

Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery

Status report for reassessment and approval under protected species and export provisions of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

July 2019

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1 Introduction

On 22 November 2016, the Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery (GOCLF) was declared as an approved Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* for a period of three years. The current WTO approval is due to expire on 22 November 2019.

This submission and **Attachment 1** (Scoping Study) constitute an application for reassessment of the current WTO for the GOCLF. The submission has been prepared according to requirements of the Australian Government's *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries 2nd Edition*.

2 Description of the fishery

A detailed description of the fishery including information on area of the fishery, management arrangements, recent trends in effort and catch, species composition and bycatch is provided separately in **Attachment 1** (Scoping Study).

3 Status of target stock

The key target species in the GOCLF is Spanish mackerel *Scomberomorus commerson*. The sustainability status of Spanish mackerel is assessed every two years as part of the national Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS) reporting process. In 2018 the Gulf of Carpentaria Spanish mackerel stock was classified as a sustainable stock. Details of the data and protocols used to make this assessment are available at <https://www.fish.gov.au/report/253-Spanish-Mackerel-2018>

4 Research and Monitoring

The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) has an ongoing state-wide fisheries monitoring program, including within the Gulf of Carpentaria. Ongoing monitoring programs currently being delivered by QDAF include;

Collecting frames from commercial fishers and recreational anglers to provide length and age data.

Collecting other samples from commercial fishers, seafood processors, seafood wholesalers and retail outlets

Regular boat ramp surveys

Regular state-wide recreational fishing surveys

Commercial and charter fishing logbooks

An interactive overview describing key elements of the QDAF monitoring program is available at <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/monitoring-compliance/interactive-map>

In June 2017, the Queensland Government released the Queensland *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027* (the Strategy). The Strategy describes the government's reform agenda for fisheries management and paves the way for Queensland to have world class fisheries management systems. The Strategy sets out clear targets to be achieved by 2020 and 2027 and specific actions to deliver on the vision and targets. There are 33 actions covering 10 major areas of reform (for details see <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/sustainable-fisheries-strategy>).

Stakeholder feedback received during development of the Strategy almost universally identified a need to address existing knowledge gaps and improve public confidence in the information being used to manage Queensland's fisheries resources. The Strategy recognises this feedback and includes commitments to improve monitoring and research programs, develop new data validation protocols, trial novel monitoring technology, implement a social and economic monitoring program, prepare regular stock assessments and implement a program of ecological risk assessments.

Action 1.1 in the Strategy committed to developing a fisheries monitoring and research plan to outline standards for improved data collection and guide the identification of data needs, resources and

priorities. The Monitoring and Research Plan was released in August 2017 and is available at <https://publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/queensland-sustainable-fisheries-strategy/resource/fc7da976-661c-43ba-aaaa-9df8c2cb39d3>

Action 1.2 in the Strategy committed to additional biological monitoring of key stocks. Collection of additional biological data is now being undertaken in partnership with commercial, recreational and indigenous fishers. Some examples are provided below.

To improve understanding of commercial shark catch, QDAF initiated a new monitoring program in July 2017 to;

- Improve data on species composition, sex and size structure of retained and released shark catch in Gulf and East Coast fisheries.
- Work with industry to develop visual and genetic tools to assist fishers more accurately identify shark species.
- Understand motivations for discarding of shark catch

Another new monitoring project was also implemented in 2017 to monitor recovery of the mangrove jack stock in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The status of the GoC mangrove jack stock was listed as overfished in the 2016 national Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS) report and has more recently been upgraded to “recovering”. The new monitoring program is collecting data from the recreational and charter sectors in the GOC to assess the progress of this recovery.

In response to a rapid increase in take of black jewfish, QDAF put forward research on stock structure, biology and status of black jewfish as an urgent research priority to the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation (FRDC). This priority was supported by the Queensland Research Advisory Committee and has since been included in the April 2019 FRDC Call for Expressions of Interest. This research will support new regulations for harvesting black jewfish that were introduced on 26th April 2019 (these regulations are described in detail in other sections of this document).

Roll out of compulsory Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) commenced in Queensland on 1 January 2019 and is ongoing including for symbols operating in the GOCLF. VMS will provide more detailed spatial and temporal information on the activities of operators in the fishery.

The eighth state-wide recreational fishing survey began in February 2019 and is due for completion in April 2020. The last state-wide recreational fishing survey was in 2013. This survey will provide additional information recreational fishing effort and catch in the GoC. Economic and social indicators for recreational fishing are being collected as part of the state-wide recreational fishing survey.

A contractor has been engaged to monitor economic and social indicators for the commercial and charter fishing sectors. They will report on the 2019 and 2020 financial years both regionally and state-wide.

Action 1.3 in the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy committed to develop partnerships to trial the use of novel technologies for fisheries monitoring, such as apps, robotic vision, spatial interfaces and mapping, social media and citizen science. Since rollout of the Strategy, there are now a number of ongoing projects contributing to this commitment. Potential for robotic vision and on-board electronic monitoring is being assessed via two contracts, progressed as a partnership between QDAF and the Advance Queensland Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program (see further details at <https://advance.qld.gov.au/sbir-recipients>). These programs are currently in the proof of concept stage and will report results and recommendations to QDAF by the end of 2019. The Advance Queensland Testing Within Government (TWiG) Program has also been used to partner with the private sector to automate aspects of the system used by QDAF to age fish otoliths. Until now, this task has been time consuming and performed by staff with specialist skills and training. Automating the task of ageing fish will allow QDAF to divert Fishery Monitoring Team effort to other tasks in the expanded monitoring program.

Action 1.5 committed to developing and implementing a practical and cost-effective system for collection of economic and social data. Economic and social indicators for recreational fishing are

being collected as part of the state-wide recreational fishing survey. A contractor has been engaged to monitor economic and social indicators for the commercial and charter fishing sectors. They will report on the 2019 and 2020 financial years both regionally and state-wide.

Data collected by the monitoring programs are entered into the Fisheries Queensland data system, where they are subject to various quality control measures. Quality control in the data systems is being further enhanced by measures described in the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy Data Validation Plan (see <https://publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/queensland-sustainable-fisheries-strategy/resource/dfbddda3-f0e4-47a2-ba25-644b999734d8>). Fisheries data are available publicly via the QFish system at <http://qfish.fisheries.qld.gov.au/> . Some restrictions are placed on the availability of data obtained through QFish to protect confidentiality. Data can also be extracted from the system on request via the Fisheries Data Coordinator.

The Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy commits to developing a program of routine stock assessments that can be regularly updated (annually or at least every two years). This program will include regular stock assessments for the key GOCLF target species Spanish mackerel.

5 Progress against current conditions and recommendations

Conditions on the approved wildlife trade operation declaration for the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery

1. Operation of the fishery will be carried out in accordance with the management regime under the Queensland Fisheries Act 1994 and the Fisheries Regulation 2008.

The GOCLF was managed and continues to be managed in accordance with provisions outlined in the Queensland *Fisheries Act 1994* and the Queensland *Fisheries Regulation 2008*.

2. The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to inform the Department of any intended material changes to the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 decisions are made.

In June 2017, the Queensland Government released the Queensland *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027* (the Strategy). The Strategy describes the government's reform agenda for fisheries management and paves the way for Queensland to have world class fisheries management systems. The Strategy sets out clear targets to be achieved by 2020 and 2027 and specific actions to deliver on the vision and targets. There are 33 actions covering 10 major areas of reform (for details see <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/sustainable-fisheries-strategy>).

Delivering commitments described in the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027* will require some legislative amendments, regulatory reform and changes to management arrangements. Some changes, such as the introduction of the Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill 2018 (details below), have already been implemented. QDAF will ensure the DoEE are notified of all intended material changes to the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery.

Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill 2018

On the 28th of February 2019 the Queensland Parliament passed the *Fisheries (Sustainable Fisheries Strategy) Amendment Bill 2018*. The Bill was implemented on (7 March) and details are available at <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/bill.first/bill-2018-047>

Changes introduced by the Bill enabled QDAF to;

- modernise the objectives of the *Fisheries Act 1994* and recognise the interests of key stakeholder groups;

- clarify the roles of the Fisheries Minister and the chief executive in the management of the State's fisheries to allow for more responsive decision-making through the use of harvest strategies;
 - establish penalties to address serious fisheries offences such as black marketing; and
 - reduce complexity and remove redundant provisions.
3. The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition.

QDAF will continue to produce and present reports annually to the DoEE as per the condition.

4. The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to provide appropriate identification tools and education to assist fishers in providing accurate identification and recording of sharks at the species level.

QDAF provides online tools to assist fishers with identification of fish and shark species in Queensland waters, including protected and no take species. These tools are available at <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fish-identification-information/fish-species-guide>

Funding from the Queensland Future DAF Innovation fund has also been made available to pilot development of an App to assist fishers quickly and accurately identify shark species at sea.

QDAF initiated a new shark monitoring project commenced in July 2017 to;

- Improve data on species composition, sex and size structure of retained and released shark catch in Gulf and East Coast fisheries.
- Work with industry to develop visual and genetic tools to assist fishers more accurately identify shark species.
- Understand motivations for discarding of shark catch

Recommendation to the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries on the ecologically sustainable management of the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Line Fishery

1. The Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries to continue to collaborate with other jurisdictions to pursue consistent and complementary research needs and management arrangements for target species.

QDAF cooperates with other state jurisdictions to deliver the national Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS) reports. These reports are produced every second year with the most recent version completed in 2018. The SAFS reports include an assessment of the Gulf of Carpentaria Spanish mackerel stock as previously described. Analysis conducted for the SAFS assessment highlights potential monitoring and research needs. DAF is also preparing an Ecological Risk Assessment for the GOCLF, which will highlight knowledge gaps in relation to risks posed by the fishery to target and non-target species.