

Chair's Meeting Summary

BARRAMUNDI FISHERY ADVISORY GROUP (BFAG)

Chair's summary of the BFAG meeting held on the 15 December 2025.

Independent Chair: Will Zacharin

Participating members: Rob Fish, Cameron Berryman, Rhys Mulholland, David Ciaravolo, Blane Simmons.

Observers: Jamie Damaso, Daniel Capps

Department of Agriculture and Fisheries staff: Matt Osbourne, Phillipa Hunter, Blake Taylor, Lou-Anne Duncan, Michael Usher, Tim Porter, Fikri Sjahrudin, Brien Roberts, Laura Smith.

Apologies: Blane Simmons

PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

The Chair welcomed the members to the BFAG and provided background on his experience and role in chairing the new group. The NT Government has made a policy decision to remove commercial gillnets for Barramundi and the BFAG primary role is to assist NT Fisheries to implement the policy and explore alternative gear trials that may be used by commercial operators after gillnets are removed.

GENERAL BUSINESS

Terms of Reference

Draft Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the BFAG were tabled and some amendments proposed and accepted. Amended ToRs to be circulated out-of-session for signing by all members and permanent observers. Members were also requested to populate the Register of Interests.

Fishery update

The Department presented an agenda paper that outlined the commercial barramundi fishing season for 2025. Catch rates were high and supported by the 2021–2024 cohorts on the back of good wet season rainfall. TEPS interactions remain consistent with previous years, with low reported mortality rates. Research and monitoring activities continue including electronic monitoring and vessel-based sampling by on-board observers. As a matter of record, the commercial Barramundi fishery is sustainable at the current level of fishing effort. It was noted that the Government's gillnet phase-out commitment has significantly impacted industry confidence, licence values, and business decisions and the processing factory owned by Wild Barramundi Pty Ltd ceased operating after the Government's announcement.

As commercial gillnet licence holders exit the fishery, there needs to be a strengthened focus on catch reporting by tourism operators, recreational fishers and Aboriginal fishing to ensure future assessments of the fishery remain robust. This will require planning and implementation of new data development programs across the different sectors and the Department to improve catch reporting.

Process to remove gillnets from the Barramundi fishery

The Department presented an agenda paper that outlined the proposed timeline and parallel steps to remove gillnets from the Barramundi Fishery; the Fishery Adjustment Scheme and the fishery reform. Proposed key timeframes were emphasised to members and included:

- Establishment of a Fishery Adjustment Committee in early 2026
- Commencement of an adjustment scheme from July 2027; and
- Commercial gillnet fishing is expected to cease by end of September 2027.

The BFAG has no role in the Fishery Adjustment Committee, which will include relevant expertise and economic experience. However, the BFAG will work with the Department in assessing whether viable commercial fishing can continue under different gear and new management arrangements. Commercial members were strong in emphasising to the Department that 'just terms' should be offered to remove gillnet licences and clarity was required in relation to the new legal framework under the Fisheries Act to remove licenses and issue new licences, if alternative gear trials proved to be successful.

Alternative gear trial framework

The Department outlined the proposed approach for alternative gear research, which aims to identify non-gillnet gear types capable of harvesting commercially viable quantities of Barramundi and King Threadfin. The Department has commenced the process of seeking funding from FRDC's Fish LIGHT (Low impact gears and innovative harvest technologies) research project, currently underway in Qld, to trial gears in the NT. The proposed approach seeks to engage with both industry and Aboriginal fishing interests to utilise alternative gear for commercial purposes. Members emphasised the need for early and genuine engagement in the design and delivery of any research trials. Members raised concerns with the project timeframes and the removal of gillnets (~2 years) but noted that the two process don't explicitly need to be linked.

Members sought clarity on the issuance of gillnets under Aboriginal Coastal Licences (ACLs) since the Government's announcement. The Department committed to providing this information at the next meeting.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Chair thanked all members and observers for their valuable input. All members would welcome further communication from the Government in relation to the future for commercial Barramundi fishing access after the removal of gillnets in September 2027. All members noted that there was urgent need for the Department to establish the Fishery Adjustment Scheme, so commercial license holders can make future financial decisions about leaving the gillnet fishery and whether they would participate in a new commercial fishery, if alternative gear trials proved to be successful. Commercial licence holders are keen to participate in the gear trials as soon as this can happen.



Will Zacharin

Chairperson

Date: February 2026