

# CHAIRPERSON'S INTRODUCTION

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For many scientists involved with applied fisheries research, often the single greatest frustration with their working life centred on not seeing research findings - usually gained from much painstaking study - translated into management policy. In many instances we had only ourselves to blame, particularly at an early stage of our career. Although we pursued the most intimate scientific details of a particular piscatory ploy with zeal, we were often blissfully unaware of the basic socio-economics of the fishery and the non-biological problems associated with its management. The demands and fascination of the research process and the career burgeoning necessity to publish in reputable scientific journals tend to over-ride or obscure associated socio-economic needs and - dare I say it - our social responsibility. If we're not familiar with the broader implications of our research to the fishing industry and the Australian public then we are unlikely to be adept at communicating our findings in a way that managers or the fishing industry can understand and act upon.

Conversely, managers and industry have certainly been known to turn a deaf ear to rational and persuasive scientific reasoning. In the not too distant past, when Australia's fisheries were still largely undeveloped, this seems to have been the norm rather than the exception. There was very much an 'us and them' mentality between scientists, managers and industry. Industry focussed on increasing profits from the expanding fisheries, while managers, most of

whom viewed fisheries as just another chapter of their career in the primary industry public sector, focussed on maintaining the *status quo* and smoothing over any troubled waters. In reality there *were* three groups; scientists, a few of whom had the temerity to voice opinions about resource status; managers, very few of whom had any real understanding about the complexity of managing fisheries as a resource; and industry, all of whom were competing furiously for as large a slice of the resource as possible. Any scientific cautions about 'putting the brakes on' usually precipitated an indignant response from industry, a neutral response from managers, and a three-sided debate which often ventured into the political arena and reached no decision.

Happily, this 'us and them' attitude between the three groups is now largely a thing of the past. Its demise is largely attributable to a single factor - *improved communication* between groups. This has led to a better understanding of the various problems faced by all sectors of the fisheries fraternity and a greater willingness to work together for the common good. An integral aim of any commercial fisheries management plan is to both conserve the resource and maximise its socio-economic returns to the community. As scientists we are aware of the dynamic nature of fish stocks and the difficulties in assessing and monitoring the status of such a resource. Fisheries science will never be able to provide the concise answers

sought by management and industry. However, by adequately communicating the reasons for such imprecision to these groups, cooperative efforts to work around or fill the information gaps can be set in motion to make the management process function as effectively as possible.

Fisheries management is a dynamic, complex process which inevitably pivots around the status of the resource and the demands of those who use it. Effective communication is central to this process. In this session I am pleased to introduce four speakers who will provide a comprehensive overview of the management advice process and the risks and uncertainties associated with its facilitation.

Russell Reichelt is Director of the Fisheries Resources Branch (FRB) of the Bureau of Resource Sciences (BRS). As one of the BRS's major functions is to ensure that scientific developments in primary industries are effectively taken up in government policy and program management, Russell is heavily involved at the fisheries science - policy interface, particularly in providing scientific advice to the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA). The way in which fisheries science advice is supplied to management at the Commonwealth level is undergoing rapid change and Russell will review this process.

Ian Somers is a Senior Research Scientist with CSIRO and has long been associated with the Northern Prawn Fishery (NPF). Ian has witnessed the 'boom and bust' years of this fishery and has played a pivotal role in carrying out research on these valuable stocks and liaising with industry and management to effectively communicate research results. The NPF is now amongst the best managed fisheries in Australia. Ian will describe the evolution of working relationships between NPF industry and researchers and the lessons to be learnt from this process.

Tony Smith is also a Senior Research Scientist with CSIRO. He has played an important

role in a number of fisheries assessments in recent years and his contributions to stock assessments of orange roughy, gemfish and southern shark are known to many of you. In the past year Tony has moved into that difficult terrain of stochastic modelling and risk analysis, which is widely regarded as the direction that resource modelling must head if it is to become more directly useful to fishery managers. Tony will present the most recent thoughts on management strategy evaluation.

Geoff Rohan is the Australian Fisheries Management Authority's General Manager of Southern Fisheries and is one of the new breed of senior Commonwealth fisheries managers; namely those with extensive experience in fisheries, rather than some other primary industry. Before joining AFMA, Geoff had worked with the Australian Fisheries Service and the Northern Territory and South Australian Fisheries Departments. Geoff will discuss what stock assessment advice managers are seeking, the difficulties of dealing with imprecision in the decision-making process and provide insight into the politics of management.

In closing, lest people think I am wearing rose-coloured glasses, I would like to make it quite clear that whereas communication and cooperation between scientists, managers and industry is considerably better than it was a few years ago, there is still great room for improvement. Factional groups still abound. Much work to break down existing barriers remains to be done. Indeed, it is probably not worthwhile engaging in detailed stock assessments unless a cooperative fishery data-gathering system can be established and maintained with industry.

I would also like to pay tribute to our hosts at this workshop, the Fisheries Department of Western Australia, who in many ways pioneered this communication process as part of the management of the western rock lobster fishery. I feel their success in this area is certainly due in part to their policy of encouraging

scientists to become fisheries managers, thereby totally short-circuiting the gap between the two groups.

I would further like to note that a fourth group, that containing the politician, is always extant. In any event, fisheries management policy is inevitably linked to the political process. The most logical, far-sighted policy has little chance of being implemented without the consent and support of the Minister responsible. Direct lobbying by self-interest groups is still very much a part of the game. With Commonwealth fisheries, management is often further complicated by Federal-State jurisdictional and political issues, but I will tactfully draw this introduction to a close.

Note: Keith Sainsbury and Tom Polacheck were unable to take part in the workshop. Their paper has been included in the report of Session 6, but was not available for discussion at the meeting.