

How AFMA considers the social aspects of the ecologically sustainable development principles in the management of Commonwealth Fisheries

AFMA regulates Commonwealth fisheries consistent with our legislation and government policy. In doing so, AFMA aims 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 foreign fishing. Under our Commonwealth fisheries legislation, AFMA must pursue the objective "to ensure 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" (*Fisheries Management Act 1991* S3(1)(b)). The ESD principles contain ecological, economic and social aspects, noting that ecological sustainability underpins economic and social benefits from Commonwealth fisheries.

The ESD principles in AFMA's legislation¹ 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."

The four themes set out below can be expected to evolve over time reflecting changing stakeholder expectations, emerging market requirements and changes in AFMA's operating environment.

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. 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 Policy on Fisheries Bycatch* and [harvest strategies](#) developed under the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy*.

Understanding and managing the impacts of climate change on fisheries and marine habitats 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 seafood business activities and the maintenance of ecosystems. Consistent with Offshore Constitutional Settlement (OCS) arrangements, AFMA does not manage the recreational and Indigenous fishing sectors in Commonwealth

¹ 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.

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 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 and will be 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 and port visits, and meetings with industry associations, environmental groups and recreational fishers.

Increasingly, AFMA is providing 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 further look for 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 of the 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 improvement².

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.

² Our most recent survey in March 2017 highlighted a particular strength was the positive perception of AFMA officers as approachable, knowledgeable and responsive.

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 appreciate our activities and engage with us about their expectations in an informative manner.

We make publicly available such documents 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. Most of these fisheries management documents have included stakeholder and/or public consultation and feedback.

AFMA's public performance reporting framework, including our Annual Report and Annual Performance Statement, provide clear measures of our achievements as a basis for community appraisal. AFMA's performance is also independently assessed in such public reports as strategic assessments under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences Fishery Status Reports, the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation Status of Australian Fish Stocks Reports and periodic Australian National Audit Office audits.

The sustainability of a number of Commonwealth fisheries has also been certified by the Marine Stewardship Council against its internationally-recognised and scientifically robust standards for ecological sustainability and effective management.