

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 48
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Programme: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: Small pelagic fishery
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 23 February 2015
Question Type: Written

Senator Whish-Wilson asked:

In regards to AFMA's recent announcement that it received a new notification that Seafish Tasmania Pty Ltd has nominated the Geelong Star to fish its concessions in the SPF:

1. Has the Department had any communications with AFMA since Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Senator Richard Colbeck, made media statements that he won't be requiring the Geelong Star to have 100% observer coverage despite such recommendations by the expert panel?
2. Given the expert panel was clear on the need for 100% observer coverage of all fishing operations, does the Department have faith that "move-on" provisions or bycatch mitigation are adequate to protect species of national significance within fishing operations in the SPF?
3. Can you detail the role of independent observers with respect to matters of species protection?
4. Beyond gaps in the effective implementation of protection measures, how will inadequate observer coverage effect reporting to the Department and to the public on the deaths of species of national significance?
5. Has the Department advised the Minister that AFMA won't be requiring adequate observer coverage on the new notification by Seafish Tasmania Pty Ltd with regards to the Geelong Star?

Answer:

1. Yes. The Department is in regular discussion with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) regarding ecologically sustainable management of Commonwealth fisheries. The extent of observer coverage on any particular vessel in any fishery is a matter for AFMA to determine.
2. Specific measures to protect species of national significance are matters for AFMA to determine. Such measures specific to the *Geelong Star* will be detailed in a Vessel Management Plan, currently under development by AFMA. In preparing the Geelong Star Vessel Management Plan, the Department has encouraged AFMA to consider the findings of the *Report of the Expert Panel on a Declared Commercial Fishing Activity: Final (Small Pelagic Fishery) Declaration 2012*.
3. With respect to matters of species protection, independent observers on a commercial fishing vessel can provide validation that interactions with protected species are reported accurately in the vessel's log book and that bycatch reduction devices are being used effectively. Specific roles for observers on the *Geelong Star* will be articulated in a Vessel Management Plan, currently in preparation.

4. AFMA provides quarterly reports to the Department of the Environment on interactions with protected species in all Commonwealth managed fisheries. These reports are available on AFMA's website. Very few fisheries have 100 per cent observer coverage and many protected species interactions reported by AFMA are derived from vessel log book data recorded when an observer has not been present. Annual verification is undertaken to determine consistency of protected species interaction recording during fishing trips for which observers are present and those trips for which observers are absent.
5. No. The Minister for the Environment has not been advised on specific management measures for the *Geelong Star*. These matters are for AFMA to determine through the development of the Vessel Management Plan.