

Sustainable Fisheries Strategy

2017–2027

Government direction on fisheries reforms – 2018

The Queensland Government is committed to reforming its fisheries to ensure they are managed sustainably into the future and continue to provide benefits for the community.

The Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027 sets out the government's ten year reform agenda. Progress is being made with a boost to compliance, more monitoring and improved engagement mechanisms in place.

Over the last year, Fisheries Queensland has engaged commercial, recreational and charter fishers, conservationists, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fishers and members of the community about options for reforming management of our key fisheries. These options have been narrowed down in consultation with fishery working groups and the Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel.

The Queensland Government has considered the proposed reforms and agreed on the direction outlined below for each of the fisheries. This will inform remaking of the Fisheries Regulation in mid-2019.

Further consultation will occur over the next 6 months on the details of these reforms and further development of harvest strategies for each of the fisheries.

Government direction on fisheries management reforms

The east coast inshore fishery is a multi-species fishery across the whole east coast using net (commercial) and line (recreational and commercial). No changes to the Gulf inshore fishery have been proposed, although a number of the proposals for the east coast may be suitable to consider when reviewing this fishery in 2019. The key reforms include:

Sustainable catch limits

- divide the fishery into 6 regions, based on key fish species;
- allocate commercial individual quota on priority species (e.g. barramundi, king threadfin, grey mackerel, school mackerel, whiting);
- set competitive total allowable catches (which are not allocated to individuals) for other key species (mullet, tailor, bream, flathead, shark);
- monitor the remainder of inshore species and establish triggers in harvest strategy for review;
- introduce a general recreational in-possession limit of 20 for fish (other than bait species) that currently have no limits in place; and
- consider recreational boat limits for priority black-market species (i.e. barramundi, black jewfish, coral trout, Spanish mackerel) (wouldn't apply to charter fishers).

Reducing bycatch and protected species interactions

- mandate the use of bycatch reduction devices in the net fishery;
- establish a best management practice program;
- implement temporary closures if triggers are reached for protected species interactions;
- simplify the netting regulations and remove complexity and unnecessary regulations (particularly when they are not needed due to quota management);
- trial alternative gear types (eg tunnel netting in north Queensland) to encourage more selective netting; and
- require better catch reporting and digital observers (once technology is available).

The east coast trawl fishery is a commercial fishery targeting prawns and a number of other key species (bugs, scallops) across the east coast. It currently operates under an individual transferable effort unit system except for some trawling in Moreton Bay. No changes to the beam trawl fisheries on the east coast have been considered at this stage. The key reforms include:

Sustainable catch limits

- divide the east coast into five management regions based on target species;
- allocate existing effort units into those regions based on catch history from vessel tracking (and for unused effort based on a split of 36% southern offshore, 21% southern inshore, 21% central and 22% northern);
- set regional effort caps based on at least achieving maximum sustainable yield and adjust these as needed through harvest strategies;
- require the surrender of a T1 symbol for new boats or adding larger boats to existing licences to reduce the number of unused T1 symbols;
- extend the existing effort unit management framework to Moreton Bay following an initial allocation process for M1 and M2 fishers to establish Moreton Bay Effort Units (existing M1/T1 operators will have their symbol split up allowing the T1 and existing effort units to be formally incorporated into the East Coast) and remove the 2 for 1 boat replacement for M2 symbol holders; and
- review blue swimmer crab trip limits and set a cap on trawl catch of 10% the TACC.

Reduce unnecessary regulations

- remove the 70 hull unit maximum (but maintain the 20m maximum length) to allow for greater efficiency and extend the current effort unit / hull unit relationship beyond 70 hull units; and
- remove the current horsepower limit.

The crab fishery uses pots to catch mud and blue swimmer crabs by recreational and commercial fishers in waters across the state. The key policy changes include:

Sustainable catch limits

- divide the commercial fishery into three units – mud crab Gulf of Carpentaria, mud crab east coast, and blue swimmer crab (state-wide);
- allocate individual commercial quota for mud crab and blue swimmer crab;
- require tagging of commercially caught mud crabs to reduce black-marketing and support quota enforcement;
- review the recreational in-possession limit for mud crab to between 6 and 10;
- introduce a new recreational possession limit of 20 for blue swimmer crab; and
- consider a recreational boat limit for priority black-market species (i.e. mud crab) (would not apply to charter fishers).

Reducing bycatch and protected species interactions

- mandate the use of bycatch reduction devices in the crab fishery;
- continue rolling abandoned crab pot clean ups; and
- prohibit the use of lightweight crab pots that are easily lost in the environment.

The coral reef fin fish fishery operates across Queensland waters, and targets reef species like coral trout and red throat emperor by recreational, commercial and charter sectors. The commercial fishery is already managed by individual transferable quotas (ITQ), and the existing recreational and charter sector requirements are generally conducive to a harvest strategy approach. The existing arrangements will be refined to incorporate additional protection for some key species, particular those in the OS category and progress some regulatory changes to clarify existing provisions and support the harvest strategy.

Harvest fisheries incorporate a number of reef-based dive and/or hand collection fisheries that are predominantly commercial (tropical rock lobster (TRL), sea cucumber, marine aquarium fish, coral). The commercial fishery is already managed through quota and the existing recreational and charter (TRL & sea Cucumber) requirements are generally conducive to a harvest strategy approach. However, there will be some changes to fully align these fisheries with other quota-managed fisheries, such as coral trout and progress some regulatory changes to clarify existing provisions and support the harvest strategy.

Next steps

It is intended to consult on draft allocation models for each fishery so individual commercial fishers can provide feedback on what it means for them before allocation criteria are finalised. Final public consultation on the fishery-specific regulatory reforms and changes is scheduled for early 2019. Implementation of the key fisheries reforms is planned as part of the remake of the regulation, which is scheduled for mid-2019.