



## FISHERIES REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FRAC)

### 17<sup>th</sup> Meeting

31 October and 1 November 2006 – Townsville

## SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the FRAC was held in Townsville on 31 October and 1 November 2006. A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

### **SOCIAL SCIENCE TO SUPPORT MANAGEMENT OF FISHERIES ISSUES IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK (GBRMP)**

The FRAC will be focussing attention over several meetings on the social and economic aspects of fisheries issues in the GBRMP. At FRAC 17, members explored preliminary aspects of the topic. During discussion, a number of themes arose, including:

#### **General processes**

- Social and economic information is not static and data needs to be collected on a regular basis, in a standardised way.
- The value to decision makers of starting with participatory processes and utilising existing services and information.
- Effective participation depends at least as much on the 'how' and the 'who', as it does on the 'content', when it comes to presenting information.
- Decision-making based on comprehensive, transparent, readily-available data is more likely to ensure that all parties know the true costs of any future changes.
- It is critical that people are convinced there are universal benefits to any proposed changes.
- The cross-jurisdictional nature and scale of fisheries issues in the GBRMP mean that progressing effective treatment of social and economic issues in the region will be a shared responsibility. Any outputs also should be seen as shared resources.
- The need for more regional focus in decision-making was strongly emphasised by members, though it was noted that external political drivers such as National Competition Policy could affect this.

#### **Fisheries and Sustainability**

- The notion of intergenerational sustainability is not widely understood, nor is the general public well informed about each of the fisheries in the GBRMP. Therefore, it is not clear what the community perceives to be acceptable in terms of the 'cost' to use or protect fisheries resources in the GBRMP.
- Very often marine systems around the world are not managed for sustainability because of the perceived 'cost' to do so – paradoxically, the longer the difficult decisions are delayed, their implementation is likely to be more costly.

- A new style of communication is required between managers and fishers to move forward on many issues. The FRAC provides a forum to do so.
- There remains a considerable gap between decision-makers and Indigenous people in terms of engagement on fisheries issues.
- Two overarching issues confound the current discussion:
  - 1) The impacts on the marine system of coastal development and land-based sources of pollution; and
  - 2) The manifestations of climate change.

In conclusion, the FRAC noted that a broad picture had emerged, now an organisational framework is required for addressing the issues. To date, issues identified include:

- Understanding past fishing activity.
- Including groups such as "grey nomads" in studies of fishing activity.
- Improving communication between the GBRMPA and fishers.
- Developing regional and localised management for commercial fishing.
- Ensuring intergenerational sustainability.
- Improving inter-group communication.
- Creating a baseline for monitoring future changes in fishing.
- Ensuring equity for all parties in decision-making.
- Establishing and maintaining common datasets for transparency of information including improved coordination and use of Government datasets.
- Regular monitoring of key social variables.
- Monitoring annually the value of licence symbols.
- Subjecting decisions to a public benefit test.
- The GBRMPA more clearly communicating its role and responsibility.
- Reporting on formal and informal institutional arrangements for commercial and recreational fishing.
- Agreeing on common rules for decision-making.
- Communicating information about the problem as the basis for common agreement.
- Understanding who will benefit from changes and who is negatively affected.

#### **INSHORE FINFISH**

The FRAC was updated on progress with developing an Inshore Finfish Management Plan. The issues, and the process to achieve this, are complex but the Management Plan will likely be finalised by late 2007. It was noted that some areas may require further work outside of the Management Plan – however such items will be foreshadowed in it.

In discussion, the Committee considered a broad range of issues related to this fishery and noted the following as being of particular importance:

- The need for validation of commercial and recreational fishing data; stock assessments of key target species; setting sustainability targets and increased research.
- Consideration of a regional approach to management.
- Interactions with threatened species.
- A review of the Zone B Dugong Protection Areas as identified in a previous GBR Ministerial Council Agreement.
- Identifying a process for engaging with Indigenous people, especially north of Cooktown.

### **GBRMPA REVIEW**

The GBRMPA Chairman gave an overview, noting that the Review had now gone to Cabinet and all the recommendations were accepted. Some key outcomes will include:

- Production of a 5-yearly Outlook Report for the Minister (to provide the definitive status, issues, and response options for the GBRMP);
- No reopening of the Zoning Plan for at least seven years;
- The Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) will play an important role and the GBR Consultative Committee will be replaced with a representative advisory board to the Minister;
- Permits and assessments will be streamlined with the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act; and
- The legislation underpinning enforcement and compliance in the GBRMP may require further review.

A close working relationship between the Commonwealth and the State is an essential component of effective day-to-day management.

### **SEABED BIODIVERSITY PROJECT AND THE EFFECTS OF REZONING PROJECT**

Members were updated on the Seabed biodiversity project – fieldwork and sorting have been completed, analyses are underway.

Key objectives are to provide a risk assessment for the trawl fisheries in the GBRMP and refine scientific knowledge on habitats in inter-reefal areas. The information also will provide a baseline from which to monitor changes in the GBRMP. The Committee noted that data will be integrated with existing hydrological and catch datasets.

In addition, the FRAC was provided with a quick update on some early results from monitoring populations of popular recreational species of fish, in green and blue zones, post-rezoning. For some species such as coral trout, on average, there has been a 70% increase in the density of fish on green reefs. In part, it was noted, this could be due to an earlier (immediately pre-RAP) very strong recruitment of juveniles. Nearly two years of protection from fishing for this cohort in green zones means a significant increase in abundance. This was a surprising observation in addition to the expected result – that is, over time, fish in green zones generally live longer, grow larger and produce disproportionately more eggs. This may result in a spill-over of more larvae and eventually large individuals to blue zoned reefs.

### **STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PACKAGE (SAP)**

The FRAC was updated on the current status of the SAP associated with rezoning of the GBRMP.

The Committee noted that identifying the impact of rezoning (as opposed to other management changes or market influences such as the increased cost of fuel) on fisheries-related businesses was proving particularly challenging and new tools have had to be developed. The bulk of Full Business Restructuring applications were received in the final month, prior to the deadline; assessment of many of these applications is yet to be finalised.

Members commented that the ever-changing goalposts and the lack of timelines had proved difficult and had delayed closure for many people.

The Committee noted that some of the lessons learned from this process have been applied to other SAPs.

The FRAC acknowledged that any future review of the SAP process for the GBRMP could not occur until the assessment and appeal process is finalised, however, the value of an independent review of the expenditure of taxpayers' money was emphasised.

### **RECREATIONAL FISHING GRANTS: FUTURE PROJECTS TO CHAMPION FOR THE GBRMP**

The FRAC has previously expressed a desire to identify projects that would both enhance the recreational fishing experience and minimise the impact of fishing in the GBRMP. Members were advised of a project that met these objectives. Popular recreational crab pots (because of their opening dimensions) may trap protected species such as turtles and crocodiles in some parts of the GBRMP and this may result in mortality. Opening dimensions are currently not regulated, though future legislative amendments are intended. Members noted that there is scope for an education campaign to raise awareness of the problem.

A locally-designed excluder and bycatch reduction device provides a simple, inexpensive solution that can be fitted to any style of crab pot.

To progress this project, the FRAC recommended that a fully costed grant proposal for an education campaign be prepared noting it should include also a research component to independently verify how the device works to reduce interactions with protected species without impacting on crab catches. A range of possible funding options was identified.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is proposed for mid-February 2007.

#### **CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE**

Mr David Bateman .....	Recreational Fishing
Mr Craig Bohm .....	Conservation
Mr Wayne Butcher .....	Indigenous
Dr Phil Cadwallader .....	GBRMPA
Mr Kevin Chard .....	Spear fishing
Mr Colin Creighton .....	Water Quality, Coastal Issues
Dr Mark Fenton .....	Socio-economics
Mr James Gillespie .....	Qld Dept Primary Industries and Fisheries
Mr Bob Grimley .....	Qld Boating and Fisheries Patrol
Mr Ray Joyce .....	Charter Fishing
Mr Richard Leck .....	Conservation
Mr Andrew McNee .....	Dept of the Environment and Heritage
Ms Cathy Skippington .....	Qld Environmental Protection Agency
Mr Lyle Squire Jnr .....	Commercial Dive-based Fishing
Ms Diane Tarte .....	Independent Chairman
Dr Andrew Tobin .....	Commercial Fishing
Mr Gary Wicks .....	Commercial Fishing
Dr David Williams .....	Scientific Community