

Summary Report – Draft Management Plan for the South Australian Commercial Blue Crab Fishery

Report pursuant to section 44(2) of the *Fisheries Management Act 2007*

15 December 2023



Government
of South Australia

Department of Primary
Industries and Regions

OFFICIAL

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Information current as of 15 December 2023

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Introduction

A 5-year *Management plan for the South Australian Blue Crab Fishery* ('the Management Plan' or 'the Plan') commenced on 1 January 2018 and, following an 18 month extension, expires on 30 June 2024. The Plan applies to the Blue Crab Fishery (BCF) which is formally constituted by the *Fisheries Management (Blue Crab Fishery) Regulations 2013*. This Management Plan is a statutory commercial fishing management plan developed pursuant to Part 5 of the *Fisheries Management Act 2007* (the Act).

Pursuant to section 49(2) of the Act, the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development (the Minister) approved a review of the Plan for the purpose of determining whether the Plan should be amended, replaced or reinstated without amendment. In doing so, the Minister approved for the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) to prepare a report on the outcome of a review on her behalf, taking into consideration feedback provided by the Blue Crab Fishery Management Plan Review Committee (BCFMPRC) which was established under section 20 of the Act for the purpose of providing this feedback.

Consistent with the outcomes of the review, the Minister approved development of a replacement draft Management Plan on 24 October 2023 and noted that the Executive Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture, PIRSA, as her delegate, will prepare a draft Management Plan to replace the current Plan with feedback from the BCFMPRC.

This document summarises the significant changes included in each section of the draft Management Plan now provided for public consultation.

This report fulfils the requirements of section 44(2) of the Act, as a report containing:

- An explanation of the purpose and effect of the draft management plan; and
- A summary of the background and issues relevant to the draft plan and of the analysis and reasoning applied in formulating the plan.

Purpose of the Management Plan

The role of a management plan as set out in section 43 of the Act is to describe the broad structure and nature of the fishery and to set out the objectives and strategies to manage the fishery. A management plan must also:

- Identify the impacts or potential impacts of the fishery on the ecosystem as well as ecological factors that could have an impact on the performance of the fishery;
- Specify methods to monitor the performance of the fishery, including performance indicators, reference points and trigger points for review and/or action; and
- Specify the share of aquatic resources to be allocated to each fishing sector and prescribe a method for adjusting allocations.

The proposed draft Management Plan sets out the management arrangements for the BCF, including co-management arrangements with industry, allocation of access between sectors, harvest strategy, stock assessment and research, compliance and monitoring arrangements.

Summary of background and issues relevant to the draft Plan

Through the formal review of the current Plan and development of the replacement draft Management Plan, several changes are contained within the proposed Draft Plan. These are outlined as follows under the corresponding section of the Plan.

Section 1 - Fishery to which this plan applies

There are no changes to the fishery to which the draft Plan applies.

Section 2 - Consistency with other management plans

There are no proposed changes to this section of the draft Plan.

Section 3 - Term of plan

The current Plan was adopted for a term of five years and has been extended by 18 months and will expire on 30 June 2024.

The proposed term of the draft replacement Plan is 10 years, commencing from 1 July 2024.

It should be noted that the BCFMPRC recommended a term of five years, with a review to be undertaken to commence within three years of the commencement of the Plan, with the view this may support the progression of various priority work areas for the fishery, and any potential outcomes of these works to be reflected in the Management Plan. PIRSA notes the Act requires that management plans are to be reviewed as soon as practicable after five years, and the Minister may also review a management plan at any time. PIRSA considers that a ten year term provides greater security to licence holders, as the term of a licence in respect of the fishery coincides with the term of the Management Plan. As the provisions of the Act enable the Minister to undertake a review at any time, PIRSA considers there is suitable provision to incorporate outcomes of strategic pieces of work where necessary.

Section 4 - Description of fishery

This section has been updated to incorporate the latest catch limits, and catch and economic information for the BCF, and also includes reference to the review of the Plan undertaken in 2023.

Section 5 - Co-management arrangements

This section has been updated to remove reference to the former Minister's Recreational Fishing Advisory Council which has been disbanded, and to remove reference to the proposed Blue Crab Fishery co-management committee as this is something that has not been taken forward and no longer considered necessary given the effective co-management arrangements in place with the South Australian Blue Crab Pot Fishers Association Inc. (SABCPFA).

Section 6 - Allocation of access between sectors

The sector allocations provided in the Plan remain appropriate and there are no pending reviews of allocations relating to Blue Swimmer Crab following the release of the 2021/22 Recreational Fishing Survey results.

Updates have been made to: include the latest recreational catches of Blue Crab; to remove reference to the former Fisheries Council; and to further clarify the allocation of Blue Crab to the Marine Scalefish Fishery.

Section 7 - Ecologically sustainable development (ESD) risk assessment and ecosystem impacts

Changes to this section of the draft Plan have been made to reflect that a revised ESD risk assessment was completed in 2023. This revised risk assessment was used to inform the development of the draft Plan, as outlined in the subsequent sections.

Section 8 - Goals and objectives

To incorporate the outcomes of the revised ESD risk assessment, changes were made to this section, as follows:

- Addition of an objective 'Ensure management is responsive to changes in environmental conditions' under Goal 4 of the draft Plan.
- Addition of Climate Change and Water Quality as risks related to Goal 1 and Goal 4. These additions are accompanied with associated management strategies and performance indicators in table 2.

- Removal of air quality and greenhouse gas/ carbon emissions as a risk, and removal of associated strategies and indicators. This was to reflect that whilst the industry and ESD risk assessment recognised these as important issues, the fishery's impact from greenhouse gas/ carbon emissions on the environment was considered to be negligible, noting the low number of vessels in the fishery (<10) and adoption of fuel efficient engines in recent years.
- Updates to the management strategy and performance indicator in relation to the risk of translocation of noxious biological material and disease.
- Updates to the objective and management strategy and indicators in relation to minimising impacts on non-target retained and discarded species and the ecosystem.
- Updated wording regarding non-target retained and discarded species.
- Removed the management strategy 'maintain a limit on the quota unit to pot ratio'. This was not considered necessary as operators in the fishery were effectively limited to the gear and quota endorsed on their licences.
- Added indicators to monitor catches of non-target species, albeit recognising current catch of non-target species was very low.

Section 9 - Harvest Strategy

No material changes were made to this section noting the harvest strategy was reviewed and updated in 2020 and was considered to be effectively controlling the harvest of Blue Crab to sustainable levels.

Plots were updated to reflect the latest Fishery Independent Survey (FIS) results.

Updates were made to the section 'Review of the harvest strategy'. This reflected that there is potential to move towards using the catch rate data from commercial pots used in the FIS, yet an estimated further three years of data would be required to further establish the relationship between research and commercial pots. It is proposed this relationship be monitored annually as part of the FIS reports provided to PIRSA, and should this information support a review of the harvest strategy, a review of the Management Plan may be considered.

Section 10 - Stock Assessment and research

Only minor updates were made to this section of the draft Plan to note the transition from hardcopy to electronic catch and effort reporting.

Section 11 - Compliance and monitoring

There are no changes to this section of the draft Plan.

Section 12 - Review of plan

Wording was updated to reflect the provisions of the Act pertaining to the review of management plans.

Wording was also added to reflect the intention to assess proposals to review the boundaries of the BCF as a strategic priority within three years of the commencement of the draft Plan; and, depending on the outcome of this assessment, the Minister may choose to approve a review of the Plan.

Section 13 - Resources required to implement the plan

There are no changes to this section of the draft Plan.

Other changes

The draft Plan draws on the most recent information sources, and references have been updated accordingly.

The previous Appendix 2, which detailed changes made to the harvest strategy in 2020, has been removed from the draft Plan.



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