

Assisting fishers develop Codes of Practice

SeaNet is a national environmental fisheries extension service for Australia's commercial fishing industry, funded by the Australian Government.

SeaNet Extension Officers work in both state and Commonwealth fisheries with groups of commercial fishers and individual operators who are interested in reducing fishing impacts, environmental 'best practice' and environmental management planning.

SeaNet provides information and advice to fishers who are working to reduce impacts on the environment, including operators developing new fishing gear or codes of practice for responsible fishing.

What is a Code of Practice?

A Code of Practice is a written document, the content largely determined by operators, owners and license holders in an industry. The code is a self-imposed set of rules or "best practice" procedures for carrying out specified activities.

A Code of Practice:

- Recommends standards of behaviour for responsible fishing practices.
- Details operational procedures that should be undertaken to avoid or minimise fishing impacts on the environment.
- Details other procedures that can improve the efficiency of operations.
- Is voluntary and adherence is up to the individual operator. However, the Code can only be fully effective and credible if adopted industry-wide.
- Codes often contain sections that have legal effect through agreements or legislation i.e. Interactions with threatened and protected species & MARPOL (in which case these sections in the Code of Practice are mandatory).
- Provides guidance on a wide range of issues – such as responsible harvesting practices, interactions with bycatch and protected species, waste disposal, catch reporting, product handling and regulatory standards. This can be particularly relevant when new operators enter a fishery.
- Can also include industry's training and safety requirements.
- Gains a high level of credibility and respect when reviewed periodically by an independent body.



Australian Government

SeaNet is a program of OceanWatch Australia funded by the Australian Government.

www.oceanwatch.org.au

OceanWatch Australia is a national environmental, not-for-profit company that works to achieve sustainability in the Australian seafood industry through protecting and enhancing fish habitats, improving water quality and advancing the sustainability of fisheries through action based partnerships with the Australian seafood industry, government, natural resource managers, private enterprise and the community.

Why should it be done?

Increasingly, commercial fisheries worldwide are expected to demonstrate to government bodies and the community the existence of sustainable practices and a responsible approach to fishing.

Stakeholders including management agencies, conservation groups, other resource users and seafood consumers now expect a well-managed and consistent approach to commercial fishing operations.

Bycatch Action Plans (BAP's)

As a requirement of Commonwealth Policy and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, 'Bycatch Action Plans' (BAP) have been completed for many Commonwealth fisheries in Australia.

Some BAP's require a Code of Practice to be developed, reviewed and revised. This assists in recommending strategies to minimise interactions with juveniles and non-target species, and possibly set out areas which, for ecological reasons, should not be harvested.

Fisheries Assessments and Management Plans

Evaluating the environmental performance of fisheries wishing to export seafood products has been completed by the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA), and many fisheries have been granted Wildlife Trade Operation's (WTO) approval or exemption. However, the WTO exemption or approval for a fishery is reviewed every three years and an industry-wide code of practice can help to address sustainability requirements and contribute to the long-term future of the fishery.

Benefits to the fishing industry

The commercial fishing industry will be able to demonstrate to government organisations, key stakeholder groups and the public that it:

- is aware that having access to the resource carries with it an obligation to utilise it in a responsible manner;
- is pro-active, having taken the initiative to develop and adopt environmentally sustainable fishing techniques to maintain healthy marine ecosystems;
- harvests seafood using environmental best practice. These initiatives can also serve as a useful marketing tool for industry products. Today's consumers are more likely to support products harvested in ways that minimise impacts on the environment;
- if used to publicly promote the industry, a Code of Practice can improve public perceptions regarding fishing;
- a Code of Practice can also enable fishers to self regulate commercial operations, keeping abreast of legal obligations (i.e. Area restrictions, handling of protected species and waste disposal).

SeaNet Officers are available throughout Australia to assist with the development of Codes of Practice for the commercial fishing industry.



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