

Our file ref: F2013/0163

To: Licensed fishing tour operators

Re: LICENSING CHANGES

Following consultation with the NT Guided Fishing Industry Association (NTGFIA), new licensing arrangements have been agreed for Northern Territory fishing tour operators (FTOs). The following information relates to all FTOs and should be noted carefully.

Future issue of FTO licences and licence transferability

- FTO licences issued at 27 February 2015 are now transferable and endorsed to use all target fishing methods in the Western Management Zone (WMZ).
- FTO licences issued after that date will be transferable but they will not be endorsed for targeted reef and bottom fishing in the WMZ.
- Transfer provisions enable the sale and lease of FTO licences.
- The current fee payable to the Fisheries Licensing Office for a licence transfer is \$260.
- Stamp duty is also payable to the Northern Territory Revenue Office for licence transfers.

Managing potential for increasing reef fishing effort in the Western Management Zone by the FTO sector

The recent changes to the management arrangements for reef fish in the WMZ introduced a number of measures designed to reduce the fishing pressure on 'at-risk' fish species. The changes, including reduced personal possession limits, the introduction of vessel limits and the declaration of reef fish protection areas were all designed to help rebuild fish stocks and to reduce the catch of golden snapper by 50% and black jewfish by 20%.

Now that these changes are in place, the Department has instigated a rigorous monitoring program to assess recovery rates in fish stocks. A watch has also been placed on FTO activity to monitor trends in target species and to assess if further management action, to limit the ability of inshore FTOs to convert to reef fishing operations, is required. Options such as licence conditions that limit the operational range of a licence to current vessel survey range or the application of client capacity controls were considered during the development of the management package but will not be introduced at this time.

It is the intention of the Department to, as much as practically possible, cap reef fishing effort by FTOs in the WMZ at current levels.

Guide Licence

In his announcement on reef fish management changes made on February 27 2015, the Minister also stated his intention to introduce a new Guide licence category for the FTO sector. The NTGFIA strongly supported this initiative as it will enable FTO licensees to employ appropriately qualified guides at short notice and improve business flexibility. Regulations for the introduction of the Guide Licence are currently being prepared and it is expected to have this new licence operational by January 1 2016.

The following is a summary of the new FTO licensing framework, incorporating the Guide Licence:

- Business owners will require a FTO licence.
- Employed guides will require a Guide licence.
- A FTO licence may only be operated by a Guide licence holder.
- Guide licences will be issued to individuals and not companies or partnerships.
- Guide licences will be non-transferable and may be issued for up to five years.
- Solo operators will require both a FTO licence and a Guide licence. Solo operators will be issued with one Guide Licence at no additional cost to their annual licence fee.
- The Guide licence will negate existing nominated person and short term operator provisions for FTOs.
- Guide licence holders will require a current senior first aid certificate and appropriate vehicle/craft operator qualifications.
- Applicants and subsequent Guide licence holders will be required to pass a National Police Check and be assessed as 'fit and proper' prior to licences being issued and/or renewed.
- The annual fee for FTO licences will remain at \$800 for 2015-16.
- The proposed annual fee for a guide licence will be \$150. Payment for longer term licences will attract a sliding-scale discount.

Guide licensees will be responsible for ensuring that:

- While on tour, the fishing operations are conducted in accordance with the FTO licence they are working under.
- Their licence is displayed while on tour.

All FTOs should consider how the new Guide licence requirement will affect their operation.

Licence application forms and other relevant information pertaining to the operation of the Guide licence will be sent to FTO licensees in a future mail-out.

Improved reporting by the FTO sector

The Department is seeking to improve the quality and timeliness of information on fishing activities submitted by FTOs (log return data). It has been proposed that it be mandated that log return data should be completed at the conclusion of each fishing day, before the clients disembark the fishing platform, and be to available for inspection by a Fisheries Officer on request. The NTGFIA has expressed concern about the practicality of this approach, stating that it is sometimes difficult for smaller operators to maintain log books whilst on the vessel and actively helping clients. I have referred this matter to the NTGFIA for advice on how to achieve the Department's need for better quality information while being practical to comply with from an industry perspective.

The introduction of the WMZ, FTO licence transfer provisions and the additional changes detailed above will herald a more contemporary management and licensing regime for Northern Territory FTOs. These changes will help to address fishery sustainability issues, meet future growth demand in the guided fishing industry and support Government's broader tourism development objectives. Further discussions

with the NTGFIA will include the possibility of electronic vessel monitoring systems and the placement of Fisheries observers on FTO vessels.

If you have any questions relating to the new arrangements please contact NTGFIA Executive Officer, Mr Graeme Williams on telephone 0412 481592, or Fisheries Manager, Mr Phil Hall on telephone 89992372.

Attached for your information is a copy of the Fact Sheet prepared at the time of the announcement of the new management measures for the FTO sector.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Glenn Schipp', written in a cursive style.

Glenn Schipp
Director Fisheries and Aquaculture
10 August 2015