



**Australian Government**

**Australian Government response to the**

**House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources,  
Fisheries and Forestry report:**

***Netting the Benefits* – Inquiry into the Role of Science for  
Fisheries and Aquaculture**

**March 2015**

On 21 March 2012, the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig, asked the then House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry, to inquire into and report on, the role of science for fisheries and aquaculture.

The Committee agreed to, inquire into and report upon, the role of science for the future of fisheries and aquaculture, and in particular:

- a) the relationship between scientific knowledge of fish species, ecosystems, biodiversity and fish stock sustainability;
- b) fishery management and biosecurity, including but not limited to:
  - the calculation and monitoring of stock size, sustainable yield and bycatch, as well as related data collection;
  - the effects of climate change, especially relating to species dispersion, stock levels and impacts on fishing communities;
  - pest and disease management and mitigation;
  - minimising risks to the natural environment and human health;
  - cooperation among Australian governments on the above;
- c) research, development and applied science of aquaculture, including:
  - transitioning from wild fisheries to aquaculture in individual species;
  - improving sustainability and lifecycle management practices and outcomes;
  - pest and disease management and mitigation;
- d) governance arrangements relating to fisheries and aquaculture, including the implications for sustainability and industry development;
- e) current initiatives and responses to the above matters by state, territory and Australian governments; and
- f) any other related matter.

On 27 November 2012, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Agriculture, Resources, Fisheries and Forestry tabled its report, *Netting the Benefits : Inquiry into the Role of Science for the Future of Fisheries and Aquaculture*. The report seeks to assess the current state of fisheries science and its application, while also addressing the future of fishing in Australia.

The Committee made 22 recommendations.

The Government has considered all the recommendations, and provides the following responses to each recommendation.

No.	Recommendation	Government Response
<b>Background</b>		
1	<p>The Committee recommends that the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) conduct and publish an annual audit of total national investment in fisheries and aquaculture research, development and extension.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p>Research, development and extension (RD&amp;E) in primary industries is central to increasing industry productivity and ensuring sustainability. The Government recognises the importance of monitoring the level of RD&amp;E going to fisheries and aquaculture and the trends in this investment.</p> <p>Regular audits of the total investment are useful. Annual audits would be expensive in time and cost, particularly as many projects are longer term and trends may not be apparent on an annual basis. A five-year assessment, in line with the FRDC's normal strategic planning and reporting cycle is an alternative that can be explored. Sharing the cost of production of the audits would need to be discussed with other jurisdictions.</p> <p>The Government will encourage all RD&amp;E funding providers to report on their investments annually, through the Australian Fisheries Management Forum.</p> <p>The FRDC reports its investments annually, which includes contributions by each government jurisdiction, industry and research partners. This reporting covers most of the national RD&amp;E.</p> <p>In 2010 the FRDC assessed national RD&amp;E capabilities and investment to inform the National Primary Industries RD&amp;E Framework; a framework that has been endorsed by the Australian Government, the states and the territories. In 2013, the FRDC commenced a second national RD&amp;E capabilities and investment assessment in line with the review timetable for the national framework.</p>

<b>Fisheries</b>	
2	<p data-bbox="212 217 1093 400">The Committee recommends that the Australian Government continue to publish a consolidated stock report for all Australian fisheries on a regular basis, after the initial publication of such a report in 2012, in consultation with State and Territory governments.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 217 1980 248">The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 292 2092 400">The Government agrees that a consolidated report on the status of all Australian fish stocks is important for industry regarding the sustainability of our fisheries.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 443 2107 552">The Government also agrees that it has a role in ensuring there is a reliable, consolidated national assessment of fish stocks; however, this responsibility is shared with the states and the Northern Territory.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 595 2107 927">Considerable progress was made in developing the method that led, in 2012, to the first national stocks status report for all Australian fisheries (Status of Key Australian Fish Stocks Reports 2012). That method highlighted the many different approaches among the jurisdictions to stock assessment and fishery status reporting. It was a major undertaking, substantially funded by the FRDC and with considerable government staff expertise required to assemble the data into the national report. The exercise also required considerable cooperation and in-kind support from all jurisdictions and the CSIRO.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 970 2092 1153">The Government understands that the FRDC and research collaborators involved in the 2012 report are currently reviewing the process and outcomes, including future national assessments and the possibility of expanding the assessment to cover ecosystem sustainability and other issues.</p> <p data-bbox="1144 1197 2114 1342">Further steps in the research and development aspects of national reporting and its application are under consideration by the FRDC. To ensure long-term delivery of national reports, appropriate cost sharing arrangements between all jurisdictions will need to be agreed.</p>

3	<p>The Committee believes that precaution is about managing risk; and therefore recommends that a new guideline on precaution be developed with agreement and support of stakeholders, for inclusion in a new national regional policy statement for fisheries, aquaculture and recreational fishing.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p>See recommendation 22.</p>
4	<p>The Committee recommends that the Australian Government expedite the creation and implementation of the monitoring and evaluation strategy for the national Commonwealth marine reserves network – to ensure that they are well managed and thoroughly evaluated, before consideration of any new MPAs domestically and globally. A timeline should be announced to show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when a complete monitoring strategy will be in place;</li> <li>• when a full evaluation will be completed; and</li> <li>• when the findings of the evaluation will be implemented.</li> </ul>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p>The Government has committed to undertaking a review of the Commonwealth marine reserves declared in November 2012. The review will include an expert scientific panel to look closely at the science supporting the new marine reserves and bioregional advisory panels to improve consultation with stakeholders. The Government will create new management plans for the marine reserves following the review. Monitoring and evaluation will be a key component of these new management plans. Monitoring and evaluation is a key component of the <i>South-east Commonwealth Marine Reserves Network Management Plan 2013-23</i>, which is not under review.</p>
5	<p>The Committee recommends that the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry work with State and Territory counterparts to commission a regular estimate of recreational fishing activity and impacts in Australia, with data and results published in a yearly consolidated report, using a nationally agreed data collection model.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in part.</p> <p>The Government is committed to working with the states and the Northern Territory to develop a data collection platform and methodology which can provide for a national survey every five years.</p> <p>The Government’s commitment to establish a National Recreational Fishing Council will provide a conduit for making the survey results more accessible to sector stakeholders, therefore ensuring the greatest utility and benefit of any results.</p>

		<p>Undertaking a national survey is likely to be a resource intensive process, and it would not be cost effective to undertake a national assessment annually.</p> <p>Prior to a national survey being undertaken a scoping study is required to review the survey methods used previously and include the findings of the national data collection project. To enable an effective survey all states and territories will need to be consulted on the methodology of the survey.</p>
6	<p>The Committee recommends that COAG seek to harmonise, where there is agreement, recreational fishing licensing, rules and data collection.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>While the adoption or otherwise by COAG of harmonised recreational fishing licensing is a matter for COAG, the Australian Government would support an initiative developed with the states and the Northern Territory to harmonise recreational fishing licensing, rules and data collection.</p> <p>Day-to-day management of recreational fishing is in large part the responsibility of state and territory governments. The Australian Government makes a significant contribution to recreational fishing through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to undertake research that supports the sector;</li> <li>• a commitment to work with the sector to reinvigorate a Recreational Fishing Advisory body;</li> <li>• a commitment to conduct a recreational fishing survey every five years; and</li> <li>• supporting peak recreational fishing bodies to develop and promote sustainable fishing practices.</li> </ul>

7	<p>The Committee recommends that the current review of Commonwealth fisheries management consider whether revisions to the <i>Fisheries Management Act 1991</i> are necessary to allow the Australian Government to more readily manage recreational fishing activity in Commonwealth waters.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The <i>Review of Commonwealth Fisheries: Policy, Legislation and Management</i>, underway at the time of the Netting the Benefits report, considered whether revisions to the <i>Fisheries Management Act 1991</i> are necessary to allow the Australian Government to more readily manage recreational fishing activity in Commonwealth waters.</p> <p>The review’s commentary on recreational fishing will be considered where applicable in policy development in the future.</p> <p>The Government notes its commitment to establish the National Recreational Fishing Council which will reinvigorate lines of communication between recreational fishers and government.</p>
8	<p>The Committee recommends that the 2008 preliminary assessment of the ‘Implications of Climate Change for Australian Fisheries and Aquaculture’ be developed by the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency into a more comprehensive study, to include broad strategic issues and localised impacts.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in part.</p> <p>Following the 2008 report on the <i>Implications of Climate Change for Australian Fisheries and Aquaculture</i> the then Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency contributed \$3.5 million to a cooperative arrangement with the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation to support research into how marine fisheries can prepare for climate change.</p> <p>This investment supported research to implement the <i>National Climate Change Adaptation Research Plan for Marine Biodiversity and Resources</i> (the Marine Biodiversity and Resources NARP), developed through the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility (NCCARF). In 2012 the NARP was updated to ensure currency and to provide guidance for research investment over the following five years. The aims of the Marine Biodiversity and Resources NARP are to:</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify the research required to help managers of coastal ecosystems and marine environments and associated industries and communities prepare for the consequences of climate change;</li> <li>• set adaptation research priorities based on these gaps; and</li> <li>• identify capacity that can be harnessed in order to carry out priority adaptation research.</li> </ul> <p>A total of 17 research projects commissioned under this cooperative arrangement were completed by 30 June 2013. The research projects conducted under the NARP covered a wide range of topics, ranging from a location specific assessment of future climate change effects on Western Australia’s marine environments to investigation of the development of a climate change adaptation blueprint to address the needs and priorities of coastal rural communities around Australia.</p> <p>The Government is providing \$9 million to the NCCARF for the three years from 2014-17. Among its activities, NCCARF will synthesise existing climate adaptation information to make it relevant for decision makers, including to tailor the Marine and Biodiversity Resources research to make it accessible for coastal and marine communities.</p>
9	<p>The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure there is a continued strong effort to monitor and analyse the effects of climate change on Australia’s oceans and communities.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>Climate change science is important in informing management decisions within the fisheries and aquaculture sector. In 2009 Australia’s key research agencies endorsed the <i>Australian Climate Change Science: A National Framework</i> (the Framework) which identified the importance of monitoring and analyses to better understand how Australia’s oceans and communities will be affected by climate change. An Implementation Plan for the Framework, developed in June 2012, recognised that such efforts were needed to</p>



		<p>develop strategies and make decisions that will prepare Australia for, and respond to, identified risks and opportunities.</p> <p>The Government continues to provide \$5.734 million per annum over 2014-15 and 2015-16 to the Australian Climate Change Science Programme (ACCSP), which delivers the science identified in the Framework, including research into ocean climate processes and monitoring to understand and track ocean change. Beyond 2015-16, the ACCSP will be amalgamated with the National Environmental Research Programme (NERP) to form the National Environmental Science Programme (NESP).</p> <p>The Government is also developing a 20 Year Strategic Plan for the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Research which will focus on undertaking nationally and globally significant science. The Plan will build on the Government's \$24 million commitment over three years to establish a new centre for Antarctic and Southern Ocean Research and the continuing \$25 million in funding over 5 years for the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Cooperative Research Centre. These initiatives will ensure a continued strong effort to monitor and analyse the influence of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean in driving regional and global processes, including change in Australia's oceans.</p>
10	<p>The Committee recommends that the Australian Primary Industries Ministerial Council commission a review of the 'National Fishing and Aquaculture RD&amp;E Strategy 2010', to assess progress in achieving the Strategy's aims, in particular in regard to the co-ordination of Australia's scientific effort. The review should consider whether additional mechanisms are necessary to complement the strategy, such as a regular national fisheries research, development and extension forum or registry of research projects.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation, but notes that Agriculture Ministers now meet through the Agriculture Ministers' Forum, rather than the Australian Primary Industries Ministerial Council.</p> <p>The Government recognises the importance of undertaking a review of the National Fishing and Aquaculture RD&amp;E Strategy 2010 to assess and evaluate its progress. The Governance Committee (formerly the National Priorities Forum) for the Strategy has started planning for a</p>

		<p>review of priorities for the next version of the strategy. The anticipated completion date for the next version is early 2015, for the start of the 2015/16 financial year.</p> <p>As part of the strategy, three bodies were established, these being the Governance Committee, Research Provider Network, and Extension Network. These groups met regularly during the life of the strategy, reviewing progress against priorities and sharing research against the identified priorities. Given significant change in research capacity during the time of the strategy, a second capability audit was commissioned and subsequently completed in November 2014. The Research Provider Network has finalised the major and support tables outlining research services in the jurisdictions.</p>
<b>Aquaculture</b>		
11	<p>The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with state and territory governments to develop further conservation agreements to streamline assessments under the <i>EPBC Act</i>, to facilitate the growth of aquaculture.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p>The Government agrees it has a role in streamlining assessment of aquaculture projects under the EPBC Act. The Government will continue to work with the states and the Northern Territory to improve efficiencies through increased application of strategic approaches, which may include further conservation agreements.</p> <p>The EPBC Act provides various measures to accredit or otherwise recognise mechanisms that operate to provide equivalent protection of matters of national environmental significance, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strategic assessments to endorse plans, policies or programs, including those of state and territory governments, and then to approve actions under endorsed programs;</li> </ul>

- assessment and approval bilateral agreements which are currently being negotiated under the one-stop shop for environmental approvals; and
- conservation agreements.

As part of the Government's commitment to reducing regulatory burden, the one-stop shop policy will accredit state planning systems under the EPBC Act. The one-stop shop policy aims to streamline the assessment and approvals process for businesses, lead to swifter decisions and improve Australia's investment climate, while maintaining high environmental standards.

The Government will continue to develop complementary streamlining initiatives with the states and the Northern Territory to improve efficiencies, for example through increased application of strategic approaches, which may include further conservation agreements.

*The Conservation Agreement in relation to aquaculture operations in the Great Sandy Marine Park as described in the Great Sandy regional marine aquaculture plan, signed on 7 September 2011, is an example of this more strategic approach. Section 306A of the EPBC Act provides for a conservation agreement to include a declaration that 'classes of actions' are not likely to have significant impacts on protected matters and therefore do not require approval under the EPBC Act. The intent of this provision is to encourage proponents to enter into strategic and regional planning approaches by delivering upfront certainty about allowable land/marine uses.*

		<p>The declaration in the Great Sandy Marine Park conservation agreement allows all low-intensive aquaculture development under the Queensland Government's <i>Great Sandy regional marine aquaculture plan</i> (October 2010) to proceed without the need for further approvals under the EPBC Act. The conservation agreement is the outcome of almost four years of collaboration between the Department of the Environment and Queensland agencies and streamlines environmental approvals. It delivers certainty for industry and the community on the future of aquaculture development in the region and increases transparency of the conditions to be applied to developments. This will assist in protecting the region's environmental values while allowing sustainable growth of planned, low-impact aquaculture.</p>
12	<p>The Committee recommends the Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Governments, lead the development and agreement of a detailed and comprehensive national aquaculture policy, including the roles and responsibilities of all governments, to address (amongst others) the issues contained in paragraph 4.89, at least in the areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National ambition;</li> <li>• Governance;</li> <li>• Regional planning;</li> <li>• Community agreement;</li> <li>• Technology; and</li> <li>• International competitiveness.</li> </ul>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Government recognises the importance of aquaculture as an important primary industry with a domestic history of success and significant growth potential. The Government's <i>Policy for a More Competitive and Sustainable Fisheries Sector</i> committed to work with industry to develop a national aquaculture strategy.</p> <p>While the adoption or otherwise by COAG of a national policy is a matter for COAG, the Government agrees that the development and adoption of a nationally agreed policy would be valuable to assist industry planning, regulation and development.</p> <p>The Commonwealth has regulatory responsibilities relevant to aquaculture, such as protecting matters of national environmental significance and managing biosecurity risks associated with the importation of aquaculture inputs (such as feed) and providing animal</p>

		<p>health and food safety certification for the export of Australian aquaculture products.</p> <p>However, most aspects of aquaculture operations are regulated by the states and territories. Any strategy will require agreement and commitment from these jurisdictions and the environment portfolio.</p> <p>Accordingly, any national aquaculture strategy would need to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, including industry and relevant Australian, state and Northern Territory government departments.</p> <p>The form and content of the strategy could be guided by this consultation.</p>
<b>Biosecurity, certification and international aid and cooperation</b>		
13	The Committee recommends that the Australian Government update AQUAPLAN as soon as possible.	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>Australia has had two previous national strategic plans for aquatic animal health. Based on a review of the second plan (AQUAPLAN 2005-2010) industries and governments cooperated to develop AQUAPLAN 2014-2019. The new plan was endorsed by industry in January 2014, and by agriculture ministers in August 2014. AQUAPLAN 2014-2019 is a joint industry-government initiative and implementation requirements will be shared.</p>

14	<p>The Committee recommends that the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry develop a model for funding and enhancing aquatic disease control and aquatic veterinary training, possibly including an industry levy, as a matter of urgency.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p>Aquaculture and fisheries industries indicated support for further work to develop formal industry-government response arrangements for emergency aquatic animal diseases at an industry-government workshop in July 2012. A draft work plan was endorsed by the National Biosecurity Committee in July 2013. The Australian government has funded a project manager to drive implementation of the workplan over four years. Ongoing engagement among industry and government parties will be required to implement the work plan.</p> <p>Training would form an element of an aquatic animal disease response agreement and a levy mechanism to fund emergency responses (similar to those for terrestrial animal industries) may be applicable. Both of these issues are addressed in the proposed work plan and will continue to be discussed and considered to determine how industries and governments would better share responsibilities and costs for emergency aquatic animal disease responses.</p> <p>AQUAPLAN 2014-2019 prioritises several activities to improve aquatic animal health education, training and awareness, including an Aquatic Animal Health Training Scheme; and development of appropriate aquatic animal health training and curriculum materials.</p>
15	<p>The Committee recommends the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation formulate an independent mechanism for conducting a performance audit or review of the entire food standards system.</p>	<p>The Government, on advice from the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation, does not support undertaking a performance audit or review of the entire food standards system on the premise of greater scrutiny of certification schemes for traceability and sustainability of fisheries management. The Australian food regulation system is designed to protect human health, not animal or plant health.</p>

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring a safe food supply. To achieve this, Food Standards Australia New Zealand develops and administers the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code). The Code is enforced by relevant agencies in states and territories, and the Department of Agriculture at the border.

Mechanisms for conducting reviews of the food regulation system already exist by way of :

- revising or developing policy guidelines which may trigger a review or the development of new standards;
- the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation initiating a review, either of the whole system or a specific area;
- undertaking a review of the food regulation agreement; or
- undertaking a review of Food Standards Australia New Zealand legislation.

Reviews of the food regulation system conducted over recent years include the Corish Review (February 2006), and the Banks Report (April 2006). Additional area specific reviews undertaken over recent years include a review of Food Standards Australia New Zealand legislation (2007), a review of the food regulation agreement (2008) and a review of food labelling law and policy (2011).

Furthermore, the Productivity Commission undertakes a rolling program of reviews as part of the *Performance Benchmarking of Australian Business Regulation*.

		<p>A review of the food standards setting system is not considered necessary or justified at this time as reviews have been undertaken recently in this area, a need has not been identified by members of the Legislative and Governance Forum on Food Regulation and the review will not meet the specific needs identified in the <i>Netting the Benefits</i> report.</p>
16	<p>The Committee recommends that, while protecting Australian intellectual property, the Australian Government make available technology and expertise through aid programs dedicated to fisheries management and aquaculture production.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>On 18 June 2014, the Minister for Foreign Affairs launched the Australian Government's new development policy: <i>Australian aid: promoting prosperity, reducing poverty, enhancing stability</i>; and new performance framework: <i>Making Performance Count: enhancing the accountability and effectiveness of Australian aid</i>. Agriculture, fisheries and water are a priority sector within this new aid paradigm – areas where Australia has particular expertise. Fisheries and aquaculture are recognised as key sources of jobs, incomes and exports and will continue to play a strong role in economic growth and poverty reduction across the Indo-Pacific region. The sector will feature strongly in Australia's economic diplomacy.</p> <p>Under the new aid paradigm, Australia will better utilise the research capabilities of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and other organisations. We will seek to improve links between research, business and communities to help spur innovation and strengthen the uptake and impact of our research. Australia will also advise whole-of-government partnerships, including with the Department of Agriculture, Defence and Environment and with the Australia Fisheries Management Authority, focusing on fisheries management and protection and also on oceans governance and the 'Blue Economy.'</p>



Examples of recent Australian funded initiatives which involve the provision of world class technology and expertise for fisheries management and aquaculture production include:

- Commencement of a new Government Partnership for Economic Development to support the Pacific Oceanscape Framework, led by the Department of the Environment, supporting marine spatial planning, the delineation of maritime boundaries and oceans governance;
- Implementation of a new Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research led Community Based Fisheries Management and Aquaculture research programme to address growing food security issues in the Pacific;
- Australia's full participation in regional fisheries meetings, led by the Department of Agriculture in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and other Australian Government agencies;
- Support for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority to build capacity in Monitoring, Control and Surveillance for Pacific Island Countries, to complement Australia's new phase of the \$2 billion Defence led Pacific Patrol Boat Program announced on 17 June 2014 by the Foreign Minister and Defence Minister;
- Hosting of the *Canberra Tuna Workshop* in July 2013 in collaboration with the Australian National University's Crawford School of Public Policy, the CSIRO and the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS) to bring together regional experts to consider options for enhancing the economic return from regional tuna fisheries;
- Funding provided to the Secretariat of the Pacific Community to conduct a major scientific study *Vulnerability of Tropical Pacific Fisheries and Aquaculture to Climate Change*, published in 2011. Contributing Australian institutions included James Cook

		<p>University, CSIRO, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, University of Queensland, and the Department of Primary Industries Queensland;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding a regional laboratory proficiency testing program, to assist in improving diagnostic capacity for ten aquatic animal diseases of regional significance. The project encompasses over 40 laboratories in 13 countries, in four cycles over 2013 and 2014; and</li> <li>• The Department of Agriculture sponsoring an emergency regional consultation on the emerging prawn disease Acute Hepatopancreatic Necrosis Disease in August 2012. This disease has severely affected prawn production in Asia.</li> </ul> <p>In the context of this recommendation, the FRDC notes that in the Government’s pursuit of providing international assistance, the Government should also be mindful of Australian intellectual property. For example, there are some fishery reports that are protected into the foreseeable future because they contain industry confidential fishing data, or other intellectual data that would potentially affect a particular fishing sector’s competitive advantage internationally.</p>
17	<p>From within the existing aid budget, the Committee recommends that the Australian Government increase aid to Pacific Island countries for projects and programs relating to fisheries management and aquaculture production.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>Under the Government’s new aid paradigm announced on 18 June 2014, the Australian Government will strategically increase fisheries assistance in the Pacific, enhance engagement in South-East Asia including within the aquaculture sector and seek to deepen our engagement in the Indian Ocean region.</p>

Since 2005, Australia's aid expenditure on agriculture, fisheries, water resource management and rural development has averaged approximately 7 per cent of its Official Development Assistance. In 2013-14, Australia's expenditure on these sectors totalled around \$316 million, or 6.7 per cent. The agriculture and fisheries sectors will contribute substantially to achieving the Government's 20 per cent aid-for-trade target by 2020.

For example, at the Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meeting held in the republic of Palau in July 2014, Australia announced a four-year \$40 million support package of core funding (including \$AUD 23.5 million in new funding) to two principal Pacific Islands fisheries organisations – the Forum Fisheries Agency and the Fisheries, Aquaculture and Marine Ecosystems Division of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

Tuna fishing is critical to many Pacific Island economies, accounting for an estimated 15,000 jobs, up to \$350 million in direct revenues and contributing upwards of a further USD 250 million to the region's Gross Domestic Product. Both offshore and inshore fisheries face increasing challenges including from overfishing, and environmental pressures. Australia will address the threats facing Pacific fisheries through international partnerships, regional aid initiatives and sustained policy coherence in fisheries, oceans, environmental and trade fora. This will include a commitment to innovative programs which embrace the principles of the Blue Economy.

<b>Governance, environmental policy and the way forward</b>		
18	The Committee recommends that the Treasurer refer to the Productivity Commission an inquiry into the efficiency of the fisheries industry across Australia and the efficiency and effectiveness of the inter-jurisdictional governance arrangements for Australian fisheries.	The Government supports this recommendation in-principle, but the proposal will need to be considered in the normal processes and in the context of other possible priorities for inquiries.
19	The Committee recommends that the fisheries management and environment protection responsibilities of the Australian Government continue to be administered by separate agencies, but that these agencies work towards a single application process (and potentially a single point of contact) for fisheries approvals, with the aim of providing a 'one-stop-shop' from the applicant's perspective.	<p>The Government supports the recommendation that Commonwealth fisheries management responsibilities and the Australia Government's environment protection responsibilities continue to be administered by separate agencies.</p> <p>The Government recognises the importance of a common approach to fishery approvals. The <i>Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition</i> provides a common framework to inform decision making under the EPBC Act in relation to commercial fisheries. The guidelines were published in 2007 after extensive review, in consultation with all jurisdictions, to streamline the information requirements for subsequent decision making.</p> <p>Currently a single application is provided by the respective fishery management agency to the Department of the Environment for decision making in regard to all relevant EPBC Act decisions for a commercial fishery. The Government notes however, that some overlap between the different provisions of the EPBC Act nonetheless remains.</p> <p>The Government is committed to reducing the administrative and regulatory process where possible and will consider further streamlining of the fisheries assessment and approval system as part of the broader review of government processes.</p>

20	<p>The Committee recommends that commercial fishing organisations in Australia form a national peak body. This process could be initially assisted by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry through facilitating contact and coordination.</p>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Government's <i>Policy for a More Competitive and Sustainable Fisheries Sector</i> committed \$1 million to support the development and promotion of sustainable fishing practices by national recreational and commercial fishing peak bodies.</p> <p>The Department of Agriculture will consult with industry through the National Seafood Industry Alliance Inc (NSIA), its constituent bodies and major seafood industry stakeholders.</p> <p>The Government will encourage the development of an appropriate and sustainable body, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having structures and procedures in place to appropriately capture and represent the views and interests of members nationally;</li> <li>• committing to develop a business plan for financial self sustainability in the medium to long term; and</li> <li>• ensuring appropriate sectoral representation (e.g. wild harvest; aquaculture; post harvest and/or importers) as deemed appropriate.</li> </ul>
21	<p>The Committee recommends that fisheries management should not be subject to political direction, except as explicitly provided for in legislation.</p>	<p>The Government notes this recommendation.</p>

22	<p>The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Council of Australian Governments, lead the development of a comprehensive national regional policy statement for fisheries, aquaculture and recreational fishing, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an overall statement of strategic intent to drive future direction;</li> <li>• a new guideline on precaution; and</li> <li>• a research, development and extension work program.</li> </ul>	<p>The Government supports this recommendation in-principle.</p> <p>The Government agrees that the strategic national alignment of fisheries, aquaculture and recreational fishing is a worthwhile goal. However it is a matter for the Council of Australian Governments to determine their work program and priorities.</p>
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