

Gascoyne Demersal Scalefish Harvest Strategy Development Working Group

Background

Licence holders in the Gascoyne Demersal Scalefish Managed Fishery (GDSF) have elected to undergo full certification under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accreditation program. The development of a formal harvest strategy for a resource is a key prerequisite as part of the MSC accreditation process (scheduled to commence in September 2016).

In response to the outcomes of an industry proposal to trial fish traps in the GDSF, the (then) Minister for Fisheries also directed that the harvest strategy for the Gascoyne Demersal Scalefish Resource (GDSR) be developed to accommodate the interests of both the commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

To progress the Minister's request, the Department of Fisheries established a stakeholder based Working Group consisting of representatives from the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, Recfishwest, commercial and recreational fishers and the Department of Fisheries, and chaired by an independent mediator. The Working Group has been tasked with developing a harvest strategy for the GDSR in accordance with the project plan.

Harvest Strategies

The harvest strategy for the GDSF is to be developed in accordance with the Department of Fisheries overarching policy '*Harvest Strategy Policy and Operational Guidelines for the Aquatic Resources of Western Australia*' (Fisheries Management Paper 271, July 2015).

Harvest strategies establish decision rules that identify the appropriate harvest levels for all sectors to meet ecological, economic and social objectives establish for a resource.

The core elements of a harvest strategy are:

1. **Operational objectives (ecological, economic and social)** – articulation, at an operational level, of what is to be achieved, and why, both for the resource and the relevant fisheries.
2. **Performance indicators** – information/data that can be used to measure performance against the operational objectives (must be measurable).
3. **Reference levels** – levels that result in an acceptable risk for each performance indicator, defined as target, threshold and limit reference levels.
4. **Harvest controls rules** – pre-defined specific management actions which maintain a performance indicator at the target reference level and avoids breaching thresholds/limits, or returns the performance indicator to an acceptable level within an appropriate timeframe.
5. **Monitoring and assessment** – the collection and analysis of all the data needed to underpin the harvest strategy and determine stock status and fishery performance against the operational objectives.
6. **Review period** – timeframe for the review of the elements of the harvest strategy.

GDSF Harvest Strategy Working Group Process

To assist the Working Group, the Department of Fisheries has pre-populated a 'harvest strategy template document' (working draft) with relevant background information for the GDSR (scheduled for release for public comment in August 2016). The working draft also

contains ecological objectives (and associated performance indicators, reference levels and harvest control rules to ensure stock sustainability) as well as examples of broad economic and social objectives.

While not precluded from reviewing any or all of the content of the working draft, it is envisaged that the Working Group will be primarily tasked with reviewing the economic and social objectives and identifying appropriate performance indicators, reference levels and developing harvest control rules relating to all objectives.

FMP271 provides examples of specific economic and social objectives and performance indicators that could be considered by the Working Group for inclusion in the harvest strategy for the GDSF. Several harvest strategies for WA fish resources have already been published which also contain examples of economic and social objectives and associated performance indicators that maybe useful reference material for the Working Group. These include (can be viewed on the Department of Fisheries website):

- [Fisheries management paper No. 272](#) - West Coast Deep Sea Crustacean Resources Harvest Strategy 2015 – 2020, July 2015.
- [Fisheries Management paper No. 273](#) - Blue Swimmer Crab Resource of the Peel-Harvey Estuary Harvest Strategy 2015 - 2020, May 2015.
- [Fisheries management paper No. 274](#) - Finfish Resources of the Peel-Harvey Estuary Harvest Strategy 2015 - 2020, May 2015.

Identifying social objectives for fisheries management was also the subject of a recent Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) funded report which is available at http://frdc.com.au/research/social_and_economic_research/applying_social_objectives_to_fisheries_mgt/Pages/default.aspx

It should be noted that an essential characteristic of a performance indicator is that it is measurable (e.g. catch/catch rates/participation/beach price etc.). The Department has a number of data sources which can be considered by the Working Group for use as performance indicators which are primarily derived from stock assessments, commercial catch data, processor returns and recreational fishing surveys. Notwithstanding this there may be other datasets which the Department is not responsible for, that may also provide suitable information to be used as a performance indicator.

Noting the timeframe for the development of this harvest strategy, information/data relating to a performance indicator must be currently available. Should the Working Group identify the need for information/data which is not currently available, consideration could be given to its inclusion in the harvest strategy should the information become available prior to finalising the harvest strategy or during a subsequent review.