North West Slope Trawl Fishery

Main features

**STATUS**
- Scampi: uncertain.
- Deepwater prawns: overfished status uncertain and not subject to overfishing.

**CURRENT CATCH**
- Catch cannot be reported for confidentiality reasons (fewer than five boats).

**MANAGEMENT METHODS**
- Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) Statement of Management Arrangements in lieu of a management plan.
- Limited entry (seven permits of 5 years duration).
- Controls on codend mesh size (50 mm maximum); no output controls.
- Harvest strategy completed in late 2007.
Fishing effort in 2006–07 was about 4000 hours, which is much less than the peak of 18 600 hours in 1987–88. Vessels operate sporadically in the NWSTF because they also work in the adjacent Northern Prawn Fishery. The exit of vessels from the Northern Prawn Fishery through the 2006 structural adjustment package, lower fuel prices at the start of 2006–07 and high market prices for scampi were expected to make fishing a more attractive proposition in the NWSTF. However, this was not reflected in fishing effort. Industry has continued to report that the economics of operating in the NWSTF are marginal because of high operating costs. Operators are also concerned about the shortage of skilled fishing crews, due partly to competition with the mining sector for labour.

The relatively low value of the NWSTF means that extensive research work is difficult to justify. In April 2006, a private exploratory survey failed to detect commercial quantities of target species. CSIRO conducted benthic habitat surveys, related to broader marine bioregional planning, in the southern inshore parts of the NWSTF in 2006.

The NWSTF operates under a Statement of Management Arrangements (which also covers the Western Deepwater Trawl Fishery). The arrangements align seasons with financial years, and specify a maximum of seven fishing permits, each of valid for 5 years. Different vessels may fish on the same permit, provided only one vessel is fishing at any time. There is a 50 mm restriction on codend mesh size.

In the northern part of the fishery, a new AFMA direction that commenced in October 2007 for a period of 2 years precludes fishing from areas inshore from the 200 m isobath while Offshore Constitutional Settlement boundaries are amended. As a result of that direction, interim 100 kg trip limits were imposed for goldband snapper (Pristipomoides multidens) and red emperor (Lutjanus sebae). AFMA has an observer program to collect biological information.
from the fishery; one observer trip was conducted in 2006–07. The fishery is undergoing an ecological risk assessment.

The NWSTF was accredited under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 in November 2004 and declared an approved Wildlife Trade Operation until March 2009. The then Department of Environment and Heritage recommended that the monitoring of deepwater shark catches should be improved. A harvest strategy for the NWSTF was completed in late 2007 (the strategy is summarised in the Western Deepwater Trawl Fishery chapter).

It is uncertain whether scampi stocks are overfished or subject to overfishing. The overfished status of deepwater prawns is uncertain; however, because they were not targeted in 2006–07 they are classified as not subject to overfishing.

Further reading

AFMA (Australian Fisheries Management Authority) 2004, Draft environmental assessment report—western trawl fisheries, AFMA, Canberra.


Moore, AS, Gerner, M & Patterson, HM 2007, North West Slope Trawl Fishery data summary 2006, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Canberra.

Patterson, HM & Whitelaw, AW 2007, Western trawl fisheries operational information 2007, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Canberra.

Rainer, SF (ed.) 1992, The fisheries biology of deepwater crustaceans and finfish on the continental slope of Western Australia, final report to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, FRDC project 1988/74.