



Stock assessment project team

Terms of reference

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The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries proudly acknowledges all First Nations peoples (Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders) and the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the country on which we live and work. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and commit to ongoing reconciliation. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Role of the project team

The role of the project team is to provide advice to stock assessment staff. **The project team is not a decision-making body.** Stock assessment staff are to consider all advice given and either adopt the recommendations or provide feedback to the project team on why advice could not or should not be incorporated into the assessment.

The project team is also not a working group. Working groups provide Fisheries Queensland with operational advice on the management of our fisheries. Project teams provide advice to stock assessment staff who are authoring a stock assessment report. It is important that information flows between the two groups, and one way for this to occur is covered in the 'Working group input' section overleaf.

The overarching objective is to support the delivery of assessment results, including stock status and recommended biological catch, in line with agreed timelines and in a consultative and transparent manner. Any work beyond the original scope must be endorsed by the project team, the Manager, Stock Assessment, and the Director, Assessment and Monitoring.

Background

The Queensland Government is committed to ensuring fisheries resources are managed in a sustainable and responsible manner that recognises the interests of all Queenslanders.

An important part of fisheries management is stock assessment. Stock assessment is the process of modelling, or estimating, the status of the fish population (stock). We often refer to the biological stock to emphasise that the starting point in stock assessment is the reproductively connected population.

Fisheries Queensland ensures stock assessments occur in a transparent and evidence-based way by engaging a stock assessment 'project team'. This is about choosing the right mix of skill sets, clearly defining team member roles and tasks, and clearly documenting the process. The project team terms of reference have been designed to support this.

Stock assessments within Fisheries Queensland have been guided by project teams with associated terms of reference since 2018. The present document is an update to the original terms of reference. This update has been made because Fisheries Queensland is expanding membership to external (non-departmental) partners to broaden the knowledge base available to support and inform the assessment and to improve transparency of the stock assessment process.

When is a project team required?

A project team is required any time Fisheries Queensland is relying on data analysis or modelling as the primary basis for harvest strategy decisions.

Membership

Project team members are invited based on their fishery knowledge, scientific or technical expertise.

A project team will usually consist of one or more persons for each of the following categories:

- Stock Assessment officer – to represent the team responsible for delivering the stock assessment and consider the advice from the project team
- Fishery Monitoring officer – to advise on the monitoring data available and matters to consider in the use and interpretation of this data

- fishery management expertise and fishery knowledge – to advise on operational aspects of the fishery and historical management changes that might have to be accounted for in the modelling
- independent reviewer – to advise on a suitable modelling environment and approaches, and to provide an independent technical perspective on modelling decisions (this person must not be from the author team responsible for this assessment and may be external to the department – ideally this person will be available for the first meeting)
- external expertise (optional) – scientists, managers and fishers that may add important knowledge and transparency (e.g. other jurisdictions when dealing with shared stocks, or stakeholder expertise with respect to data such as fishing club data or historical catch records)
- chair (usually Manager, Stock Assessment) – to chair each project team update, organise minute-taking, provide support to the stock assessment team and enable oversight of the stock assessment schedule, deliverables and liaison with the Fisheries Queensland Executive.

Obligations and responsibilities of members

Being a project team member has important obligations and responsibilities. Specifically, members have to:

- commit to attend all project updates either in person or by Microsoft Teams (meetings can be rescheduled if some members are unable to attend at the proposed time)
- commit to reading and evaluating project material prior to the meetings
- constructively negotiate to achieve acceptable outcomes and compromise when necessary
- respect the views expressed by other members
- avoid pursuing self-interest and participate in discussions in an objective and impartial manner
- assist in the communication of complex ideas and issues in a clear and simple manner
- seek input prior to the project team meeting from other members of their unit or network
- observe confidentiality and exercise tact and discretion when dealing with sensitive issues
- not publish or communicate to any person, to whom they are not authorised to publish or communicate, any fact or document that comes to their knowledge or into their possession because they are a project team member and that (because of its confidential nature) it is their duty not to disclose
- promptly advise the Chair in writing (or announce at the start of a meeting) of any conflict-of-interest issues that arise, including those that may be perceived by others or have the potential be a conflict, subsequent to appointment
- conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the Queensland community's expectations for reasonable conduct at all times – this requires a commitment to honest, fair and respectful engagement, including showing respect towards all persons involved in project team business
- review draft results and the stock assessment report
- present to relevant fishery working groups if requested.

Non-project team members may be invited to the first meeting to ensure that the project team obtains initial input from a variety of people within Fisheries Queensland. Subsequent project team meetings may also call upon non-project team members to provide input into particular areas of the discussion. This may include online feedback sessions with stakeholders when stock assessment project milestones are reached (e.g. catch history, catch per unit effort, age-length etc.).

Meeting frequency

An initial meeting will take place at the start of the stock assessment and the project team will subsequently meet at least monthly, or more frequently if required, to monitor progress against assessment milestones. In some instances, the assessment lead may send out written material or updates in lieu of a meeting. If project team members would prefer to discuss the written material amongst the team, then a project team meeting will be organised.

The intent of regular meetings is that they will be relatively brief, detailed discussions aimed at supporting the assessment team, particularly in making the many decisions required to keep the assessment moving forward. Making these decisions in the project team environment will also assist with record keeping.

The chair and stock assessment lead will arrange meeting dates and times, and organise minute-taking. Detailed minutes will be kept and used to support methods and decision-making for write up in the stock assessment report.

Project team meeting records

The points to be covered at each meeting include decisions, progress towards milestones, problems, interim results and outputs.

The first meeting should canvas the biology and life history characteristics of the species to be assessed, operational and historical management of the fishery, available data sources, past assessments and intended assessment approach (including the model structure, software and required outputs).

Each subsequent meeting will address and update a defined set of agenda items and milestones including:

- agenda
- actions arising from last update
- model inputs and outputs
- suitable model for the assessment
- progress towards timelines
- summary of the discussion.

A short presentation with the meeting objectives, topics for discussion and actions from the last meeting will guide the meeting. A single presentation for each assessment will be stored on a Fisheries Queensland SharePoint site and will assist in providing a record of the meeting. This presentation will be emailed to the project team prior to the meeting so that members can conduct any required research prior to the session.

Discussion notes will record major discussion points, decisions and actions raised during the discussion. These notes and the supporting presentation will be available to the project team through SharePoint or Microsoft Teams.

Working group input

Input from the relevant working group(s) may be sought upon the generation of various 'model input milestones'. These will vary depending on the assessment, but will usually include catch history, catch rate standardisation and age-length frequencies. When this feedback is sought, it will usually be via a focused video (remote) meeting to allow working group members to provide comments and make suggestions.

Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest occurs when private interests interfere, or appear to interfere, with the performance of official duties. All members must perform their role/contribute in a fair and unbiased way, ensuring that decisions made are not impacted by self-interest, private affiliations, or the likelihood of gain or loss for them or others. Private interests include personal, professional or business interests, as well as the interests of individuals that you associate with, such as family, dependants and friends.

Conflicts of interest fall into three categories – actual (there is a direct conflict between your current duties and your existing private interests), potential (your role and private interests could conflict in the future) and perceived (it could appear that your private interests could improperly influence the performance of your role). Conflicts of interest can be pecuniary (if there is a reasonable likelihood of financial loss or gain) or non-pecuniary (if there is no financial component, but may involve self-interest, personal or family relationships or other affiliations).

All conflicts of interest (actual, potential and perceived) must first be identified and declared to the Chair at the first meeting. Steps can then be taken to appropriately manage and resolve the matter in the public interest. Having a conflict of interest alone is not considered misconduct. However, it is important that members are open about the conflict of interest, how the conflict of interest is managed and ensuring a conflict of interest is resolved in the public interest. Once reported, the Chair will then make an assessment about what action, if any, is required to manage the conflict of interest. This may include the member being asked to leave the meeting for discussion on specific items. Members must actively participate in the process to manage or resolve conflicts of interest in the public interest and adhere to all agreed resolution strategies. If the circumstances of a member change, they should consider whether this brings about any new conflicts of interest, or changes to an existing conflict of interest.
