



## FISHERIES REEF ADVISORY COMMITTEE (FRAC) 18<sup>th</sup> Meeting 14 and 15 February 2007 – Townsville SUMMARY DOCUMENT

The 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the FRAC was held in Townsville on 14 and 15 February 2007. A summary of the outcomes of the main items discussed is set out below.

### SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF FISHERIES ISSUES IN THE GBRMP

The Committee was provided with several expert socio-economic presentations as part of the ongoing discussion on the use of social science to support fisheries management decisions. Key points were:

- Social science is to be used as a tool to assist with maximisation of conservation values whilst minimising the impact on people and social structures. Natural resources provide important ecosystem services and are not limitless, so it is important to share the cost of using the environment for multiple purposes.
- While there is a clear understanding of the need for better integration of social and economic factors into management decisions, new tools will have to be developed to achieve this.
- A sound knowledge base would allow governments, community and industries to better understand and appreciate the 'value' of differing activities and therefore better identify what effect any government initiatives might have on them. In this context, it will be important to assess cumulative effects of different activities and understand the effects of past management decisions.
- The next step is to identify obvious strategic directions and build an appropriate framework for management in terms of ecologically sustainable development (ESD).
- The objectives of a new Marine and Tropical Science Research Facility (MTSRF) project are to develop, test and parameterise a set of social and economic indicators for the GBRMP. Good indicators can be measured regularly, are cost effective and relatively easy to measure.

Members provided the following comments:

- The true costs of a sustainable future need to be fully addressed. The longer it is avoided, the more difficult it becomes.
- The application of the precautionary principle to decisions within the regulatory environment is evolving. Most risk-based assessments of fisheries resources are addressing biological risks and are beginning to consider economic aspects of risk. However, there is no explicit analysis of the consequences associated with the social aspects of risk. There needs to be a risk matrix integrating social risks, rather than address these only through political avenues.
- Proposed indicators will measure first-level impacts initially. More sophisticated indicators will need to be developed to measure flow-on effects to support industries.

- Perception of impact is likely to be strongest when people believe their identity (or role in society) has been forced to change beyond their control. Genuine consultation will ensure good understanding of the economic drivers as well as considering people's opinions and perspectives.
- More attention needs to be given to the analysis, interpretation and communication of information.
- Better understanding of the policies and processes around public funding for research, monitoring and structural adjustment packages is required.
- For the future, past policy decisions will need to be addressed by all stakeholders, collaboratively. Future change, ideally, will be driven by proactive industry/community-led stewards in collaboration with managers. This topic will be discussed further at FRAC 19 to identify specific information needs and future directions for the use of social science in managing fisheries issues in the GBRMP.

### DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND WATER RESOURCES (DEW) UPDATE

Members were provided an overview of the proposed process for the second round of strategic fisheries assessments. The FRAC noted that:

- Following the assessment of 130 fisheries over the past five years, a number of refinements to the assessment process are envisaged.
- The DEW is committed to improvements to facilitate and streamline the assessment process. They are working to achieve consensus on what is most important and relevant and put effort into developing a risk assessment approach to achieve change where it is most needed.
- There is emerging interest in taking a more regional approach (rather than fishery by fishery) and including a cumulative element to risk consideration.
- Twenty Queensland fisheries are due for assessment by the end of 2008.

Committee members remarked that:

- More explicit presentation of the issues underpinning each set of DEW recommendations would enable stakeholders to identify when 'on the water' management improvements had met the intent of the recommendations.
- A positive outcome of the assessment process is that it has helped to focus people's thinking on what is required for ecologically sustainable fisheries.

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSHORE FINFISH FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN

The FRAC was updated on the results from the recent "Have your say" questionnaire. Eight hundred and forty five responses were received and 43 public meetings were held.

Key issues included:

- ◆ Concern about the localised sustainability of commercial netting
- ◆ Strong public support for improved management of at-risk species
- ◆ Strong desire for greater regional consultation on fisheries matters
- ◆ Strong support for the review of size and possession limits for inshore species.

A number of working groups are established and are working to tight timeframes – it is hoped that a Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) and draft Management Plan will be developed by the end of 2007.

In regard to the net fishery, given the non-selective method of take, it was noted that the GBRMPA has particular concerns about the sustainability of the targeted take of sharks, the potential for localised depletion for some species and the risk of interactions with threatened or protected species. As a consequence, the GBRMPA is preparing a series of position statements to help inform the inshore finfish consultation process [Note. *These are now finalised, incorporate input from FRAC members and are available on the GBRMPA website.*]

Researchers working on the MTSRF Inshore finfish observer project provided an update for the Committee:

- Fieldwork began in mid 2007, to be followed by a series of risk assessments
- Mitigation strategies will be developed based on the results of this work

Members acknowledged that while it is unfortunate there is a mismatch in timing between the development of the new management plan and the output of the research results, it is an iterative process and researchers will be well placed to monitor how the new management plan (once it is implemented) changes fishers' behaviour.

### SHARK CONSERVATION ISSUES

The FRAC was advised about the need for urgent action to reduce shark and ray mortality, more generally. This is based on increasing and widespread concern about both the targeted take of a range of shark species in the net fishery and anecdotal reports of significant incidental mortality of reef shark species in the reef line fishery. Key issues that emerged during discussion were:

- The lack of broad scale data sets on abundance estimates and relative mobility for different species of sharks.
- The need to validate anecdotal information on line fisher behaviour. Sharks are not targeted in the reef line fishery so reducing shark mortality will require an educational approach.
- The lack of understanding about shark behaviour; there was some suggestion that relative exposure to humans may influence (bias) abundance estimates in some remote places.

The FRAC was advised that a whole-of-agency position paper on sharks and rays is being developed (in line with the National Plan of Action guidelines for sharks) to address these matters in the GBRMP. Members noted that this would need to clearly identify regulatory obligations, objectives, possible discernible triggers, potential actions as well as social and economic considerations. As this is progressed, further advice will be sought from the FRAC.

### NEW TECHNOLOGY AND BYCATCH MITIGATION IN THE TRAWL FISHERY

The East Coast Trawl Fishery has a target reference point of achieving a 40% reduction in trawl bycatch. Committee members were briefed on new bycatch mitigation technology. Recent field trials have shown promising results. To increase uptake by fishers, OceanWatch Australia has established a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation-funded extension project to lend (for free) the new models of bycatch reduction gear to fishers to try for themselves. Most participants are keen to continue using the new gear. FRAC members strongly supported this approach and encouraged further work to improve best practice across industry, noting that further development of the new technology could have positive environmental and economic effects.

### CLIMATE CHANGE ISSUES IN THE GBRMP

Members were provided with an overview of the current scientific knowledge about climate change and marine systems. It was acknowledged that there is still considerable uncertainty about the extent to which climate change will affect GBR ecosystems. Some species are likely to adapt by shifting their range, however other species will be very vulnerable, which is likely to result in significant changes to reef communities, in their current form.

A key theme, worldwide, is “managing for resilience”. From a theoretical perspective, the concept of resilience or ecosystem health is easy to grasp. However, at a practical level, little attention has been applied to the question of how climate change will affect individual fisheries, and how this might be included in management frameworks.

The FRAC was advised that a panel of experts is preparing a vulnerability report on the GBRMP (to be released later this year). This will identify key knowledge gaps and include a climate change action plan that will hinge on developing strong partnerships with each sector to improve their capacity to understand and adapt to expected climate change impacts.

Members requested that, following the release of the Vulnerability Report, the next major discussion item for the FRAC should cover fisheries-related issues associated with climate change.

### NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is proposed for 28 and 29 November 2007.

#### CURRENT MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMITTEE

Mr David Bateman	Recreational Fishing
Mr Craig Bohm	Conservation
Mr Wayne Butcher	Indigenous
Mr Randall Owens	GBRMPA
Mr Kevin Chard	Spear fishing
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 Water Resources
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