

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 The Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF) is the most valuable Commonwealth fishery in Australia, worth between \$100 and \$150 million annually. Concerns about the long-term sustainability of the catch, due to declines in annual catch over the last several decades, prompted the development of the Northern Prawn Fishery Amendment Management Plan by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority. The amended arrangements will ensure a decline in the quantum of the catch.

1.2 AFMA argues that the changed arrangements are advantageous, firstly because current arrangements to restrict the catch cannot be enforced and, secondly, the amended arrangements give greater flexibility to restrict the catch in future, should it be necessary.

1.3 The adoption of the amendment management plan is not universally supported within the industry. The major arguments are that the level of overfishing is overstated, the proposed arrangements will not affect fishing performance and some operators, principally the smaller ones, will be unfairly disadvantaged.

1.4 Following a thorough consideration of the proposed arrangements, the Committee supports the Northern Prawn Fishery Amendment Management Plan 1999 as the most equitable and legally defensible means of achieving a long-term sustainable northern prawn fishery. The Committee considers that limited evidence has been presented to support any alternative proposal over the AFMA plan.

1.5 The Committee considers that the adoption of the amendment management plan as provided for in the Regulations provides the most practicable means of achieving a reduction in catch. At the same time, the amendment management plan also provides the flexibility for an annual adjustment in fishing effort, at relatively small expense to operators, who generally need to replace nets on an annual basis.

1.6 However, the Committee recognises that it is possible that the impact of the management plan may be disproportionately felt in some areas. Should this occur, then the Committee supports assessment of the extent of the impact in vulnerable areas and the implementation of appropriate structural adjustment measures.