

Queensland Harvest Strategy Policy

Version: 1

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	What is a harvest strategy?	2
3	Where does a harvest strategy fit?	2
4	Policy statement.....	3
5	Key policy positions	3
6	Fisheries reforms	4
7	Priorities for development of harvest strategies	4
8	Harvest strategy principles	5
	<i>Consistency with relevant legislation and over-arching policy objectives</i>	5
	<i>Reliance upon available information</i>	6
	<i>Cost effective and unambiguous</i>	6
	<i>Management of recreational and traditional fishing under a harvest strategy</i>	6
	<i>Precautionary principle</i>	6
9	Process for developing harvest strategies.....	6
10	Responsibilities and accountabilities	6
	References	7

1 Introduction

In June 2017, the Queensland Government released the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy*, outlining its vision for the sustainable management of Queensland's fisheries resources (DAF, 2017). One of the ten key reform areas was that the future management of Queensland's fisheries would be guided by harvest strategies.

The adoption of harvest strategies for all of Queensland's fisheries is consistent with contemporary best practice fisheries management principles and helps address a number of the comments made by stakeholders in regard to the current approach to management, particularly

- A desire for greater clarity around fisheries decision making processes
- The importance of setting sustainable catch limits for each fish stock
- A focus on evidence-based decisions
- A more proactive approach to management where emerging issues are addressed before drastic action is required; and
- A desire for greater clarity in regards to the future aspirations and management objectives for Queensland's fisheries.

Many fisheries also occur within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area and harvest strategies will help to increase the resilience of fish stocks which play a vital role in the reef ecosystem.

2 What is a harvest strategy?

Harvest strategies provide a transparent and predictable decision making framework for fisheries management. As responses to fishery conditions are considered and documented up front, this provides greater certainty for fishers, managers and other stakeholders and avoids *ad hoc* decision making (Sloan *et al.*, 2014).

A national definition provided by Sloan *et al.* (2014) is -

A harvest strategy is a framework that specifies the pre-determined management actions in a fishery for defined species (at the stock or management unit level) necessary to achieve the agreed ecological, economic and/or social management objectives.

3 Where does a harvest strategy fit?

Harvest strategies in Queensland fit within a broader fisheries management context (see Figure 1). Harvest strategies will address the fishing activities of all sectors; commercial, recreational and traditional.

The *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027* sets out the government's strategic direction and reform agenda. The *Fisheries Act 1994* and *Fisheries Regulation 2008* (the Regulation) set out the overarching objectives and guidance for managing fisheries. The Regulation includes the authorities to take fish, as well as input and output controls for fisheries. Harvest strategies will set out the pre-determined management actions that will be given effect through the Regulation. For example, quota declarations are made under the Regulation, in accordance with decision rules set out in the harvest strategy.

The assessment of fishing related risks to target, byproduct and bycatch species, threatened, endangered and protected species, and on habitats and will be undertaken through an ecological risk assessment (ERA) and addressed through a risk management framework. Harvest strategies will be used to address high risks generated out of ERA processes. Risk management actions could be a control on fishing through the harvest strategy decision rules (e.g. catch or effort quota), or through other regulatory mechanisms (e.g. spatial

closures, gear restrictions). A separate Ecological Risk Assessment Guideline will support the identification of ecological risks.

Harvest strategies will set out the existing allocations between sectors, based on the most current catches at the time the harvest strategy is finalised. Any reallocation from one sector to another will be considered through the process and criteria set out in the Resource Allocation Policy.

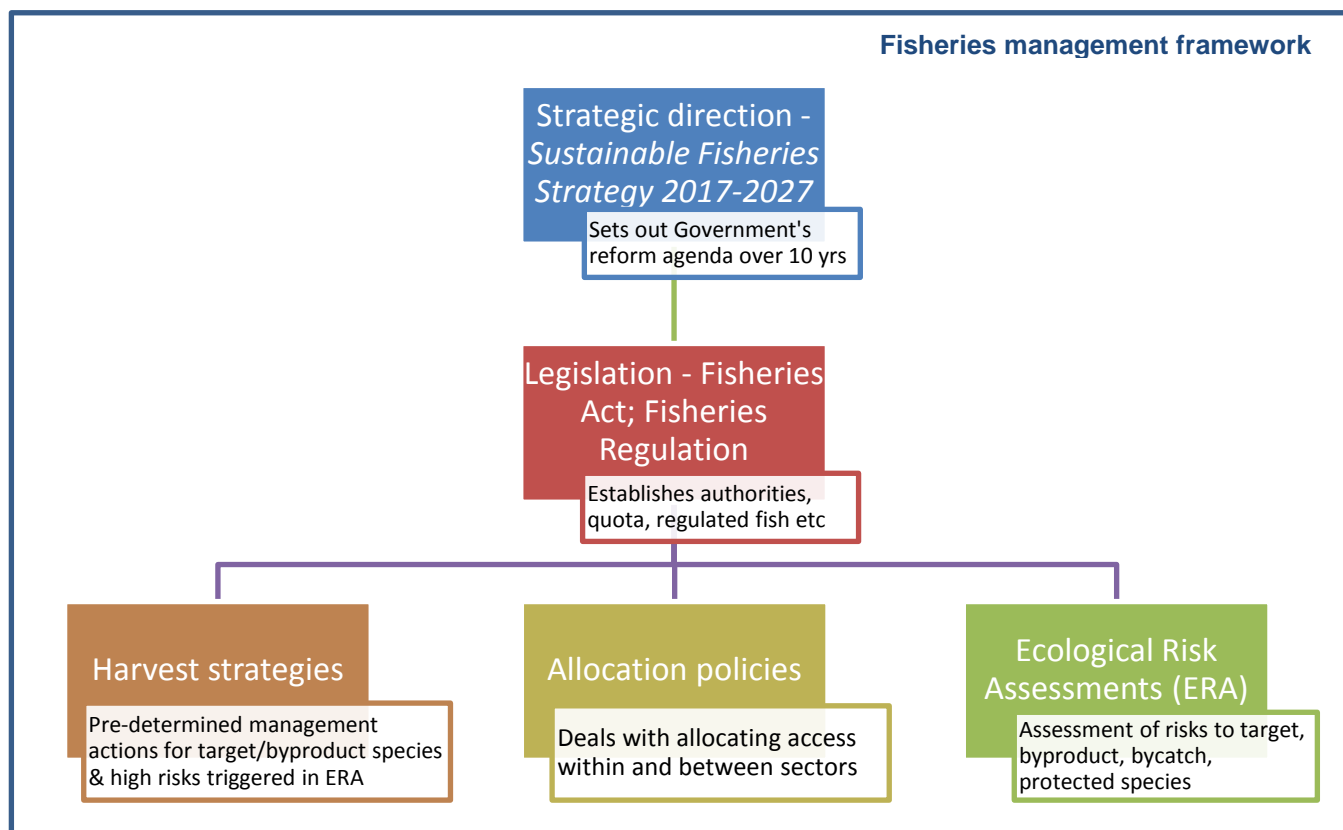


Figure 1 Fisheries management framework in Queensland.

4 Policy statement

Queensland will use a harvest strategy to set out pre-determined management actions in a fishery for defined species (at the stock or management unit level) necessary to achieve the agreed ecological, economic and/or social management objectives.

Harvest strategies will address the fishing activities of all sectors (commercial, recreational (including charter) and traditional) and will apply to target and byproduct species primarily.

While in most jurisdictions harvest strategies only apply to target species, Queensland's harvest strategies will also cover bycatch, protected species where an ecological risk assessment process generates a high risk. This removes the need to have separate policies for these components because the management principles are the same for all these resources in terms of ensuring risks to all these components are kept at acceptable levels.

5 Key policy positions

The *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy* sets out a number of policy positions that are relevant to harvest strategies. This includes:

- Queensland's fisheries resources are managed in accordance with harvest strategies, with **all major fisheries to have a harvest strategy by 2020**
- Sustainable limits will be set based on maximum sustainable yield (approx. 40-50% biomass) by 2020, **moving towards maximum economic yield (approx. 60% biomass) by 2027**
- Harvest strategies will set out fishery-specific **targets and limits, along with management actions for achieving them**
- There is **clarity about how resources are accessed** and shared between different users
- Fishing rules adequately constrain catch to meet fishery-specific targets and **cover all sectors** (commercial, recreational, traditional)
- A consistent approach to management arrangements is applied to each fishery with a **preference for output controls (e.g. quota) wherever possible**
- **Latent effort is managed** to minimise risk of increased effort over time
- The **process is as simple as possible** to provide certainty for fishers and minimise administrative and legislative process to ensure timely management actions; and
- **Regionally specific rules** are put in place (where appropriate).

6 Fisheries reforms

Some fisheries may not have the fundamental management structures in place to allow for a harvest strategy that responds to changes in stock abundance or other circumstances. These fisheries will require management reform before a harvest strategy can be put in place. Some extensive fisheries will need to be split into appropriate management units (e.g. by fish stock or region) in order to apply management arrangements at the correct scale. In other fisheries, reforms will be needed to unitise the fishery (e.g. formally allocating quota) so that the quota can be increased or decreased depending on the performance of the fishery. In these cases, the harvest strategies will be drafted along with proposed reforms, which will likely need to be implemented through legislation.

7 Priorities for development of harvest strategies

The following table sets out the priority order for developing harvest strategies. Priorities have been set based on criteria around sustainability, achievability and socio-economic concerns:

Table 1 Priorities for harvest strategy development.

Fishery	Key species/stocks covered (not limited to)
Initial high priorities	
Trawl	Tiger prawn, red spot king prawn, scallop, Moreton Bay bugs, eastern king prawn, banana prawn
Crab	Mud and blue swimmer crab
East Coast Inshore Fin Fish	Barramundi, threadfin, shark, mullet, tailor, bream, whiting, flathead, grey mackerel, school and spotted mackerel
Coral Reef Fin Fish	Coral trout, red throat emperor, other coral reef fin fish species

Fishery	Key species/stocks covered (not limited to)
Tropical Rock Lobster	Tropical rock lobster
Sea Cucumber	sea cucumber
Coral and Marine Aquarium Fish	Corals and marine aquarium fish
Next immediate priorities	
Rocky Reef Fin Fish	Snapper, pearl perch
Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fin Fish	Barramundi, threadfin, shark, grey mackerel
Spanner crab	Spanner crab
Stout Whiting Trawl	Stout whiting
Remaining priorities	
Gulf of Carpentaria Developmental Fin Fish Trawl Fishery <i>n.b.</i> currently a developmental fishery and harvest strategy to be developed should this fishery progress to a regulated fishery	Saddletail snapper, crimson snapper, mangrove jack, golden snapper, red emperor
East Coast Spanish Mackerel	Spanish mackerel
Gulf of Carpentaria Line	Spanish mackerel
Deepwater Fin Fish	Bar cod, blue-eye trevalla, rosy jobfish, bass groper
Beam Trawl	Banana prawn, greasy prawn, school prawn
Yabby	Yabby
Blood Worm	Bloodworm
Beach Worm	Beachworm
Adult Eel	Longfin eel, southern shortfin eel

8 Harvest strategy principles

Consistency with relevant legislation and over-arching policy objectives

Relevant legislation and policy objectives should be identified and considered in developing harvest strategies for Queensland fisheries. This includes the *Fisheries Act 1994*, subordinate legislation and policies, and other relevant State and Commonwealth legislation.

The development of harvest strategies should have regard for Queensland's over-arching policy objectives, including the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy*.

The importance of ensuring fisheries are managed in a sustainable way within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area is recognised in the *Sustainable Fisheries Strategy*. Consideration should be given to the *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2015) in developing harvest strategies for fisheries that operate in the Great Barrier Reef.

Reliance upon available information

In developing harvest strategies for Queensland fisheries, the best available information should be used. While it may be desirable to obtain better information or establish an additional data source to use as the basis for a harvest strategy indicator; this should not be used as a reason to delay the development or implementation of a harvest strategy based upon the available sources of information.

Information that could potentially improve a harvest strategy for a Queensland fishery should be described in the Fisheries Information Needs section of individual harvest strategies.

Cost effective and unambiguous

Efforts should be made to ensure that any harvest strategy that is developed for a Queensland fishery is cost effective to both implement and administer; and be proportional to the social and economic values of the fishery in question.

Furthermore, efforts should be made to ensure that harvest strategies are as clear and transparent as possible. As some harvest strategies may employ a highly technical system of indicators and reference points, the development of a 'plain English' explanation of the harvest strategy and its relationship to the fishery may be required.

Management of recreational and traditional fishing under a harvest strategy

While the primary focus of harvest strategies in Australia has been on commercial fisheries, they can also be used to inform and guide the management of recreational and traditional fishing. As such, a harvest strategy for a Queensland fishery should outline sustainable limits for the entire fishery and establish decision rules to regulate fishing by all sectors.

Precautionary principle

Harvest strategies for Queensland fisheries should apply the precautionary principle in guiding how risk is managed and in the development of reference points, particularly when a high degree of uncertainty exists. This will help ensure fishing activities are consistent with ecological sustainability principles, prevent overexploitation and provide for recovery of depleting or depleted stocks within reasonable timeframes.

9 Process for developing harvest strategies

Harvest strategies will be developed in accordance with the *Guidelines for implementing the Queensland Harvest Strategy Policy*.

10 Responsibilities and accountabilities

Fishery working groups are responsible for providing advice on the development of harvest strategies and their review. The fishery working groups have a broader role on providing management advice on their respective fisheries.

Fisheries Queensland is responsible for providing technical advice on the development of harvest strategies and their review, monitoring fishery performance, applying the decision rules against the reference points and consulting with broader fishery stakeholders.

The Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel is responsible for providing independent expert advice on fishery performance, and harvest strategies.

The Minister is responsible for endorsing harvest strategies to ensure fisheries management optimises the sustainable use of our fisheries resources for all Queenslanders.

The Chief Executive will ultimately be responsible for the approval of a harvest strategy for Queensland fisheries in accordance with the statutory functions outlined in Part 3 of the *Fisheries Act 1994*.

References

Commonwealth of Australia. (2015). *Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan*. Australian Government. 111pp.

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Sloan, S., Smith, T., Gardner, C., Crosthwaite, K., Triantafillos, L., Jeffriess, B. and Kimber, N. (2014). National guidelines to develop fishery harvest strategies.

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