

Question on Notice

No. 992

Asked on 24 August 2023

MR S ANDREW ASKED MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT AND FISHERIES AND MINISTER FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES (HON M FURNER)

QUESTION:

With reference to the ‘Coral fishery discussion paper – Consultation on management action to implement WTO conditions of approval’, in which the department committed to undertaking ‘additional rounds of consultation and review’ with Queensland Coral Fisheries, prior to any future ‘management actions’ relating to (a) ITQ species list for future years, (b) ITQ allocation processes and (c) Impact alleviation—

Will the Minister confirm this commitment was honoured and provide substantive details of the consultation process the department undertook with the industry prior to the issuing of Fisheries Legislation (Coral) Amendment Regulation 2023?

ANSWER:

In October 2021 the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment made a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) declaration, commonly referred to as a WTO export approval, under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, which included several conditions for Fisheries Queensland (FQ) and industry to address.

In response, Fisheries Queensland (FQ) undertook public consultation on the management changes required to meet the conditions of the WTO and ensure export approval for industry. In April 2022, as part of this process, FQ released the ‘Queensland Coral Fishery Discussion paper - Consultation on management action to implement WTO conditions of approval’.

Following public consultation and after careful consideration of feedback, the first new management arrangements for the coral fishery commenced on 1 July 2022. This included 106 individual prescribed commercial catch limits for species, or groups of species of international concern. These limits were implemented to meet the conditions stipulated by the Federal Government to keep the coral fishery export approval in place. The discussion paper and consultation report have been published online at <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/fisheries-reforms>.

However, a prescribed commercial catch limit can be a sub-optimal fishery management measure, as it can cause a competitive “race to fish”. Fishing competition between licence holders can lead to localised depletion of inshore reefs and inequity between access and also pose safety risks with more risky fishing behaviour (i.e. going to sea in bad conditions). Prescribed commercial catch limits for high value species can also be exceeded in fisheries where numerous fishing operators are working at the same time under modest catch limits. Such take in excess of the prescribed limits did occur in the fishery during the 2022-23 fishing season and was a breach of the WTO conditions.

The majority of the industry raised these concerns with FQ and this led to a second round of targeted consultation occurring from 5 October 2022 to 11 November 2022 on proposed measures to address this problem. Following further careful consideration, the *Fisheries Legislation (Coral) Amendment Regulation 2023* was made, which implemented seven individual transferable quotas for species that were of particular importance to the coral industry. The allocation of these ITQs followed pre-existing and long-standing individual quota allocations across the fishery.

The seven species selected for ITQ allocation were supported by 12 of the 17 quota holders. All seven species were also listed on the WTO approvals Appendix B, which indicates species of concern to the Federal Government and the international community.

FQ engaged with coral fishery licence holders and key fisheries stakeholders ahead of each management change. Consultation occurred through input to consultation papers, individual appointments to speak with fishery managers, online monthly catchups for all licence holders, online question and answer sessions and also through meetings of the aquarium and coral fishery working group. The working group met on three occasions during this period and recommended that ITQ's should be introduced for key driver species. Working group communiques are available online at <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable/fishery-working-groups/marine-aquarium-fish-and-coral-fisheries-working-group/communiques>