

Barramundi Fishery Management Advisory Committee

Chair's summary

Meeting #1

Participating Members: Mr Ian Cartwright (independent Chair), Mr Geoff Diver, Mr David Ciaravolo, Mr Dennis Sten, Dr Peter Kyne, Dr Rachel Groom, Mr Peter Pender, Mr Murray Knyvett, Mr Ross McDonald, Ms Tarun Richards

Observers (for the full meeting) Mr Will Bowman (DITT), Dr Mark Grubert (DITT), Dr Thor Saunders (DITT), Mr Calvin Deveraux (TO), Mr Daniel Breed (WPS), **(for agenda items 2-5):** Ms Joanne Rudd (AFANT), Mr Dan Bergamo (NTGFIA), Mr Leo Guida (AMSC)

Executive support: Mr Jonathan McPhail (DITT), Ms Eliza Kimlin (DITT)

Introduction

The first meeting of the re-established Northern Territory Barramundi Fishery Management Advisory Committee (the Committee) was held on Thursday 9 September 2021 at the NT Fisheries Building, Berrimah, Darwin.

As it was the first meeting of the new Committee, the Director of Fisheries spoke on behalf of the Minister, noting:

- The Barramundi Fishery (including King Threadfin) is seen as the premier Fishery in the Territory. It has great significance to all stakeholders for its valuable social, cultural and economic contribution to local and regional communities.
- It has been almost 30 years since the implementation of the Barramundi Fishery Management Plan and there is a need for a review and establishment of a new, comprehensive management framework to support the future of this Fishery for the benefit of all stakeholders. Overseeing and having input into process presents an opportunity for the Committee to set this new direction.
- The review of the Barramundi Fishery and development of a new management framework is a Government commitment and a Blue Mud Bay commitment that includes a sustainable commercial share to the Aboriginal sector.
- Appointed members on the Committee have a diverse range of expertise, and are encouraged to share their knowledge, views, and understanding of the opportunities that the Barramundi Fishery presents.

The Committee are required to do their best to arrive at consensus decisions. Where this is not possible the majority position will be sought, with dissenting views captured in detail.

Register of interests

Committee members will need to pay particular attention to any direct pecuniary or other interests, which may require an interested party to absent themselves from discussions and/or decisions to be taken by the Committee.

Industry views

Members provided their views on key issues arising in the fishery and member's expectations for the work of the committee, a summary is provided below. There was a good deal of commonality in the priority issues identified, which included:

- The overarching requirement for healthy and abundant fish stocks.

- The importance of having due regard to managing impacts on Threatened, Endangered and Protected Species (TEPS), which, alongside meeting other management objectives that include ensuring appropriate access for cultural fishing, is essential if the fishery is to maintain its social licence.
- That fisheries management 'success' should not be managed by the level of catch alone but also by user experience and success.
- The importance of building trust and effective communication between stakeholders.
- Availability of contemporary and robust data on which to base management decisions.
- Meaningful Aboriginal involvement in the development of the Management Framework/Plan.
- Resolving the challenge of equitable resource sharing between user groups.

Terms of reference

The Terms of Reference (ToR) presented to the committee have been approved by the Minister. Several issues relating to the ToR, including confidentiality, attendance of observers, the Chair's Summary and meeting agendas and papers were discussed.

While the work of the Committee and the minutes are to be confidential, it is important that there is an appropriate level of transparency. Making the Chairs Summary available to the public, the use of working groups and member consultations with their respective stakeholder groups will help in this regard.

The Committee requested that, subject to the provision of reasonable reasons for attendance, observers be able to attend full meetings as occurred in other NT fisheries MACs. The observer issue had regrettably been a matter of some confusion prior to the first meeting, which the Committee felt strongly that this issue must be resolved prior to the next meeting.

The Chair will write to the Minister recommending that a number of amendments to the Terms of Reference be made, reflecting the comments raised by members.

Code of conduct

The Committee members noted and signed the Code of Conduct.

Conservation sector representation

The gap in membership regarding a dedicated representative from the conservation sector was discussed. It was agreed that there was a need to engage effectively with the conservation sector given the high profile of bycatch and TEP species. There was agreement that it was unnecessary to appoint a conservation member given the presence of scientific members with strong conservation backgrounds. However, it was agreed that it would be useful if a member of a conservation organisation wished to be an observer, which would be possible under the suggested amendments to the ToR.

Governance framework

The Committee was informed of the Governance Framework for the review and development of the management framework, including establishing working groups on an 'as needs basis' and processes for broader consultation.

The Fishery and process to develop a management framework

The Committee were presented with an overview of the management arrangements for Barramundi and King Threadfin, the stock assessment process and status, and current research being undertaken.

There are several steps planned to undertake the Barramundi Fishery review and to develop the management framework. A distinction should be drawn between:

- the **management framework**, which is a policy document that will form the legislative basis on which to manage the fishery, and,
- the **management plan**, which is a legislative document based on the management framework and used to regulate the Fishery.

The Committee will be engaged in providing advice on the development of the management framework.

The Department are developing guidelines to undertake a Social and Economic Risk Assessment. Having stakeholders and experts involved in the Social and Economic Risk Assessment (SERA) is essential to effectively capture the values held by each sector.

To align with aspirations and expectations, and to achieve broader support and ‘buy-in’, the Committee agreed that it would be necessary to include a Communication and Engagement Plan in the management framework. It will be important to maintain good stakeholder engagement throughout the development of the management framework.

The Committee has the potential to seek advice from other stakeholders and experts during the process using two approaches;

- through working groups established under the ToR; and
- a consultative process with members’ user groups, to be conducted by the Department in collaboration with members (e.g. on long term fishery goals)

The Committee noted the opportunity at the end of the review process for public comments.

Ecological risk assessment

The Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) undertaken in February 2021 has now been completed and a final report will be released soon by the Department. The new management framework will need to effectively address the risks identified in the ERA.

Long-term goals for the Barramundi Fishery

The Committee discussed the framework of high-level objectives, long term goals for the fishery. The high-level objectives are specified in the Fisheries Act and other relevant legislation and while not open to change, are subject to interpretation and implementation through the long-term goals and operational objectives for the fishery.

While there are four major user groups (commercial, recreational, fishing tourism and Aboriginal) it is also important to acknowledge that conservation groups and the broader community are also key stakeholders.

There was an in-depth discussion of draft long-term fishery goals for the Barramundi Fishery, put forward by the Department. The Committee made a number of recommended amendments, including those relating to Target and by-product resource sustainability, broader ecosystem sustainability, process and engagement, resource access and sharing,

maximising benefits to the community and meeting Community expectations and sector needs.

The Department, with advice from members, will hold targeted consultations on the draft long-term fishery goals before the next meeting. With the relevant member, the Department will also undertake consultation with regional land councils.

Timeframe

The Committee discussed the timeframe provided by the Minister for Agribusiness and Aquaculture and raised several concerns about the ability to deliver a draft management framework by December 2022. These included the level of work to be completed, such as the review of management arrangements, the harvest strategy and resource sharing, the importance of undertaking appropriate consultation that will take time and consideration that COVID-19 may disrupt the process. The typical timeframe to complete some of these tasks is longer than the current projected timeframe requested by the Minister. It was agreed by the Committee that the Chair inform the Minister to this effect.

Next meeting

Friday 10th December 2021

Ian Cartwright
Chair, BFMAC

For further information on the issues above, please contact the Mr Jonathan McPhail, Aquatic Resource Manager on telephone number 8999 2100 or via email, jonathan.mcphail@nt.gov.au.