

**Report to:** Dave Welch- Commissioner AUF Q, Adam Smith Commissioner AUF  
**Subject:** GBRMPA- Fisheries Reef Advisory Committee  
**Date:** 12 August, 2004

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I attended my first FRAC meeting on 10/11 August. My initial reaction is that this will be a useful forum for the AUF to participate in. While I am included as a representative of the “spearfishing industry”, there are a number of non-spearfishing fisheries dealt with by the committee that will probably be of interest to AUF members. These other fisheries e.g. sea cucumbers and coral harvesting are undertaken by divers and obviously impact on the environment we undertake our activities in. Furthermore, it seems to me that the principle of the decisions made in these other fisheries will have some application in the decisions made in the fin fish fishery.

It was made clear to me that spear fishing and especially spearfishing in yellow zones was a contentious issue within the recent RAP process. It is incumbent upon us in the spearfishing community to undertake our activities with an awareness of the privileges we enjoy within this world heritage area.

#### Meeting agenda

I do not intend to comment upon all agenda items. I will concentrate on those that impact most on divers.

- 1.0 Seabed Biodiversity Project- a project is underway investigating the non-coral areas of the GBR. Investigations will help determine whether current trawl practices are being undertaken in a sustainable way as required by the Qld Fisheries Act. It will also help identify significant bioregional areas.
- 2.0 The New Zoning Plan (RAP) - the new plan commenced 1 July 2004. This has been well advertised and there are numerous brochures and maps available in hard copy and via www. Of some interest was the fact that the zoning maps have clear lat/long co-ordinates and that these details have been provided to several of the companies that produce electronic navigation equipment. As a consequence several of these companies have the zoning maps available now or will have soon in a digital form.
- 3.0 Yellow Zones/Spearfishing /Special Management Area (Public Appreciation Areas)- spearfishing is now allowed in yellow zones (conservation) but restricted in certain areas where there is potential conflict with other users. These Special Management Areas in the main are former yellow zones where spearfishing was not permitted. About half coincide with existing State Government spearfishing closures. I am informed that the current issue with the Cape Upstart SMA will get a fair hearing and that it is possible for GBRMPA to take action as the SMAs are established by regulation, rather than legislation. The process, however, will not be speedy.
- 4.0 Compliance and the New zoning Plan- Additional funds of \$2.9m per annum have been received to enhance enforcement. It was interesting to see that there appears to be a very structured approach to surveillance and intelligence gathering by the GBRMPA compliance staff. Surveillance is being co-coordinated with the Qld Parks and Wildlife service, Boating and Fisheries patrol, Water Police and Customs National Marine Unit.

5.0 Queensland Zoning for State Waters- put simply the GBR extends to the low water mark. From this point to the coast is the responsibility of the State Govt. A proposal has been developed by the state to mirror the GBR zonings to the shore line. This proposal while not seeming to effect spearfishers greatly has caused unrest amongst the recreational and professional fishermen. The reason for this is that over significant coastal areas yellow zones will be extended to the shore and creek mouths.

Accordingly, pro-fishers (mainly netters) and crabbers will not be able to work in these key areas, thereby forcing them up the rivers and creeks and into conflict with amateurs.

The aim of the State Govt is to put some certainty/consistency in place for users of the GBR coastline. This is laudable and legislatively neat. The logic is questionable, however, when the RAP process was about preserving a certain percentage of significant Bio regions. Now the coast and particularly the estuarine systems are vitally important Ecosystems, the problem is though that the RAP zonings were not developed with Estuary systems in mind.

The Qld EPA has issued a Regulatory Impact Statement and Brochure on this matter called "Queenland's Proposed GBR Zoning- Have your say". All I can recommend is that members obtain a copy and have their say.

6.0 Sea Cucumber Fishery- The industry has entered into a voluntary agreement regarding size, stock assessment points, zoning of the fishery and splitting the white teatfish quota between the zones above and below 19 Degree South Lat. Zones will be fished on a 3 yr rotational basis.

7.0 Qld DPI& Fisheries Update-A number of state initiatives were referred to. These are probably available in other forums so I will only mention the more relevant points i.e. Reef Line Fishery – recent changes made to the Spanish Mackerel Fishery re filleting, access to L1 holders, quota holdings, monitoring requirements etc. Inshore Fishery- Latent effort to be removed and endorsements expected to reduce from 800 to 450, an overall management plan to be developed as proposal and circulated to key stakeholders, working groups established for effort and closures, size and possession limits and performance indicators. A combined Regulatory Impact Statement to be issued pre Xmas.

8.0 Fish Spawning Aggregation Management Issues/Spanish Mackerel- presentation on the vulnerability of reef fish when undertaking spawning aggregations and the general decline in numbers being evidenced world wide. Specific reference was then made in relation to Spanish Mackerel and included the points that there is only one primary site where aggregation takes place on the GBR and this is well known to fishers, the current legal size limit of 75cm is less than the breeding size of 89cm, spawning takes place on the new moon in spring and the new seasonal closures do not protect pelagics. It was proposed that action needed to be taken to protect Spanish Mackerel and a range of options were presented. This presentation and the options were not well received for reasons including, it was light on empirical evidence and the Spanish Mackerel Fishery in Qld had just been reformed with Legislation passed in June 2004.