

The Marine Fisheries Association (MFA) Forum

Principles of Reform

Background

The South Australian Government established the 'Commercial Marine Scalefish Fishery Reform Advisory Committee' (the Committee) to guide the development and implementation of a reform package for the South Australian commercial Marine Scalefish Fishery. Guided by their principal vision of having an economically optimal and sustainable industry that supports profitable, small scale and regionally-focused fishing operations, the Committee has a three-pillar approach to reforming the fishery, incorporating regionalisation, rationalisation (commercial licence reduction) and unitisation. They recognise that reform requires an inclusive process that engages all licence holders and listens to their concerns. As a key part of the consultative process, the Marine Fisher's Association established a forum to consider requests from the Committee and develop an industry position on different matters before the Committee.

Following three meetings of the MFA Forum during the first half of 2019, we provide the following key principles which it believes are critical to the reform process.

Sustainability of stocks is paramount

Recognising that management of the fishery includes ecological, economic and social objectives, sustainability of stocks is paramount. Regardless of the proportion of the stock taken by each sector (commercial, recreational – including indigenous), the total fishing mortality (from all sectors) on each stock must not exceed sustainable levels.

Integrated cross-sectoral management

The MFA Forum advocates that any reform mechanism should explicitly include both the commercial and recreational (including Indigenous) sectors in future management arrangements.

In order to achieve sustainable management, annual total allowable catch (TAC) limits must be determined and applied to the four key MSF stocks (Snapper, King George Whiting, Southern Calamari, Southern Garfish) as a minimum. This will be applied in the form of a Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) and a Total Allowable Recreational Catch (TARC).

Costs of management (monitoring, research, assessment, compliance) must be paid by each sector in proportion to their cross-sectoral catch shares. In the future, commercial licence fees should be based on a user-pays principle; with lower base licence fees and the remainder paid on amount of catch/effort shares.

Each sector should have appropriate and adequate monitoring and compliance systems in place to ensure sectoral catches do not exceed annual sectoral limits. Real-time reporting and fish tags may be a component of such systems. We recognize that these systems may be different for each sector and for different regions of the fishery.

Regionalisation

In addition to supplying fresh fish for Adelaide markets, commercial MSF fishers recognize the importance of their industry in providing for and supporting coastal communities across South Australia.

We recognize the diversity of fishing operations in the MSF as they have evolved to reflect spatial differences in regional fish stocks, coastal habitats, infrastructure and pressures placed on fishery

resources through growing coastal populations. We desire to maintain a regional base for our industry and the communities it supports in any future management.

There is a high level of support for regionalisation of the fishery to meet the various sustainability, economic and social objectives of cross-sectoral fisheries management. Most industry options suggest development of regional licences as the best way to achieve this, but recognize that different management mechanisms may be applied in the different regions.

There is currently a state-wide allocation of the TAC to different extractive sectors (commercial, recreational, indigenous); this needs to be reconsidered on a regional basis. We want this to be a key component of ongoing discussions.

Rationalisation

In order to have a sustainable Marine Scalefish Fishery that supports economically viable and profitable fishing businesses into the future, the MFA recognizes the need for rationalisation of the ~300 commercial licences that currently have access to the fishery.

Any rationalisation of the fishery must acknowledge the fishing entitlement of current licence holders and provide a fair reparation for those choosing to surrender their licence and leave the fishery. We support the use of economic data to inform the future composition of the MSF fleet so that it consists of viable businesses for both full-time and part-time operators.

Given the preference for regional management in the future and the different commercial and recreational fishing pressure in the different regions, we recognize that some regions require more rationalisation of commercial fishing licences than others.

Despite the fishery having operated under various Management Plans since the 1970s, the current fishery is not ecologically sustainable and the commercial sector is not economically viable. We believe that there is a positive business case to be made for the SA Government to assist in funding a once-off reform of the fishery so that it can achieve its ecological, economics and social objectives into the future.

Unitisation

Either following or as part of rationalisation, we recognize that future unitisation of the fishery (catch- and/or effort-based) is the management tool most likely to achieve the sustainability, economic and social goals of cross-sectoral management.

Allocation of the units must be fair and equitable across all those currently involved in the commercial and recreational fishery. There may be a need for transitional arrangements to be implemented for groups of operators in specified circumstances.

Although unitisation may be focused on key species in the fishery, future management arrangements must ensure that catches of secondary byproduct species and bycatch are not detrimental to the overall ecological sustainability of the fishery.