

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.

FISHERIES REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE

5th Meeting

21 and 22 March 2002 – Townsville

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

WATER QUALITY IMPACTS ON FISHERIES RESOURCES/HABITATS IN THE GREAT BARRIER REEF MARINE PARK

Members were briefed on the processes that drive enrichment of estuaries and where sediments may end up in the GBR lagoon; and were made aware of the importance of the community becoming aware of the links between catchments and marine habitats, and the links between larval and mature fish. The FRAC was asked to consider supporting the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) in advising the community about the linkages between catchment management and fisheries through education programs, designing effective interpretive material, and tapping into regional natural resource management plans.

It was agreed to develop a statement to put forward to the Chairperson of the GBRMPA for distribution to the Reef Protection Taskforce and other appropriate forums as a reflection of the FRAC's views. The statement will indicate that the FRAC strongly recommends that improving catchment management, improving the quality of run-off and stopping the loss of riparian habitat are essential to the maintenance and rehabilitation of the health and long-term sustainability of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area (GBRWHA) ecosystems, particularly the inshore regions and the species that rely on these ecosystems.

Recommendation: *“Many of our fisheries resources are dependent on inshore, estuarine and riverine environments for their sustainability. The FRAC strongly recommends that improving catchment management, improving the quality of run-off and stopping the loss of riparian habitat are essential to the maintenance and rehabilitation of the health and long-term sustainability of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area ecosystems, particularly the inshore regions and the species that rely on these ecosystems. In making this recommendation, the Fisheries Reef Advisory Committee notes that:*

- *The levels of sediment and nutrient exported from our catchments are not sustainable for these Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area ecosystems, our rural land uses or our fisheries and require concerted and coordinated remedial works and activities;*
- *Impacts such as loss of wetlands, increased nutrient and sediment loads and restrictions on fish passage are all severely impacting on fisheries habitat and fish stocks; and*
- *In working to secure sustainable fisheries, one of this Committee's key tasks is to ensure quality marine, estuarine and riverine habitats to support our fisheries.*

Within this context, the Fisheries Reef Advisory Committee strongly supports the need for works and activities that will minimise the downstream effects of land use and secure healthy waterways, estuaries and nearshore reefs within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.”

QUEENSLAND FISHERIES SERVICE (QFS) – FISHERIES MANAGEMENT UPDATE

Coral Reef Fish Species

A statutory Fisheries Management Plan for Coral Reef Fish species currently is being prepared by QFS, with a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) accompanying the plan, and will be subject to a public consultation process. The process has Ministerial approval and has been noted by Cabinet. The fishery is the second most valuable in economic terms, following trawl, and largely occurs within the GBRWHA.

Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery

There are major concerns about the sustainability of Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) in Torres Strait, and on the East Coast; catch rates have declined alarmingly. The TRL Working Group has determined a series of measures to address the problem. The management measures will be progressed via a general Regulation amendment and be accompanied by a Regulatory Impact Statement. The FRAC recognised there is an issue with the level of effort in this fishery, and recommended that effort be reduced as a matter of urgency, as the proposed measures do not deal with the issue.

Marine Aquarium Fishery

There are two significant issues that affect this fishery, latent effort and high levels of localised effort. A number of management measures have been proposed by QFS following discussions with industry and Harvest MAC (Management Advisory Committee), and these are proceeding through amendments to Regulations; they will be subject to RIS and public consultation.

COMMERCIAL CORAL COLLECTING IN THE GBRMP/INDEPENDENT PANEL

Members were updated on the status of commercial coral collecting, recapping the then Minister for the Environment, Senator Hill's, wish for the fishery to be sensitively closed. However, following extensive lobbying by the coral collecting and aquarium industries, the Prime Minister had asked that Senator Hill “implement arrangements which allow for the commercial harvest of coral to continue, subject to

strict conditions.” Consequently, the GBRMPA established an independent expert panel to report to the GBRMPA Chairperson on a set of management arrangements to give effect to the Prime Minister’s directive. The panel met on 1-14 February 2002, was briefed by the GBRMPA, and held meetings with industry as well as meeting with Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), QFS, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council of Australia (PIJAC) and other stakeholders. The final report is yet to be presented to the GBRMPA. Environment Australia has advised that once the fishery is considered to be managed in an ecologically sustainable way, export approvals will be granted.

FISHERIES COMPLIANCE IN THE GBRMP

The Commonwealth Government has funded an enhanced enforcement program, using a whole-of-government approach, with a range of agencies. The enhanced interaction between Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol (QBFP), QPWS, Coastwatch, Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), Queensland Water Police and Federal Police, has resulted in a more effective exchange of information. New penalties came into effect in July 2001; maximum penalty for fishing offences against Zoning Plan being \$220,000 for individual, \$1.1 million for company; penalties at discretion of Magistrates. Members were advised that it would be beneficial for the GBRMPA to be provided with letters of support in particular types of prosecution. The FRAC noted the value to the GBRMPA of back-up statements from peak sectoral organisations and agreed that members of the FRAC, where appropriate, will undertake to seek such statements from their respective organisations.

REPRESENTATIVE AREAS PROGRAM (RAP): UPDATE

Members were updated on the progress of the RAP, and were advised that simplified information was being developed, and the Minister was being briefed in April to establish a launch date. Work is being carried out to shoreline classification, coastal wetlands information, and utilisation of QFS commercial fishing information. Information is also being sought from recreational fishers on where activities are conducted; and the locations of boat ramps are also being looked at.

TRAWL ISSUES

Update on Developments in East Coast Trawl Fishery

Since the last meeting, effort levels in the fishery had been reduced and there has been less effort expended than provided for in the Management Plan. 83% of total allowable fishing effort had been used in the ECTF in 2001, with 79% of the allocated effort in the GBRWHA used in 2001. There were a variety of reasons for the significantly lower level of effort, including the physical impossibility for a vessel to use effort for every day of every year, due to breakdown, refit, illness, holidays, economic constraints, etc. In the first year of a plan of this magnitude, there is likely to be uncertainty as to how to use fishing effort; i.e., which day, which month, which season. Also, people tried to conserve effort, then were faced with the situation where more days were left.

QFS released the Review Paper on Permitted Species in the ECTF, after which a Regulatory Impact Statement was released. The GBRMPA is concerned that there was no stock assessment on which to base decisions, with the review paper

showing that little is known about currently permitted species.

The industry was given 14 steaming days in addition to fishing day allocation. This had proved to be a generous allocation of additional days in light of the provision that deemed vessels to be steaming if they travelled at or above 5.5 knots; and that QFS could reinstate fishing days if operators could prove they were fishing. The matter of steaming and determination of counting days was a legal process that requires determination under natural justice provisions.

GBRMPA Audit of the East Coast Trawl Fishery

Members were briefed on the requirement for the GBRMPA to audit the fishery, which was reiterated in the Gazette on 27 September 2001. This process was not formally discussed between the GBRMPA and QFS officers, however, a meeting had been convened on 2 April 2002 to discuss the process. The Fisheries Issues Group has prepared a draft report that looks at issues such as fisheries management arrangements and adequacy; the information base underpinning management decisions; overview; legislative/consultative frameworks; monitoring and research; stock assessment; adequacy of management arrangements; and the environmental impact.

REVIEW OF NETTING PRACTICES IN DUGONG PROTECTION AREA "B"

In 1999, a review of fisheries in Dugong Protection Areas (DPAs) resulted in recommendations endorsed by the Great Barrier Reef Ministerial Council on 30 July 1999 to investigate the success or otherwise of DPA Fisheries Regulations. The 1999 review was not intended to develop new policy in regard to the management of mesh netting and interactions with dugong. *Fisheries Legislation Amendment and Repeal Regulation (No. 1) 2001* gave effect to most of the recommendations agreed at the Council’s meeting in July 1999. At its meeting on 8 June 2001, Council agreed that a review of large mesh netting in DPA “B” zones should be undertaken. A report will be available for the Council meeting in June.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is proposed for July 2002.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE	
Mr David Bateman	Recreational Fishing
Dr Carol Booth	Conservation
Dr Phil Cadwallader	GBRMPA
Mr Colin Creighton	Water Quality and Coastal Issues
Mr Mark Flanigan	Environment Australia
Mr James Gillespie	Aquaculture
Mr Cliff Greenhalgh	Commercial Fishing
Mr Ray Joyce	Charter Boats
Ms Rosemary Lea	Fisheries Management
Mr John Olsen	Commercial Fishing
Mr Chris Roberts	Indigenous Community
Ms Kirsti Sampson	Conservation
Mr Lyle Squire	Commercial Harvest Fishing
Mr Rod Supple	Fisheries Enforcement and Compliance
Ms Diane Tarte (Chairperson)	Environment
Dr David Williams	Scientific Community