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TWENTY-THIRD REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 5 - 9 August 1991)

AUSTRALIA COUNTRY STATEMENT

Regional Technical Meeting on Fisheries
South Pacific Commission
Noumea, 5-9 August 1991

COUNTRY STATEMENT

Australia

OVERVIEW

The retained catch of fish, crustaceans and molluscs by Australian fishermen reached 210,400 tonnes in 1989/90, an 18% rise on the previous year. Although most categories experienced falls in the value of production, the gross value of production rose from \$A883 million to \$A951 million. This rise is attributable to rises in non-tuna finfish and aquaculture production. Aquaculture production increased to \$A189 million, with molluscs (oysters are the major farmed species) accounting for \$A131 million. Fisheries production ranked 5th after wool, cattle, wheat and milk, with about 44% of exported fish products going to Japan and 25% to the USA. Over 90,000 tonnes of fish products worth approximately \$A400 million were imported in 1989/90 from diverse sources dominated by Thailand, New Zealand, Canada, Malaysia, USA and Japan (Source: Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics).

The management of fisheries in Australia is shared between Commonwealth (federal) and state level organisations. The Commonwealth fisheries are managed by the Australian Fisheries Service which is due to become a statutory authority, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, in late 1991. The 1989 fisheries management policy includes an emphasis on conservation of resources, efficiency of exploitation, and on the use of output controls, specifically individually transferable quotas (ITQs). The policy states that the "practicality (of ITQs) should be examined before other management controls are considered". The status of the major Commonwealth-managed fisheries are shown in Table 1.

MAJOR FISHERIES OF INTEREST TO SPC MEMBERS

East Coast tuna fishery (domestic)

Longline: The main species caught in this fishery off Australia's east coast are yellowfin and bigeye tuna. In 1989/90 175 boats were licensed with a total of 660 tonnes taken. The main markets are the Japan and USA sashimi markets.

Purse seine: The catch, mainly skipjack tuna varies markedly from a few 100 tonnes to 5000 tonnes per year, most of which goes to domestic canning. There were 10 licensed boats in 1989/90.

Jack Mackerel fishery

Four boats took 12,500 tonnes of jack mackerel, *Trachurus declivis*, in 1989/90 valued at approximately \$2 million. The catch is taken in southern waters and the main markets are domestic fishmeal, bait and petfood.

Table 1 Summary status of Commonwealth (or jointly managed) commercial fisheries showing a qualitative assessment of both the stock and the knowledge base for that stock.

Fishery	Location	Knowledge of stock¹	Exploitation level
Northern prawn	N	Adequate	Fully, some over
Torres Strait prawns	N	Adequate	Fully, some over
Torres Strait lobster	N	Adequate	Under exploited
Scallops	SE	Adequate	Dangerously over
Southern shark	SE	Adequate	Dangerously over
Southern bluefin tuna	S	Good	Dangerously over
East Coast tuna	E, NE	Inadequate	Unknown, unlikely to be over, but caution required with some species
Jack mackerel	S, SE	Inadequate	Uncertain, possibly fully
Great Aust Bight trawl	S	Inadequate	Still developing
South East Trawl	SE	Inadequate (with exceptions)	Some fully, some over, many uncertain
- Orange Roughy	S, SE	Inadequate	Fully, and present level not sustainable
- Gemfish	S, SE	Good	Eastern stock dangerously over
Deepwater	W, NW	Inadequate	Fully in parts, e.g. NW crustaceans, unknown elsewhere
NW Shelf demersal	N, NW	Adequate	NW shelf over, others probably fully
East coast seamounts	E	Inadequate	Little known
Wild-caught pearl	NW, N	Inadequate	Probably over

¹Indicates whether sufficient information is available to be confident about assessment of exploitation level

Northern Pearls

The gold-lipped pearl shell, *Pinctada maxima*, is the main species taken both for mother of pearl and for pearl culture. The value of product from Western Australia and Northern Territory is approximately \$A90 million and \$A1 million from Torres Strait. For pearl culture, wild pearl shell are collected by divers, nuclei inserted and then the shell is farmed until the pearls are harvested. A management plan is in place for Western Australia, a draft plan is being prepared for the Northern Territory but presently none for Queensland. The fishery is managed as a Joint Authority with responsibilities split between the Commonwealth and the States.

Trochus in Torres Strait and Queensland East Coast

Following high prices in 1990 (\$A10/kg) there was increased interest in this fishery, but this has since subsided with the present prices of only \$A4-7/kg. The fishery is considered to be over-exploited, with many areas of local depletion. The industry has instituted a voluntary closure between Lizard Island and Cape York. The current management arrangements for the Queensland trochus fishery include limited entry on the east coast, a total allowable catch of 350 tonnes on the east coast, 150 tonnes in Torres Strait, a minimum size (base diameter) of 8 cm, a maximum base diameter of 12.5 cm, with individual operators holding non-transferable quotas.

Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster

The tropical rock lobster, *Panulirus ornatus*, are speared or hand collected by divers in the Torres Strait fishery. Lobsters are generally taken in the 1-2.5 kg size range but exceptional specimens are up to 6 kg. The value of catch in 1989/90 was approximately \$A5 million.

Torres Strait prawns

There are 133 licensed vessels which took a 1989/90 catch valued at approximately \$A15 million. As with tropical rock lobster fishery, the catch sharing arrangements agreed between Australia and Papua New Guinea in respect of prawns relate to boat numbers rather than total catches and take into account the catching capacity of prawn trawlers and the distribution of prawn stocks.

Northern prawn

This fishery extends from Cape Londonderry in Western Australia to Thursday Island in the east, taking in parts of the Timor and Arafura Seas and the Gulf of Carpentaria. The main species are the banana prawn (*Penaeus merguensis*), endeavour prawns (*Metapenaeus endeavouri* and *M. ensis*) and tiger prawns (*Penaeus esculentus* and *P. semisulcatus*). In 1990 approximately 7000 tonnes were taken, valued at \$A70 million. There are currently 215 northern prawn boats, although a scheme is now in place to

reduce the overall number of boats and increase the efficiency of the fishery. The fishery is considered to be fully exploited.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH (ACIAR) Fisheries Projects

Giant clam culture project

This project is now in its 2nd phase (the final year of a 2 phase program). The first phase established the technical feasibility of mariculture of giant clam species. This work involved 3 Australian institutions (James Cook University, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Queensland Department of Primary Industry) and 6 Pacific Island country partners (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Philippines (2 institutes), Tonga and Tuvalu). The second phase has focussed on:

- farming technologies appropriate for developing countries in SE Asia and Pacific Islands,
- assisting collaborating countries with research directed at clam stock assessment and management of wild populations,
- the introduction of populations to areas where species are locally extinct.

This project finishes in January 1992.

Tuna bait fish project

This is a 3 year project, now in its second phase. The work was initiated in 1990. This phase involves extensive field studies of the tuna bait fisheries in Fiji and Kiribati. Biological data and fisheries statistics from the large Solomon Island fisheries are also being reanalysed to refine stock size estimates and management advice generated in the early phase of the work.

Visual assessment of reef fish stocks

This is an 18 month project (Queensland Dept of Primary Industry) on visual assessment of reef fish stocks involving work on the Great Barrier Reef and selected reefs in Fiji.

FOREIGN FISHING IN THE AUSTRALIAN FISHING ZONE (AFZ)

In 1990 there was a maximum of 250 Japanese vessels (plus 2 processor vessels) and 8 Taiwanese vessels permitted to fish in the AFZ. A quota of 800 tonnes of southern bluefin tuna applied to the Japanese vessels. The catch by all foreign vessels in the AFZ is shown in table 2.

Table 2: Catch by foreign vessels in the AFZ (source: Australian Fisheries Service).

Country (Joint venture company)	tonnes	species	Recording period
Japan	1568	*sth bluefin	1-Jan-90 to
	2710	yellowfin	31-Dec-90
	1627	albacore	
	912	bigeye	
	2027	other fish	
	8844	TOTAL fish	
Thailand (Seanorth)	2500	trawl fish	25-Oct-89 to 24-Oct-90
Taiwan (KKFC)	300	trawl fish	1-Nov-89 to 31-Oct-90
China	1021	trawl fish	1-Mar-88 to 28-Feb-89
Norway	2050	trawl fish (mostly orange roughy)	1-Nov-89 to 31-Oct-90

* For that year, the SBT quota was 1800 tonnes and for the present year it is 800 tonnes, with most SBT taken from around Tasmania.

References

Background Fisheries Statistics, 1990, published by the Australian Fisheries Service, Canberra, Australia.

Source: Background Fisheries Statistics
May 1991, Australian Fisheries Service

AUSTRALIAN FISHING ZONE INFORMATION

Area of the AFZ* : 8.94 million square km.
Area of Australia** : 7.68 million square km.
Length of Australian coastline** : 36 735 km.

*includes the offshore territories of Cocos, Christmas, Norfolk, Macquarie, Heard and McDonald Islands.

**excludes offshore territories.

Source: ABS (15)

Map 1: THE AUSTRALIAN FISHING ZONE

