

Commission meeting

The Commission convened for its 95th meeting in Hobart, Tasmania on 09 and 10 September 2024.

Stakeholder Engagement

The meeting was held in the lead up to Seafood Directions 2024, which is the premier ideas, innovation, and networking event for the Australian seafood industry. Co-hosting the Commission with Seafood Directions provided a unique opportunity to engage more directly with a wider range of stakeholders than is normally possible.

In addition to considering the written reports submitted by the Australian Bluefin Tuna Industry Association (ASBTIA), the Great Australian Bight Industry Association (GABIA) and the Scallop Fishermen's Association Tasmania (SFAT), the Commission met directly with the Commonwealth Fisheries Association, the Northern Prawn Fishery Industry, Austral Fisheries, Atlantis Fisheries Consultancy Group (representing the South East Trawl Fishery Industry Association, Southern Shark Industry Alliance and Small Pelagic Fishery Industry Association), Tuna Australia and SFAT.

Matters discussed across the stakeholder groups were diverse, but the Commission took note of several common themes that it considered instrumental for its future deliberations:

- Economic factors continue to be of universal concern. Fuel and freight costs, market prices and crew availability/cost were raised by most stakeholders. The Commission noted that, while these issues are beyond the mandate and control of AFMA, they relate to AFMA's ongoing commitment to ensuring that its regulation is fit-for-purpose in pursuing the whole range of AFMA objectives. While sustainability of stocks and the broader environment will always take precedence, AFMA is committed to ensuring that fisheries management regulations also facilitate maximising net economic returns to the community.
- AFMA levies. Commissioners noted that levies have remained static for over a decade and that this is a success story in terms of seeking cost efficiency in AFMA's management processes and corporate administration. However, it was noted that AFMA's costs of doing business are spread across an ever decreasing fleet size but are also increasing rapidly, and this will necessitate increased levies in the future. The Commission assured stakeholders that it is committed to continually seeking efficiency, identifying external sources of revenue and continually reviewing its cost recovery arrangements.
- Competition for marine space continue to be a key concern, although some stakeholders did note that some of the offshore energy areas that have been finalised will result in lower impacts than was originally feared. Stakeholders highlighted the need for AFMA to keep its spatial management measures under review as other restrictions evolve to ensure that species and habitats receive appropriate protection, but duplication of conservation/management is minimised.

Commissioners also attended Seafood Directions, providing additional opportunities to meet with a broad range of the Australian seafood industry.

Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF) Harvest Strategy

The Commission approved a revised harvest strategy for target stocks in the SPF. The new harvest strategy does not alter the tiered structure that has been effectively implemented in the fishery for the last decade. However, it incorporates a revised harvest control rule, which includes a trigger reference point at 40% of unfished biomass (B_{40}). The trigger reference point sits below the target reference point (B_{50}) and acts to reduce the total allowable catch if biomass declines in order to maintain the stocks well above the limit reference point (B_{20}).

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The Commission noted that there have been no observed cases of stock decline under the previous harvest strategy, but that the addition of the trigger reference point adds greater precaution and will assist the fishery to maintain Marine Stewardship Council certification.

Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF)

The Commission considered and approved a proposal to change the process for setting total allowable catches of tropical tunas in the ETBF from an annual consideration to a three-yearly decision. The Commission noted that the revised approach includes ongoing annual assessment of critical performance indicators for each stock (yellowfin, bigeye and albacore tuna), and consideration of any changes made to stock management by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission.

The Commission noted that the revised process will provide administrative streamlining and some cost reduction while still maintaining necessary oversight and flexibility in decision making. The Commission welcomed advice from AFMA Management that a similar approach is being developed for the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery.

The Commission also considered and approved an extension to the modified ETBF Swordfish Harvest Strategy until December 2026. This will allow continuation of the "low catch rule" that avoids the fishery being penalised in circumstances where catch and effort for swordfish is suppressed due to economic factors. The Commission approved the extension based on the results of Management Strategy Evaluation testing conducted by CSIRO and noting that the harvest strategy is under comprehensive review.

Northern Prawn Fishery Harvest Strategy

Following consultation with the Northern Prawn Management Advisory Committee out of session the Commission finalised amendments to the NPF Harvest Strategy.

Ecological Risk Assessment and Management

The Commission approved substantial revisions to *Fisheries Management Paper 14 – AFMA's Approach to Ecological Risk Assessment and Management*. The revised framework provides greater clarity and streamlining, ensures consistency with overarching government legislation and policy, and reflects scientific best practice. The Commission welcomed the revised framework and its focus on ensuring that Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs) and responses are kept up to date.

The Commission also noted advice from the AFMA Research Committee that planning and funding for ERAs will now be mainstreamed in the AFMA research prioritisation and budget process to ensure priority fisheries are assessed as needed.

Amended Management Plans

The Commission approved technical amendments to 10 AFMA Management Plans. These amendments reflect the establishment of the Administrative Review Tribunal to replace the abolished Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The Commission reviewed the terms of reference for its sub-committees and agreed that they were fit for purpose without amendment. Commissioners also considered membership and chairing of the sub-committees and decided on the following:

- Mr Scott Spencer would remain the chair of the Economics Working Group, with Ms Sevaly Sen remaining the participating Commissioner.
- Dr Sally Troy would take up the chair of the Ecological Risk Management Steering Committee.
- Mr Brett McCallum would remain chair of the AFMA Research Committee, with Dr Ian Dutton taking up the role of participating Commissioner.

Commissioners noted that it is open to them to participate in any of the sub-committees.

The Commission also provided guidance on revision of the AFMA Commission Charter which AFMA Management will progress before the next meeting.

Next meeting

The Commission agreed that its next meeting would be held in Canberra on 12 and 13 November 2024, and set the following dates and venues for future meetings:

Date	Location
11–12 March 2025	Melbourne
12 May 2025	Virtual
15–16 July 2025	Mooloolaba
9–10 September 2025	Sydney
11–12 November 2025	Canberra

Helen Kroger
Chair