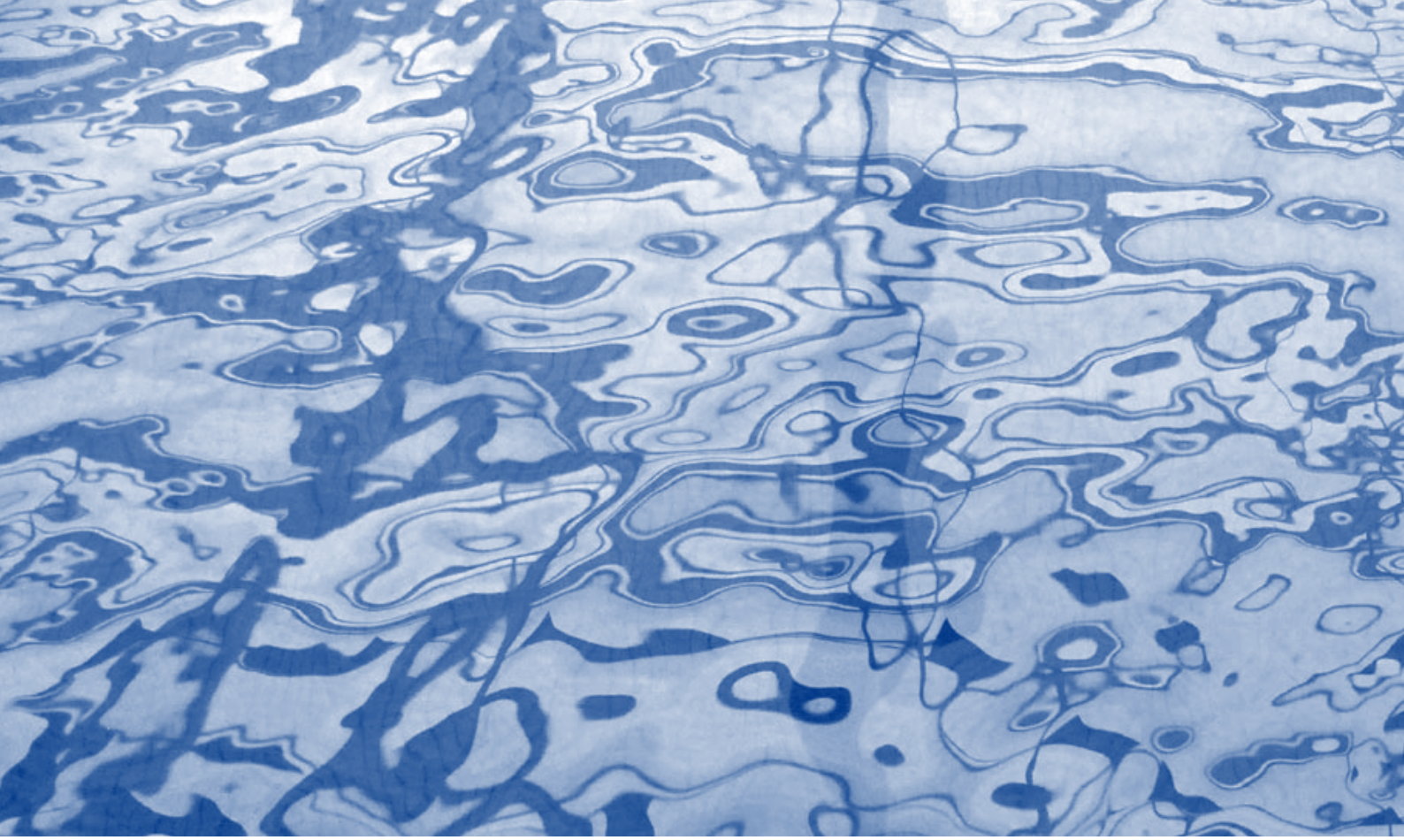
Resource allocation in Queensland

Benefits of developing a fisheries resource allocation policy in Queensland



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Benefits of developing a fisheries resource allocation policy in Queensland

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Abstract

In 2002 and 2003, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) oversaw the development of a Fisheries Resource Allocation Policy (the policy). The policy was developed in close cooperation with key stakeholders and represented the first strategic policy to be completed by the Minister's strategic policy council. The policy provides a fair and transparent process for making allocation decisions or assessing proposals that advocate changes to current allocation arrangements. At the heart of the policy is a set of guiding principles that should be adhered to when making decisions related to allocation of fisheries resources. Since its implementation, the number of inadequately justified reallocation proposals has fallen dramatically, demonstrating that it is providing an important filtration mechanism. While the policy has not been formally applied to a proposal, it has proved a useful tool for management planners. The policy provides consistency, transparency, sets high standards for allocation proposals and recognises the needs and aspirations of all stakeholders. This paper describes the policy, how it was developed, the benefits that have accrued, and other related issues.

Introduction

Natural resource management agencies internationally have experienced similar pressures over the last decade to more explicitly allocate community owned natural resources, whether related to water, fisheries or other resources. During 2002 and 2003, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries (DPI&F) developed a Fisheries Resource Allocation Policy (the policy) to articulate its position on allocation within and between sectors and establish a fair and transparent decision-making process.

Drivers for development of a fisheries resource allocation policy

A number of parallel issues culminated in the need for DPI&F to provide a strategic direction on how the government would address allocation issues. One of these drivers was an increasing number of proposals from fishing lobby groups to allocate specific areas for the sole access of one user group. These calls stemmed from an increasing level of conflict between different user groups. This conflict is a result of greater competition for resources due to:

- increasing leisure time,
- increasing population,
- expanding export markets,
- a boating boom in the south east corner of Queensland,
- increasing popularity of ecotourism, and
- greater international exposure of charter businesses.

There was politically little advantage in making a decision that may have a devastating impact on one sector at the expense of another, particularly when there was limited information, apart from political lobbying, on which to base a decision. Consequently, the Minister's Fishing Industry Development Council (FIDC) recommended taking a more considered approach through development of a policy to guide future allocation decisions.

Use of policy

From the outset it was clear that the use of policy rather than legislation would be the most appropriate direction for Queensland to take in developing a framework for making decisions on allocation of fisheries resources. The use of policy provides flexibility, but also gives a clear indication of the Queensland Government's position on an issue. It provides more discretion than is possible through the application of legislation and can better deal with changing circumstances and community values. Decisions made under the policy can be appealed through the Fisheries Tribunal, thus still providing natural justice.

Development of the policy

A working group was established by the FIDC, with membership consisting of representatives from all major stakeholder groups including commercial, recreational, charter, aquaculture, seafood marketing, and conservation groups as well as the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. An indigenous representative was not available, however, comments were sought through the ATSIS policy unit. The working group met five times, where they negotiated the principles and processes, and helped identify the aspirations of each user group.

Scope of the policy

It was important when developing the policy to clearly identify its scope, particularly in context of the types of fisheries resource users, the government agencies with some form of management responsibility and the types of allocation changes that the policy would apply to. Stakeholders agreed that the policy should apply to both consumptive and non-consumptive users of fisheries resources, recognising the value of the resource to the tourism and diving industries, as well as the community in general. In terms of the types of allocation changes that would need to be considered in context of the policy, it was agreed that the scope did not extend to minor allocation changes such as those resulting from changes to fish size limits. The scope does allow for the principles to be used internally as a valuable guide to management planning. The policy does not apply to allocation changes made by other state government agencies or the Australian Government, as it is a DPI&F policy only.

What the policy entails

The policy is based on a number of key components – a set of guiding principles, a decision-making process, guidelines for proponents and statements about stakeholders' needs and aspirations. At the heart of the policy is a set of agreed principles on which allocation decisions should be based.

Principles for making allocation changes or assessing allocation proposals

- The ecological sustainability of fisheries resources and the ecosystems on which they depend is paramount.
- Allocation decisions should be based on the best available ecological, economic and social information.
- Any allocation changes should aim to maximise the benefits to the Queensland community. In doing this, the decision-making process needs to involve the community and seek wide-ranging opinions in recognition of the fact that fisheries resources are owned by the community.

- Allocation arrangements should be explicitly stated in terms of the sectors involved, the percentages of the total catch allocated to each and the allocation methods. Such arrangements should reflect sectoral values and the management objectives for the fisheries resources concerned.
- Allocation within a fishery sector should seek to avoid adverse changes to the relative positions of existing operators.
- Where adjustments to fisheries resource access are required, market forces should be used to achieve this wherever practical.
- If a fisheries resource is over-used and an overall reduction in access is required to ensure sustainability, either all extractive user groups should share equally in that reduction of access or a specific reallocation proposal should be made.
- Resource allocation adjustments should be open to scrutiny and should have a time frame sufficient for implementation of change.

The principles provide not only a guide for assessing proposals submitted to DPI&F, but also a valuable framework for developing new management arrangements internally. For example, the principles were used to help develop the Strategic Directions Document - Strategy for Developing a Fisheries Management Plan for Queensland's East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Species. This fishery is well known for allocation disputes due to the overlap between commercial and recreational target species and desired areas to fish.

The policy clearly articulates other factors that should be considered when making allocation decisions. These include scrutinising any social or economic valuations, taking account of impacts outside the control of fisheries management (e.g. climate change etc), considering the potential for spatial separation of user groups and ensuring integration occurs across various agencies and jurisdictions.

The policy outlines a transparent and fair decision-making process that uses advisory groups already in place to try to negotiate a resolution. Where resolution can't be reached, an independent panel is used as a tiebreaker.

A set of guidelines is included in the policy to establish a standard for the content of proposals. Those that do not meet the standard will not be considered. The guidelines put the onus on proponents to demonstrate the benefits of the proposal, rather than government having to investigate and determine whether a proposal is with or without merit.

Importantly, the policy also includes statements about the needs and aspirations of the range of different stakeholder groups involved in the allocation debate (Table 2). The inclusion of this component was a fundamental reason for the successful sign off of the policy by stakeholders. It provides valuable information which may form useful objectives against which impacts of any new management arrangements could be measured.

Table 2: Needs and aspirations of fisheries resource users.

Fisheries resource user	Summary of needs and aspirations
Commercial fishing	Security of access and business certainty; recognition of community value; flexibility; compensation.
Recreational fishing	Opportunity for access; diversity of experience; some reasonable expectation of catching a fish; equity; recognition of benefits.
Charter fishing tourism	Recognition distinct from the recreational sector; sustainability of the industry; regional equity.
Seafood consumers	Recognition as a user group; expectation of availability, affordability and quality.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	recognition of diversity; traditional use; indigenous commercial fishing
Aquaculture	Access requirements; recognition of reliance on other sectors for source food and broodstock
Conservation	ecologically sustainable development; a comprehensive network of no take zones.
Tourism/ecotourism	World class tourism activities; security of access; business certainty.
Community	Knowledge that the resource is being managed sustainably.

Benefits of the policy

The benefits of the policy can be described in terms of two distinct periods – during development of the policy and following implementation.

Development of the policy itself gave stakeholders a chance to come to the table and negotiate a fair process and principles on which allocation decisions should be based. It was the first major strategic policy developed by FIDC and demonstrated the cooperation between user groups and their willingness to work together to ensure future allocation decisions can be made in a way that provides the greatest possible benefit to the Queensland community. The collaborative approach seen during development of the policy was a positive step in resolving long-standing conflict issues and was reinforced by the inclusion of statements regarding the aspirations of different user groups.

The policy itself provides a fair and balanced approach to allocation. It uses systems already in place (e.g. MACs) to minimise duplication and use existing expertise. It is consistent with national progress on allocation (e.g. Coolangatta Communiqué (DAFF, 2002a) and the framework for resource sharing and management in Commonwealth-managed fisheries (DAFF, 2002b)).

Since its implementation the number of inadequately justified reallocation proposals has fallen dramatically, demonstrating that it provides an important filtration mechanism.

The process in place requires that proponents speak to stakeholders prior to submitting a proposal, thereby promoting collaboration rather than reaction.

It also makes it more difficult to submit proposals that are unbalanced and likely to cause unacceptable impacts on a particular user group. The process also promotes the use of dispute resolution processes for conflict driven proposals.

Application of the policy

The policy has been approved, but not formally applied to a proposal to date. It was determined that no action will be taken on applications that were submitted prior to the development of the policy. Proponents are required to resubmit proposals based on the requirements set out in the policy if they wish to proceed with them, but none have so far. The exception is those proposals that were based purely on sustainability reasons. These proposals have been forwarded to management advisory committees for consideration as part of the normal management planning process. For example, numerous applications have been received over the last ten years in relation to restrictions on inshore netting to minimise perceived declines in catches in local or regional areas. These applications are being considered by working groups established to develop proposed new management arrangements for the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery, and are only being considered on the basis of the ecological sustainability of fish stocks in those areas.

As mentioned, the policy has been used as a basis for developing a strategic directions document which will guide development of new management arrangements for the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Fishery. This fishery has a long history of complex allocation issues (e.g. beach netting for tailor) and it is hoped that the policy will provide a solid basis for discussions regarding any allocation changes resulting from development of a management plan.

Linkages with other processes

Implementation of new fisheries licensing and fee arrangements, which introduced greater security and better defined access rights for commercial fishers, may lead to increased use of market-based mechanisms for implementing changes to allocation. It introduces a formula for calculating compensation where commercial fishing rights are diminished for the benefit of another user group. This will allow both the community and those proposing reallocations to see the real cost of the changes being proposed and consider innovative ways of raising the funds necessary to implement change.

In a similar vein, it is expected that more market-based reallocations may occur as a result of more modern management measures being introduced over the last few years, for example individual transferable quota arrangements in the reef line, trawl and spanner crab fisheries.

Issues for the future

While there have been tangible benefits as a result of the policy being introduced, it has also raised more questions about allocation. For example, significant changes have been made to fisheries management arrangements over the last couple of years. One of the issues that must be considered in applying the policy is how allocation decisions can be made when fisheries resource users have limited opportunity to adjust to multiple and ongoing changes. Also there are no clearly enunciated baseline sharing arrangements or any suggestion that the current allocations are the most appropriate.

Significant allocation changes have been made outside DPI&F, with little or no consideration of the principles set out in the policy. For example, the rezoning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park effectively constitutes a spatial reallocation, with significant benefits directed at the recreational sector, in some cases at the expense of the commercial sector (i.e. yellow zones). The rezoning represents one of the largest adjustments in allocation arrangements in the history of Queensland's fisheries management and applies to a range of different users. It is possible that DPI&F may receive applications seeking to shift allocation arrangements because of the impacts of the RAP. Stakeholders may argue that areas currently closed under Queensland's fisheries legislation should be removed to offset the increased areas now closed to fishing under the rezoning of the marine park.

One of the ongoing issues in fisheries management is having quality data to support good decision-making. It is difficult to allocate explicit shares of a resource when the amount of resource available for harvest is either unknown or lacks scientific certainty. Similarly, putting in place management arrangements to adequately constrain users to within their share can also be problematic, particularly in regard to the recreational sector. At what point does the cost of establishing management frameworks to share the catch outweigh the benefits of the allocation?

One of the questions regarding application of the policy is whether it is too onerous on proponents. Does it stop all applications, or just the frivolous ones? It is likely to be a combination of these, but it is difficult to make a clear assessment when no proposals have been submitted and feedback is limited.

It may be that the greatest value of the policy lies in its use in management planning processes, for example, in development of the East Coast Inshore Fin Fish Management Plan. It may also prove useful in assessing the impacts of new or existing management arrangements, by providing statements about the needs and aspirations of each fisheries resource user against which those impacts can be measured.

Conclusions

The Fisheries Resource Allocation Policy attempts to pull together a range of complex allocation issues within a single overarching framework, while still providing flexibility for deciding allocation proposals on a case by case basis. The policy has provided an important structure to deal with complex issues where a structure didn't exist before. It doesn't provide a single formula that can determine allocation values, but it does provide a fair process for negotiating positive and balanced outcomes. It encourages stakeholders to work together and understand each other's positions and aspirations, hopefully leading to greater cooperation between user groups and more balanced and widely accepted allocation outcomes.

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