



Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

The Hon Joe Helper MP
Minister for Agriculture
PO Box 175
Maryborough VIC 3465

Dear Minister

I am writing to you as Delegate of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts in relation to the re-assessment of the Victorian Sea Urchin Fishery (SUF) under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The SUF was first assessed by the Australian Government Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (formerly the Department of the Environment and Heritage) in November 2005 under Part 13A of the EPBC Act in accordance with the Australian Government *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries*. This assessment was based on the submission provided by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). In light of a number of concerns that needed to be addressed to manage environmental risks in the short-medium term, the SUF was declared an approved Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under Part 13A of the EPBC Act. This declaration allowed the export of product from the fishery for a period of three years.

In August 2008, DPI submitted the *Ecological Assessment of the Victorian Sea Urchin Fishery Reassessment Report* for assessment under the EPBC Act to allow continued export approval for this fishery. The submission has been assessed for the purposes of the wildlife trade provisions of Part 13A of the EPBC Act.

I am pleased to advise that assessment of the fishery is now complete. The new assessment report will be available on the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts website at:
<http://www.environment.gov.au/coasts/fisheries/index.html>.

In considering the current management regime, I am satisfied that the operation of the fishery is consistent with the objects of the wildlife trade provisions in Part 13A of the EPBC Act. I am also satisfied that it is unlikely to be detrimental to the survival or conservation status of any taxon to which the fishery operation relates, or threaten any relevant ecosystem over the next three years.

Performance against the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries – 2nd Edition* is adequate, however there are a number of issues that need to be addressed to contain environmental risks in the longer term, particularly regarding the delay in developing management arrangements and the lack of information on biology and ecology of target species. Hence, I propose to declare the SUF an

approved WTO under Part 13A of the EPBC Act, subject to the three conditions at **Attachment A**. This declaration would allow the export of product from the SUF until 4 November 2011.

While there are some environmental risks associated with this fishery, I consider that DPI is committed to addressing these issues and is already taking proactive steps in most areas. Officers from our two departments have discussed key areas requiring ongoing attention. In addition to the conditions to the WTO declaration, I understand that they have agreed to a number of recommended actions, focusing on addressing key issues for the SUF, to be implemented before the next Australian Government assessment of the fishery. The recommendations at **Attachment B** have been an important factor in my decision to declare the fishery a WTO and I look forward to receiving your confirmation that they will be implemented.

Yours sincerely



Claire Howlett

Delegate of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts

23 October 2008

Attachment A

Conditions on the Wildlife Trade Operation Declaration for the Victorian Sea Urchin Fishery (SUF)

1. Operation of the fishery will be carried out in accordance with the Sea Urchin Fishery (SUF) management arrangements made under the Victorian *Fisheries Act 1995* and *Fisheries Regulations 1998*.
2. Department of Primary Industries (DPI) will advise the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) of any intended change to the fishery's management arrangements that could affect the assessment against the criteria on which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) decisions are based.
3. DPI to produce and present reports to DEWHA annually as per Appendix B to the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition* (the Guidelines).

Recommendations to the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) on the ecologically sustainable management of the Victorian Sea Urchin Fishery (SUF)

The SUF is a relatively well-managed fishery with a range of management measures to promote the ecologically sustainable harvesting of species from the fishery. These measures include: very limited number of entitlements, and gear restrictions (hand collection only).

The following recommendations have been made to further strengthen the effectiveness of the management arrangements for the SUF and minimise environmental risks in the short to medium term. Unless a specific time frame is provided in the recommendation each recommendation must be addressed before the next assessment of the SUF in November 2011.

1. DPI to review the management arrangements of the SUF, with consideration of progressing, the SUF, to a developed fishery. The review should include an assessment of the effectiveness of the current performance indicators and measures and consideration of suitable performance indicators and measures for impacts on the ecosystem.
2. DPI to:
 - a) conduct an ecological risk assessment (ERA) for all aspects of the SUF, including, but not limited to, areas at risk of localised and serial depletion; and
 - b) develop and implement appropriate management measures, including priority research needs, to address risks identified in the ERA.
3. DPI to collaborate with other jurisdictions and actively pursue consistent and complementary research needs and management arrangements for target species.