

Issues for consideration by the SARC identified at a meeting of the Estuary General Netting Working Group held 3 August 2015

Important note: *The issues below were raised by members of the WG as expert individual views for consideration by SARC. They are not considered to be the representative view of any particular group of fishers or shareholders. The issues raised will be considered by SARC in formulating the final recommendations on linkages that will be provided to the Minister for his consideration.*

Comments on linkage recommendations

General issues:

- Fishers indicated that circumstances vary between regions, and so the timing of changes is very important as some can cope with changes faster than others.
- Some acknowledged that the degree and extent to which SARC have moved in terms of the draft recommendations deserves credit.
- A suggestion was made that even raising the minimum shareholding in every share class by 1 share would promote some movement in shares.
- Concern was voiced regarding fishers who need extra days – if there are insufficient days available for these fishers the reform process will fold.
- Concern was raised regarding fishers who will not release/sell shares when linkages come in, they will just lease them – this makes it harder for full time fishers to acquire the shares required.
- Concern was raised that inadequate priority has been allocated to the Reform in terms of dollars relative to the value of the fisheries in comparison with the previous Commonwealth funding for restructuring of that fishing industry.
- It was suggested that the principle that drove initial share allocation was wrong and that real share management didn't result from that allocation.
- Concern was voiced that while the reform will generally guarantee linkage (e.g. days), there's still no guarantee of access given the previous record of MPAs, recreational fishing havens and other closures.
- Social licence/community acceptance was raised as a big issue being faced by this fishery.
- It was suggested that the reform is still going too far too fast and timing is critical.
- Concern was raised that SARC did not talk to fishers initially and there is a need for further consultation. Some fear that the draft recommendations have gone in, and do not reflect the views of fishers and will not be changed regardless of consultations and industry views.
- It was indicated that there is still difficulty for some fishers to understand and interpret recommendations and other information – creates fear and difficulties in making decisions.
- Concern that timing will mean reform may flow into the next electoral cycle and be shelved.
- Some suggested that fishers need to know more about detailed management arrangements around the linkages and other issues to enable proper consideration of options and decision-making.

Estuary General – Meshing:

- i) **Enforce the current minimum shareholding**
 - Supported/not supported??

ii) Days regime (effort quota)

- Some fishers rejected the draft recommendations in their current form.
- Some indicated that more effort will be created even if days are reduced, as fishers will work harder on those days. There was concern from fishers that this may damage the fishery with environmental/work safety impacts.
- Some suggested that the days regime would not increase viability as it is too restrictive in a fishery that is not viable currently for fishers who could potentially work 365 days now.
- Concern that the days regime suggested does not provide more access to product (over current access); with some other options you can get additional access. Net length was suggested as an alternative linkage option which would provide more access unlike days. Net length was suggested along with a nominal increase in minimum shareholding to get people to release some shares because at the moment there's nothing to promote willing sellers of shares.
- Some concerned that proposed changes would result in additional discarding.
- Suggestion was made that the SARC should reconsider the industry linkage option of 125 days for 125 shares.
- Some indicated that the allocation of days (24hr periods) per year is not enough to earn a living, also that the 24 hour fishing period will not work; there will be an OH&S issue.
- Concern was raised over the days regime as fishers go "fishing" many days, but are only "catching" on some days, and the days allocation limits the days they can fish to achieve the catch needed.
- Issue was raised that the markets need a consistent supply of fresh seafood, and that under the proposed days arrangement this continuity will be threatened.
- Concern was raised that days may lead to additional conflict between user groups, as peak fishing periods are also most popular with recreational fishers.
- ITCALs were suggested to be too low or inadequate given that catches have been up in recent years and environmental conditions have now stabilised, some suggested that they do not reflect the days fished/reported. There was also concern that the days (ITCALs) vary between regions.

iii) Quota for blue swimmer and mud crabs

- Some supported quota and suggested that where shares are proposed to be allocated based on existing current shares and fishers can buy and know what they will get, they should be able to get a benefit from their shares immediately rather than having to wait till 2018 or longer. Waiting for quota implementation was suggested to be too long.
- Others didn't support quota. Some raised the issue that when (blue crab/mud crab) quota is reached, there's no incentive to care for any additional catch, so more crabs may be damaged/discarded; alternatively this could also lead to black marketing.
- Some fishers voiced opposition to quota on the grounds that it doesn't allow flexibility, it stops fishers from having good years (as you reach a limit/cap), but it doesn't stop them from having bad years (this was on the basis that fishers expect Total Allowable Commercial Catches to be set on an annual basis).
- Some suggested their proposed regional allocation of blue swimmer crabs (kgs) is inadequate.

iv) Unendorsed crew

- Concern was raised that the additional crew assistance available for an additional 250 shares will quadruple effort, and that this result is contrary to the intention of the reform process.
- Some indicated that assistance for unendorsed and unlicensed crew should not be allowed, but others supported unendorsed (but not unlicensed) crew.

- It was suggested that if additional crew were permitted, there should be an additional fee, (rather than having to buy a commercial fishing licence at \$600) since there is a benefit to the FB.

v) Remove the requirement for boat < 10m to be licenced – Meshing/CAT1/CAT2/HHC

- Supported/not supported??

vi) Removal of requirement to register nets (with mesh size <4.5inches) – Meshing/CAT1/CAT2

- Some fishers do not support removal of net registrations. An example was given indicating that it will increase Mulloway catch and lead to user conflict as this species is targeted by recreational fishers.
- It was suggested by some that net registrations should be retained as a means of controlling effort.

Estuary General – Prawning:

i) Minimum shareholdings

- Some suggested that the maximum number of endorsements proposed is too low given that fishing activity has been low in recent times due to floods, fish kills and environmental conditions in some areas. Also, the point was made that when not using prawn endorsements fishers shift effort into another share class/activity.
- Fishers indicated that it is important to note, and take account of, the differences in the prawn ballot processes between rivers/waters and the differential effects of allowing the additional shares for an extra ball in the ballot. A suggestion was made for 150 shares for a minimum and 100 for an additional marble.
- Suggestion was made to round up figures (from numbers such as 166 to for example 150) for minimum shareholdings and additional balls in ballots as this is easier for fishers to understand and is compatible with existing arrangements.
- Some thought that there had been a significant change from the original linkage option to current draft recommendation (e.g. Region 4 was 234, now 166 shares).
- Concern was voiced over the potential reduction in the number of boats operating in certain areas, indicating that when prawns are running and fully fished in a good season a certain number of operators work the area and that this is viable; they work there now without any issues, so don't want to see the number reduced.

Estuary General – CAT1 & CAT2 Hauling:

i) Enforce the current minimum shareholding - CAT1/CAT2 hauling

- Supported/not supported?

ii) Days regime (effort quota)- CAT1/CAT2 Hauling

- It was suggested by some that the kick off date for linkages where no panel process is required (where allocation is based on current shares) should start 2017.
- Suggestion that there may be a shortage of shares in some regions.
- Fishers indicated that currently they are restricted to one shot per day (**in some waters**) with net that's also restricted (**by length**). Question was asked by fisher- should they be allowed to have an extra shot until unendorsed crew comes in? Also concern over pressure (from the public) on the Department to reduce number of shots.
- Some were happy with the proposed days allocation for CAT1 as compared to the allocation in the original options papers, acknowledging that the change has been significant from

options paper. It was suggested that the current draft recommendation for days is still inadequate, but some fishers suggested they can work with this.

- Concern was raised again about the 24hr day, fishers indicating that this will force people to work unsafely although there is a duty of care to skippers regarding being sensible about working hours. Some indicated that the 24hr period provides the greatest time to fish, but if there's a bad result (no catch, logistical issues) they need a second chance to shoot again/launch again within the 24hr period.
- Concern about the allocation of days being changed in the future when the TAE comes in.
- Issue was raised about Garfish, fishers indicating that this is a meshing not hauling operation and that fishers can't keep garfish out of hauler. SARC confirmed that they have a submission on this issue of hauling/meshing/bull-ringing for Garfish. Fishers suggested that the reform is an opportunity to deal with this issue.
- Some indicated that there needs to be a significant shift in shares in some regions and that the exit grant needs to facilitate the shift.

iii) Catch quota – CAT1/CAT2 Hauling

- Fishers noted that there was no quota allocation in CAT1/2 or HHC for eels even though it is caught. DPI clarified that previous WG meetings found that catches in these share classes was negligible. In some cases catches recorded by region were clerical errors.

iv) Provide for unendorsed crew

- Support for removing requirement to have endorsed fisher and should come in at the same time as the exit grant (2016) and not 2018 - to encourage movement of shares.
- Suggestion that there should be nominal fee (additional fee) for a skipper, but that this should not be applicable for the crew to pay. The fee should apply to the commercial fishing licence, so that it stays with skipper (same issue mentioned in meshing).

Handline & Hauling Crew (HHC):

i) Minimum shareholdings

- Fishers made comment that the HHC share class was given to fishers and that an average of 14 tonnes of catch was taken in the relevant time period, also that access needs to go to the people who are catching the 14 tonne and that the exit grant should sort this out.
- Suggestion was made to bring the minimum shareholding increase forward (from July 2018 date) to coincide with the exit grant.
- Others indicated that they can't see the benefit in what's proposed in terms of the increased minimum shareholding, suggesting that the number of shares you need to hold is over the top.

ii) Remove the hauling crew component from these share classes

- Supported??
- Suggestion that the handline side of the share class should be retained, and be encouraged as it is an environmentally friendly/sustainable activity and fishery.

Other fisheries management issues raised for consideration by DPI:

- Some fishers acknowledged that catch records are incorrect and yet fishers are not fined; fishers questioned why this does not happen and real catch figures be provided.
- Suggestion that a demerit scheme should be introduced so that penalties would be applied to businesses not nominated fishers, as FB owners can just add new nominated fishers each year.

- Suggestion that where fishers are undertaking fisheries management activities (e.g. running prawn ballots) there should be an adjustment to fees/cost recovery.
- Request that DPI consider changing the fishing period (June 1st) for meshing to align it with other netting (flathead and overnight sets) activities.
- Suggestion that management arrangements need improving re limit on hooks & compliance in the HHC share class.
- Clarification was sought regarding the Fishery Management Strategy and whether this still applies and what legislation fishers are following/will follow after the reform is implemented.
- Clarification of cost recovery arrangements is also needed- if days reduced from those currently worked, will that result in a reduction in fees paid?
- Comment was made that getting access back to areas that have been shut off is important.

Exit Grant issues:

- Concern over individuals purchasing large parcels of shares, preventing access to established fishers, who would then be forced to lease access at expensive rates.
- Suggestion that there should be a restriction on trading such as a cap on the amount of shares that can be held/purchased in a particular share class.
- Suggestion that buying shares ahead of the announcement of the linkage/exit grant is speculative.
- Suggestion that it is important that the fixed price for an empty fishing business is sufficiently high so as to provide sufficient incentive to sell. \$30K was seen by some as good price for fishers, which may require the application of additional funding.
- Suggestion that the exit grant process needs to speed up as many are waiting for it. The point was made that we should not lose sight of the fact that some fishers want to get out but we need to get the exit grant right.
- Concern was raised that there is not enough money available to fix the problem that the Government created; with enough money, the reform could be achieved. This is a priority requirement for fishers, which SARC is urged to recommend to Government.
- It was suggested that latency keeps being used as a reason for reform - some share classes are used only occasionally, but diversity is important – it will be difficult to obtain shares in these share classes and so a buy-out would be better for maintaining diversity.