



**Australian Government**  
**Bureau of Rural Sciences**

## Regional Profile—East Marine Region

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### **Description of commercial, recreational and charter fishing activities**

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## Executive Summary

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### East Marine Region

The East Marine Region (EMR) covers more than 2.4 million square kilometres of water off the east coast of Queensland and New South Wales (including Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island), from the town of Bermagui to the tip of Cape York. The Region includes waters between 3 and 200 n. miles from the coastline but does not include the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which is managed separately by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

### Socio-economics

Commercial fishing generates both direct and indirect employment opportunities in coastal regions and can be a substantial contributor to the economic and social wellbeing of communities. Key indicators of social and economic wellbeing include:

- Key landing and/or home ports
- Fishing sector employment
- Regional dependence on fishing and
- An overview of recent changes affecting fisheries in the EMR.

### Employment

It is estimated that 3,600 persons are employed in commercial fishing in the EMR, representing 0.2% of the total employment for the region. It is recognised this is indicative only as it does not reflect unpaid family workers, prevalent in the sector, and high levels of seasonal casual employment (Larcombe et. al. 2006). Employment data for fishing were obtained from 2001 Census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Data from the 2006 Census will be released in late October, 2007 but this data was not available at the time of writing.

### Regional Fisheries Employment by key ports

Main Port	Fishing employment (% of total regional employment)	
Cairns	< 1 <sup>a</sup>	0.5 <sup>b</sup>
Innisfail	1.4 <sup>b</sup>	
Townsville	1.3 <sup>b</sup>	
Mackay	0.3 <sup>b</sup>	
Gladstone	0.6 <sup>b</sup>	
Bundaberg	0.8 <sup>b</sup>	
(Mooloolaba	< 1 <sup>a</sup>	0.4 <sup>b</sup>
Brisbane	0.2 <sup>b</sup>	
Southport	0.1 <sup>b</sup>	
Coffs Harbour	< 1 <sup>a</sup>	1.1 <sup>b</sup>
Sydney	0.1 <sup>b</sup>	
Ulladulla	0.5 <sup>b</sup>	
Bermagui	2.3 <sup>b</sup>	

## Key Ports

The key ports for commercial fishing in the EMR include: Cairns, Innisfail, Townsville, Mackay, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Mooloolaba, Brisbane, and Southport in Queensland (Qld), and Coffs Harbour, Sydney, Ulladulla, and Bermagui in New South Wales (NSW). Employment data suggests that Bermagui, Innisfail and Townsville are the ports with the highest dependencies on commercial fishing in the EMR. This said, dependency studies suggest all key ports had a strong reliance on fishing related industries.

## Fisheries

Fisheries within the region target a broad range of species—from sedentary Beche-de-mer on reefs in the Coral Sea, to wide-ranging pelagic species such as tunas and billfish, targeted within the EMR and indeed in international waters beyond the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ). Details of fishing gear used in the region can be found in Appendix 4. A snapshot of the value of fishing in the region is provided in the following table. Full details of catch volume and value by fishery can be found in the overview table at the end of the executive summary.

### Estimated value of commercial fishing in the EMR\*

Fishery	Value \$m
<b>Qld</b>	60.9
<b>NSW</b>	30.1
<b>Australian Government</b>	230.47+
<b>Combined</b>	321.47
<b>Total Australian Fisheries</b>	213 000#

\* values are calculated for proportions of fishing activity that occurs within the EMR and in many cases have been extrapolated from whole fishery data and may be under or over representation.

+ Some fisheries will be underrepresented due to the five boat rule and the break up of each fishery

# 2005/06 figure includes aquaculture production

It is important to remember that while every effort has been made within this report to present information relevant to the EMR and associated planning, many species of fish targeted commercially are highly mobile. Fisheries, both Commonwealth and State, are usually defined by where fish and fishers are, which unfortunately does not always neatly overlap with the biogeographic regionalisation that underpin regional marine planning. A true picture of fishing effort and regional dependencies for a particular fishery may require consideration of information presented for several adjacent regional marine areas.

Summaries of commercial fishing activity in the EMR are presented in the overview table below

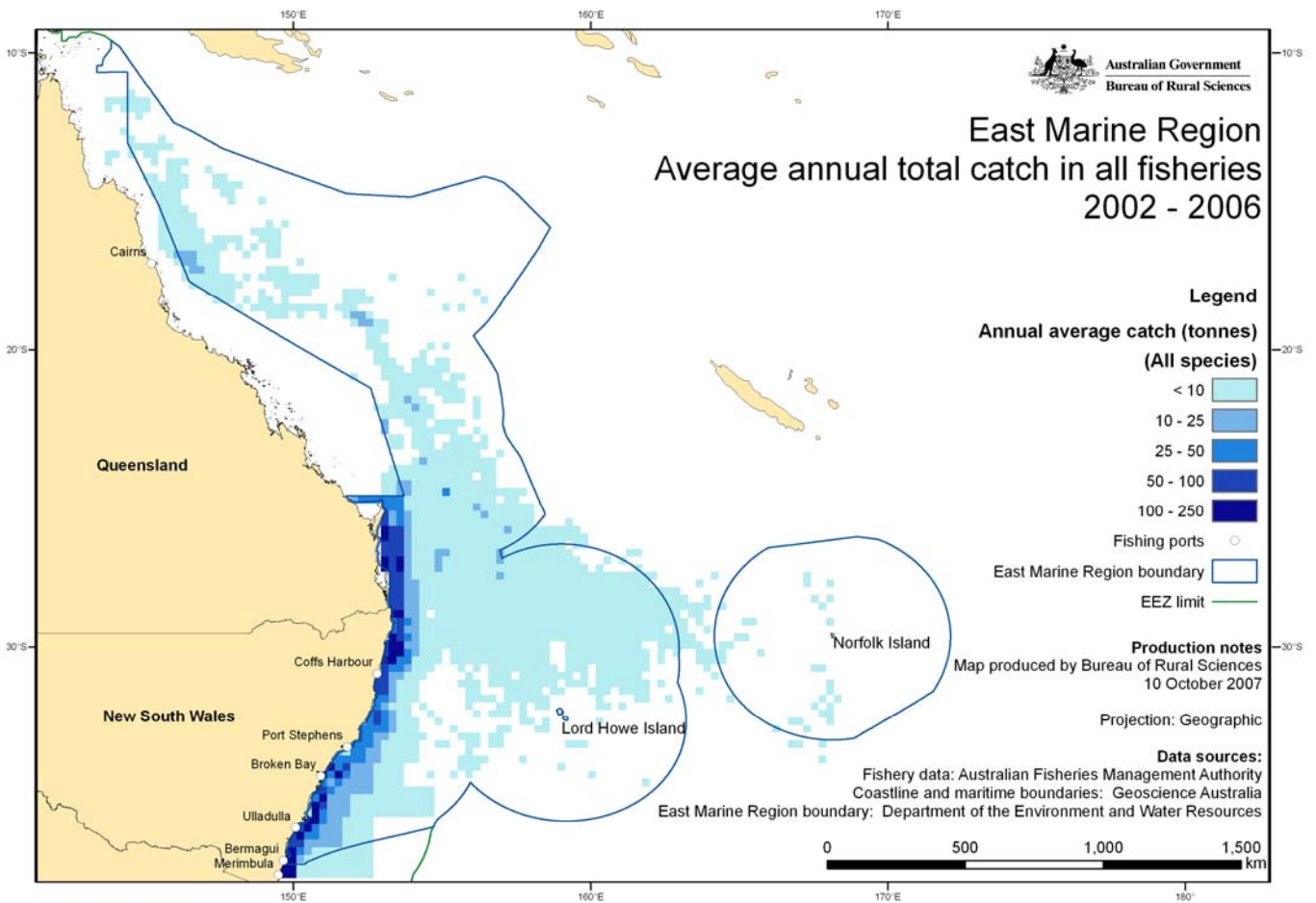
## Recreational Fishing

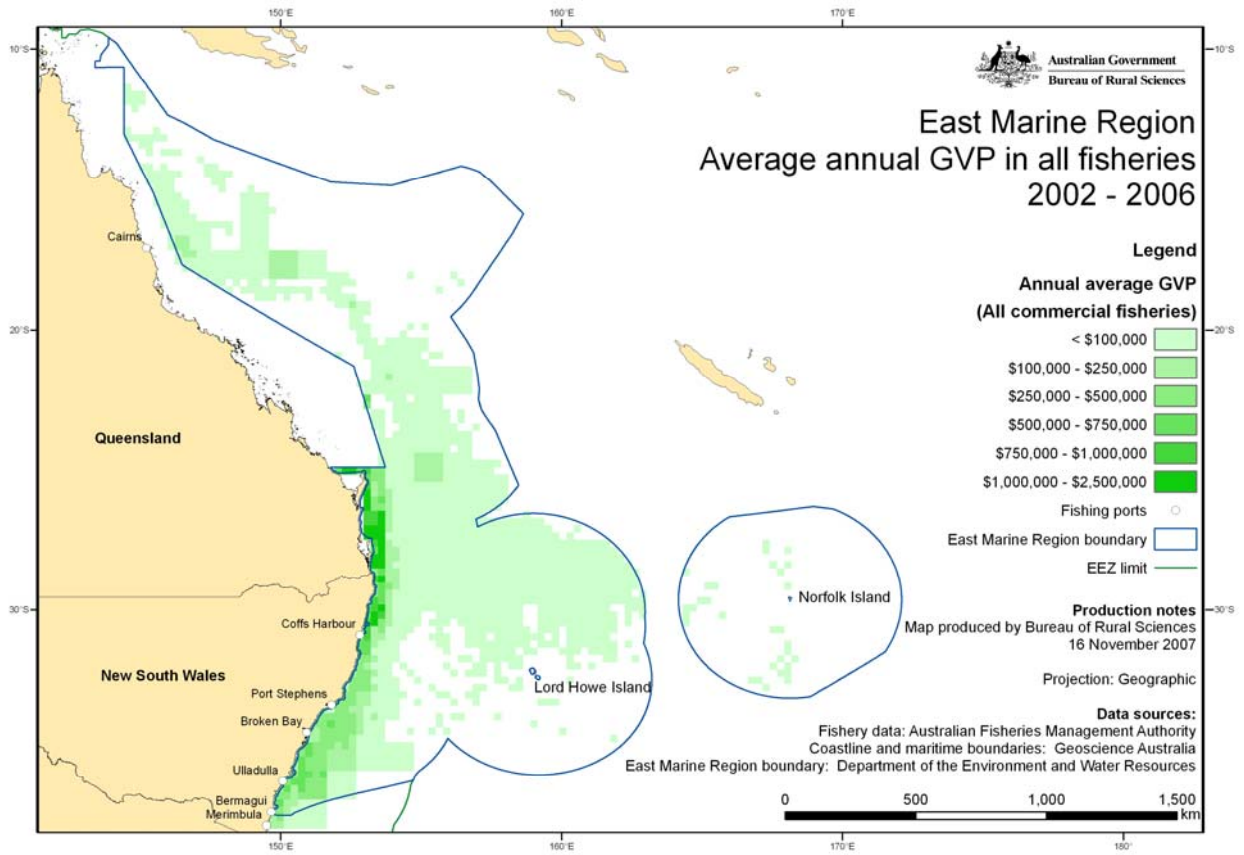
The two States bounded by the EMR (NSW & Qld) were shown in the national survey to have the highest participation in recreational

fishing, with an estimated 1.7 million people indicating they had participated in recreational fishing at least once in a 12 month period.

**Resource management challenges**

Climate change and resource sharing are emerging as major future management challenges for fishing in the EMR.





## Overview of fishing in the east marine region

Fishery	Management area	Species	Fishing method	Catch within bioregion (value)	Operators/ businesses	Status
<b><u>Commonwealth</u></b>						
<b>Coral Sea Fishery</b>	Extends from Cape York to Sandy Cape off Queensland. AFZ boundary and on the west by a line 10 to 100 n. mile seawards of the Great Barrier Reef	Bêche-de-mer, aquarium fish, trochus, lobster, various reef fish	Hand collection, otter trawl, seine net, long-line, trap, trot-line, drop-line and handlines	153 t (A\$0.377 m)	18 permits	All fisheries uncertain
<b>Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery</b>	Cape York to the South Australia-Victoria border, out to AFZ boundary including Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands, Tasmania and High Seas	Yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, albacore tuna, broadbill swordfish and striped marlin	Longline fishery and small minor-line component	6363 t (A\$30.1 m)	115 longline permits and 50 minor-line permits	Bigeye and yellowfin (overfishing, but not overfished). Striped marlin and broadbill swordfish (overfished status uncertain and overfishing status uncertain); Albacore (not overfished, no overfishing)
<b>Norfolk Island Fishery</b>	Norfolk Island is located 1500 km east of Brisbane. Australia exercises territorial control over the surrounding 200 n. miles EEZ	Labrids, Pomacentrids and cods, kingfish, trevally, tunas and Lethrinids, Serranidids	Otter trawl and demersal line	Inshore 5 t (value N/A) Offshore (no current fishing activity)	Inshore - no permits Offshore - no current permits as exploratory fishery ceased in 2003	Inshore (uncertain), offshore (uncertain)
<b>Skipjack Fishery</b>	Eastern skipjack: southern New South Wales to north-eastern Tasmania between November and	Skipjack tuna	Purse seine and some pole-and-line fishing	confidential (less than 5 boats)	20 permits	(Not overfished and not subject to overfishing)

June each year

<b>Small Pelagics Fishery</b>	Southern Queensland to southern Western Australia, currently divided into four management zones	Blue mackerel, jack mackerel, redbait and pilchards	Purse seining and mid-water trawling	Blue mackerel 1972 t (confidential); jack mackerel 744 t (confidential); redbait 8344 t (confidential)	74 permits	Blue mackerel (not overfished and not subject to overfishing). Jack mackerel, yellowtail scad and redbait (uncertain)
<b>Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery</b>	Off the coast of central and southern NSW (also Great Australian Bight)	Southern bluefin tuna	Long-line in eastern bioregion, purse seine in SA	Total Australian fishery 5244 t (\$140m)	98 SFR holders	(Overfished and subject to overfishing)
<b>Southern Squid Jig Fishery</b>	Offshore of Lakes Entrance, Queenscliff and Portland in Victoria	Arrow squid	Squid jigging	619 t (\$1m)	N/A	(Uncertain)
<b>South East Scalefish and Shark Fishery (Commonwealth trawl, scalefish-hook and deepwater trawl sectors)</b>	Trawl sector from Sydney southwards around Tasmania to Cape Jervis in SA; adjoins east coast deepwater sector that extends to 24°30'S off Queensland. Scalefish-hook sector from the same boundary off Queensland to SA/WA border. Within the East Bioregion, the main effort is on seamounts from Sydney to Brisbane. Deepwater to 4000 m	Blue warehou, deepwater sharks, eastern gemfish, orange roughy, redfish, silver trevally, dories, blue-eye trevalla, blue grenadier, flathead and alfonsino	Mid-water trawl, demersal otter trawl, pair trawl, demersal longline and dropline	Trawl TAC species 18330 t, non-TAC species 3550 t (\$59m); deepwater trawl (no catch in 2006; 2005 confidential)	59 trawl SFRs, and 56 hook SFRs; 10 for deepwater trawl (1 active)	(Eight stocks overfished; nine stocks not overfished; overfishing status of seven stocks uncertain; no stocks classified as overfishing; 15 stocks not subject to overfishing; overfishing status of nine stocks is uncertain): deepwater alfonsino (uncertain)

## New South Wales

<b>Rock Lobster Fishery</b>	NSW coast offshore to the 4000m isobath under (OCS) arrangements with the Commonwealth	Eastern rock lobster	Trap/pot  Hand collection (SCUBA or hookah prohibited)	52.2 t (A\$2.4m)	122 shareholders	(Fully fished)
<b>Ocean Trap and Line Fishery</b>	Seaward from NSW coast to the 4000 metre isobath (approx. 60 to 80 nm offshore). Under OCS arrangements with the Commonwealth, the OTLF extends into beyond traditional state waters	Australian bonito, snapper, leatherjackets, yellowtail kingfish, grey morwong, blue-eye trevalla, spanner crabs, silver trevally, yellowfin bream, banded rock cod, gummy shark	Fish trap, spanner crab net, setline, trotline, driftline, poling, handline, jigging, dropline, trolling	1350 t (A\$11.5m)	478 fishing businesses	Of the 11 primary target species, (3 are considered to be growth overfished, 4 fully fished, 2 moderately fished and 2 undefined).  Of the 14 secondary target species (10 are considered undefined, 1 recruitment overfished, 2 fully fished)
<b>Ocean Trawl Fishery</b>	NSW coast offshore to the 4,000 metre isobath between Barrenjoey Point and the Queensland border. From Barrenjoey Point to the Victorian border, the Commonwealth retains jurisdiction beyond 3 n. miles	Eastern king prawn, school prawn, Royal red prawn, Balmain bugs, octopus, silver trevally, tiger flathead, sand flathead, southern calamari, school whiting, fiddler shark	Otter trawl (prawns & fish) and Danish seine	2100 t (A\$16.2 m)	271 fishing businesses	Of the 12 primary species (3 are considered growth overfished, fully fished, 3 undefined, 2 uncertain and 1 lightly fished).  Of the 16 secondary species (9 are considered undefined, 5 fully fished, 1 growth overfished and 1 moderately fished)

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<b>Offshore Recreational and Charter Boat fishery</b>	Offshore from the 3 n. mile boundary off the NSW coast to the continental shelf and beyond (commonly out to approximately 50 n. miles)	Game—black, blue and striped marlin, yellowfin tuna, albacore, broadbill swordfish, various sharks. Demersal - snapper pearl perch, ocean jackets, morwong, flathead, nannygai, dories, teraglin, blue-eye trevalla. Bait—blue (slimy) mackerel and striped/skipjack tuna	Game, demersal and charter fishing—predominantly line fishing	Catch N/A Value Recreational N/A Charter (A\$212 000 m) 2001—2002	279 licensed charter—not all fish offshore	Unknown
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## Queensland

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<b>Blue Swimmer Crab Fishery</b>	The fishery area extends along the entire Qld coastline. Most catch is taken in inshore and continental shelf waters up to approximately 50 m depth, mainly in southern Qld, south of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park	Blue swimmer crabs	Crab pots and collapsible traps	875 t (A\$5.9 m)	190 commercial boats accessing the fishery
<b>Spanner Crab Fishery</b>	The fishery area covers inshore and offshore (>3 n. miles) waters off the Qld coast, from the NSW border to the NT border. Catch is concentrated in coastal waters up to 80 m depth between Yeppoon and the Qld—NSW border	Spanner crab	Crab pots, collapsible traps and dillies	875 t (A\$5.9 m)	504 licences
<b>East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery</b>	The ECIFF area includes all tidal waters along QLDs east coast eastward of 142°09' E, near Crab Island (approximately 11° S), to the Qld—NSW border	Barramundi, king salmon, blue threadfin, grey mackerel and various sharks	A variety of net methods and hook and line	5,437 t (A\$23 m)	499 net fishery and 1649 line fishery licenses
<b>East Coast otter Trawl</b>	The ECOTF is Queensland's largest commercial fishery, extending from the tip of Cape York to the QLD/NSW border. The majority of the fishery occurs in Commonwealth waters though the fishery is managed by QLD under OCS agreements with the commonwealth	Tiger prawns, Endeavour prawns, red spot king prawns, banana prawns, and scallops	Otter Trawl and Beam Trawl	2185 t (A\$32 m) combined weight/value with East Coast Stout Whiting Fishery  Stout Whiting Fishery for 2005 1,130t \$2.5 million	501 licences

<b>East Coast Stout Whiting Fishery</b>	The fishery area, known as the T4 fishery region. It is defined in legislation as the area between the 20 and 50 fathom (36 and 90 m) depth contours. It operates from Sandy Cape to Caloundra	Stout whiting	Demersal otter trawl	2185 t (A\$32 m) combined weight/value with East Coast Otter Fishery  Stout Whiting Fishery for 2005 1,130 t (A\$2.5 m)	5 licences
<b>Queensland Offshore Recreational and Charter Boat Fishery</b>	Offshore from the 3 n. mile boundary to the edge of the continental shelf along the coast of Qld. However, game fishing and the collection of bait for game fishing tends to be offshore of the key ports of the Gold coast, Brisbane, Mooloolaba, and Cairns	Game—black, blue and striped marlin, yellowfin tuna, albacore, broadbill swordfish, various sharks. Demersal—snapper pearl perch, flathead, dories, teraglin, blue-eye trevalla. Bait—blue (slimy) mackerel and striped/skipjack tuna	Game fishing and demersal fishing is mostly line fishing	N/A	

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# 1. Introduction

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## Regional Marine Planning

The Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) provides a wide range of options for dealing with the challenges posed by immediate environmental threats as well as the longer term need for greater sustainability in our use of the oceans. One of the greatest challenges is to apply the right suite of measures to ensure that the environment is adequately protected and doing so in a way that is economically and socially viable and an efficient use of public resources. Taking a "system-wide" approach to conservation and environmental management through marine bioregional planning provides an opportunity to deliver an integrated package of measures.

Marine bioregional plans are prepared under Section 176 of the EPBC Act. The marine bioregional planning process is also the means by which the Australian Government is meeting its commitments under the National Representative System of Marine Protected Areas by identifying a representative system of marine protected areas in its waters.

An underlying objective in marine bioregional planning (MBP) is to balance conservation, social and economic objectives. In undertaking MBP it is therefore important that the social and economic characteristics of commercial fisheries operating in the East Marine Region (EMR) are understood and inform the development of marine protected areas (MPA) and other conservation options.

The three stages in marine bioregional planning are development of the Bioregional Profile, the draft Bioregional Marine Plan and the final Bioregional Marine Plan. This paper's purpose is to provide the fisheries information for the development of the regional profile for the EMR. It will also be the starting point for identifying the potential implications for fisheries of various conservation options considered during the development of the draft plan.

## Overview of the East Marine Region (EMR)

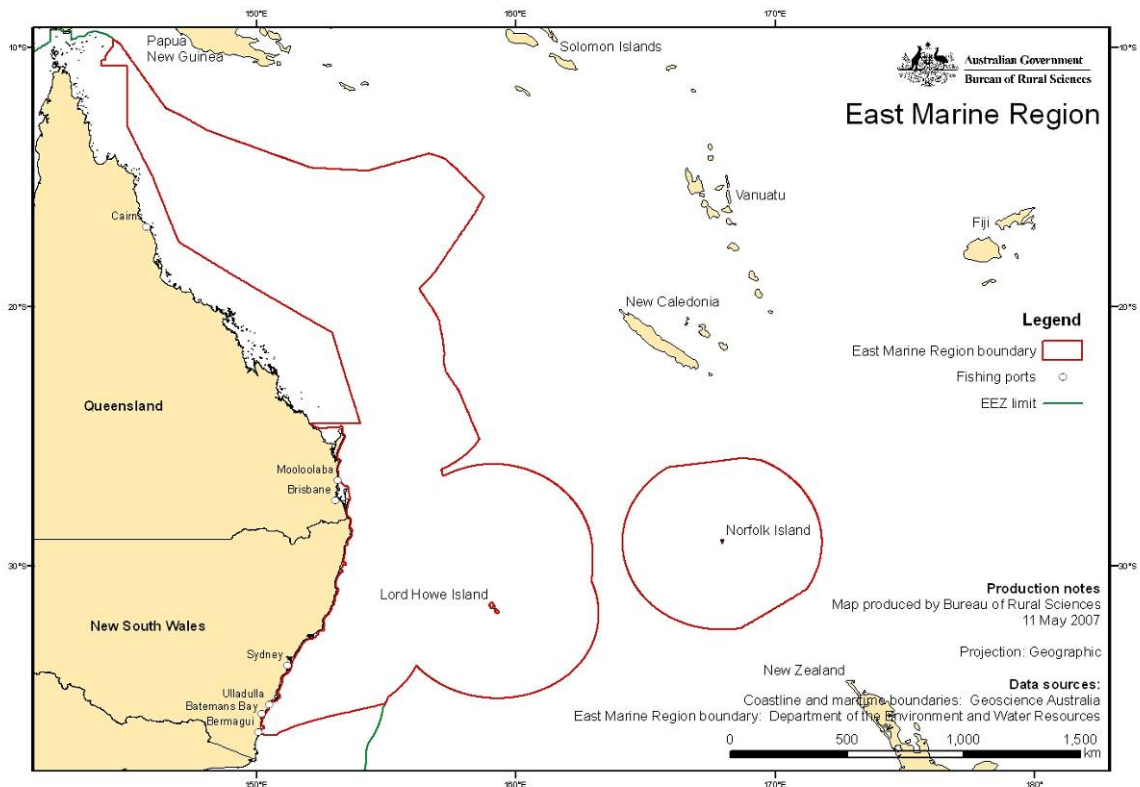
*(The physical description of the East Marine Region draws on details published on the Dept. of Environment and Water Resources website - <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/mbp/east/index.html>)*

The MBP framework divides the oceans off Australia into 41 provincial bioregions (large biogeographical areas defined by similar ecological characteristics). The East Marine Region includes 14 provincial bioregional units.

The EMR covers more than 2.4 million square kilometres of water off the east coast of Queensland and New South Wales (including Lord Howe Island and Norfolk Island), from the town of Bermagui to the tip of Cape York. The Region includes waters between 3 and 200 n. miles from the coastline but does not include the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which is managed separately by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority.

The EMR spans both tropical waters and warm temperate waters and is recognised for its globally significant marine biodiversity. Large numbers of marine organisms are unique to the area, particularly in the temperate waters off New South Wales.

The EMR's biological diversity is heavily influenced by the East Australian Current (EAC). The EAC flows south through the tropical Coral Sea towards the temperate regions with "cold core" and "warm core" eddies peeling off into the Tasman Sea along the way. This is the largest ocean current close to the coast of Australia, shaping the ecology of both marine and terrestrial environments over a wide area.



**Figure 1 - East Marine Region Boundary**

Oceans in the EMR are relatively low in nutrients and primary productivity. Exceptions occur where water bodies converge and mix to create "hot spots" of primary productivity containing chlorophyll rich waters. These seasonal and transient upwellings are significant features of the EMR and occur periodically near places like Cape Byron, Smoky Cape and Sugar Loaf Point, drawing nutrient-rich water from depths of 200 metres or more.

A chain of seamounts runs parallel to the outer shelf from Fraser Island south to Sydney. Seamounts are key geological features in the Region, and their interaction with ocean currents creates a variety of habitats on their slopes. Detritus, nutrients and organisms are transported to the seamounts by deep water currents. These support large aggregations of deepwater fish such as oreos and orange roughy.

A number of geographically isolated oceanic reefs are also present in the East Marine Region, mainly in the Coral Sea. Water depths in the Region range from 200 metres along the shelf to more than 5800 metres in the deep holes and valleys between New South Wales and Lord Howe Island. Other geomorphological features include canyons, basins, plateaus, ridges, saddles, the continental shelf, slope and terraces.

Many large predators (e.g. whales, seals, sharks, marlin, swordfish and tuna) live in and migrate through the Region, although they were considerably more abundant before European settlement of the Australian continent and the development of industrial scale fishing in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The key ports for commercial and recreational fishing in the EMR include: Cairns, Innisfail, Townsville, Mackay, Gladstone, Bundaberg, Mooloolaba, Brisbane, and Southport in Queensland (Qld), and Coffs Harbour, Sydney, Ulladulla, and Bermagui in New South Wales (NSW).

## An overview of the socio-economics of the fishery profile

The socio-economic analysis of fishing in the EMR includes activity associated with Commonwealth and State fisheries that occurs in towns and ports spread along the coast, including where catch is landed and businesses are located, as well as the locations where people engaged in fishing activity live. Commercial fishing generates both direct and indirect employment opportunities in coastal regions and can be a substantial contributor to the economic and social wellbeing of communities. To provide a profile of this activity, the following indicators were used:

- Key landing and/or home ports
- Fishing sector employment – direct and indirect
- Regional dependence on fishing and
- An overview of recent changes affecting fisheries in the EMR.

The analysis identifies key ports for the fisheries based on landed and/or home port data, where this data is available from the Commonwealth and/or States. Landed ports tend to have on-shore linkages focussed on the processing sector (such as co-operatives, handling and transportation). On-shore linkages of home ports tend to be focussed on sectors providing repairs and maintenance as well as sectors where other business and family expenditure and activity occur (including household expenses, schools).

### *A word of caution*

It should be recognised that the regional marine planning framework that this document informs only takes place in Commonwealth waters. While this is consistent with the legislative requirements of the EPBC Act, it is important to realise that fisheries management boundaries in Australian waters frequently follows the locations of the resource being targeted rather than political boundaries. Offshore Constitutional Settlement arrangements can see fisheries under state control extending through Australian territorial waters (and similarly Commonwealth controlled fisheries extending to the coast).

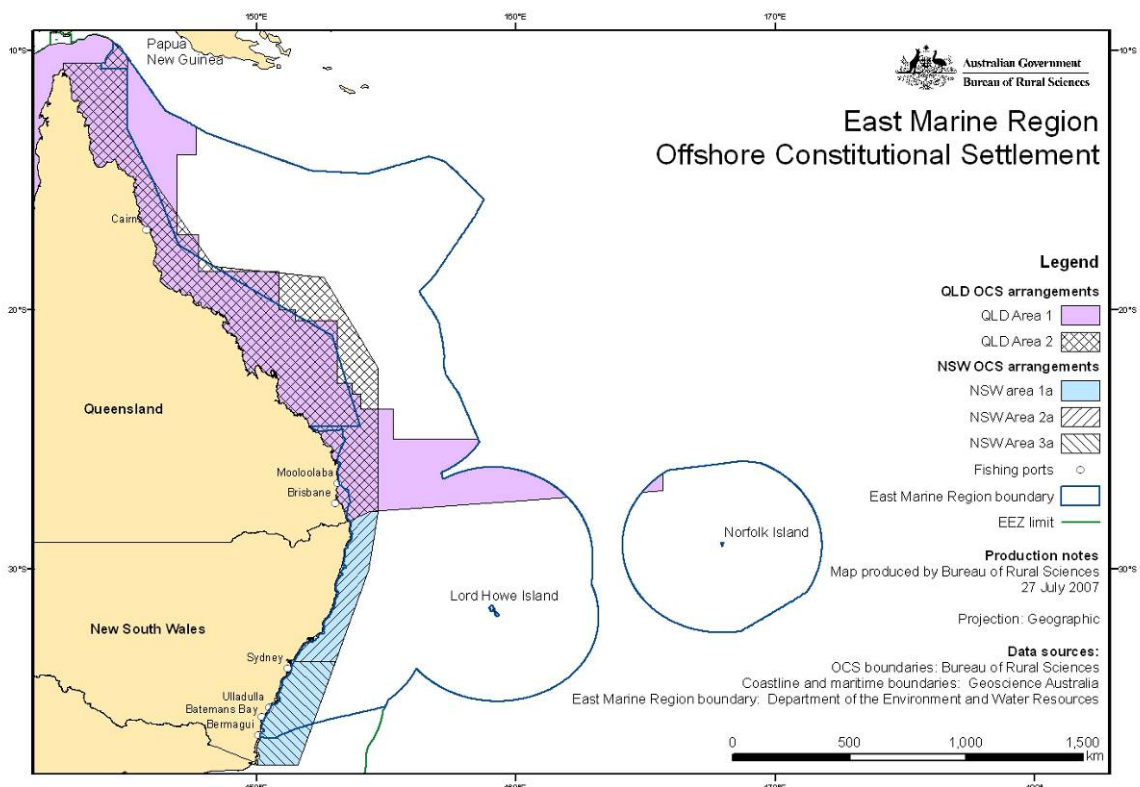


Figure 2 - OCS boundaries in the EMR

In an effort to fully reflect fishing effort in the EMR, catch effort from that component of fisheries that intersect the region have been reported in this document. However, this data is normally recorded for an entire fishery, and not separated into that catch taken from state or commonwealth waters. Further in many cases only a small proportion of the catch from a fishery may be taken in the EMR. To get a true scale and value of individual fisheries, particularly their importance to regional sectors, it is necessary to review information in a fishery by fishery basis as presented by the relevant Commonwealth and State fishery agencies.

As a final note, while bioregional planning provides a biophysical framework in which to categorise areas in Australia's territorial waters, these waters are also home to many highly migratory fish species which are found around the coastline and into international waters beyond. Fisheries data for these fisheries will cover several marine regions, and while efforts have been made to identify catch relevant to the EMR, data for the fishery as a whole need to be considered to get the full picture.