Question on Notice

No. 856

Asked on 17 June 2021

MS F SIMPSON ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

With reference to the installation of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)— Will the Minister (a) detail how the department (i) ensures FADs support sound fishery management and are installed in an ecologically and environmentally sustainable manner (ii) determines each location, including which fish species each FAD location is projected to attract, (b) support research to assess the impact of FADs on fish stocks and stakeholders and (c) publish the monitoring data and research from FAD locations pre and post FAD implementation, and if so, when?

ANSWER:

(a) (i) Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) are human-made structures anchored offshore that attract fish. FADs are utilised by most states and territories in Australia to enhance fishing experiences, particularly recreational and charter fishing.

In 2019-2020, the Palaszczuk Government committed $1 million as part of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027 to roll out a series of FADs, making more pelagic fish species accessible to the Queensland fishing community. These include Mahi mahi, more commonly known as dolphinfish, wahoo, tuna, cobia, mackerel, and billfish.

The benefit of making it more likely recreational fishers will hook one of these species is that it will likely reduce the number people targeting overfished species, such as snapper and pearl perch. This then provides the opportunity for overfished species to recover.

Longer-term benefits of the program, such as less fishing of overfished species, will be monitored.

The installation of FADs in Queensland is being conducted in accordance with relevant legislation, including the *Sea Installation Act 1987*, the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservations Act 1999* which requires a risk assessment to determine if the proposed deployment will have a significant impact on matters of national significance and the *Navigation Act 2012* which requires the issuing of a Notice to Mariners and charting of installations such as FADs. Permits are also required, and were obtained, for the deployment of FADs within the State's Great Sandy Marine Park.

(a)(ii) FAD locations were selected in consultation with fishing experts and stakeholders to enhance the success of attract target pelagic fish species. Consultation included consideration of the environmental conditions (sea surface temperature, currents, water depth), known distribution of target fish species and historical fishing catch and effort information from FADs previously deployed by fishing clubs.

The commercial fishing industry was consulted on proposed locations to minimise impacts on access to commercial fishing grounds.

(b) The FADs program includes an extensive monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of the deployed FADs, with some aspects of the monitoring coordinated across state jurisdictions.

Some FADs are fitted with acoustic receivers and form part of the Integrated Marine Observing System (IMOS) national receiver network for tracking tagged animals around Australia.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF) recently gave in-principle support for a research proposal through the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to review current regulation and policies and recommend best-practice guidelines for the deployment, management and monitoring of FADs in Commonwealth-managed waters. DAF will contribute information on its FAD program and recommendations from this research will be considered in respect to the future management of FADs in Queensland waters.

Anecdotal advice collected from charter and recreational fishers suggests improved catch of FAD targeted species in the vicinity of FADs, and reduced catch of potentially overfished species.

(c) Monitoring and research data is available in several locations dependent on the data collection and collaboration.

Recreational fishing data is available on the DAF webpage at www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/monitoring-research/monitoring-reporting/recreational-fishing.

Animal detections at FADs are available on the IMOS animal tracking webpage at https://imos.org.au/facilities/animaltracking.

The stock status of species caught around the FADs is available in the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation's (FRDC) Status of Australian Fish Stocks Reports at https://fish.gov.au/reports.

The results of the FRDC funded 'Fishing for change: A social marketing approach to reduce the recreational harvest of snapper and pearl perch' should be available on the FRDC webpage when the project is completed next year.

A collaborative research project with the University of the Sunshine Coast, James Cook University, and the Australian Institute of Marine Science, that aims to assess the movement patterns of mahi mahi around FADs off Southern Queensland, is expected to be published next year.