

FISHERIES, TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH, RESEARCH

1894. Hon Murray Criddle to the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries

The Government's Fishing Policy states that Labor will be -

‘creating an independent body to formulate and oversee the process whereby the TAC (total allowable catch) of specific fisheries is to be allocated between the conservation requirement, and the recreational and commercial sectors. In performing this task the responsible body will be required to reflect the scientific assessment of the TAC, the level of the current use by each sector, and the net benefit to the State. This function may require some legislative amendment’

- (1) What efforts has the government made in scientific assessment of TAC?
- (2) What research into the level of current use by each sector has been done?
- (3) Has there been an allocation of that use to stakeholders?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

1. Under the Government's Fisheries Policy there will be a move to explicit catch share allocations under the Government's Integrated Fisheries Management (IFM) initiative. The IFM initiative is the result of a four-year planning process, which has involved the production of six major reports, and a wide ranging consultative process with major interest groups.

This ground-breaking initiative is founded on the principles of ecologically sustainable development and is an Australian first. It also addresses a key element in the State Sustainability Strategy, and meets many of the commitments made in the Gallop Government's election platform. This will result in explicit allocations, and/or reallocations over time in order to achieve the optimal community benefits from the use of fish stocks.

A key component of this initiative will be the establishment of an Integrated Fisheries Management Advisory Committee to oversee the reviews of the priority fisheries. The Department of Fisheries will be starting an intensive data collection and review process which will give top priority to the west coast finfish fisheries, including dhufish, the abalone fishery and the rock lobster fishery.

The IFM initiative will establish a clear process, policies, legislation, and ultimately the research and compliance capacity, to meet not only sustainability requirements, but also take into account the needs of all sectoral interest groups – including commercial, recreational and tourism and aboriginal fishing sectors.

Scientific assessments to provide target TACs, or equivalent total allowable effort (TAEs) required to take the TAC, for most of the State's significant commercial fisheries are undertaken by the Research Division of the Department of Fisheries and reported annually in the State of the Fisheries Report. TACs (or TAEs) are normally provided in the form of a catch range commensurate with the natural variability of the species.

For the small commercial fisheries and fish stocks exploited predominantly by the recreational sector, the process of determining either a TAC or a TAE is complicated by data limitations, particularly from the recreational sector. Where assessments have been undertaken for these fisheries and fish stocks they are also reported in the State of the Fisheries Report.

2. The level of research into the current use by each fishing sector is summarised in the annual State of the Fisheries Report.

For all commercial fisheries, records of current and past use are available from the statutory catch and effort returns provided by all commercial vessels.

Information on fish resource use (catch) by the recreational sector is estimated using a variety of surveys. For high-value marine species, e.g. rock lobster and abalone, surveys are carried out annually, whereas for lower-value finfish stocks surveys are conducted less frequently due to resourcing constraints. For these recreationally caught species, the most recent surveys (typically conducted at 5- to 7-year intervals) are noted in the recreational section of the State of the Fisheries Report.

The conservation ‘requirement’ for each fishery is met through a variety of management measures under the Fish Resources Management Act 1994, including closed areas/seasons etc, and is taken into account in the Department's research to assess the TAC or TAE.

3. While there are no explicit allocations in place, there are a small number of fisheries or fished stocks where inexplicit catch share outcomes have been achieved. Examples include recreational only fisheries such as the marron fishery and southwest freshwater fishery and commercial only fisheries such as prawn, scallop and deepwater fisheries. Catch share outcomes have also been achieved through formal or informal mediation processes such as in the Cockburn Sound crab fishery.