

Queensland Seafood

Industry Association

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QSIA SUBMISSION . Assessment of the Deep Water Fin Fish Fishery (DWFFF)

There are a number of significant issues regarding the current status of this fishery.

Data collection

The commercial fishery data for the DWFFF has traditionally been determined on information from the L8 logbook. L8 is a multiple hook licence of which there only 7 . 8 available and not all of these have been active in this fishery. The small number of these licences suggests that access to this fishery is limited and controlled. However the major effort in this fishery is through L1 license holders (hooks limited to 6 per fisher) of which there are over 270, subsequent to the latent effort reduction in 2009. This data is collected in a different logbook without specific identification of the deep water species. This makes an assessment of catch levels difficult other than by interpretation of the grid and site levels entered by the fishermen.

Bar rock cod and bass groper are two commonly caught species in this fishery particularly by the L1 operators, and under the Coral Reef Plan regulations require an RQ symbol and are entered and recorded as Other Species which are under quota as per the CRFFF plan.

To obtain an estimate of the catch of all these species therefore necessitates compiling data from both logbooks including an interpretation of whether cod species are from the deep water or not. This is a flaw in assessing effort in this fishery. However despite this, there is clear evidence of greatly increased catches of bar cod due to increase of effort from the L1 fishery. This is not due to mechanical and electric reels in the commercial fishery as these have been available and being used for many years. It is due to effort shift by L1 licence holders into this fishery.

Species Biology . Information

There is minimal data available for these species. It is known that the water temperature at the depths they come from is typically below 10 degrees C and species at this depth are typically slow growing, slow to reach sexual maturity and little is known about their life cycle which includes a pelagic larval stage and settlement. They are large mature fish at capture averaging around 15 Kg. Age - length data is important to determine longevity and growth rates which are relevant to assessing the degree of fishing pressure that is sustainable. Commercial fishers in this fishery have been supplying Fisheries Queensland (FQ) with frames and assisting FQ to improve the knowledge of the biology of these species. They are also involved in assisting with the FQ Observer Program and supplying data to assist with the Tactical Research Fund study from FRDC. These fish are largely found from the 200 metre depth contour to 500 metres and predominantly around the 280 . 350 depth ranges. This places them at considerable distance from the coastline as most of the fishing occurs along the continental shelf. This depth contour is exposed to the

East Australian current at all times and the behavior and speed of this is unpredictable and can change quickly. The current has a major effect on the ability to fish in this depth and therefore the fishery is somewhat protected by the distance from shore, weather and the speed of the current.

Effort from the recreational and charter fishery.

There is evidence to indicate a growing effort from these sectors particularly with the growth and availability of recreational style electric reels. These can be fitted to fishing rods and set to retrieve large fish from deep water with minimal effort. Without these the depth of water is such that with standard rods and reels one or two fish would be as much as any recreational fisherman is likely to handle as there is significant effort in bringing these fish to the surface. As they come from deep water there is major barotrauma and they will not survive on discard. The bag limits on these large fish (average commercial weight is 15kg per fish) are the same as for any of the cod species and there is no limit on blue eye trevalla. There is therefore the potential under current regulations for a major impact on these species by the recreational and charter sector.

QSIA Recommendations.

1. Further research is required to assess sustainable effort in this fishery.
2. Data collection be adjusted to reflect catch levels of the deep water species.
3. Create a limited access fishery with the development of sustainable commercial catch levels - development of specific input and output controls that reflect the needs of this fishery.
4. Electric and mechanical reels be limited to the commercial fishery. This precedent has been set in Western Australia.
5. Recreational bag limits and gear be adjusted to reflect the size and age of these fish and the fact that they are not able to be released and survive, OR species of bar cod, bass groper, and blue eye trevalla is made commercial only.

QSIA recognizes that a working group including industry representatives is in the process of being developed to address issues in this fishery including the uptake of mechanical fishing apparatus.

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