Chapter 21
International fishery management arrangements

FIGURE 21.1 Areas of competence for regional fisheries management organisations

Notes: CCAMLR Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources. CCSBT Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna. EEZ Exclusive Economic Zone. IOTC Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. RFMO Regional fisheries management organisation. SIOFA Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement. SPRFMO South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (see Chapter 28 for full extent). WCPFC Western and Central Pacific Ocean Fisheries Commission. IOTC and WCPFC areas of competence include EEZs.
Several fishery resources of commercial importance to Australia have ranges extending outside the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ) into the high seas and the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of other countries. These stocks are important for Australia in providing a source of economic benefits for the Australian fishing industry, and require regional cooperative action for effective management. Management responsibility is shared by multiple governments through international instruments (conventions and agreements), which are often implemented through a regional fisheries management organisation (RFMO) or other international body (Figure 21.1). As a party to these international instruments, Australia implements measures agreed by the relevant body in managing its domestic fishery; in a number of cases, Australia’s domestic standards exceed those agreed internationally. Australia’s continued engagement in international fisheries processes is critical to supporting access for the Australian fishing industry and promoting responsible management to ensure sustainability of the fisheries and the ecosystems that support them.

This chapter provides an introduction to international fisheries arrangements to which Australia is a party. Status reports of the domestic fisheries involved are provided in Chapters 22–29. Although the fisheries of Torres Strait are also managed under an international agreement, they differ substantially from the fisheries described here and are therefore addressed separately in Chapters 16–20.

Through participation in RFMOs and other international fisheries bodies, Australia aims to implement its commitments and obligations under overarching international instruments, including the:
- 1995 Agreement for the Implementation of the Provisions of the UNCLOS relating to the Conservation and Management of Straddling Fish Stocks and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (UN Fish Stocks Agreement)
- 1995 United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries
- 1995 Agreement to Promote Compliance with International Conservation and Management Measures by Fishing Vessels on the High Seas
- 2006 and 2009 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolutions on Sustainable Fisheries (UNGA 61/105, UNGA 64/72)
- 2009 Agreement on Port State Measures to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing.

Globally, the species targeted on the high seas vary by area and fishing fleet. Some of the most extensive high-seas fisheries are pelagic fisheries catching highly migratory tunas, billfishes and sharks (defined under UNCLOS Annex 1). Currently, five conventions/agreements have been established to manage such species and species groups, of which Australia is party to three:
- Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in the Western and Central Pacific Ocean
- Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna
- Agreement for the Establishment of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission.
Australia has also participated in the development of new agreements where there
are gaps in the international management of other non–highly migratory stocks in the
high seas. This has included the development of the Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries
Agreement (SIOFA) and the Convention on the Conservation and Management of the
High Seas Fishery Resources of the South Pacific Ocean. Arrangements for demersal
species in Antarctic waters and for the AFZ of Heard Island and McDonald Islands
are implemented through the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine
Living Resources (CCAMLR). The AFZ of Macquarie Island is adjacent to the CCAMLR
convention area, rather than within it. However, for consistency, the Macquarie Island
Toothfish Fishery is managed in line with CCAMLR arrangements.

The Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy (HSP; DAFF 2007) requires
that harvest strategies be developed for all Commonwealth fisheries, apart from
those that are managed under the joint authority of the Australian Government
and another Australian jurisdiction or an international management body or
arrangement. However, the policy notes that the Australian Government will advocate
the principles of the policy within all jointly managed fisheries. The scientific
committees of some RFMOs report against reference points for biomass and fishing
mortality when providing advice on stock status. These may be defined differently to
those in the HSP. For jointly managed stocks, ABARES determines stock status in light
of the limit reference points described in the HSP.

21.1 Regional fisheries management organisations

Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission

The Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC) is responsible for
the world’s largest and most valuable tuna fishery. In 2012, the total tuna catch of
the fishery was worth more than US$7.2 billion and constituted about 59 per cent
of the global tuna catch. The WCPFC area of competence includes the EEZs of many
developing Pacific island states (Figure 21.1), for which tuna fishing is a significant
source of income. The WCPFC has a specific mandate to manage fishing impacts on
all highly migratory fish species listed on UNCLOS Annex 1, except sauries (family
Scomberesocidae). See Chapter 22 for more information.

Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna

The Convention for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna, which established the
Commission for the Conservation of Southern Bluefin Tuna (CCSBT), originated from
discussions between Australia, Japan and New Zealand in the mid-1980s, following
an observed decline in stock biomass. The convention applies to parties fishing for
southern bluefin tuna (Thunnus maccoyii), rather than to fishing operations within a
specified geographic area. Therefore, it covers areas of the Indian, Atlantic and Pacific
oceans (Figure 21.1), overlapping with the areas of competence of the CCAMLR,
the WCPFC and the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). The CCSBT’s primary
management measure is a global total allowable catch (TAC), which is allocated to
members and cooperating non-members. Currently, Australia, Japan, New Zealand,
the Republic of Korea and the Fishing Entity of Taiwan hold the majority (92 per cent)
of the global TAC. See Chapter 24 for more information.
Indian Ocean Tuna Commission

The IOTC is an intergovernmental organisation established under article XIV of the FAO constitution. It is mandated to manage tuna and tuna-like species in the Indian Ocean and adjacent seas (Figure 21.1). The IOTC’s area of competence covers a large number of countries, and both artisanal and industrial fishing vessels. Membership of the IOTC is open to Indian Ocean coastal countries, and countries or regional economic integration organisations that are members of the United Nations or one of its specialised agencies that actively fish for tunas in the Indian Ocean. The IOTC is responsible for the world’s second largest tuna fishery in terms of both volume and value. In 2012, the tuna catch of the fishery was worth more than US$4 billion and constituted about 34 per cent of the global tuna catch. The Indian Ocean differs from other oceans in that small-scale or artisanal fisheries take around the same quantity of tuna as industrial fisheries. See Chapter 25 for more information.

Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources

The CCAMLR was established to conserve and manage the Southern Ocean Antarctic ecosystem, mainly in high-seas areas. It originated from concern over the effects of fishing for krill (Euphausia superba) on the broader Antarctic ecosystem. The objective of the CCAMLR is the conservation and rational use of Antarctic marine living resources. In managing fisheries within its area of competence, the CCAMLR uses harvest strategies that specifically incorporate ecological links in setting TACs. Such an approach views the entire Southern Ocean as a suite of interlinked ecological systems—this distinguishes the CCAMLR from the other multilateral fisheries conventions. The strategies result in conservative TACs that aim to reduce the potential effects of fishing on other species, such as predators of the target species. There is also a focus on mitigating impacts on the benthic environment and bycatch, particularly seabirds. Fisheries in the CCAMLR convention area are required to have high levels of observer coverage, data collection and reporting, and there are specific requirements for new or exploratory fisheries. See Chapter 26 for more information.

Southern Indian Ocean Fisheries Agreement

Australia signed the SIOFA on 29 December 2006, and deposited an instrument of ratification on 23 March 2012. The SIOFA entered into force on 21 June 2012. The objectives of the agreement are to ensure the long-term conservation and sustainable use of the non–highly migratory fisheries resources in the SIOFA area of competence through cooperation among the parties. The agreement promotes the sustainable development of fisheries in the area, taking into account the needs of developing states bordering the area that are parties to the agreement—in particular, the small-island developing states. See Chapter 28 for more information.
South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation

The Convention on the Conservation and Management of the High Seas Fishery Resources of the South Pacific Ocean was adopted on 14 November 2009 after three years of formal negotiations. Australia deposited its instrument of ratification on 23 March 2012, and the convention entered into force on 24 August 2012. The convention, which is implemented by the South Pacific Regional Fisheries Management Organisation, covers non-highly migratory fisheries resources in the south Pacific Ocean. The area has been fished by vessels from numerous countries, using both pelagic and demersal gear. The largest fisheries focus on pelagic species in upwelling areas of higher productivity off the west coast of South America. Other fisheries target demersal species found on seamounts and ridges in the central and western areas of the southern Pacific Ocean. See Chapter 28 for more information.

21.2 Literature cited