



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Heritage

## FISHERIES ASSESSMENT FACT SHEET

Overfishing is an international concern which, since the collapse of major international fisheries such as the Atlantic Cod and the Anchovy, has become a major issue for global food security and for many national economies. The Australian Government has responded proactively to these concerns through the establishment of a fisheries assessment process, becoming a world leader in sustainable fisheries management.

Historically, fisheries management has focused on the species targeted, but fishing can impact on other species that are not targeted but caught and discarded or kept for their commercial value. The assessment process has significantly expanded the focus of fisheries management to consider the broader range of impacts and concentrate on the protection of entire ecosystems rather than individual species.

All Commonwealth managed fisheries and all state export fisheries must now undergo an independent environment audit under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Under the audit, the Department of the Environment and Heritage (DEH) assesses each fishery to determine if it is being managed in an ecologically sustainable way. After December 2004, no Australian fishery will be able to export without an approval under the EPBC Act.

DEH evaluates fisheries against criteria set out in the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries* requiring that the fishery:

- does not have unacceptable or unsustainable impacts on a Commonwealth Area
- takes all reasonable steps to ensure that protected species are not killed or injured
- does not or is not likely to adversely affect the survival or recovery in nature of the species
- is managed in an ecologically sustainable way.

The assessment process ensures that fisheries have the capacity to undertake the reforms, and have systems in place to detect negative trends and to respond appropriately to such trends.

Fisheries that are consistent with the guidelines are able to export their fish products for three or five years, while recommendations for further improvements specific to each fishery are implemented. While DEH continues to work with industry and fishery managers to improve performance, the fishery is accountable for implementation of the recommendations. Export can be prohibited, should they fail to do so.

The ongoing assessments will allow DEH to instigate continual improvement in fisheries management and to achieve a truly sustainable industry.

There are 118 fisheries to assess under the EPBC Act by 1 December 2004. To date, 31 have been completed 59 are in progress, and 28 are yet to commence the assessment process.

For more information visit [www.deh.gov.au/coasts/fisheries/](http://www.deh.gov.au/coasts/fisheries/)