



# Stock assessment project team

Terms of reference

June 2024

## 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 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 skillsets, clearly defining team member roles and tasks, and clearly documenting the process. The project team terms of reference have been designed to support this.

## When is a project team required?

Any time that Fisheries Queensland is relying on analysis or modelling as the primary basis for fishery management decisions.

## Objective

The role of the project team is to provide advice to stock assessment staff. 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 overarching objective is to support the delivery of assessment results, in line with agreed timelines, 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, Fishery Science.

Note that the project team is not a working group. Fishery 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.

## Membership

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

Each project team will usually consist of one person from each of the following categories:

- stock assessment – to represent the author team responsible for delivering the stock assessment
- fishery monitoring – to advise on what biological and recreational monitoring data is available and matters to consider in the use and interpretation of this data
- fishery management – to advise on operational aspects of the fishery and historical management changes that might have to be accounted for in the modelling
- additional internal expertise – this may include for example database and logbook expertise, ecological risk expertise, regulatory policy expertise, economic expertise, recreational expertise
- independent scientist – to provide an independent technical perspective on modelling decisions (this person must not be from the stock assessment team and may be external to Fisheries Queensland, and if this person is funded or co-funded by interested stakeholders this must be explicitly declared to the chair)

- additional external expertise – scientists, managers and fishers that may add important knowledge and transparency for example other jurisdictions when dealing with shared stocks, stakeholder expertise with respect to data such as fishing club data or historical catch records, fishing techniques and contemporary or historical practices
- chair – to chair each project team meeting and organise minute taking (this person must not be from the stock assessment team and may be external to Fisheries Queensland)
- Manager, Stock Assessment (or proxy) – to provide support to the stock assessment team, to enable oversight of the stock assessment schedule, deliverables, and liaison with the Fisheries 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 (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 where necessary
- respect the views expressed by other members
- avoid pursuing self-interest and participate in discussion 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 which comes to their knowledge, or into their possession because they are a project team member and which (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 stock assessment report.

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 additional 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 roughly monthly, 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 Manager, Stock Assessment, will liaise with chair and the project team to 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, outputs
- suitable model for this assessment
- progress towards timelines
- summary of the discussion.

A short presentation with the meeting objectives, topics for discussion, actions from the last meeting will guide the meeting. A single presentation for each assessment will be stored on SharePoint and will assist in providing a record of the meeting. This presentation should 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 MTeams. A summary of the project team decisions will be included as an appendix in the published report.

## 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 focussed video (remote) meeting wherein working group members can 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, and if so report this to the chair.