commercial, recreational, and Indigenous fishers are taken into account.

Ongoing Monitoring requirements in the SPF Jeremy Lyle, SPF Scientific Panel member

Dr Jeremy Lyle presented two project scopes to review monitoring requirements in the SPF with an objective to inform the level and mix of ongoing monitoring and coverage. Data on fishing operations in the fishery is collected a number of ways:

- Underpinned by observer coverage:
 - first 10 trips (trawlers) and then 20% days fished
 - first five trips (purse seine) and then 10% days fished

- Logbooks
- Operator sampling
- Electronic monitoring (on-vessel cameras)

J. Lyle explained that new fishing operations in the fishery and advances in monitoring systems has presented an opportunity to review monitoring and coverage in the SPF. This review would be done to inform the level and mix of future coverage, once sufficient data becomes available.

ITEM 6

Spatial Management in the SPF

Max Kitchell

M. Kitchell made a presentation about Spatial Management in the SPF, with the following Scientific Panel recommendations:

- The requirement that only 75% of an individual's quota can be taken from a single zone should be removed
- The current 2000 tonne trigger per 30-day period (as the limit at which vessel must move out of that grid) should be replaced by a 10% TAC trigger
- Should retain the option of applying different and specific spatial management measures to deal with special circumstances where the two recommendations above might not be appropriate

M. Kitchell gave the following definition of localised depletion, as defined by the Panel:

Localised depletion is a persistent reduction in fish abundance in a limited area, caused by fishing activity, over spatial and temporal scales that negatively impacts on predatory species and/or other fisheries

Many of the questions raised by forum participants were answered by this presentation. Recreational representatives were keen to see better spatial definition of where and when fishing happens.

Some participants were concerned about what impact Commercial SPF activities have on fish re-aggregation / fill time / persistence and how that may affect recreational activities.

Grant Pullen from the Tasmanian Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment pointed out that two issues were being conflated: stock depletion and spatial depletion. Recreational fishers acknowledged that they are concerned about the time and location of commercial fishing and its impact, perceived or otherwise, on recreational fishing, rather than any concern about overall stock depletion or broader ecosystem impacts.

The forum suggested that the Panel investigate the arrangements between recreational and commercial operators in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) as a model for the SPF. Reducing the grid size to management. The forum also suggested that the Panel review the 10% Total Allowable Catch (TAC) trigger. Specifically, considering whether it is low enough.

ITEM 7

Update on the SPF Scientific Panel / Stakeholder Forum Model review

Sally Weekes

S. Weekes gave the following update regarding the review of two-year trial for provision of economic and scientific advice regarding SPF (instead of the Resource Assessment Group):

- Currently under review, consultation to inform the review is about to start via questionnaires for each group

- Commission will consider outcomes in early 2018
- Panel / forum has been extended until mid-2018 to allow for outcomes of the review to be implemented

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Document review and authorisation

Job Number: 38-A-01

Doc Version	Final/Draft	Date	Author	Reviewed by	Quality checked	Release approved by	Issued to
1.0	Final Draft	20.12.12	C. Flanagan-Smith	-	P. Mawson	C. Flanagan-Smith	Darci Wallis
2.0	Final	22.12.17	C. Flanagan-Smith	-	P. Mawson	C. Flanagan-Smith	Darci Wallis
3.0	Final	12.01.18	C. Flanagan-Smith	-	-	C. Flanagan-Smith	Darci Wallis