



The Hon Mark Furner MP
Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries
and Minister for Rural Communities

Our ref: CTS 03072/22

21/03/2022

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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliamentary Services
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter of 24 February 2022 regarding petition number 3665-21 received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly about proposed changes to the Queensland East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery.

As part of the Queensland Government's Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2020–2027, the East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery was regionalised on 1 September 2021 to create five management regions along the coast to improve the management of key stocks within each management region. Regionalising the fishery involved reallocating existing east coast individual effort units into each region based on an individual's historical fishing effort. Reallocating effort units in this way enables fishing effort to support harvest strategy objectives within each of the management regions.

The 2022 regional effort caps for the Northern and Central trawl management regions have been initially set to achieve 40–50 per cent biomass, or maximum sustainable yield, and are well above current effort levels in each trawl region. These limits are referred to as the total allowable effort for a region – or 'regional effort cap'. Setting such limits will rebuild or maintain stock levels of key species.

Consistent with public consultation undertaken in 2020, future effort limits for each of the trawl regions will be set by applying the regional harvest strategies and to achieve 60 per cent biomass, or maximum economic yield. These decisions would be based on the recommendations from stock assessments of key species in each management region. More information about the consultation is available online at <https://daf.engagementhub.com.au/draft-harvest-strategy-policy>.

Please note that no changes are planned for the 2022 fishing season.

Research Underpinning Harvest Strategy Targets

The target in each of the trawl harvest strategies is 60 per cent biomass. The 60 per cent biomass target was informed by research conducted by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporate and CSIRO, set out in the report *Setting economic target reference points for multiple species in mixed fisheries*. The full report is available at www.frdc.com.au/project/2011-200. Although underpinned by this research, biomass targets outlined in the harvest strategies can be updated and tailored to specific fisheries and species as more information becomes available.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries has prepared a short video to explain the fisheries management principles that underpin the current reform. The video can be accessed at www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/managing-fisheries-for-sustainability.

Proposed Transitional Approach and Timing

A 2021 stock assessment for Tiger Prawns identified that biomass levels for the species in the Northern and Central trawl regions were at approximately 50 per cent of unfished levels. Accordingly, reduced levels of fishing effort were recommended on that species to rebuild stock biomass to the harvest strategy's target reference point of 60 per cent biomass. A copy of this stock assessment is available at <https://era.daf.qld.gov.au/id/eprint/8049/>.

Following initial consultation with regional harvest strategy workshops in late 2020 and early 2021, Fisheries Queensland is proposing a transitional approach to rebuilding to 60 per cent biomass in these two regions. The transitional arrangements would result in applying a three-year average effort level to set the regional effort caps for the 2023 fishing season commencing in March 2023. Please be assured that the proposal takes into account industry member feedback – and further consultation will be undertaken before any decisions are made.

This approach addresses concerns about increased trawling effort within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. It also assists in addressing Commonwealth Wildlife Trade Operation approval conditions, which are necessary for enabling export. During this time, Fisheries Queensland will review the existing tiger prawn assessment and complete assessments on other important trawl species, such as Red Spot King prawns and Moreton Bay bugs. This would inform management options for these trawl regions and arrangements would apply for the 2024 fishing season.

Timing of Reforms and Transitional Arrangements

The Queensland Government does not support a moratorium on implementing the fisheries reforms and new harvest strategies. We are open to sensible approaches that would support industry to transition to the new management arrangements and Fisheries Queensland will be consulting with regional harvest strategy workshops before mid-2022.

Consistent with our co-management objective for Queensland fisheries, I encourage industry members to get involved in the regional harvest strategy workshops to discuss issues like the one raised in this petition. I encourage those who are not members of fishery working groups to following current discussions through the meeting communiques published on DAF's website (www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/fishery-working-groups). DAF will continue to provide opportunities to encourage interested persons contribute.

If your office would like further information, please contact my office on 07 3719 7420.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Furner'.

MARK FURNER MP

**Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and
Minister for Rural Communities**