**EXPLANATORY STATEMENT**

**LEGISLATIVE INSTRUMENT**

**Issued by the Authority**

**of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

*Fisheries Management Act 1991*

*Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Amendment Direction No. 1 2025*

Subsection 41A(2) of the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* (the Management Act) provides that the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) may, after consultation with the Management Advisory Committee for the fishery, direct that fishing is not to be engaged in the fishery, or a particular part of the fishery, during a particular period or periods. Prior to making such a direction, AFMA must ensure that each holder of a fishing concession and scientific permit in the relevant fishery is provided with a copy of the direction seven (7) days before that direction takes effect. *Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Direction 2021* (the Seasonal Closures Direction) is a direction made on 15 March 2021 under subsection 41A(2) after consultation with the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee (NORMAC) and notification to concession holders of the Northern Prawn Fishery (the Fishery).

Subsection 41A(3) of the Management Act provides that AFMA may, at any time, vary or revoke a direction made under subsection 41A(2). Subsection 41(2B) also provides that in an emergency a direction may be given under subsection (2) without any consultation, provided a copy of the direction is sent to each holder of a fishing concession. However, AFMA has consulted with NPF Industry Pty Ltd (NPFI) prior to making the Amendment Direction. NPFI is the peak industry body and represents approximately 95 per cent of the concession holders in the Fishery. AFMA has met the requirements of Subsection 41A(4) of the Management Act, which stipulates that AFMA must ensure a copy of the varied direction is sent to each concession holder in the relevant fishery as soon as possible.

The *Fisheries Management* (*Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Amendment Direction No. 1 2025* (the Amendment Direction) varies the Seasonal Closures Direction to provide for additional area closures for specified periods within the Fishery.

The Amendment Direction is a legislative instrument for the purposes of the *Legislation Act 2003* (the Legislation Act).

**Objectives**

The objectives of the Amendment Direction are to provide for additional area closures in the Fishery to protect juvenile tiger prawns, allow sufficient escapement to ensure an adequate spawning biomass of banana prawns and to achieve the maximum economic yield (MEY) from the Fishery.

The Northern Prawn Fishery Harvest Strategy 2024 (Harvest Strategy) includes a MEY-based banana prawn catch trigger, used to calculate the length of the banana prawn fishing season. This trigger is variable and is calculated in-season, based on economic data provided by the peak industry body for the Fishery, NPFI. The high variability and environmental dependency of banana prawn recruitment results in significant variations in stock availability from year to year.

The Harvest Strategy also includes rules that are agreed by all stakeholders which determine catch levels for the banana prawn fishery. These are called decision rules which require the closure of the banana prawn fishery once the MEY threshold is reached. However, these decision rules can only be applied if a ‘representative sample’ of the catch rates for the season across the fleet is reported. All catch data (kg/day, or total catch and total days) for the whole fleet (or greater than 95 per cent of industry members and advisors on the Northern Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee) is considered a ‘representative sample’, with the decision rules specifying the fishery close if this is not available.

On 23 May 2025, NPFI informed AFMA that the average catch of banana prawns per boat per day was 424 kgs, which is lower than the 425 kg per boat per day trigger limit. Therefore, in accordance with the Harvest Strategy, AFMA will close the banana prawn fishery to allow sufficient prawn escapement for an adequate spawning biomass of banana prawns that will contribute to the fishery in the next fishing season (noting the NPF is still open to target tiger prawns). Accordingly, the Amendment Direction, for the specified periods, closes:

1. the Sweers Island - Mornington Island area to protect juvenile tiger prawns;
2. the Fishery area to all fishing west of 138 degrees (Northern Territory waters); and
3. the Fishery area to daylight trawling east of 138 degrees (Queensland waters).

Outside these closures there is continued access to the tiger prawn fishery until 15 June 2025.

**Background on the Fishery**

The Fishery is an area of waters that extends from the coastline to the edge of the Australian Fishing Zone (200 nautical miles offshore) north of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Fishing in the Fishery is for prawns and four major ecologically related species (namely squid, scampi, bugs and scallops). There are two fishing seasons in the Fishery. The area of the Fishery overlaps the areas of a number of fisheries for other species that are managed by Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Fishery is managed by limiting the amount of fishing effort under the *Northern Prawn Fishery Management Plan 1995*. These limitations are known commonly as input controls and are used in the Fishery to address both the biological and economic objectives of the Fishery. The specific types of inputs that are controlled in the Fishery are the amount of fishing time (limited within the fishing seasons), the amounts and types of fishing equipment and the number of boats in the Fishery.

**Consultation**

Variations made under subsection 41A(3) of the Management Act do not require AFMA to consult. However, consistent with section 17 of the Legislation Act*,* AFMA consulted with NPFI prior to making the Amendment Direction. NPFI is the peak industry body and represents approximately 95 per cent of the concession holders in the Fishery. NPFI keeps all concession holders in the Fishery informed on matters relating to the management of the Fishery. NPFI supports the making of the Amendment Direction.

**Regulation Impact Statement**

The Office of Impact Analysis (OIA) has advised that a Regulation Impact Statement is not required for this instrument, consistent with the listed in Table 1 of the OIA’s Approved Carve-outs as at 12 March 2024 for AFMA (OIA23-06107) for instruments of a machinery nature.

**Statement of compatibility prepared in accordance with Part 3 of the *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011***

This legislative instrument is compatible with the human rights and freedoms under section 3 of the *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011*. A full statement of compatibility is set out in the **Attachment A**.

**Details of the Amendment Direction are set out below:**

***Section 1*** Provides that the name of the instrument is the *Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Amendment Direction No. 1 2025*.

***Section 2*** Provides that the instrument commences on on the day after it is registered on the Federal Register of Legislation.

***Section 3*** Provides that the instrument is made under subsection 41A(3) of the *Fisheries Management Act 1991*.

***Section 4*** Gives effect to Schedule 1.

***Schedule 1*** Schedule 1 outlines the amendments to the *Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Direction 2021*.

***Item 1 of***

***Schedule 1*** Omits subsection 8(5) which is not longer applicable and replaces with an updated provision that provides that fishing is not to be engaged in in the area defined in Schedule 11, which is the area of Sweers Island – Mornington Island, during the specified period.

***Item 2 of***

***Schedule 1*** Omits subsection 8(6) which is not longer applicable and replaces with an updated provision that provides that fishing is not to be engaged in in waters west of the meridian of Longitude 138 degrees East during the specified period. This clause prohibits all fishing west of 138 degrees (Northern Territory waters) during the specified period.

***Item 3 of***

***Schedule 1*** Omits subsection 8(7) which is not longer applicable and replaces with an updated provision that provides that fishing is not to be engaged in in waters east of the meridian of Longitude 138 degrees East during the specified period. The effect of this clause is that fishing will be closed to daylight trawling east of 138 degrees (in Queensland waters) during the specified period.

**ATTACHMENT A**

**Statement of Compatibility with Human Rights**

*Prepared in accordance with Part 3 of the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011*

**Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Amendment Direction No. 1 2025**

This Legislative Instrument is compatible with the human rights and freedoms recognised or declared in the international instruments listed in section 3 of the *Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011*.

**Overview of the Legislative Instrument**

The *Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Amendment Direction No. 1 2025* (Amendment Direction) varies the *Fisheries Management (Northern Prawn Fishery Seasonal Closures) Direction 2021* toprovide for additional area closures for specified periods within the Fishery.

In particular, the Amendment Direction varies the closure conditions by providing for additional area closures for the last three weeks of the 2025 banana prawn season to allow sufficient escapement from this fishery and to maximise net economic returns to the Australian community. The Amendment Direction, at the specified periods, closes the Sweers Island - Mornington Island area to protect juvenile tiger prawns; closes all waters west of 138 degrees (Northern Territory waters); and prohibits daylight trawling east of 138 degrees (Queensland waters).

**Human rights implications**

This Legislative Instrument does not engage any of the applicable rights or freedoms.

**Conclusion**

This Legislative Instrument is compatible with human rights as it does not raise any human rights issues.