

Small Pelagic Fishery Scientific Panel

Box 7051

Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2610

F2017/1159

6 February 2018

Dear Stakeholder Forum Attendee,

Thank you for your attendance at and contribution to the Small Pelagic Fishery Stakeholder Forum held in Sydney on 6 December 2017.

At the conclusion of the Forum I outlined four matters that seemed to have gained broad agreement from the stakeholders present and indicated that the Scientific Panel would consider these matters when next we met. The Panel met on 22 January 2018 and resolved to provide the following response to these matters of interest.

1. Consideration/investigation of time required for re-aggregation or “refill” of SPF species after trawling activity and the impacts of persistent trawling activity (including impacts of a large trawler breaking up bait schools)

The Panel is not aware of any international or domestic research that has sought to address this issue directly and, therefore, consideration of this matter would require specific new research which, in essence, would involve getting a large trawler to steam repeatedly through pelagic schools and then assessing the change in abundance. Such research would be logistically difficult and very costly. Furthermore, the results would probably be inconclusive as there are a range of environmental variables that also impact the movement of pelagic fish, making it difficult to isolate the impact of trawling alone.

The Panel would be reluctant to recommend this type of research project within the context of the limited funding available. We don't believe this work warrants ranking as a high priority research project in our 2018-19 research plan which focuses on projects critical to the ongoing management of the SPF. These research priorities were presented at the Forum.

In passing we note that significant commercial fishing activity occurs on a small pelagic species in the Australian sardine fishery off South Australia with no detected impact on other fisheries. This fishery has consistently taken in the order of 30,000 tonnes per year for over a decade with no discernible adverse affects on other sectors, including the Southern Bluefin Tuna recreational fishery.

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2. Reduction of the current one degree square grid size to allow for more refined management

The Panel considers that the current spatial and temporal settings within the spatial management arrangements are appropriate and balance the geographic size of the fishery with the practicalities of management. In reaching this view the Panel noted that one degree squares are the common size used for various forms of spatial management in other fisheries internationally.

3. Review of the proposed move-on trigger of 10% of the TAC from a grid square over 30 days, with particular concern from the recreational sector that 10% is too high.

On reflection the Panel agrees that 10% of the TAC from a grid square over 30 days is too high to achieve the objective of this measure, which is to spread fishing effort such that very large quantities of fish are not taken from relatively small areas over short time periods.

When first considering this matter, the Panel was more focused on the principle of the move-on trigger being a % of the TAC rather than a fixed tonnage as is currently the case. We had not fully considered to what the % should be.

Having received the advice from participants at the Forum, we have given further consideration to the % and believe it should be somewhere between 2% and 4%. This will be the advice we provide to the AFMA Commission.

The Panel believes a move-on trigger in the range of 2%-4% of the TAC from a grid square over 30 days, strikes the correct balance between spreading fishing effort while remaining practical for the boats involved in the fishery. It should be noted that this setting is based on the expert opinion of the Panel and recent fishing activities in the SPF.

While the Panel recognises the move-on rule is in place to provide an extra element of precaution against localised depletion, we reiterate our view that localised depletion is unlikely to occur within the SPF given the high mobility of the target species and conservative TACs that have been set for each of the seven stocks.

4. Use of the ETBF voluntary arrangement between the commercial and recreational sectors as a model for the SPF

The Panel agrees that any arrangements, voluntary or otherwise, that avoid spatial and temporal conflict at sea would be beneficial to this fishery. We would encourage the relevant parties within the SPF to consider such an arrangement.

By definition, this sort of arrangement can only be entered into by representatives of the recreational and industry sectors. The Panel could not be a party to such an agreement nor would we play any part in its negotiation. If AFMA could play a role in bringing the parties together in the first instance that may prove helpful in initiating the process.

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On behalf of the Panel, I again thank you for your contributions to the Stakeholder Forum. These interactions are important to the Panel. They have in the past and will in the future make for more informed recommendations from the Panel to the AFMA Commission.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Max Kitchell', with a long, wavy flourish extending to the right.

Mr Max Kitchell

Chair, Small Pelagic Fishery Scientific Panel