

FISHERIES REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting

29 and 30 March 2001 – Townsville

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

A summary document is prepared after each meeting of the Reef Advisory Committee to inform other advisory committees serving the Authority, and persons generally (including the public) of business of the RAC. The document forms part of the records of the meeting and so its content is limited to matters raised in the meeting, and, where necessary, background details given to the meeting. Any inquiries should be referred to the Authority's Secretariat, or to the appropriate Member.

INCREASED PENALTIES FOR ILLEGAL TRAWLING AND FISHING

An update was given on the progress of the introduction of increased penalties for illegal fishing and trawling in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP). Members heard that the process was almost complete and discussed the following issues:

- Vessel monitoring systems (VMS) will assist in addressing the problem of illegal trawling and fishing.
- Increased penalties do not necessarily solve the problem; they are maximum penalties; exclusion from the zone is the real deterrent.
- Need to improve our education of courts and judges.
- Indigenous people can assist with surveillance/enforcement but there is a problem with consistency of training.

CORAL REEF FINFISH FISHERY

An update on the coral reef finfish fishery was given and members were informed that the independent panel's report was with the Minister for consideration prior to release. The following issues were discussed:

- Recognise that the fishery does need a management plan.
- Displacement of effort should be monitored.
- Indigenous people have not had the opportunity to gain access into the fishery yet.

The Committee endorsed the GBRMPA trying to get the independent panel's reports released as soon as possible and undertook to contact the Minister's office.

EAST COAST TRAWL FISHERY (ECTF)

The GBRMPA is yet to accredit the revised ECTF Management Plan under its Far Northern Section Zoning Plan. Currently, discussions are underway between Commonwealth and Queensland officials on the reporting requirements and assessment framework that would ensure that the management plan delivers ecological sustainability for the fishery. The GBRMPA will not consider accrediting the plan until Queensland sets in place mechanisms to guarantee there will be no

migration in effort in the World Heritage Area (WHA). The GBRMPA accreditation would be subject to annual audit.

The Queensland Minister had written to Senator Hill regarding how Queensland would prevent effort increasing in the WHA. However, the Queensland Fisheries Service (QFS) has not yet provided details of how this will be done. The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) members expressed concern at the time taken for the accreditation process. As far as the Indigenous representative was aware, there has been no consideration of reservation of effort units for potential use by Indigenous peoples.

DRAFT POLICY ON THE CONDUCT OF EXTRACTIVE RESEARCH IN 'GREEN' ZONES

The Committee was presented with a draft policy that was being considered by the GBRMPA. The following issues were discussed:

- Needs to be some acknowledgement that green zones are used as control sites.
- Needs to be some latitude for research in green zones otherwise will be extremely difficult to show that the Representative Areas Program is working.
- Research permitted in green zones should have demonstrated benefit to conservation of green zones.
- What constitutes an impact in green zones varies. Research is being singled out; there are other examples of impacting activities; e.g., tourism impacting on fish spawning aggregation sites.
- Issue is not about extraction, but about impact and about taking a risk assessment approach to research.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE GBRMPA'S POLICY ON STOCKING OF HATCHERY-PRODUCED FISHERIES RESOURCES

The GBRMPA had received a letter from the Queensland Fisheries Service regarding a potential 'scallop enhancement' program in the waters of the GBRWHA. The Authority had responded that it could

not agree in principle to the concept of stocking scallops within the WHA. Members were asked what they thought about 'stock enhancement' in general. The following comments were provided:

- QSIA members said it has a lot of potential and could provide a good economical fishery; it is a way of achieving another food source economically and ecologically.
- Stocking is a bad idea; it does not fit in with WHA ideals and is indicative of management problems in the fishery.
- Prefer good management arrangements rather than re-stocking.
- Proportion of the natural adult population should be protected to enable natural recruitment to occur.
- Need to consider genetics and disease implications.

FUTURE OF CORAL COLLECTING

It is the Minister's view that coral collecting was not an appropriate activity in the WHA, and he has asked the GBRMPA for advice on how to close the fishery. Members were asked for their views on this issue. The Committee acknowledged management of the coral harvesting fishery could be better, but most members supported not closing the fishery and discussed the following issues:

- Closure would seriously curtail aquarium industry.
- Should be working to best scientific information for sustainable fisheries management.
- If we cannot support a sustainable fishery, how can we support unsustainable ones.
- Closure of industry would encourage displacement of effort into areas that would not be able to cope.
- Compensation for existing permit holders.
- There is a stable, domestic market for live coral.
- Should the fishery be closed, a black market is likely to develop.
- Regarding Indigenous interests, the site of proposed activity should be investigated in relation to other uses and values at the clan estate level. It is assumed collecting will be subject to future Act notification.

Members did not agree on a mechanism to close the fishery. The Committee agreed to voice its opinions on this matter to the Chairperson of the GBRMPA.

REPRESENTATIVE AREAS PROGRAM (RAP)

A number of up-date presentations from GBRMPA staff were given on various aspects of the Representative Areas Program. In general, members discussed the following issues:

- Whole range of impacts on biodiversity should be considered.
- Displacement of users needs to be considered.
- Some communities will be more vulnerable than others.
- Whether it was appropriate to select impacted areas adjacent to the coast.

- Indigenous peoples cannot easily exercise economic operations outside their clan estates. The GBRMPA has to try to support Indigenous groups in negotiating operational or management boundaries with the GBRMPA which are compatible with traditional owner aspirations for their country and RAP objectives.
- Crucial that mangroves are given some weighting.
- Critical that decisions about the maximum amount of bioregion protected, and the reasoning behind those decisions, are made public.

Information was presented on the fisheries data sets used in the RAP process. The GBRMPA sought advice from the Committee on how to use these data. The following issues were discussed:

- The GBRMPA is taking a reasonable approach to using the reef line fishery data, but should bear in mind other line fisheries and market shifts.
- Members had concerns about focussing on high value products and that, in addition to gross value of production (GVP), other values (e.g., tonnage) should be considered.
- Members supported the GBRMPA using all available data from all years for trawl.
- Social considerations must be taken into account.
- No-one should be financially disadvantaged by decisions made.
- The GBRMPA should not put value judgements on areas where, for example, the total catch is similar but one area is more variable than another.
- The GBRMPA should be flexible and willing to negotiate in terms of proposed candidate areas.
- Needs to be in-depth consideration on how to manage displaced effort.

A PERSPECTIVE ON INDIGENOUS FISHERIES

A presentation was given which outlined the problems faced by Indigenous communities in coordinating Indigenous input into marine management planning, and gave an overview of the structure of clan estates in the Far Northern Section of the Marine Park, and on the establishment of Sea Forum. Members were informed that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fishing Strategy had been prepared nationally through support from the Commonwealth Coastal Policy, but the Strategy had still to be addressed by Commonwealth and State governments.

The GBRMPA was encouraged to think about the possibility of exclusive Indigenous fishing zones. Members raised concerns about the appropriateness of licences being made available free of charge, rather than putting a value on them. The Committee recognised the input of Indigenous groups in Marine Park planning as an important issue, and agreed to progress the matter at the next meeting.

The next meeting is proposed for 28 and 29 June 2001.