

Secretariat of the Pacific Community

**1<sup>st</sup> SPC Heads of Fisheries Meeting**  
*(Noumea, New Caledonia, 9–13 August 1999)*

**Information Paper 3**

Original: English

**Country Statement 1999: Australia**



## **COUNTRY STATEMENT 1999: AUSTRALIA**

### **1. SUMMARY**

Total estimated production from Australian domestic fishing and aquaculture in 1997/98 was 223,000 tonnes, with an estimated gross value of production of approximately A\$1.86 billion. This is an increase of 5.14% over 1996/97. A\$491 million of this figure came from aquaculture, an increase of 12% over the previous year. The highest value fisheries remain rock lobster and prawns.

Issues that continue to present a challenge to the management of fish resources include over-fishing, over-capacity, increased community awareness and activism over conservation issues such as bycatch and ecosystem health, the realisation of benefits from value-adding; and increasing competition for resources between recreational and commercial fishing interests.

The Australian Government released its *Oceans Policy* in 1998, the Year of the Ocean. The government is committed to integrated ecosystem-based planning and management for multiple uses of our oceans. This includes pursuing improved coordination between the States and Commonwealth to ensure that jurisdictional boundaries do not hinder effective planning and management.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia, the industry, Australian Fisheries Management Authority and the States continue to build on the progress of the last few years in implementing management regimes based on the principles of ecologically sustainable development. At the same time, steps are being taken to utilise fisheries resources in the most efficient way, including the introduction of appropriate harvesting technology.

## 2. GOVERNMENT ACTION

### Commonwealth

The Commonwealth Government established the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) as a Commonwealth Statutory Authority in 1992 under the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991*. AFMA is responsible for the day to day management of Commonwealth fisheries under the *Fisheries Management Act 1991*.

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia (AFFA), provides the Government with a central point for policy development (including the principles of multiple resource access), advice and coordination on national and international fisheries management issues and other matters affecting the development of the industry.

AFMA's objectives are met through the employment of a partnership approach which actively involves a range of interested parties in the process of developing and implementing fisheries management arrangements. This approach includes establishing and operating Management Advisory Committees (MACs) or Consultative Committees (CCs) for each major Commonwealth fishery. AFMA also consults regularly with the national peak industry body for Commonwealth fisheries, the Australian Seafood Industry Council (ASIC).

There is increasing community interest in the marine environment. The focus of the community is moving from concern about specific fish species to broader issues regarding the use and quality of the marine environment. AFMA has a strong commitment to the protection of the ocean's ecosystems and biodiversity by promoting sustainable use of fisheries resources.

The Australian community is also increasingly aware of issues such as the discarding of fish and the impacts of fishing on the marine environment and non-target species. AFMA sees its responsibilities as requiring it to manage the long term sustainability of fisheries resources for the benefit of all users and interest groups both now and in the future. This requires that stocks be maintained at sustainable levels and, where necessary, rebuilt to ensure maximum inter-generational equity. It also requires that fisheries management aims to minimise the impact of fishing on biological diversity and ecosystems. As part of this process, research into environmentally friendly fishing methods, and bycatch minimisation is seen as a priority.

Research relevant to Commonwealth fisheries management is carried out by the Bureau of Rural Sciences, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, the Australian Institute of Marine Science, universities and State agencies. Funding for fisheries research at the Commonwealth level originates primarily from Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, but comes also from the Departments of Industry, Science and Resources (DISR), Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA), State Government departments and the fishing industry.

### States and Territories

- Queensland's fisheries resources are managed under the *Fisheries Act 1994* by both the Queensland Fisheries Management Authority (QFMA), which was established under the Act, and the Fisheries Group of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). The Queensland Fish Management Authority provides feedback to the Government by conducting extensive consultations with stakeholder groups and the broader community. Stakeholders include commercial fishers, fishing tour operators, seafood processors and marketers, recreational anglers, traditional and indigenous fishers, conservationists and

environmentalists, scientific researchers, compliance officers, and associated federal, State, and local government departments and agencies. The QFMA has management and zonal advisory committees to provide guidance on fisheries management and fisheries-related issues. The Fisheries Group within the Queensland Department of Primary Industries is one of several business groups and, in broad terms, has responsibility for aquaculture and fish habitat management.

- In October 1997 the South Australian Department of Primary Industries and Resources (PIRSA) was created through the amalgamation of the former Departments of Primary Industries and five other departments. The new agency has a clear focus on agriculture and fisheries (primary industries) and minerals, energy and petroleum (resources). Major achievements in fisheries include the initiation of five year management plans for all major fisheries and securing funding for a five-year Farmed Seafood Initiative.
- Tasmanian fisheries are managed under the *Living Marine Resources Management Act 1995* and the subordinate legislation that supports it. Under this Act, all commercial fishing must be under licence, as well as some recreational fishing, and Fishery Management Plans are to be prepared for all fisheries. The process of preparing management plans is well under way, and the first, for Rock Lobster, Abalone and Scalefish, were implemented in early 1998.
- The Fisheries Department of Western Australia's 1994 review shifted the agency's resource base to external funding and cost recovery and in 1997 Fisheries WA released a Strategic Plan for 1997/2002. Significant recent achievements include: restoration of the western rock lobster breeding stocks; continued expansion of the pearling industry; introduction of 20 new fishery management programs, and the creation of new programs for recreational fishing, aquaculture and fish and fish habitat protection.
- NSW Fisheries is the agency responsible for managing the fisheries resources of New South Wales. The agency provides management, scientific research, advisory and compliance services. It advises the government on the use and conservation of fisheries resources. In consultation with industry and the community, NSW Fisheries develops policies and regulations on resource sharing and allocation. Principal legislation administered by the department comprises the Fisheries and Oyster Farm Act 1935 and the Fisheries Management Act 1994. NSW Fisheries now produces an annual status report for each of the commercial and recreational fishery sectors and each of the major aquaculture industries. The report reflects increased emphasis on the assessment of Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD). New categories include by-catch/discards and environmental issues.

### **3. RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

#### Commonwealth fisheries

Australia declared a 200nm Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on 1 August 1994, augmenting the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ) of 200 nautical miles (nm) declared in 1979. Details of some of the main Commonwealth managed fisheries are as follows:

The Northern Prawn Fishery is the most valuable fishery under Commonwealth jurisdiction. The 1997/98 catch of 8900 tonnes represented a gross value of A\$119 million for 125 boats. Technological advances have increased the efficiency of NPF fishing operations and effective effort is climbing above the optimum level. The management approach for dealing with this "effort creep" is to change the unit of fishing capacity from the current vessel unit to a gear-unit. Another important management issue is the implementation of a bycatch action plan for the Fishery. This plan mandates the introduction of Turtle Exclusion Devices (TEDs) and Bycatch Reduction Devices (BRDs) in all trawl nets by April 2000.

The 1998 global Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) catch is estimated to be around 17000 t. Australia and Japan continue to account for the majority of the catch (5100 and 7500 t respectively). There were significant catches by Taiwan (~ 1400 t), Indonesia (estimated 1500 t) and Korea (~ 1560 t). New Zealand maintained a small catch of 330 t. Longline fishing accounted for about 95% of the 1998 SBT global catch. The remainder were taken by surface fishery operations. Australia's 1997–98 SBT TAC remained the same as that since 1989–90 at 5265 t. Around 85% of the Australian catch came from the South Australian pole/purse seine fishery, with 3500 t placed in farm cages and 900 t landed for export fresh-chilled to Japan. As no global CCSBT quota had been established due to a breakdown in bilateral negotiations, no Japanese longliners were licensed to operate in the Australian Fishing Zone after November 1997.

The Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery was formally established in 1988. Marketing opportunities for pelagic longline caught fish have since grown. In particular, fresh chilled yellowfin and bigeye tuna are exported to Japan for sashimi. In 1997-98, this sector caught 4,954 tonnes, valued at A\$31.2 million dollars. The purse seine fleet consists of 19 boats, targeting skipjack tuna off New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania for domestic canning. In 1997-98, this sector caught 837 tonnes, valued at A\$1.2 million dollars. The principal strategies used to manage commercial fishing in the ET&BF are limited entry, zoning, inshore boat size restrictions, bycatch provisions and gear restrictions.

1998 saw a significant increase in interest in the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery. Some 20 vessels participated in the fishery, of which 8 vessels took total mixed catches in excess of 35 tonnes. There was a considerable increase in investment in the fishery during 1998. Total 1998 catches for WTBF longline and handline operations for yellowfin tuna were 229 t, broadbill swordfish 224 t, bigeye tuna 146 t, rudderfish 34 t and albacore tuna 15 t

The Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) commercial fisheries are prawn, tropical rock lobster, line fishing (mainly Spanish mackerel), pearl shell, bêche-de-mer and trochus. The gross value of production of the fisheries was A\$37 million in 1998/9. 88 prawn and 405 combined lobster, pearl shell and/or Spanish mackerel licences issued. These fisheries have continued to be managed in a sustainable manner which seeks to maximise the opportunities for traditional inhabitants of the region to participate in all sectors of the industry. In 1984 the Australian and Papua New Guinea governments ratified the Torres Strait Treaty, which established the Torres Strait Protected Zone. The Treaty also defined who has jurisdiction over islands and areas of sea in the Protected Zone, and of the fisheries and seabed resources. Under the Treaty arrangements in Australian waters some fisheries were managed jointly by the Commonwealth and Queensland governments. On the 1st of April 1999 Queensland managed fisheries including finfish, crab, trochus and bêche-de-mer were also placed under Joint Authority management.

The South East Fishery (SEF) covers waters managed by the Commonwealth off southern Queensland, NSW, Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia and mainly includes fishing methods for taking demersal scalefish species. The fishery is the main source of Australian caught fish for the metropolitan markets of Sydney and Melbourne. It is managed as two sectors, trawl i.e demersal otter trawls and Danish seines, and non-trawl, covering demersal mesh nets and lines. The estimated total catch for both sectors in 1998 was 27,300 tonnes valued at A\$64.8 million. Orange roughy and blue grenadier are the two most important fish species caught in the SEF by volume and value.

The Southern Shark Fishery is based on several species of temperate sharks inhabiting the continental shelf and slope of southern Australia. In 1997/1998 the fishery landed an estimated 3465 tonnes (carcass weight) of shark, principally consisting of gummy shark and school shark. The estimated value of the catch was A\$11.8million. The fishery is managed through a range of input controls and access is currently restricted to 160 vessels.

The Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery is based on demersal catches from the shelf, upper slope and deepwater slope of southern Australia. In 1997/98 the fishery landed an estimated 2,600 tonnes of fish valued at A\$6 million, mainly deepwater flathead and bight redfish. The fishery is managed by limiting access to ten Statutory Fishing Rights as well as limitations on cod-end mesh size, and the use of boats in excess of 40 metres in length.

## Recreational Fishing

In Australia there are around 37,000 km of coastline and thousands of kilometres of streams and waterways. Recreational fishing offers an important leisure activity for over 4.5 million Australians annually and supports about 90,000 jobs. The Australian fishing tackle and bait industry has an annual turnover in excess of A\$170m. The recreational boating industry accounts for another A\$500m in turnover, around 60% of it fishing related. The recreational fishing industry estimates that international tourists spend over A\$210 million on fishing in Australia each year. A national survey of recreational and indigenous fishing will be conducted as a cooperative project between the Commonwealth and State fisheries agencies in 2000-2001.

## Economic Efficiency

Under its economic efficiency objective, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority has adopted policies of pursuing efficient harvesting regimes and providing positive incentives for commercial fishers to conserve stocks. This is achieved by providing secure and transferable access rights within statutory management plans for major commercial fisheries.

In the absence of regulation or restriction, individual fishers tend to continue to increase effort in a fishery until the cost of catching an additional fish is greater than the price received for it. Each fisher is also in competition with other fishers to get a greater share of the catch. In pursuit of economic efficiency, AFMA is concerned with establishing effective management regimes which encourage the achievement of maximum profitability at the fishery level rather than that of individual fishers. Hence, it is up to each fisher to develop the most appropriate and efficient fishing operations within the applicable management arrangements.

## Regional Management Arrangements

Several fishery resources of commercial importance to Australia can only be managed effectively through cooperative regional action. Accordingly, Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry-Australia (AFFA):

- provides policy advice and coordination on fisheries issues involving neighbouring countries;
- seeks to secure cooperation from countries with whom we share resources to improve standards of fisheries management in those countries; and
- seeks to influence the standard of regional fisheries management through participation in relevant regional bodies, e.g. Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC), Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), and the Multilateral High Level Conference on the conservation and management of highly migratory fish stocks of the western and central Pacific Ocean (MHLIC).

Australia is a signatory to the Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), together with New Zealand and Japan. The Convention aims to ensure, through appropriate management, the conservation and optimum utilisation of southern bluefin tuna. The CCSBT establishes a global total

allowable catch (TAC) on southern bluefin tuna (SBT) each year, in an effort to maintain and re-establish the parental biomass of the SBT stock.

Australia is now an active member of the seventeen member Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). The States and Territories, in addition to AFMA and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation have supported participation by Australia in the Commission as a forum in which to address management issues and stock concerns on an international basis. The commission is concerned predominantly with yellowfin, bigeye, skipjack, albacore tunas, and billfish. Australia has also been an active participant in the MHLC process and looks forward to the establishment of an effective and workable commission in the near future.

Australia and Indonesia have been working together to address the problem of illegal fishing through a Fisheries Co-operation Agreement. Indonesian fishing boats apprehended within the Australian Fishing Zone are predominantly fishing for bêche de mer and trochus. Australian concerns focus on the harm being done to fisheries and wildlife by Indonesian fishers, and the quarantine and customs risks from Indonesian access to the Australian mainland. Widespread targeted surveillance by Coastwatch and the Royal Australian Navy is employed to curtail this illegal activity. Access for traditional Indonesian fishers to certain offshore areas is allowed under an MOU between the two countries.

This was the second season of fishing in the Heard and MacDonalld Islands Fishery and the first season of a new Management Policy. Two boats were granted permits in the fishery after an open selection process. Reports to the CCAMLR indicated that the entire TAC (3700 t) of toothfish was likely to be taken. Icefish were targeted sporadically between mid-May and September as commercial demand required and a total of 115 t was caught up to September 1998. A Sub-Antarctic Fisheries Assessment Group, which was formed by AFMA in 1997, developed a draft strategic research plan covering fishery, ecological and economic research. The Assessment Group provides a point of coordination for research being carried out by various agencies such as the Australian Antarctic Division and the CSIRO.

## Environmental Problems

Awareness of environmental problems is growing throughout Australia, as in the rest of the world. The main fisheries related environmental issues in Australia are: degradation of fish habitat by coastal zone development, and coastal and land-based marine pollution; responses to environmental emergencies; the impact of introduced species through ballast water and hull fouling; and the effects of fishing, particularly trawling, on marine communities.

In 1995 the incidental catch of seabirds during oceanic longline fishing operations was listed as a key threatening process under the Endangered Species Protection Act 1992. This necessitates the preparation and implementation of a threat abatement plan to reduce seabird bycatch to a specified level. There has also been an increased focus on applying conservation measures for tuna longline operations through the strengthening of “codes of conduct” for the handling of marlin and sharks. Research and management is continuing on the use of turtle exclusion devices (TED’s) in prawn trawls, and advances in technology such as the use of GPS, sonar and net sondes, are improving selectivity and reducing bycatch.

## Indigenous Fishing Activities

In recent years there have been a number of claims under the *Native Title Act* in relation to offshore areas, none of which have yet been determined. It is still not clear how Native Title applies to these areas. This is

a complex issue as the concept of ownership of offshore areas or of living marine resources is not dealt with clearly in national or customary law. Discussions between officials and representatives of native claimants are continuing.

#### **4. PRODUCTION**

The majority of fisheries in the Australian region are fully exploited, and some fisheries, such as the Southern Bluefin Tuna fishery, are over exploited. A few fisheries still have some ability to expand wild production, but within management controls. These include the western tuna, southern jack mackerel and squid fisheries.

Australian fisheries production in 1997/98 was \$1.86 billion including A\$491 million from aquaculture. Actual tonnage remained about the same over the last three years. Australia's most valuable seafood products, based on 1997/98 data, were:

- rock lobster      A\$373 million
- prawns            A\$377 million
- tuna                A\$130 million
- other fin fish    A\$404 million
- abalone            A\$192 million
- pearls              A\$190 million

#### **5. AQUACULTURE**

In 1997/98 Australian aquaculture production of 27,000 tonnes realised a farm gate value of A\$491 million. Over the past four years the value of Australian aquaculture has increased on average, by 17% per annum, making aquaculture one of the fastest growing primary industries in Australia.

Relatively small by world standards, Australian aquaculture production is dominated by a few sectors. In 1997/98 the major farmed species by value were pearls (\$190m), salmon (\$64m), tuna (\$130m), edible oysters (\$51m), and prawns (\$32m).

Australia has the ability to produce a wide range of species due to the existence of different climatic conditions. Emerging industries with good potential include abalone, mussels, eels, freshwater crayfish and an array of marine and freshwater finfish.

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