

NORTHERN TERRITORY DEMERSAL FISHERY

Export Exemption Submission

RE-ASSESSMENT REPORT

FEBRUARY 2009



A report prepared for the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) as required for re-assessment under Part 13 and 13 A of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*.

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Introduction

The Northern Territory Government's Department of Regional Development, Primary Industry, Fisheries and Resources (DRDPiFR) submitted a document to the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) for assessment of the NT Demersal Fishery (DF) under Parts 13 and 13 A of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The assessment resulted in the fishery being declared as being exempt from the export regulations of the EPBC Act, for a period of 5 years beginning in May 2004.

Following the initial assessment of the DF, a substantial level of information is now publicly available regarding the environmental performance of the fishery. In order to focus limited resources on continuous improvement within the fishery and to build on the findings from the initial assessment, the submission requirements were streamlined (by the regulating authority) to align with annual reporting requirements for the fishery.

Since initial accreditation, DRDPiFR has submitted to DEWHA regular reports regarding the progress and status of the DF, including reports on the completion and, where appropriate, ongoing reporting against recommendations. Ongoing outputs from the recommendations, where available, have been reported in the 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2007 Fishery Status Reports and a copy provided to DEWHA.

The DF is now due for reassessment against the Guidelines. DRDPiFR has prepared an assessment report that includes this document, the annual Fishery Status Reports published since the initial assessment in 2004, and the DF reports submitted to DEWHA. In compiling the report, DRDPiFR has addressed the Guidelines and where necessary, responded to each of the issues outlined.

As a result of the initial assessment of the fishery in 2004, a series of recommendations were agreed to between DEWHA and DRDPiFR. These agreed recommendations were focused on ensuring the continuation and enhancement of current sustainable management practices. This document specifically addresses these recommendations and provides a response to each.

The document should be read in conjunction with the Annual Fishery Status Reports, and the initial assessment document that was provided to DEWHA in 2004. For a comprehensive understanding of the legislative arrangements in place for the DF please refer to the *Northern Territory Fisheries Regulations* available for download at

www.nt.gov.au/drdpifr/Fisheries/index.cfm?header=Legislation

Copies of the NT Annual Fishery Status Reports are available to download at www.nt.gov.au/drdpifr/Fisheries

Please note that for all management decisions, NT Fisheries uses the most current data available accessible through a desktop system linked with the

compulsory logbook data program. Such data are summarised for public access, where appropriate, in the Annual Fishery Status Reports. These are published after all data for the calendar year have been compiled, validated and thoroughly analysed. A copy of the 2007 Fishery Status Report is available for download.

DRDPIFR will ensure conditions recommended by DEWHA in the assessment process will continue to be reported upon in the 2008 and subsequent Annual Fishery Status Reports.

The following progress has been made by DRDPIFR in implementing the DEWHA recommendations.

DEWHA Recommendation 1

Inform Environment Australia of any future amendment to the management regime for the Demersal Fishery.

DRDPIFR's Response

There have been no changes to the management regime in the Demersal Fishery. A 'Future Plans' section, detailing proposed changes to the fishery (if any), is reported in the Annual Status Reports from 2004. DRDPIFR will inform DEWHA of future amendments to management arrangements in the fishery if they fall outside of annual reporting timeframes.

Potential changes to the Demersal Fishery have been published in the 2007 Status Report. As these future plans are further developed, DEWHA will be informed of progress in a timely manner.

DEWHA Recommendation 2

NT Fisheries to move towards analysing effort using a more accurate measure of effort in the fishery than days fished.

DRDPIFR's Response

Ongoing. Reporting of catch and effort to finer, shot by shot resolutions has been introduced to compulsory logbooks in order to provide information at the appropriate scale to enable better assessment of effort.

DEWHA Recommendation 3

NT Fisheries to undertake a risk assessment of the species making up the groupings of Red Snapper, Goldband Snapper and Cod in order to establish greater confidence that there are no individual species that are particularly vulnerable or susceptible to fishing and may require additional management responses. In the event that a species is found to be particularly vulnerable NT Fisheries to implement appropriate management responses within 12 months.

DRDPIFR's Response

NT Fisheries has completed a combined offshore snapper fisheries risk assessment workshop looking at target, byproduct, bycatch and TEP species (Attachment 1). Outcomes from this workshop have revealed no significant impacts from fishing are discernable for species making up Red Snapper, Goldband Snapper and Cod groups in the Demersal Fishery. No additional management arrangements are considered necessary at this time.

DEWHA Recommendation 4

NT Fisheries to maintain data validation mechanisms for target, byproduct, bycatch and protected species interactions and implement alternative data collection validation techniques if observer trips are no longer feasible or are insufficient to provide robust information on the fishery.

DRDPIFR's Response

Ongoing. In particular, capacity to conduct cross-validation analysis between catch returns, market returns and relevant trader-processor returns is available and extensive reviews are conducted as required. Alternative data collection validation is not considered necessary at this time due to the scale of the fishery. Observer coverage is planned for 2009 as increasing catches from the fishery indicate further validation processes may be justified.

DEWHA Recommendation 5

NT Fisheries to continue to seek alternative cost effective fishery independent sampling techniques and report outcomes in annual status report.

DRDPIFR's Response

Given the small size and nature of the fishery, logbook monitoring of the fishery is considered to remain a feasible measure to provide robust information on the fishery. There has been no cost effective fishery independent sampling techniques identified which would be appropriate to the needs of this small fishery.

Any outcomes from alternative cost effective fishery independent sampling techniques trialled will be reported in the annual status reports.

DEWHA Recommendation 6

NT Fisheries to continue to work towards more refined yield estimates of principle target species to determine sustainable harvest levels, particularly for Goldband Snapper. By 2006 NT Fisheries to implement an interim precautionary trigger reference point for Goldband Snapper.

DRDPIFR's Response

The identification and analysis of goldband snapper research in order to refine yield estimates is ongoing. This matter will also be referred to the Timor Reef Fishery Assessment Group due to the possibility of shared goldband stocks with the Timor Reef Fishery. Preliminary results from the GIS project have been able to provide further information on spatial distribution of goldband catch and effort in the fishery (Attachment 2) to better inform analysis.

Fishing activity in the Demersal Fishery increased moderately in 2006, and substantially in 2007. The increased number of participants active in the fishery will assist the catch and effort data gathering process required to refine goldband yield estimates.

As reported in the 2004 ecological assessment report, participants at the 1996 Northern Trawl Fisheries Assessment Working Group workshop considered the 100 tonne sustainable yield estimate for goldband in the Timor Sea (area adjacent to the Timor Reef Fishery) and the 100-400 tonne sustainable yield estimate for goldband in the Arafura Sea derived from trawl surveys (Ramm 1994, Ramm 1997b) to be unreliable.

Workshop participants considered that these values were likely to underestimate potential yields. Despite their utility, trawl surveys cannot obtain quantitative samples from rough, rocky habitats, and thus have a limited ability to sample all habitats representatively. Recent work from the GIS study would support this assumption as goldband appear to prefer nontrawlable habitats.

DEWHA Recommendation 7

NT Fisheries to determine spatial distribution of effort and catch in the fishery and investigate the risk of localised depletions by 2006. In the event that significant risks are identified, NT Fisheries to implement appropriate mitigation measures in a timely manner.

DRDPIFR's Response

Preliminary results from the GIS project analysed spatial distribution of effort and catch in the fishery for goldband species (attachment 2). No significant risks for this species have been identified to date given the relatively low level of fishing activity in the fishery.

The final GIS report has not yet been published. No significant risks of localised depletion have been identified in the draft report. NT Fisheries will analyse the final report when available to ensure consistency with this position. A copy of the final report will be provided to DEWHA.

Over the next two years, NT Fisheries will continue to explore spatial distribution of effort and catch in the fishery and investigate the risk of localised depletions for other major species caught in the fishery.

DEWHA Recommendation 8

NT Fisheries to continue to cooperate with other relevant jurisdictions to pursue complementary management and research of shared stocks for all target and by-product species, that may be affected by cross-jurisdictional issues.

DRDPIFR's Response

The NT participates in cross-jurisdictional workshops with it's neighbours annually. In 2008, the annual Northern Australian Fisheries Management workshop was held in Darwin, with the Demersal Fishery forming part of discussions regarding complementary research and management arrangements for shared stocks. A number of collaborations, such as the

development of a Northern Australian Red Snapper Harvest Strategy framework are currently in place and more are planned.

DEWHA Recommendation 9

NT Fisheries to monitor the species composition of bycatch and byproduct with a view to undertaking a more rigorous risk analysis, if there is a significant increase in the catch of individual species.

DRDPIFR's Response

Logbooks have been upgraded to increase data collected on bycatch and byproduct species. The catch species composition is reviewed annually and to date, no significant increases in the number of byproduct or bycatch species have been noted. Monitoring of catch species composition will continue.

DEWHA Recommendation 10

NT Fisheries to continue to monitor the proportion of juvenile/adult snapper landed and implement appropriate management strategies, such as temporal/spatial restrictions, as appropriate.

DRDPIFR's Response

The size distribution of catch is monitored annually and appropriate management arrangements are in place.

Note: Front page only displayed here. Full report forwarded to DEWHA 28/01/2009

Ecological Risk Assessment of the Northern Territory Offshore Snapper Fisheries



A report to the Australian Government on the ecological risk assessment requirements set out in Wildlife Trade Operation approvals for the Northern Territory fisheries under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* approvals. This paper has been compiled by the Northern Territory Government's Department of Regional Development, Primary Industry Fisheries and Resources (DRDPIFR).

January 2009

ATTACHMENT 2.

NT Demersal Fishery goldband catch and effort distribution map (coloured areas represent predicted levels of goldband productivity).

Demersal fishery GIS map.pdf

Map has been taken out of this page due to mailing size issues.

NOTE: To open map, place cursor on words, left click mouse button, right click mouse button, move cursor down to 'Package Object', then move cursor right to 'activate contents' and left click mouse. A warning message will appear, if happy opening the pdf, click yes to open map.