

## Commission meeting

The Commission convened for its 96<sup>th</sup> meeting in Canberra, ACT on 12 and 13 November 2024.

### Stakeholder Engagement

The Commission considered written updates from the Great Australian Bight Industry Association, Scallop Fisherman's Association of Tasmania Inc., Tuna Australia (TA) and the Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association, and met with representatives of the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) toothfish fishery, the Northern Prawn Fishery Industry (NPF) and Atlantis Fisheries Consulting Group. The Commission was disappointed that a planned meeting with the board of TA was unable to proceed and looked forward to a future opportunity to meet. Commissioners expressed gratitude to all stakeholders that provided written or verbal updates, noting these remain of high value to the work of the Commission.

The Commission discussed the growing importance of economic information to inform its decision making on several agenda items throughout the meeting. Commissioners agreed that greater effort is required from MACs and RAGs to provide analysis or insight on economic issues when providing advice, even if that advice is largely qualitative. Quota trading data were seen to be especially useful for many issues and could be readily produced by AFMA for MAC/RAG consideration.

### HIMI Total Allowable Catches

The Commission considered and agreed the TACs, as set out below, consistent with the catch limits agreed at the recent annual meeting of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

#### **Target species:**

- Patagonian toothfish (*Dissostichus eleginoides*) 2,120 tonnes
- Mackerel icefish (*Champsocephalus gunnari*) 1,824 tonnes

#### **Bycatch Species:**

- *Macrourus Caml* and *M. whitsoni* 409 tonnes
- *M. holotrachys* and *M. carinatus* 360 tonnes
- Unicorn Icefish (*Channichthys rhinoceratus*) 1,663 tonnes
- Skates and Rays (*Bathyraja spp.*) 120 tonnes
- Grey Rockcod (*Lepidonotothen squamifrons*) 80 tonnes
- All other species 50 tonnes (for each species)

In making its decision, the Commission noted with concern that the catch limit for toothfish agreed by CCAMLR was substantially lower than levels considered precautionary by the Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group's (SARAG), following its in-depth examination of the stock assessment model, including model assumptions and uncertainties.

The Commission noted that a considerable amount of work, led by SARAG in partnership with the Australian Antarctic Division, would commence shortly to resolve remaining uncertainties in the current stock assessment.

AFMA Chairman’s Summary – 96<sup>th</sup> meeting  
Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery

The Commission considered and agreed the total allowable commercial catches (TACC), undercatch and overcatch limits and determined weights for yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna and albacore for the 2025, 2026 and 2027 fishing seasons under the multi-year TACC-setting procedure approved by the Commission at its September meeting.

	<b>TACC (t)</b>	<b>Overcatch %</b>	<b>Undercatch %</b>	<b>Determined Weight (t)</b>
Albacore Tuna	2,500	10	10	2
Bigeye Tuna	1,056	10	10	2
Yellowfin Tuna	2,400	10	10	2

The following TACCs for swordfish and striped marlin were set for the 2025 fishing season by the Commission.

	<b>TACC (t)</b>	<b>Overcatch %</b>	<b>Undercatch %</b>	<b>Determined Weight (t)</b>
Broadbill Swordfish	1,047	10	10	2
Striped Marlin	351	10	10	2

The Commission discussed at length the recommendation of Tropical Tuna MAC (TTMAC) to increase the yellowfin tuna overcatch and undercatch percentage to 20 per cent as a response to so -called ‘pulse’ events in the fishery. The Commission had regard to the principles in Fisheries Management Paper 10 regarding undercatch and overcatch allowances and noted that, given the yellowfin tuna TACC has been continually undercaught since 2016, and the data available on quota trading which suggested the market was working effectively, the rationale for increasing the under/over provision was unclear.

While the Commission recognised there are a range of options to respond to the potential for ‘pulse’ events in the fishery, it agreed to refer the matter back to TTMAC for further advice and to retain the current unders/overs setting of 10 per cent for yellowfin tuna in the interim.

Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery

The Commission considered and approved the procedure for setting a three-year multi season TACC for the three tropical tuna species (albacore, bigeye and yellowfin) in the Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF), noting it would help reduce regulatory processes and provide greater operational certainty for the industry.

Using the multi-year procedure, the Commission determined the following TACCs for the WTBF for the 2025-26, 2026-27 and 2027-28 fishing seasons, commencing 1 February and ending 31 January each season:

	<b>TACC (t)</b>
Bigeye Tuna	2,000
Broadbill Swordfish	3,000
Striped Marlin	125
Yellowfin Tuna	2,000

The Commission agreed to determine the:

- a) next fishing season in the SBT Fishery to be 1 December 2024 to 30 November 2025;
- b) Australia's National Catch Allocation (ANCA) for the fishing season defined in a) above, to be 6,930.25 tonnes;
- c) Actual Live Weight (ALW) of an SFR for the fishing season defined in a) above to be 1.30159668 kilograms.
- d) percentage of undercatch for the fishing season defined in a) above to be:
  - i. 20%, if the total commercial catch in the fishery for the season is less than the effective commercial catch limit minus 20% of ANCA for that season; or
  - ii. 100%, if the total commercial catch in the fishery for the season is greater than or equal to the effective commercial catch limit minus 20% of ANCA for that season.
- e) overcatch percentage to be five per cent;
- f) overcatch amount to be 100 tonnes; and
- g) overcatch additional weight to be 2 tonnes.

#### Northern Prawn Fishery

Following a presentation by representatives from the Northern Prawn Fishery Industry (NPFI), the Commission discussed the challenging economic conditions in the fishery and subsequent impact on outputs from the bioeconomic model used to calibrate fishing effort to projections of Maximum Economic Yield.

The Commission noted that the factors that underpin the challenging economic conditions in the fishery now appeared to be ongoing in nature and therefore agreed that further advice from NorMAC would be critical to inform its decisions. The Commission agreed to seek NorMAC's advice on management options to respond to these circumstances, such as fleet reductions, gear reductions, changes in season length and maintaining the status quo.

#### Southern Squid Jig Fishery

The Commission noted advice from AFMA Management that squid boats were starting to change fishing practices, including some learnings from the Japanese squid fishery, and that this had the effect of increasing catches and, anecdotally, prices. The Commission determined the TAE for the 2024 fishing season at 550 standard squid jigging machines.

#### Research issues

The Commission discussed the tight funding environment for investment in both standard and strategic research and agreed to continue to seek opportunities with new research providers as well as targeting new initiatives with existing partners such as the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, particularly as they move towards a new strategic plan.

#### Next meeting

The Commission agreed that its next meeting would be held in Melbourne on 11 and 12 March 2025.

Helen Kroger  
Chairman