
**COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HIGHLY
MIGRATORY FISH STOCKS IN THE WESTERN AND CENTRAL PACIFIC OCEAN**

FIRST MEETING OF THE TECHNICAL AND COMPLIANCE COMMITTEE

[5-9 December 2005]

and

SECOND ANNUAL SESSION

[12-16 December 2005]

2 December 2005

NATIONAL REPORT

AUSTRALIA

Overview of the Fishery

The Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) includes Commonwealth waters off Queensland, New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and Tasmania out to the 200 nautical mile (nm) limit of the AFZ and includes waters around Norfolk Island (See Attachment A). Since 1 July 2002, the ETBF has encompassed high seas within the area of competency of the Commission for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean.

A variety of tuna, tuna-like species and billfish are targeted by the commercial and recreational/game fishing sectors of the fishery. The principal target species for the commercial fisheries are yellowfin tuna, bigeye tuna, broadbill swordfish and striped marlin. Yellowfin tuna and the marlin species are important target species for the recreational sector. By-product species have also increased in economic importance for the commercial longline fishery, with significant numbers of rudderfish, dolphin fish, albacore tuna and other species being landed in recent years.

The commercial fishery is dominated by the longline component, which operates year round and ranges across the entire fishery. Minor line methods include rod-and-reel, handlining, trolling and polling.

Whilst the Japanese began fishing off eastern Australia in the 1950s, domestic longliners did not actively target the tuna resources in this region until the mid-1980s. Indeed, the total catch only exceeded 1,000 tonnes for the first time as recently as 1995. While the fishery expanded rapidly during the mid-to-late 1990s, the fishery is now entering a more mature phase which will likely see expansion slow and operators consolidate and fine-tune their fishing activities in light of the increased understanding of the resource availability and the prevailing markets.

Whilst managed as a single fishery, the ETBF is in fact a complex system involving multi-species and multi-method fishing activities and is accessed by commercial operators, game fishers and charter fishing operators. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) manages only commercial fishing for tuna and billfish species in the area of the fishery.

A formal Management Plan for the ETBF commercial fishery and came into force on 21 October, 2005. Implementation of the ETBF Management Plan is expected in late 2006 at which time the Fishery will be managed through a longline and minor line total allowable effort (TAE). The longline TAE is to be determined as the total number of hooks set in the fishery and the minor line TAE as the total number of hooks that can be set by these methods at any one time. Eligible permit holders will be issued statutory fishing rights (SFRs) that determine their portion of the TAE. The management plan requires the take of other users in the fishery to be considered, however, recreational fishing for tuna and billfish, including both private and charter operated fishing vessels, is managed in accordance with State laws.

Until the Management Plan is implemented and SFRs are granted, the Fishery continues to be managed by annual fishing permits (through transitional arrangements under the Management Plan).

Species

The primary species of fish taken in the ETBF are shown in the table below:

Common Name	Scientific Name
Albacore tuna	<i>Thunnus alalunga</i>
Bigeye tuna	<i>Thunnus obesus</i>
Billfish*	Families Istiophoridae and Xiphiidae
Longtail tuna**	<i>Thunnus tonggol</i>
Northern bluefin tuna	<i>Thunnus thynnus</i>
Rays bream (pomfret)	Family <i>Bramidae</i>
Skipjack tuna***	<i>Katsuwonus pelamis</i>
Yellowfin tuna	<i>Thunnus albacares</i>

*Includes broadbill swordfish (*Xiphias gladius*) and striped marlin (*Tetrapturus audax*). There is a legislated ban on the commercial take of all black and blue marlin.

** Longtail tuna is to become a recreational only species managed under appropriate commercial bycatch arrangements.

*** A separate management plan is being developed by AFMA for skipjack tuna.

Management Arrangements

Until the ETBF Management Plan is implemented, the commercial sector of the fishery will continue to be managed through a system of limited entry and a range of conditions on permits, such as requirements related to spatial and temporal management, bycatch provisions, gear restrictions and vessel monitoring systems.

Management of Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) Catch in the ETBF

SBT is managed as a separate fishery across southern Australia. To prevent the non-quota mortality of SBT in the ETBF area of waters, special SBT core and buffer zones are established each winter off the East Coast of New South Wales. These zones are restricted access areas where operators are required to hold ETBF permits as well as SBT statutory fishing rights to fish. Zones are set using information from a CSIRO SBT habitat preference model, catch and observer data, Integrated Computer Vessel Monitoring System (ICVMS) data and any other relevant information available.

To enter these zones fishers are required to meet minimum standards of the SBT quota holdings and observer coverage on their vessels.

Skipjack Tuna

Since 1 July 2003 skipjack tuna has been managed as a separate purse seine fishery. A formal plan of management is being developed for the Eastern Skipjack Tuna Fishery. The Eastern Skipjack Tuna Fishery is currently managed by limited entry and a range of other management conditions on fishing permits. Skipjack fishing in Australia has been characterized by high variability in availability because the historical fishing grounds are at the extreme of the species distribution and fishing effort has remained low.

Interim management arrangements for Swordfish

At its meeting of 20-21 October 2005, the AFMA Board agreed to an interim management arrangement for broadbill swordfish catch in the ETBF. These arrangements will come into effect on 1 January 2006 through a variation to the conditions on ETBF Fishing Permits. In summary, the new arrangements will be:

- A total allowable catch of 1,400 tonnes (whole weight) of broadbill swordfish by ETBF operators for the 2006 calendar year;
- A bycatch limit of 10 broadbill swordfish per trip will apply to all vessels in the ETBF;
- Exemptions to the bycatch limit are available on application to those eligible. Eligibility will be based on a catch history as recorded in logbooks, of a processed weight of greater than 8 tonnes for the combined 2003 and 2004 calendar years; and
- Trigger limits will apply and if exceeded, all operators will revert to the 10 fish bycatch limit until such a time that the catches drop below the preset limits.

To assist in managing this new arrangement, operators will be required to use catch disposal records and prior to landing reporting arrangements.

Catch Reporting Arrangements

Logbooks

Longline sector operators, and those operators who are using both pelagic longline and minor line methods, are required to complete the .Australian Pelagic Longline Daily Fishing Log (AL05) on a shot-by-shot basis. Minor line sector operators are required to fill in the .Australian Tuna Minor Line Daily Fishing Log (OT03) on a daily basis. The OT03 was introduced into the fishery in December 1992. Operators fill in catch and effort logbooks while fishing. They are required to send them to AFMA 14 days after the end of each month.

AFMA monitors the incidence, nature and scale of interactions of high risk and other bycatch species through the AFMA logbook and data management programs, fishery observer programs and specific projects. AFMA archives all relevant data on catches and species and produces annual data summaries.

Observers

AFMA observers collect data to verify logbook information, they also collect additional data not collected in the logbooks such as fish lengths and scientific samples such as otoliths for fish age studies. A complete description of the data collected by observers is contained in the ETBF observer project plan (available from AFMA's website - www.afma.gov.au). From 1 July 2003 AFMA commenced random observer coverage in

the ETBF longline sector, with a target coverage level of 5.1%. The data collected by AFMA.s observers is entered into AFMA.s OBSERVER 2003 database.

Fleet Structure and Permits

The breakdown of the methods allowable on all ETBF permits in 2005 is shown in the Table below:

Longline	17
Longline and Minorline	119
Longline, Minorline and Pole	84
Minorline	47
Minorline and Pole	10
Carrier	2
Minorline and Shark Gillnet	3
Pole	2
TOTAL	284

Permit Holders – Active & Inactive

- As at October 2005, there were 213 longline permits and 64 minor line permits.
- Of the longline permits, 113 were active in 2004/05 and 100 were inactive.
- The 100 inactive longline permits provides a good measure of the latent effort in the fishery.

Catch and Effort

Longline Catch (tonnes) of key species by financial year

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Yellowfin Tuna	2,144	1,306	1,920	2,460	3,390	2,408	1,946
Bigeye Tuna	897	678	998	1,018	935	769	824
Swordfish	1,654	2,082	1,854	2,336	2,175	1,670	1,638
Striped Marlin	493	514	717	768	631	574	409
Albacore Tuna	421	362	396	663	493	547	629
Sharks	258	309	307	336	176	179	133
Other	353	271	441	756	649	659	864
Total	6,220	5,522	6,632	8,337	8,449	6,805	6,310

Minor Line Catch (tonnes) of key species by financial year.

	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Yellowfin Tuna	1.84	1.77	2.94	2.79	10.97	14.24
Striped Marlin	3.85	0.65	1.64	0.38	0.25	0.53
Albacore Tuna	1.59	1.52	2.66	1.48	3.24	3.92
Bigeye Tuna	0.00	1.86	0.07	0.96	22.18	33.81
Skipjack Tuna	3.14	1.62	2.40	9.38	0.10	0.42
Australian						
Bonito	2.52	0.06	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.00
Sharks	0.65	1.30	0.32	0.93	2.14	0.72
Other	2.30	2.30	0.53	0.90	12.13	5.53
Total	15.89	11.08	10.54	16.82	51.16	59.17

Longline Effort

The Table below shows longline effort in the ETBF in terms of hooks set, shots made and the number of active vessels. An active vessel was defined as a vessel that did at least one shot in the fishery for the corresponding financial year. It does not necessarily mean that there were the same number of active permits but it is safe to assume that the numbers would be very similar.

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Hooks (millions)	9.91	9.86	10.09	11.80	12.69	11.11	9.37
Shots	10,762	11,070	11,529	12,874	13,535	11,766	9,869
Active vessels	156	147	136	143	140	131	113

Minor Line Effort

The minor line effort measured in hours spent fishing using a particular method is shown in the table below:

	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
Handlining	117	122	36	98	506	511
Rod and Reel	448	667	55	189	54	78
Trolling	1,879	777	711	714	267	354
Unknown	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2,444	1,566	801	1,001	828	943

Purse Seining and Poling

No catch was recorded using the purse seining and poling methods in 2004/05.

Environmental Requirements

Strategic Assessment Reports

AFMA submits information on its various fisheries to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage for assessing the ecological sustainability of management arrangements for Commonwealth fisheries. This is a requirement under the Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (EPBC Act). The successful accreditation of the ETBF through the strategic assessment process enabled this Fishery to be accredited for export approval and to interact with protected species.

Bycatch Action Plans

The Tuna Fisheries Bycatch Action Plan (BAP) was adopted in 2004 and specifies a range of actions requiring implementation. The primary purpose of the BAP is to ensure that direct and indirect impacts of Commonwealth fisheries on aquatic ecosystems are taken into account and managed accordingly. AFMA collects target, bycatch and environmental data as well as monitoring the incidence, nature and scale of interactions of high risk and other bycatch species.

A purse seine BAP has also been developed for the skipjack tuna fishery and southern bluefin tuna fisheries.

Other measures

A Threat Abatement Plan (TAP) for seabirds was developed and is adhered to by the ETBF as well as the National and International Plans of Action on sharks, the National Seal Strategy and the pending Turtle Recovery Plan.

Surveillance and Enforcement

AFMA has a sophisticated surveillance and enforcement regime for the ETBF which consists of compulsory Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS), catch monitoring, vessel and fish receiver inspections, aerial surveillance, and compulsory observer coverage in many areas of the fishery.

Future Management and Developments

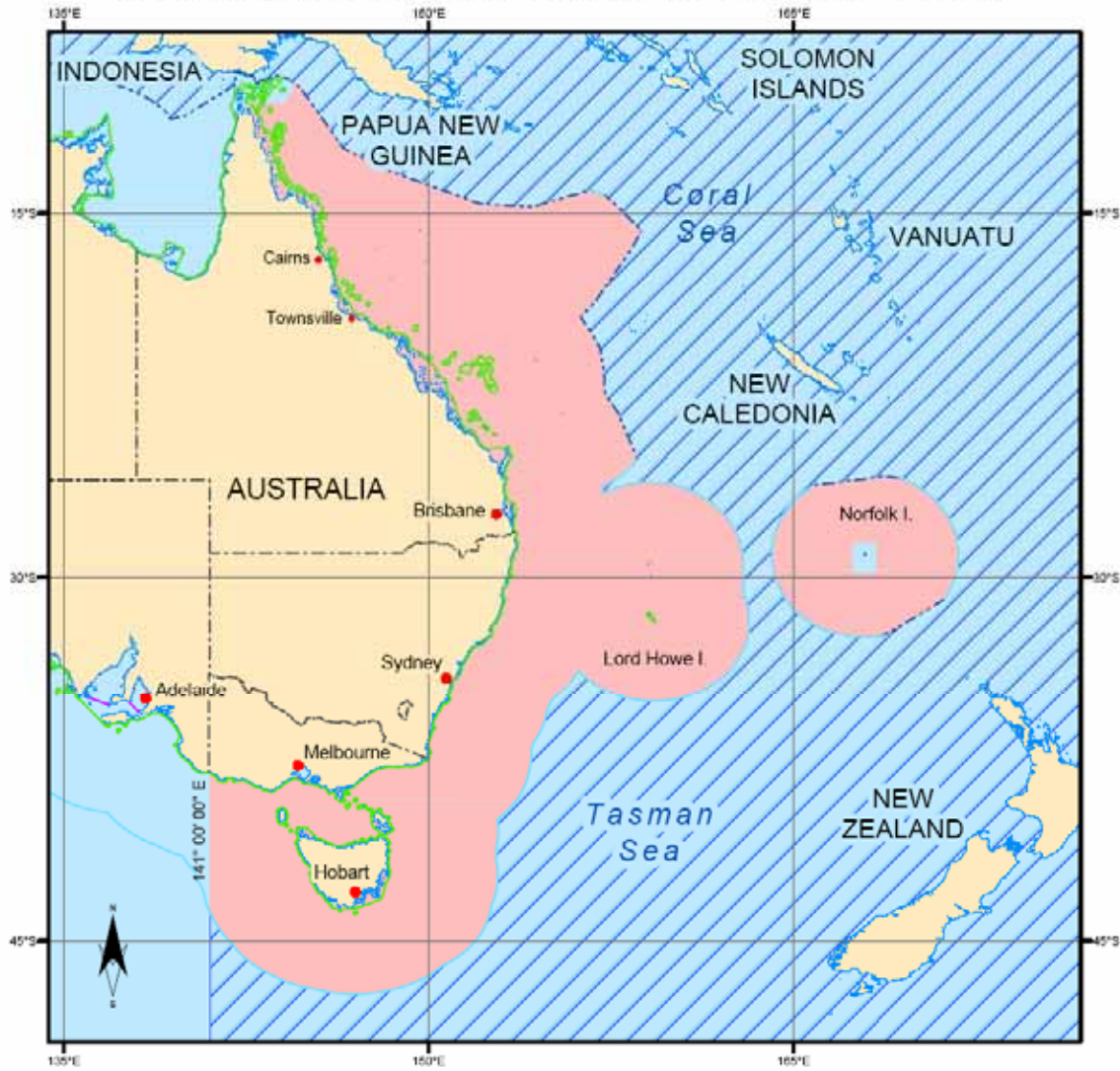
Australia has a new ETBF Management Plan, based on managing the TAE in the Fishery, which will be fully implemented by 2007.

Australian has a developing high seas fishery and the Management Plan provides for expansion of this fishery in this area.

On 23 November 2005 the AFMA Board announced the intention to set the total allowable effort in the fishery to ensure that no more than 7 million hooks can be set in the mainland Australian Fishing Zone and no more than 2.5 million hooks can be set in the remainder of the fishery. This will come into effect following the grant of Statutory Fishing Rights (SFRs) under the Management Plan. This is anticipated to commence in 2007.

The AFMA Board has also agreed to manage the take of broadbill swordfish under catch limits for 2006, and an annual catch limit of 1,400 tonnes for swordfish will be introduced on 1 January 2006.

Area of the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery



Mercator Projection

Latitude of true scale: 29° S
Longitude of Central meridian: 157° E

Datum: AGD66

LEGEND

-  Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery
-  Area of High Seas
-  Land and Coastline
-  Limit of Coastal Waters (3nm)
-  Limit of Exclusive Economic Zone (200nm)
-  Treaty line/Median line
-  Limit of the State

NOTES:

1. The area of the Fishery is sourced from the Fisheries Management Regulations 1992 (30 April 2004 - amendments up to SR 2004 No. 70) and permit conditions.
2. Within this fishery, arrangements exist between the Commonwealth and TAS, VIC and QLD, whereby the Coastal Waters of these States are deemed part of the AFZ.
3. The maritime zone boundaries shown on this map are sourced from AMBIS 2001 (v1.1) (October 2001).
4. The area of the high seas does not include waters within the EEZ of other countries.

Produced by the National Mapping Division of Geoscience Australia, for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, April 2005.

© Commonwealth of Australia 2005

MP 03/2457.34.5

