

1997-1998
Fishes

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

to the

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
Report on

**The Northern Prawn Fishery
Amendment Management Plan 1999**

September 2000

The Northern Prawn Fishery Amendment Management Plan – Government Responses to the Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Northern Prawn Fishery Amendment Management Plan 1999 be adopted without further amendment.

Government Response:

The Government supports this recommendation. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) implemented the new arrangements for the fishing period that commenced on 4 August 2000.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that AFMA monitor the impact of the amendment management plan on shore based activity as well as offshore based activities, noting that if the impact is sufficiently severe, it may be necessary for the Commonwealth to provide strategic adjustment assistance.

Government Response:

This recommendation falls outside the specific objectives and functions of AFMA. However, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA) is pursuing funding through the Fisheries Resources Research Fund (FRRF) to allow the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARE) to undertake research to determine the impact on both shore based and offshore based activities.

The Government supports the intent of the recommendation but has not seen any specific need for adjustment assistance at this stage.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the proposal for an industry-funded research vessel for the CSIRO be adopted to assist in further research into the level of overfishing and effort creep in the northern prawn fishery.

Government Response:

AFMA has discussed this proposal, involving the purchase of a current NPF trawler, with the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC) and with the Northern Prawn Fishery Assessment Group (NPFAG). Both NORMAC and NPFAG welcome increased research in the fishery, particularly the potential for more at sea data collection.

However, both NORMAC and the NPFAG also recognise that it is unlikely that one research vessel could meet all of the research needs for a fishery, both in terms of the vessel design and in terms of data collection. It is also important that whatever resources are provided they are not reserved exclusively for the CSIRO but should be available for all research agencies to use.

NORMAC and CSIRO have suggested that a more suitable approach may be to establish an industry-funded "Vessel Research Fund" which would allow the chartering of a suitable vessel/s on an as-needed basis for NPF research.

An independent evaluation and preliminary costing of the various options for the provision of a research vessel was commissioned from Professor Russell Reichelt. Professor Reichelt is Chairman of the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and former Director of the Australian Institute of Marine Science which operates two research vessels.

Professor Reichelt's paper was presented at the NPF Strategic Planning Workshop in Cairns on 19-20 June 2000. The workshop was attended by about 70% of all Statutory Fishing Rights (SFRs) owners in the fishery. The workshop gave strong support for more at-sea research but rejected the specific approach of purchasing an industry vessel.

Following the detailed consideration and rejection of the proposal by the broader industry, NORMAC and CSIRO, the Government does not support this recommendation. AFMA will continue to examine other methods of industry funding of increased at-sea research.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the AFMA/NORMAC consider including factors that remove effort in the fishery in the calculation of effort creep.

Government Response:

In February 2000, the Northern Prawn Fishery Assessment Group (NPFAG) initiated work on this matter.

AFMA and NORMAC have funded further work on this issue by DJ Sterling Trawl Gear Services. A first draft report was presented to NPFAG at its meeting on 17-18 May 2000. The proposed framework includes factors that both increase and decrease effective effort in the fishery. Initial calculations show that effort creep is averaging between 4.2 and 4.3 percent annually.

A paper prepared by Mr DJ Stirling on behalf of NPFAG was presented to participants at the NPF Strategic Planning Workshop held in Cairns in June 2000. The workshop viewed the alternative approach as an improvement but identified some other factors that may affect effort creep. Workshop participants while acknowledging effort creep does occur in the fishery queried the assumptions used in its calculation. To allow for a wider understanding of the calculation of effort creep further opportunities for discussion between researchers and industry participants are to be provided. NORMAC has agreed to discuss the matter of effort creep further at the next workshop (February 2001) as part of a broader discussion on stock assessment prior to the 2000 tiger prawn assessment.

The Government supports this recommendation and it has been implemented.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that further research be undertaken by CSIRO, in conjunction with DJ Sterling Trawl Gear Services and the Australian Maritime College, into the prawn trawling performance prediction model developed by Mr Sterling, and its implications for gear SFR management.

Government response:

In November 1999, AFMA agreed to jointly fund this project being undertaken by CSIRO, Australian Maritime College (AMC) and Curtin University entitled "A new approach to fishing power analysis for the NPF". This funding has come from the AFMA Research Fund (ARF) and the Fisheries Resources Research Fund (FRRF) administered by AFFA. This project will bring together newly acquired data and the strengths of statistical and

engineering modelling to build a composite model of fishing power. Mr Sterling is part of the project team. Work on the project has recently commenced and this two-year project is due for completion in December 2001.

The Government supports and has implemented this recommendation.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that an industry poll be conducted, possibly by AFMA, to ascertain the level of support for a continuation of the 1993 levy to raise funds for voluntary buy-outs.

Government Response:

This is primarily a matter for the fishing industry.

Statutory Fishing Right holders considered a paper prepared by Mr Frank Meany on the issues and costs of a buy-out at the NPF Strategic Planning workshop held in June 2000. After considering various options, there was very little support from industry members for an industry funded buy-back of Gear SFRs and there was only marginal support for a buy-back of Class B SFRs.

Following the detailed consideration and rejection of the proposal by the broader industry, the Government does not support this recommendation.

Recommendation 7

The Committee also recommends that AFMA investigate the use of time units as an alternative to season closures.

Government Response:

NORMAC has considered the use of time units (defined as transferable boat days) and concluded that it is not an appropriate replacement for seasonal closures. For the main, NPF seasonal closures were put in place on either biological and/or economic grounds to protect small prawns and pre-spawning stocks. It would therefore not be desirable to allow fishers to fish all year around.

AFMA requested one of the proponents of the proposal, Mr Steve Eayrs, to prepare and present a discussion paper on time units at the NPF Strategic Planning Workshop in June

2000. The general opinion of the workshop was with gear based management now in place time units were not worth pursuing for the management of the NPF.

The Government supports this recommendation, which AFMA has implemented by requesting the preparation of a report on time units which was considered at the Strategic Planning Workshop. However, following the detailed consideration and rejection of the proposal by the broader industry, the time units will no longer be pursued at this time for the management of the NPF.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends the endorsement of the proposed one-to-one translation from Class A SFRs to gear SFRs as the only legally defensible means of translation.

Government Response:

The Government supports this recommendation.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that, during the next two years, AFMA:

- a) **Undertake thorough research to calculate the ability of the Northern Prawn Fishery Amendment Management Plan to deliver the long term sustainability of the fishery;**

Government Response:

Pursuing ecologically sustainable development is an ongoing legislative objective of AFMA for all fisheries it manages. AFMA will, as a matter of priority, develop targets, standards and indicators for target species and will work towards establishing similar measures for assessing marine community and ecosystem level impacts. AFMA will continue to monitor, through established processes, the long-term sustainability of the fishery. The process will include wide industry consultation through both NORMAC and NPFAG with input from relevant experts.

The Government supports this recommendation and will continue to monitor the status of the fishery.

- b) Undertake an assessment of the proposed effort units management proposal to ascertain the ability of the proposal to deliver sustainable management of the fishery; and**

Government Response:

The proponents of this proposal, the Northern Prawn Fishery (Queensland) Trawl Association and Mr David Sterling, were asked to prepare and present a discussion paper on effort unit management for the NPF Strategic Planning Workshop in June 2000 to allow consideration by the broader industry. The workshop noted that effort units were being introduced in the Queensland East Coast Trawl fishery. The widely held view though, of workshop participants, was with gear based management now in place effort units were not worth pursuing for management of the NPF.

The Government supports this recommendation, which AFMA has implemented by requesting the preparation of a report on effort units to be considered at the Strategic Planning Workshop. However, following the detailed consideration and rejection of the proposal by the broader industry, effort units will not be pursued at this time for the management of the NPF.

- c) Commission research to ascertain the future economic impact of the Northern Prawn Fishery Amendment Management Plan on the operators in the fishery.**

Government Response:

ABARE periodically conducts economic surveys of Commonwealth managed fisheries for the purposes of monitoring the economic performance of the fisheries. Surveys are usually conducted every two years and annually when a major change has occurred in the fishery management.

The NPF was last surveyed in 1999 with respect to the 97-98 year. It is proposed to conduct a survey in early 2001 covering 98/99 99/2000. Additional questions are to be included in this survey to get estimates of the future impact of the change in management. Gear based management will have been in place for one season (half a year) which will provide some basis for providing estimates. This survey report would become available later in 2001.

AFFA is pursuing funding through the FRRF to allow ABARE to develop an economic model to predict the future economic impact of gear based management. This model would utilise survey data and would necessarily need to include outputs from the CSIRO, AMC and Curtin University project, "A new approach to fishing power analysis for the

NPF", various harvest strategies and stock rebuilding scenarios. The output from this research would be sought during 2001.

The Government supports this recommendation.

