

Commission meeting

The Commission convened for its 94th meeting in Canberra, ACT, on 9 and 10 July 2024.

Commissioner Appointments

The Commission welcomed the participation of Dr Ian Dutton and Dr Sally Troy as newly appointed Commissioners, on a term until 30 June 2029. Ian brings valuable skills and experience in fisheries research and development to the Commission. Sally brings high level expertise in natural resource management and governance.

Commissioners thanked Dr David Smith and Mr Will Zacharin for their hard work and service to AFMA as outgoing Commissioners.

Induction, Stocktake and Future

Noting the commencement of some Commissioners, and the reappointment of others after five-year terms, the Commission received a number of corporate and fishery induction and information presentations.

Commissioners considered analysis developed by AFMA Management on the relative impacts from a “regulatory burden¹” perspective of decisions that AFMA has taken over the last five years as a stocktake exercise.

Commissioners also discussed a wide range of strategic and tactical issues that will shape AFMA's work in the coming few years, including:

- Climate adaptation.
- Risk tolerance adjustments driven by 'spatial squeeze', smaller fleets, smaller footprints, smaller catch.
- Viability of small government agencies in an increasingly costly governance environment and CPI growth.
- External economic drivers of change.
- Electronic monitoring and artificial intelligence.
- Discards as a high priority issue.
- Tension between industry bodies around the future of fisheries, with no current coherency.
- The National Sustainable Oceans Plan as a potential platform for marine sector-wide sharing of information collection, data sharing and cost.
- Involving younger industry stakeholders would be beneficial and produce some different, forward-thinking ideas.
- Ensuring that AFMA engages appropriately with First Nations people to better understand their fishing interests.

Climate Risk Framework (CRF)

The Commission noted progress on refining the CRF following feedback from initial trials in several fisheries and consideration by the high-level working group.

The Commission approved version two of the CRF and encouraged AFMA Management to disseminate it within Resource Assessment Groups (RAGs) and Management Advisory Committees (MACs) for further trial.

¹ In this context, impacts on regulatory burden were a combination of changes to operating flexibility, revenue, and fishing costs.

Longline Season Extension in the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery (MITF)

The Commission approved the trial of a longline fishing season extension from 1 September to no later than 21 September 2024 in the MITF subject to strict conditions.

The Commission noted that trialling an extended season comes with risks due to increased seabird activity and abundance but was satisfied by the robust assessment process that AFMA, the Sub-Antarctic RAG and the Southern MAC had undertaken, the strict conditions attached to the trial, and the excellent performance of the fishery on seabird mitigation since its inception.

Northern Prawn Fishery Tiger Prawn Total Allowable Effort (TAE)

The Commission noted that economic conditions in the fishery continue to be extremely challenging, driven primarily by high fuel costs, carryover production and low prawn prices. These factors heavily influence the bioeconomic model that recommends a TAE to achieve Maximum Economic Yield (MEY) for tiger prawns. The Commission noted that the recommended TAE was a significant reduction from 2023, despite the fact that there are no sustainability concerns for any of the four relevant prawn stocks.

The Commission considered the recommendation from the Northern Prawn MAC (NORMAC) that the TAE be implemented as an Olympic TAE, rather than via fixed season dates as was the case in 2023 and agreed that this would provide a greater level of precision.

As such, the Commission agreed:

- The TAE for the 2024 tiger prawn season will be set at 4,013 boat days.
- To give effect to this, AFMA will continue to work with the Northern Prawn Fishery Industry (NPFI) on a monitoring protocol to be used to count fishing days.
- AFMA will monitor fishing effort in conjunction with NPFI and will close the fishery via Direction when it is forecast the effort limit will be reached.

The Commission discussed the fact that some external factors impacting the fishery have been evident in recent years. The Commission noted the need for AFMA to work with NPFI to consider the implications for the fishery should these factors persist.

Engagement with Partners

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)

The Commission met with senior executives from DAFF to discuss issues of mutual importance, primarily around the review of the Harvest Strategy Policy. Commissioners thanked DAFF for the collegiate approach that has been taken to the review, and discussed several key issues that AFMA sought to have covered in the review including:

- The requirements for rebuilding depleted species, particularly where their decline and/or recovery are driven more heavily by climate change than by fishing pressure.
- The settings for target reference points, including the lack of availability of information that would inform anything other than a proxy TRP for most fisheries. Linked to that, Commissioners highlighted the need for any sectoral considerations that lead to a change in TRPs or other harvest strategy components for a fishery to be progressed through the separate Resource Sharing Framework.

AFMA Chairman's Summary – 94th meeting

Commissioners welcomed the impending release of the CHSP review discussion paper and looked forward to engaging further.

Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC)

Commissioners met with senior executives of FRDC to discuss developments in research and stock assessment, and upcoming priorities for both organisations. The Commission expressed its thanks to FRDC for the support it provides to fisheries and on marine issues throughout Australia. Following on from discussions between the AFMA CEO and the previous FRDC Board, Commissioners highlighted the need for even greater integration of funding from all available sources as alternative ways of monitoring, assessing and managing stocks and fisheries in the context of the changing marine environment.

The Commission congratulated Dr Beth Woods OAM for her appointment as Chair of the FRDC and looked forward to working with her and her team.

Appointment of ScallopMAC and NORMAC Chairs

The Commission noted that the roles of the Chair to the ScallopMAC and NORMAC were now vacant following the appointment of Dr Dutton to the Commission.

The Commission appointed the following:

- a. NORMAC Chair – Mr Geoff Richardson 11 July 2024 until 30 June 2027; and
- b. ScallopMAC Chair – Dr Daryl McPhee from 11 July 2024 until 31 March 2027.

Next meeting

The Commission agreed that its next meeting would be held in Hobart on 9 and 10 September 2024, noting this would immediately precede Seafood Directions and therefore offer opportunities to meet with various stakeholders.

Helen Kroger

Chairman