



Management changes for the fishing tour operator sector

Why the changes?

The aim of the intended management changes is to ensure sustainability of reef fish stocks around Darwin and improve the management of the fishing tour operator (FTO) sector.

Golden snapper and black jewfish stocks are being overfished and will continue to decline under current arrangements. In order to protect breeding fish and allow vulnerable reef fish stocks to rebuild, fishing mortality must be reduced. Taking action now will mean improved fishing experiences in the future. Delay will see fish populations and fishing quality continue to deteriorate.

Changes to the management arrangements for the recreational and commercial fishing sectors to recover at-risk reef species have also been announced.

What are the changes?

Charter trips will largely be managed via changes to recreational fishing rules, which include reef fish protection areas, and new possession and vessel limits to allow the recovery of “at risk” species. This package will reduce the catch of vulnerable reef fish and allow breeding stocks to rebuild over time. For a full understanding of these changes refer to the Recreational Fishing Rules fact sheet.

Following consultation with licence holders and the NT Guided Fishing Industry Association, fishing tour operators will also be subject to a number of new management measures including:

- A Western Management Zone for reef fish from the WA/NT border to Vashon Head on Cobourg Peninsula, encompassing all waters extending out to the Australian Fishing Zone (AFZ) (Figure 1).
- All existing fishing tour operator licences will be made transferable and permitted to operate within the zone. No new licences to target reef fish will be issued within the Western zone.
- New licences will continue to be issued for operation outside the zone to accommodate regional and Indigenous development opportunities.
- A new fishing guide licence will be introduced to improve business efficiency and client safety. The licence will provide businesses with the flexibility to employ guides at short notice and ensure appropriately trained and professional guides are employed within the industry. Guides will be required to undergo a criminal history check and possess the necessary vessel and first aid qualifications.

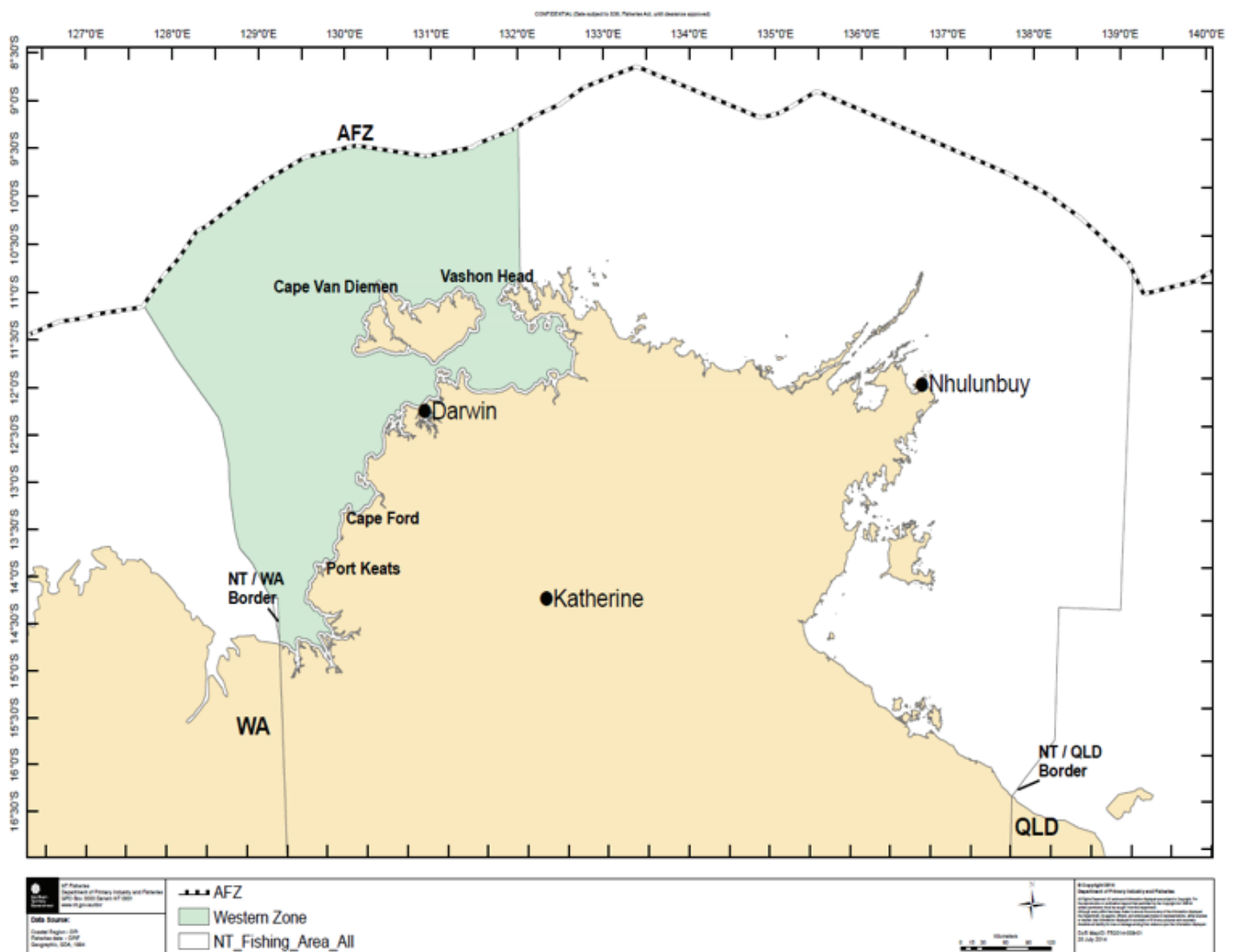


Figure 1. Western Management Zone for the Charter Fishing Sector.

Other proposals under development

- Further management arrangements will be developed to reduce the potential of increasing fishing effort on “at risk” reef fish stocks within the fishery. This work will be undertaken as a priority in consultation with the NT Guided Fishing Industry Association, with a view to completion by the end of 2015.
- The scope of operations outside the Western Management Zone will be specified to ensure the sustainability of operations, increase business and investment certainty; and outline clear pathways for the regional development within the fishery.
- Investigation will also be undertaken into the merit of a Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) for charter vessels to improve reporting accuracy and compliance.
- The introduction of a formal observer program to comprehensively assess the accuracy and consistency of logbook reporting. This program will expand observer coverage to address publicly raised concerns by operators within the sector that current logbook data is not sufficiently accurate for management purposes.

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