



FISHERIES REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FRAC) 16th Meeting 16 and 17 February 2006 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The 16th meeting of the FRAC was held in Townsville on 16 and 17 February 2006. A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

PROGRESS WITH ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION (EPBC) FISHERY ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

The FRAC discussed the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries' (QDPI&F) progress against the 238 recommendations resulting from the first round of EPBC fishery assessments for fisheries in the GBRMP. QDPI&F indicated it was keen to seek further collaborations with the GBRMPA and other stakeholders to assist with delivering on the recommendations. The FRAC noted that through a process of continual improvement the aim was to achieve exemptions or approvals for five years. Members discussed priorities for implementing the recommendations and how round two assessments should be undertaken, with the following outcomes:

- While some long-term monitoring programs have been amended to improve stock assessments, recommendations relating to data deficient fisheries will be addressed through a risk-based approach.
- Members noted the benefits of a risk-based approach, but emphasised the importance of robust stock assessments.
- Policies rather than legislative changes are likely to be used increasingly to achieve change following the "year of consolidation".
- Resources for implementing the recommendations remains an issue; the new QDPI&F fees and charges will not cover the full cost, and most research funding sources do not fund fisheries management "core business".
- The FRAC acknowledged the efforts of the Australian Fishery Managers' Forum to minimise duplication and maximise resources by considering collaborative and cross-jurisdictional funding requests for research on generic issues, the application of existing management models and decision-support tools across different fisheries, and the use of risk-based approaches.
- The FRAC recognised that the increasing focus on interaction with communities at a regional scale provides a strong driver for more regional reporting of fisheries data to better inform these processes.
- Members acknowledged that external drivers (cheap imports, increasing fuel costs, fluctuating Australian dollar, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing) were legitimate factors that needed to be included for round two assessments. Other socio-economic issues also need to be addressed so there is a synergy between politics, research and management.
- The FRAC noted that the EPBC process is about improved performance; the real test is ensuring there are mechanisms

in place to achieve on-water, long-term changes to ensure ecological sustainability of fisheries.

- The concept of "ecological sustainability" is effectively a continuum, the question is at what point on the line is a fishery seen to be ecologically sustainable and consensus reached? The FRAC acknowledged that any definition of a sustainable fishery needs to encompass environmental, social and economic aspects, and decision-making must be achieved in collaboration with the community.
- Trust and confidence must be established because communities must have confidence that their opinions are taken into account by managers before they are willing to contribute.
- Paradoxically, there is also a public perception of "over consultation" on key issues for many sectors. The challenge is to engage people in meaningful ways (e.g., using non-technical summaries to explain issues at hand and provision of regional information), directed at a "grass roots" rather than a representative level. The FRAC noted that previous cases of public consultation may not have been effective in reaching all stakeholders who wished to participate, because the "community representatives" who were consulted, did not always represent their constituents adequately.
- The FRAC noted that round one assessments and recommendations have focussed little attention on "recreational take" in any fishery. This must be addressed effectively in round two.

In summary, the FRAC developed a 10-year vision for fisheries in the GBRMP:

- Ecologically and economically sustainable fisheries.
 - Increased and effective collaboration across governments, industry, researchers and managers.
 - Increased understanding in the wider community about the application of ecosystem-based management to fisheries.
 - High levels of confidence amongst all stakeholders.
- Actions that would facilitate achieving this vision were:
- Integrated management processes with data gathering, decision support systems and consistent reporting at regional scales.
 - Routine integration of biotic and abiotic factors into data interpretation; recognition of local/regional conditions that contribute to unsustainable fishing of populations in particular areas.
 - Independent audit of all QDPI&F annual fishery status reports similar to the Bureau of Rural Sciences' (BRS) approach for Commonwealth-managed fisheries.

An indicator of achievement of the vision would be:

- Future rounds of EPBC fisheries assessments for fisheries in the GBRMP that resulted in a significant proportion with export exemptions, or, fisheries with Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) permits with very few recommendations.

CAPRICORN REEF MONITORING PROGRAM (CAPReef)

Members were updated on the Central Queensland community-based monitoring program known as CAPReef. This project was initiated in 2004/5 with seed funding from the GBRMPA. It arose out of the GBRMPA rezoning consultation process, Sunfish/Local Marine Advisory Committee consultation and community involvement. Many different kinds of data are being collected. The key drivers for the project have been the major changes in Marine Park and fisheries management over the past few years.

The FRAC noted that results to date from the social survey suggest that four out of five fishers support the need to protect the GBR, and further, that the community appears to be more accepting of management changes (such as increases to green zones) than some media reports indicate. This observation supports the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) independent survey results that show that support for green zones is about 85% in coastal communities along the GBR.

The FRAC commended the program as a means of empowering communities and stakeholders and noted that it could be applied to other coastal communities if there were people willing to lead the process.

EFFECTS OF LINE FISHING EXPERIMENT (ELF) AND ELF SIM MODELLING FOR CORAL REEF FINFISH FISHERY

Members were updated on the 10-year ELF experiment run by the CRC Reef, and the subsequent ELF Sim model developed for the Coral Reef Finfish Fishery. Involvement of stakeholders has been a critical component of this project, which has improved knowledge of the biology of target species significantly. Results have already been applied to the management of the GBRMP and the Coral Reef Finfish Fishery.

Results showed that line fishing has a significant impact on coral trout and red throat emperor (RTE) populations and that closures are having an effect – these species of fish were not only more abundant on closed reefs, but were also larger, though this varied regionally (areas with greatest fishing pressure showed more dramatic effects).

The ELF Sim model incorporates biological data, fishing effort and management strategy options for coral trout and RTE, to enable managers to determine the likelihood of various management strategies meeting their objectives.

The FRAC noted the flexibility of the ELF Sim model and the potential for its application to other species of coral reef finfish.

GBRMP STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT PACKAGE (SAP)

The FRAC was updated on the DEH process for the SAP associated with rezoning the GBRMP. The licence buyout component of the SAP is about to be reviewed, with a review of the full SAP scheduled for 2007. Lessons learned from the GBRMP SAP will be applied to future SAPs.

The FRAC commented that, with hindsight, if it had been known that the government was prepared to spend this amount of money on the SAP (given the number of fishermen who applied for a licence buyout) it might have been better to have bought out twice as many licences. This would have reduced significantly the need for business restructuring for fishermen because the remaining fishermen would be working in a much less competitive environment.

Members acknowledged that while this approach may have addressed the fishery side of the problem, the flow-on effects to the community and land-based businesses would still have needed to be addressed.

WATER QUALITY COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Members were updated on the Queensland Wetlands Program with a focus on the new Wetlands Communication Products being developed by the GBRMPA.

The FRAC noted the objectives of the new communication and education material are to assist the user to understand what a wetland is, the connectivity between the catchment and the reef, the values of wetlands from different sector perspectives, and the fact that wetlands exist in most local coastal areas. The material demonstrates the connectivity between on-land practices and fisheries in estuaries and inshore waters.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES

An in-depth discussion of the socio-economic aspects of GBRMP fisheries is planned for the next few FRAC meetings. In preparation, members discussed a framework by which they could first be informed about the issues and then provide advice to the GBRMPA. Discussion centred on the connectivity between social, economic and cultural factors and the need to gain a good overview.

The FRAC acknowledged the need to bring in experts in the field of change management; review case studies of other industries which have already been through major change – noting the parameters and the insights gained; and consider not only the current social, economic and cultural aspects of each sector in the fishing community but also to predict and address how future and emerging issues could impact on these sectors and how these impacts could be minimised.

It was noted that the positive aspects of change needed to be acknowledged in the process and built on. For example, the views of the many coastal communities, who support protection for the GBR and see the benefits, need to be integrated into building a strong sense of community stewardship towards the GBRMP.

NEXT MEETING

This was the final meeting of the current term of the RACs. The next meeting is proposed for June 2006.

CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr David Bateman	Recreational Fishing
tba	Qld Environment Protection Agency
Mr Craig Bohm	Conservation
Dr Phil Cadwallader	GBRMPA
Mr Kevin Chard	Spear Fishing
Mr Colin Creighton	CSIRO Water for a Healthy Country
Mr Ian Cresswell	Dept of the Environment and Heritage
Mr James Gillespie	Qld Dept Primary Industries and Fisheries
Mr Cliff Greenhalgh	Commercial Fishing
Mr Bob Grimley	Qld Boating and Fisheries Patrol
Mr Ray Joyce	Charter Fishing
Mr Richard Leck	Conservation
Mr John Olsen	Commercial Fishing
Mr Chris Roberts	Indigenous Community
Mr Lyle Squire	Commercial Dive-based Fishing
Ms Diane Tarte	Independent Chairperson
Dr David Williams	Scientific Community