

Title: Reflecting on Recommendations Based Purely on Observations Made While Prawn Trawling in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Prawn Fishery, Australia: By-Catch, Quotas, Fuel Subsidies and Other Policy Matters

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Abstract: In the mid-90s the Commonwealth Scientific and Research Organisation (CSIRO) funded a social science (economics) research trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The objective of the trip was to observe and model commercial fishing patterns in the NPF, and develop an all encompassing model for describing fleet dynamics in the NPF. As an outcome from the trip a Markov fleet dynamics framework was developed (Ngwenya, 1997), and the empirical findings of the fleet dynamics model were reported in Ngwenya (2001). However, recommendations on by-catch, setting of a quota, pricing of prawns, vessel monitoring systems and the likely role of subsidies made on the basis of a qualitative analysis of fishing patterns in the NPF, were not published. In this paper, those recommendations that were based on qualitative analysis are reported. The recommendations are important in as far as they contribute to a historical account of fleet dynamics in the NPF, and also set the scene for developing long-term strategies for a sustainable fishery, using both qualitative and quantitative analyses. There are also fishery management lessons to be learnt from the observations made; in particular, the focus on a multi-disciplinary approach and mixed-methods research. The trip to the Gulf of Carpentaria was a real rare event in that it allowed a non-scientist and non-fisheries expert to observe commercial fishing practices in one of the Australians best managed fisheries. The recommendations made are as significant and current as the Markov dynamics model developed from the trip.