

NORTHERN TERRITORY FINFISH TRAWL 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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Combined NT Offshore Snapper Fisheries ERA report. (front cover only, full report available)	

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 Finfish Trawl Fishery (FTF) 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 May 2004.

Following the initial assessment of the FTF, 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 FTF, 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 FTF 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 FTF 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 FTF 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 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.

Recommendation 1:

NT Fisheries to inform the Department of the Environment and Heritage of any changes to the management regime that may impact on the ecological sustainability of the Finfish Trawl Fishery.

DRDPIFR's response

There has been only a minor change to the management regime in the Finfish Trawl Fishery. A no-take of shark or shark products was a voluntary restriction initiated by the operator; this has since been included into the formal regulations for this fishery.

Any future changes to the Fishery are also flagged in the Annual Status Reports from 2004. DRDPIFR will inform DEWHA of future plans to amend management arrangements in the fishery if they fall outside of annual reporting timeframes.

Recommendation 2:

NT Fisheries to undertake a risk assessment of the species making up the groupings of Red Snapper and Goldband Snapper 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

Fisheries has recently held a combined offshore snapper fisheries risk assessment workshop to analyse target, bycatch and byproduct species (Attachment 1). Outcomes from this workshop have not identified any species to be in a vulnerable risk category. The final workshop report has been sent to DEWHA.

Additionally, based on annual analysis of observer and logbook data which indicate that catch composition for individual species remain stable, established reference trigger points have not been reached and there are no indications of any particular species being vulnerable to the impacts of fishing. Capacity to improve the reporting of individual species was increased in 2007-2008 through revision of the compulsory daily logbook to enhance reporting of species detail.

Recommendation 3:

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

Data validation mechanisms are monitored annually. In particular, capacity to conduct cross-validation analysis between catch returns, market returns and relevant trader-processor returns is available and are conducted as required. Alternative data collection validation is not necessary at this time as there are ongoing observer trips which provide robust supportive information commensurate to the size of the fishery.

Recommendation 4:

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

DRDPIFR's response

Ongoing. Given the small size and nature of the fishery, onboard 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.

Recommendation 5:

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

DRDPIFR's response

The NT participates in cross-jurisdictional workshops with its neighbours at least annually. A cross-jurisdictional Northern Australian Fisheries Management workshop was held in Darwin in 2008. No significant issues or future plans were raised that would affect the Finfish Trawl Fishery.

Recommendation 6:

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

DRDPIFR's response

Fisheries recently held a combined offshore snapper fisheries risk assessment workshop to analyse byproduct and bycatch species (Attachment 1). Outcomes from this workshop have not identified any species deemed to be in a vulnerable risk category. The final workshop report has been sent to DEWHA.

Species compositions of byproduct and bycatch are also monitored through observer programs and logbooks. The data are regularly analysed to determine if there is a significant increase in the catch of individual species. Individual catches of byproduct and bycatch species do not appear to have significantly increased and established trigger reference points have not been breached.

The operator has made alterations to the design of the trawl net by changing the 'wing' sections from diagonal to square hung mesh, thus allowing a greater number of smaller fishes to escape prior to landing. The operator continues to trial 'T90' square mesh cod ends and a bycatch reduction device installed just prior to the cod end opening. Reports from these trials indicate an improvement in product quality with a noticeable (observed) reduction of larger animals landed to the bycatch-return grid situated above the vessel's fish hopper.

Recommendation 7:

NT Fisheries to undertake a risk assessment of the Finfish Trawl Fishery byproduct species with respect to vulnerability to fishing by December 2008 and implement appropriate management measures for high-risk species within 12 months of the risk assessment.

DRDPIFR's response

Fisheries has recently held a combined offshore snapper fisheries risk assessment workshop to analyse target and byproduct species (Attachment 1). Outcomes from this workshop have not identified any species deemed to be in a vulnerable risk category. The final workshop report has been sent to DEWHA.

Additionally, information on bycatch species and frequency of capture are reported on annually in the Fishery Status Reports.

Recommendation 8:

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 by observers annually and current management arrangements are deemed appropriate at this time.

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).

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