

Chairperson's Introduction

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I thank the Society for the opportunity to chair this session entitled "Basis for Setting Legal Lengths". The session will consist of three presentations. The speakers will be representatives of the various research and management areas involved in determining legal lengths. The first speaker will be Mr Terry Walker who will be speaking from the scientist's perspective. This will be followed by Mr Ross Winstanley with the Manager's perspective, and then Dr Philip Sluczanowski who will present some recent advances in modelling with particular reference to legal lengths.

Before proceeding I wish to present a sincere apology from Dr Rod Lenanton of the Western Australian Marine Research Laboratories. Rod was to speak on the biological parameter requirements for determining legal lengths but unfortunately was injured in a sporting accident and is unable to attend.

Legal length is a tool commonly used by fisheries managers when pursuing their main objectives of stock sustainability and optimum resource utilisation. These objectives, as well as biological, economic and other factors, must be considered when setting legal lengths.

I would like to comment on one of the matters raised in general discussion during the last session. In relation to comments on the relevance or not of legal lengths, particularly minimum lengths, I would like to highlight that to the general public, particularly the commercial and recreational fishers, it is one management measure that is universally accepted and quite frequently demanded. It is one measure the public perceives as of conservational value whether this is true or not.

The legal length affects stock reproductive potential (e.g. spawning biomass, eggs), catch and catch per effort (in numbers, biomass and value). Different outputs are of interest to different user groups. For example, conservationists are interested mainly in the reproductive potential, processors may want fish of certain market-determined size, whereas fishers usually want to maximise their individual catches and catch rates.

Population dynamics models enable managers to assess the trade-offs between competing issues. Such models are based on information obtained by field biologists who measure the underlying dynamic processes such as fecundity, growth and mortality. "Per-recruit" models are particularly useful when setting size limits.

The effectiveness of legal lengths depends also on how well they can be enforced and to what extent the community supports them.