

**SOUTH PACIFIC COMMISSION**  
**TWENTIETH REGIONAL TECHNICAL MEETING ON FISHERIES**  
**(Noumea, New Caledonia, 1 – 5 August 1988)**

**COUNTRY STATEMENT – AUSTRALIA**

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#### COUNTRY STATEMENT - AUSTRALIA

##### 1. INTRODUCTION

To the present, the Australian fishing industry has been based largely on inshore and continental shelf fisheries resources. These resources, like those of many other nations, are considered to have reached or be nearing full exploitation and the decline in production foreshadowed by high exploitation rates has prompted the introduction or development of management plans for most of Australia's major fisheries. Most fisheries income has been derived from crustaceans. In the last two years, however, greater interest has been shown in developing trawl fisheries on the continental slope, particularly in south eastern Australia but also in other regions including the east coast, west coast and Great Australian Bight and the north west shelf. As these developments occur, they should cause an increase in the relative importance of finfish in the total Australian catch, both in value and quantity.

A major development in pelagic fisheries in the last 3 years has been the exploitation of jack mackerel on an industrial scale off eastern Tasmania. For 1987, the fishery landed 40,000 tonnes of catch, now making this the largest single species fishery in Australia. The catch was largely used to make fish meal for Tasmanian Atlantic salmon farms.

The following sections of this Country Statement deal briefly with major features of commercial fisheries activities in Australia.

##### 2. PRODUCTION

###### (a) Fleet:

In 1987, approximately 9,100 commercial fishing boats were licensed, however, only 5160 held Commonwealth fishing licences which are required for operations in Commonwealth controlled fisheries. Although boat numbers have not increased in recent years due to limits on numbers of fishing licences, fishing effort has risen significantly due to upgrading of vessels and to technological advances in fishing gear, fish finding gear and navigational equipment. In developing offshore fisheries, impetus for gear advances has come from the demands of locating and target fishing schools in the deep water environment.

(b) Landings:

The value of the Australian commercial fish catch continues to grow. Total landings by domestic vessels were estimated at 204,000 tonnes live weight in 1986/87, valued at \$735m. This is an increase of 13.7% in volume and of 24% in value compared with 1985/86. Production of shellfish fell by 5% while that of finfish increased by 23%.

The increase in value is due to a combination of factors, namely the depreciation of the US dollar against the Japanese yen, strong export markets for large prawns, and the increasing exports of sashimi quality fish to the Japanese market. Prices for finfish on the domestic market rose strongly in 1986/87. The dollar's depreciation against the yen will maintain high domestic prices for shellfish.

The added attention being given by the Australian fishing industry to the improvement of product quality, the regularity of supply and the relatively low value of the Australian dollar are enhancing Australia's market position.

(c) Imports and Exports:

The value of Australia's imports of marine produce in the year ending June 1987 was a record \$420, an increase of 27% over the previous year. Exports were valued at \$621m, an increase of 29%.

Australia's main exports in 1986/87 were prawns (15,000 tonnes, \$218m), rock lobster (12,000 tonnes, \$194m), abalone (3,700 tonnes, \$108m) and scallops (1,300 tonnes, \$23m). Nearly all prawns and whole rock lobsters and 60% of the abalone exports went to Japan. The United States took 88% of the rock lobster tails; Hong Kong took 23% of the abalone and 50% of scallops. Scallop exports to France declined to 27% of the total exported in 1986/87.

On 1 June 1987 Australia placed an embargo on the import of South African fisheries products. The ban may cause longer term disruption to the market for smoked fish products in Australia.

### 3. MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC FISHERIES

(a) General:

Management plans for Australia's major fisheries are being developed, modified and implemented to conserve stocks and to promote economically efficient development and exploitation within sectors of the fishing industry. Management policies are jointly developed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and industry through appropriate management advisory committees and ultimately the Australian Fisheries

Council. Most management arrangements are based on limited entry supplemented by other input controls to effectively limit fishing effort to an acceptable level. The southern bluefin tuna fishery and the abalone fishery which are managed through a system of individual transferable quotas, are the only significant exceptions. Gear restrictions, seasonal closures, buy-back of fishing rights and restrictions on upgrading of vessels are features of some management schemes.

Of recent interest is the continuing development of a comprehensive management programme for the east coast tuna fishery geared mainly to yellowfin and bigeye. Close consultation with the appropriate industry organisations, State Governments and recreational angling groups has been maintained. A management plan will be introduced in July 1988.

A National Fisheries Adjustment Program has been introduced, funded by a \$6m grant from the Commonwealth Government. Funds are to be used to commence capacity reduction schemes in effectively managed fisheries with demonstrated over-capacity. The provision of assistance is conditional on fishermen agreeing to contribute to the continued funding of the Program.

(b) Torres Strait Treaty:

The Torres Strait Treaty which Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) signed on 18 December 1978, came into force on 15 February 1985. It represents a unique border agreement between independent sovereign nations in that it establishes a Protected Zone (PZ) within which both nations have rights and obligations, rather than a single border line. Within the PZ are lines dividing the areas of primary fisheries and seabed jurisdiction between the two nations.

Australia and PNG have entered into arrangements under Article 22 of the Treaty, setting out joint management arrangements for commercial fisheries for prawns, Spanish mackerel, pearl shell, dugong, turtles and rock lobster and for the commercial rock lobster fishery in the Gulf of Papua north of 9S. These are valid to 15 February 1990. The rock lobster fishery arrangement was renewed in February 1988 and this agreement will also expire on 15 February 1990.

The Treaty also is unique in that it protects the rights of the traditional inhabitants of the PZ and adjacent areas by recognising and preserving the existing pattern of traditional fisheries activities. In practice, this means favouring management options which allow the greatest opportunity for traditional inhabitants, eg. diving rather than trawling for lobsters. A Commonwealth Government research programme has been developed to support management programmes in the PZ.

(c) The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park:

The Great Barrier Reef covers an area of almost 350,000 square kilometres off the north east coast of Australia. Of this area, 98.5% has now been declared Marine Park, under the auspices of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Act.

The area contains fishing grounds of major significance to the Queensland fishing industry and to recreational fishermen. Fisheries authorities are closely involved in developing management policies for the Marine Park to ensure the continued productivity of fish stocks and to ensure that commercial and recreational fishing interests are considered, along with conservation and tourism. As yet, the effects of different fishing techniques on fish stocks and the reef habitat are little understood and have been identified as priority areas for research.

(d) International Management of Southern Bluefin Tuna:

Since December 1982, officials and scientists from Australia, Japan and New Zealand have held regular meetings to consider international management arrangements for southern bluefin tuna. The need for management was recognised as a result of a unanimous scientific concern at the status of the spawning stock which, after heavy and increasing fishing effort by Japanese and Australian vessels, had been depleted to about 30% of its pre-exploitation level.

While no formal agreement has been concluded yet, there is a consensus that an international co-ordinated management approach is necessary for the conservation and rational utilisation of the global stocks of SBT. Currently, Australia and Japan have come to an arrangement which will effectively limit their catches to 11,500 tonnes and 19,500 tonnes, respectively. New Zealand has established a quota of 1,000 tonnes but its actual catch has been of the order of 100t in recent years.

4. FOREIGN FISHING

The Australian-Japan Subsidiary Agreement on tuna longline fishing was renegotiated in August-September 1987 for the twelve months commencing 1 November 1987. A consideration in determining areas of access was an undertaking by Japanese industry to continue in 1987/88 the global catch limit of 19,500 tonnes of SBT agreed in 1986. That undertaking was in response to continued international scientific concern at the depletion of SBT stocks. Some southern bluefin tuna producing waters of the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ) adjacent to Tasmania remain open to Japanese longline operations. The longline fleet had been excluded under the 1984/85 access agreement from AFZ waters south of 34S in which, historically, virtually all the Japanese catch of SBT in the AFZ had been taken.

In April 1987, Australia signed the multilateral Treaty on Fisheries with the United States. The US ratification of this Treaty was deposited in Port Moresby on 15 June 1988, effectively bringing the Treaty into force. This Treaty provides the terms and conditions under which US tuna purse seiners may operate in the region. Fourteen other South Pacific countries have signed this Treaty which provides for US\$60 million in fees and assistance over the next five years.

United States vessels will be permitted to fish in a restricted area of Australia's fishing zone in the Coral Sea. Fishing operations in this area will be subject to careful monitoring and review.

Australia has also participated in preliminary discussions hosted by the Forum Fisheries Agency concerning a possible multilateral arrangement with Japan. Such an arrangement would most likely be very different to the US Treaty, due to the differences in fleet composition and the range of existing bilateral arrangements.

The current twelve months agreement with the Australian agents for the commercial fishing interests of Taiwan expires on 31 October 1988. Negotiations will soon be held for renewal of the agreement for the year from 1 November 1988.

The Australian/Republic of Korea annual Subsidiary Agreement on squid fishing will be re-negotiated in early August 1988. The 1987/88 agreement allowed for up to 10 Korean squid jiggers to take a maximum total of 4,000 tonnes. In the event the Korean vessels took only small tonnage, in 1987/88.

Australia has one joint venture agreement with a company involving commercial fishermen of Thailand. This agreement ends on 30 September 1988 and grants access to demersal resources in northern waters on condition that Australian vessels are introduced to the fishery.

Specific controls are placed on foreign fishing vessels which are required to report their position every day and their catch every 6 days as well as to complete comprehensive logbooks.

#### 5. COMMONWEALTH FINANCING OF FISHERIES RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Grants totalling \$6.2m for 1987/88 were allocated from the Fishing Industry Research Trust Account (FIRTA) for a range of research projects, including biological research, gear technology, exploratory fishing, education and extension, and seafood handling and marketing. Research into tropical diseases and ciguatera received funding support. Nearly \$1m of the total has been allocated to projects on orange roughy and other species caught in the developing southern slope

fisheries. The Fisheries Development Trust Accounts is continuing to fund exploratory surveys into the size and extent of the orange roughy fishery and the level of fishing which can be sustained. Funds have also been provided for the provision of isothermic contour charts for the fishing industry and the development of a viable sashimi tuna fishery off southern Queensland.

## 6. MARICULTURE

Mariculture production in Australia continues to be lead by the culture of oysters, chiefly Crassostrea commercialis and the Pacific Oyster C. gigas. Public investment and interest in mariculture, however, is increasingly directed towards penaeid prawn and barramundi farming ventures, especially in northern New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. Many of the commercial ventures now underway are adapting technologies from Asia, particularly Taiwan. At this stage, actual production has been negligible (40t of crustaceans in 1987) and results over the next few years will need to be assessed to determine the short term viability of the industry in Australia.

Atlantic salmon farm production in Tasmania has increased from 987t in 1985 to 1291t in 1987. This industry has adapted Norwegian technology and progressed rapidly to the commercial production stage.

## 7. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

### (a) Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB):

Through its aid programme, Australia has provided over \$1,092,000 of support for the SPC Tuna and Billfish Assessment Programme since its inception 7 years ago, including \$146,000 in 1987/88. It similarly supported the earlier SPC Skipjack Survey and Assessment Programme. In 1987/88, Australia provided \$103,000 towards the SPC regional training project for fisheries and \$27,000 towards the SPC Pacific Inshore Fisheries Resources Workshop.

Australia also provides the Forum Fisheries Agency with one third of its regular budgetary funds. For 1987/88 there was a small increase in Australia's contribution to \$733,000.

### (b) Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR):

## GIANT CLAMS

An International Giant Clam Workshop was held in Townsville in March 1988 to present and review the results of the project. Members from the South Pacific were invited to the workshop. The support for the project amounted to approximately 1.2 million dollars. A proceeding of the Giant Clam Workshop will be produced shortly.

## COCONUT CRABS

The project has been reviewed by the Government of Vanuatu and an ACIAR nominee and the preliminary considerations are that the project has achieved its major objectives and will not be continued. A publication of the results will be produced by ACIAR and forwarded to the member countries. Reports have been made to the SPC Fisheries Workshop. The value of the project was \$380,000.

## BAITFISH

The project has been extended to include Kiribati with financial assistance from AIDAB. Reports of the project have been made to the SPC Fisheries Research Workshop. The value of the project is \$500,000.

## 8. TRAINING IN PRACTICAL FISHERIES

The School of Fisheries at the Australian Maritime College provides education and training for practicing fishermen, degree students and at the Post Graduate Diploma level. All courses are structured around the following main subject areas: Fishing Gear Technology (small scale and industrial methods), Seafood Handling and Processing, Resource Assessment and Management, Fisheries Economics and Business Practice. The importance of Australia's tropical fisheries ensures that the courses have a tropical emphasis and meet training needs in the Australian region.

Numerous students from the Pacific and South East Asia have already attended courses and their numbers continue to grow. The College would also welcome initiatives leading to special courses, on or off campus, designed specifically for the needs of the South Pacific region.

For further details please contact:  
 School of Fisheries  
 Box 21, Beaconsfield 7270  
 Tasmania, Australia.



## 9. BUREAU OF RURAL RESOURCES

Coordination of research into scientific aspects of those fisheries in the Australian Fishing Zone for which the Commonwealth has management responsibility is the function of the Fisheries Resources Branch within the Bureau of Rural Resources. The major roles of this group are to

- . to co-ordinate and undertake specific research projects on fisheries managed by the Commonwealth
- . to provide scientific advice to fisheries managers within the Commonwealth Government
- . to critically review scientific research carried out on fisheries managed by the Commonwealth and to recommend on priorities for future research.

Further information about the Fisheries Resources Branch can be obtained from

The Assistant Director  
 Fisheries Resources Branch  
 Bureau of Rural Resources  
 Department of Primary Industries and Energy  
 Canberra  
 ACT 2600

## CONCLUSION

This paper provides but a brief list of Australian fisheries activities. Further details on any aspect may readily be obtained from the Director, Australian Fisheries Services, Department of Primary Industries & Energy, Canberra, ACT 2600.

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