



Australian Government

Great Barrier Reef  
Marine Park Authority

## POSITION STATEMENT

### **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Position Statement on regional management issues in the Queensland East Coast Inshore Finfish Fishery**

[Post publishing note]

This Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Position Statement in relation to the *Queensland East Coast Inshore Finfish Fishery* was developed in June 2007.

The Statement was developed to inform the Queensland Government review of the fishery. Recently, the Australian Government assessed the revised management arrangements for this fishery against provisions of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the *EPBC Act 1999*). An independent review informed this assessment. In February 2009 the fishery was declared an approved Wildlife Trade Operation until February 2012.

The fishery is now operating under a suite of conditions and recommendations. For more information on the assessment, conditions and recommendations please refer to the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website: <http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/fisheries/index.html>



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This document outlines the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's (GBRMPA) position on regional management issues in respect to the East Coast Inshore Finfish Fishery (ECIFF)

The ECIFF is the largest and most diverse fishery in Queensland covering an area from the New South Wales border to Cape York. Being an inshore fishery, it is a fishery that is accessible to most people and it enjoys a very high level of recreational participation. It is also the fishery of most relevance to coastal Indigenous communities. A multitude of species is taken in the fishery with both the catch composition and species taken changing from north to south. In common with other inshore fisheries in Australia resource allocation issues are a feature of the fishery and are expected to remain so into the future.

The commercial component of the fishery is generally a net fishery. Net fishing, particularly gill net fishing, is not a fishing technique that is well understood by recreational fishers and within the fishery, as elsewhere in Australia, there is often localised conflict or misunderstanding between commercial and recreational fishers over access to areas and perceptions about a share of the resource and the amount of by-catch. Net fishers are often blamed for localised fish resource depletion and fish wastage. Resource allocation issues of this type are very difficult to solve or manage on a coast-wide scale. Informal localised agreements, sometimes supported by legislation (as is the case with weekend netting closures), are often arrived at among local people and a balance is struck. This balance can unravel if new commercial or recreational fishers, who are not aware of informal local arrangements, move into an area either permanently or temporarily and commence fishing in a way that is not in accord with local understandings. Currently, the commercial fishers in the inshore fishery are, subject to their netting endorsements, able to fish anywhere along the east coast of Queensland that is open to the relevant type of commercial net fishing. A recent, but not unusual issue has arisen in Port Douglas, where 'non-local' commercial gill-netters are reputed to have moved into the area and depleted local stocks of grey mackerel. These kinds of occurrences are not unusual and can cause conflict at three levels. (1) The 'out of town' gill net fishers can upset informal local arrangements; (2) they can be blamed, or actually cause, localised depletion of fish stocks; and (3) they may be blamed for any reported or perceived increase in impacts on protected species such as dugong.

The types of issues that have happened at Port Douglas can happen (and have happened) anywhere along the coast and, currently, there are few effective mechanisms to deal with them. Concern about local issues and an ability to have some sort of input into local area agreement making or management was a common theme that emerged in many of the inshore finfish fishery port meeting visits that were conducted by the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (QDPI&F) late in 2006 as part of the ECIFF management planning consultation process.

The GBRMPA believes that an ability to apply some form of regional management control or structure within this fishery can be an effective mechanism to address area-based resource allocation issues. It can also provide a basis for resource sharing agreements to be reached at a

local level that may promote stewardship for the resource and that can have improved conservation outcomes. A form of regional management can also recognise the bio-geographical differences in stock abundance and distribution and can allow recognition that management arrangements in one region may or may not be appropriate in another. Importantly, a regional management approach, at whatever scale, can positively recognise the importance of the inshore fishery to local economies and local people including Indigenous people.

Regional management and regionally-based management are not the same thing. The ability to have regional or local area arrangements in place does not have to mean that management must be situated within a region. The type of regional management that the GBRMPA supports for this fishery, is a type that would enable consultation, negotiation and conflict resolution at a regional or local level but generally, the management of stocks would occur at the state-wide level. A management framework that can facilitate regional or local area management arrangements can provide an opportunity and incentive for a community to be actively involved in promoting resource stewardship and it can allow for the development of creative solutions to difficult problems.

As a starting point the GBRMPA suggest that regions, aligned with nominal bio-geographical and community differences, could be identified as having a potential for regional management, particularly with respect to resource sharing into the future. Nominal regions might be:

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|---------------------|--|
| 1. Cape York        | Cape York to Bloomfield River          |
| 2. Wet Tropics      | South of Bloomfield River to Lucinda   |
| 3. Dry Tropics      | South of Lucinda to Bowen              |
| 4. Central Tropics  | South of Bowen to Shoalwater Bay       |
| 5. Southern Tropics | South of Shoalwater Bay to Agnes Water |
| 6. Southern         | South of Agnes Water to the NSW border |

The GBRMPA is aware that the QDPI&F is considering how a regional approach might be implemented. The GBRMPA supports and encourages the QDPI&F to consider how suitable management arrangements can be developed that will facilitate the resolution of:

- Resource allocation issues (particularly near larger regional towns) and commercial versus recreational catch share issues; and
- Problems that may occur if effort is bought out in an area where acceptable local area management arrangements are developed and there is no mechanism to stop other effort migrating in and thereby potentially negating the local area management arrangements that are in place.

The GBRMPA is also aware that QDPI&F is considering how communities might be able to have input into local area management. The GBRMPA, through its local marine advisory committees (LMACs), already has a mechanism in place to receive community-based advice about local marine and coastal zone management issues of importance. There may be an opportunity for LMACs, or sub-committees of them, to be involved with any processes that the QDPI&F might develop. The GBRMPA invites discussion with QDPI&F about this as we recognise that we share many areas of common interest.