



Briefing Note: Gulf of Carpentaria (GC1) Mud Crab Fishery TACC

Date: 24 April 2025

Issue: Review of the GC1 mud crab fishery Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) following a 2024 under catch triggering Decision Rule 1.7.

Context:

- The GC1 mud crab fishery is a high-value, small-scale commercial fishery in Queensland's Gulf of Carpentaria, supporting employment, economic activity, and food production in remote communities.
- The current TACC of the GC1 mud crab fishery is 108 tonnes.
- In 2024, the commercial harvest was 67.8 tonnes (62.8% of TACC). This triggered Decision Rule 1.7 under the *Queensland Mud Crab Harvest Strategy 2021-2026*.
- Under Decision Rule 1.7, the TACC may be reduced by the Queensland Government to 74.58 tonnes unless justified on socio-economic grounds.
- Decision Rule 1.7 was designed to address under catch due to ecological and sustainability reasons.
- The GC1 mud crab fishery is sustainable.
- The level of under catch is not due to a decline in mud crab stocks. Rather, it is the result of:
 - Weather affecting the seasonal catch;
 - Significant financial and operational pressures affecting industry operators; and
 - Changing ownership and utilisation of quota among quota holders.
- In this context, a TACC reduction does not have ecological justification and would exacerbate economic challenges.

Key Evidence:

- **Weather:**
 - The Gulf of Carpentaria mud crab stock is sustainable, with biomass estimated at 58% of unfished levels (2017-18 data) and catch rates rising from 29 kg/day (2019-20) to 47.6 kg/day (2021-22) (Status of Australian Fish Stocks 2023).
 - The region's wet season (November-April) typically enhances crab recruitment, aligning with stable stock indicators (J.B. Robins, A.R. Northrop, M.A. Grubert, R.C. Buckworth, M. McLennan, W.D. Sumpton, and T. Saunders) June 2020.
 - Favourable successive monsoon rainfall since October 2021 will have supported the breeding biomass to underpin recruitment though these years including 2024.

- **There are significant headwinds affecting industry revenue and costs:**
 - **Input Costs:** Freight costs for live mud crabs to southern ports were \$9.80-\$10.90/kg in January 2024, reflecting the fishery's remote location. Fuel prices in Karumba reached 225.6 c/L for ULP 91, compared to 204.8 c/L in Brisbane (Q2 2024), a 20-30 c/L premium (FuelPrice Australia).
 - **Quota Leasing:** Costs of \$3-\$5/kg absorb significant revenue, deterring fishing effort.
 - **Market Prices:** Wholesale "beach prices" have not kept pace with rising costs, despite retail prices ranging from \$35-\$95/kg.
- **Industry is also facing several operational challenges:**
 - Crew shortages, illness, and strategic "pulse fishing" (targeting high-price periods like Christmas) reduced fishing effort in 2024.
 - Documented below average catches in the Mapoon and Weipa regions contributed to under catch in the 2024 calendar year.
- **Quota ownership and utilisation patterns are also changing:**
 - An ageing fishing cohort and the 2023 exit of high-performing fishers reduced catch efficiency, with daily catch rates dropping from 55 kg/day in 2023 to 39 kg/day in 2024.
 - Quota underutilisation by non-fishing owners (27% of quota pool) contributes to the shortfall, reflecting structural challenges in quota management.

Conclusions:

- The 2024 under catch is primarily driven by economic pressures (high input costs, low profitability), operational constraints (limited effort), and social factors (workforce changes), not a decline in mud crab stocks.
- Stock assessments confirm sustainability, with biomass well above limit reference points and improving catch rates, negating the need for a TACC reduction on ecological grounds.
- Reducing the TACC to 74.58 tonnes risks further compressing fisher margins, potentially leading to job losses, reduced participation, and long-term decline in the fishery's viability.
- Decision Rule 1.7's automatic TACC reduction is overly rigid, failing to account for external drivers. Discussions in 2022 proposed amending its assessment period to 2024-2025 for flexibility (Crab Fishery Working Group).

Policy Options:

- **Option 1 (Recommended):** Maintain TACC at 108 tonnes, supported by evidence of stable stocks and external under catch drivers. This aligns with the Queensland Harvest Strategy Policy to balance ecological, economic, and social outcomes.
- **Option 2:** Maintain TACC at 108 tonnes and introduce support measures, such as airfreight or fuel subsidies, to enhance fisher participation and quota utilisation.
- **Critique of Decision Rule 1.7:** The rule's reliance on catch thresholds ignores external factors like economic constraints or environmental variability. A review is needed to incorporate comprehensive assessments, as proposed in prior working group discussions (Crab Fishery Working Group).

Ministerial Considerations:

- **Ecological:** Stable stocks, single take male mud crab harvest and favourable environmental conditions justify maintaining the TACC, ensuring compliance with the Fisheries Act 1994 sustainability objectives.
- **Economic:** Preserving the TACC protects jobs and revenue in remote Gulf communities, critical for regional development. A reduction could disproportionately affect small-scale fishers.
- **Political:** Industry stakeholders, including quota holders, support maintaining the TACC (Business Queensland). Environmental groups may advocate for stronger stock protections, but current data confirms sustainability. Ongoing consultation with Indigenous fishers aligns with inclusive policy priorities (DAF Traditional Fishing).

- **Risks:** Persistent under catch could retrigger Decision Rule 1.7, highlighting the need to review and implement more flexible triggers that consider socioeconomic and environmental drivers to better inform fishery decisions

Recommendations:

1. Maintain the TACC at 108 Tonnes
2. Revise Decision Rule 1.7 for Adaptive Management
3. Develop a Tailored Harvest Strategy for GC1 by 2026
4. Implement Targeted Support Programs
5. Fund Research and Monitoring for Informed Decisions
6. Engage Stakeholders for Consensus

Next Steps:

- Seek Ministerial approval for the recommendations.
- Engage stakeholders (industry, recreational, charter, Indigenous groups, environmental NGOs) to communicate the decision and address concerns.
- Commission updated economic modelling and stock assessments for the 2026 review to ensure ongoing sustainability.
- Draft a revised Harvest Strategy prior to the 2026 review that segregates the GC1 fishery and incorporates better decision-making rules that are informed by socio, economic, operational and environmental drivers.

Attachments:

- *Technical note - Gulf of Carpentaria Mud Crab Fishery Quota Management Issues.*

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Attachment 1: Technical note

Gulf of Carpentaria Mud Crab Fishery Quota Management Issues

1. Introduction

The Gulf of Carpentaria (GC1) mud crab fishery is a small-scale high-value commercial fishery in Queensland, capped at a Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) of 108 tonnes. It is regionally significant for employment, economic activity, and local food production in remote Gulf communities, with a strong reputation for sustainability and premium product quality (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

In 2024, the fishery recorded a commercial harvest of 67.8 tonnes, or 62% of the TACC, triggering Decision Rule 1.7, the “Breakout Rule,” under the Queensland Mud Crab Harvest Strategy 2021–2026 (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, 2021). This rule requires a review and potential TACC reduction to 10% above the most recent harvest (approximately 74.58 tonnes), which could result in significant economic harm, reduced fisher participation, and long-term structural decline (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

The Queensland Harvest Strategy Policy (v2.01) and Fisheries Act 1994 mandate balancing ecological, economic, and social outcomes (Queensland Government, 2021). Decision Rule 1.7, intended to address “paper quota holders,” misinterprets the 2024 under catch, which is driven by operational and economic factors, not inactive quota holders (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Applying the rule without an economic impact assessment violates policy requirements for social and economic considerations (Queensland Government, 2021). A 16 April 2025 letter from Fisheries Queensland indicates the government is considering maintaining the TACC, supported by stakeholder input and a socio-economic survey (D’Silva, 2025).

This technical note provides evidence-based insights into the trends and issues impacting the GC1 mud crab sector, arguing that the 2024 under catch is driven by external economic, environmental, social and operational factors, not stock depletion.

It supports the industry and fishery managers current view that the TACC should remain at 108 tonnes and the Breakout Rule should be re-considered. Moreover, it is the strong view of the GC1 quota owner group that the Harvest strategy be reviewed in 2026 and the following things be considered:

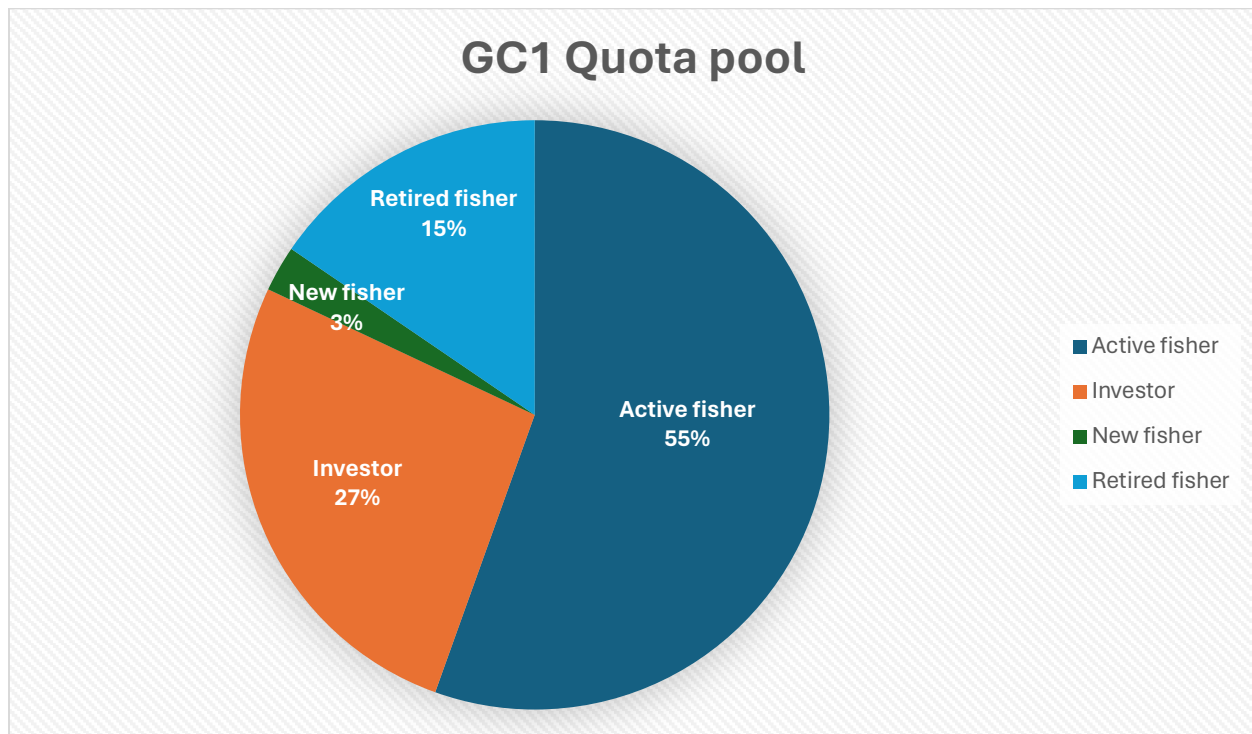
- Separation of the EC1, GC1 and Sand crab fisheries in recognition of their divergent needs;
- Recalibrate the Breakout Rule considering both its % break and the timeline over which it triggers intervention; and
- Incorporate better decision-making rules that are informed by social, economic, operational, and environmental drivers.

The analysis below draws on government reports, industry data, stakeholder consultations, and recent research, aligning with the Queensland Harvest Strategy Policy’s requirement for balanced ecological, economic, and social outcomes (Queensland Government, 2021).

2. Ownership, Quota Utilisation and Structural Issues

The GC1 fishery operates under an Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system, requiring a minimum 1.2-tonne entitlement (Business Queensland, 2025). The GC1 quota ownership group at this time of technical note is defined by 19 owners, represented by Active Fishers (55%), Retired Fishers (15%), New Fishers (3%) and Investors (27%). (See Figure 2) (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Figure 1 – GC1 Quota Pool by owner type



Source: (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025) (Fishnet 2025)

Since the inception of quota in 2021, the pool of quota holders has reduced from 56 to the current 19 owners. The GC1 permanent quota purchase price has ranged between \$80 to \$105 per kg, supported by fisher and investor confidence in the Gulf of Carpentaria mud crab fishery.

There are several quota holdings held by private impact investors representing 27% of the current GC1 quota pool. These owners have divergent commercial leasing strategies, with some choosing to focus on leasing primarily to first nations fishers, with the balance maintaining their quota for existing and new commercial fishers.

While investors are valuable to our fishery context, they do represent higher risk of underutilisation owing to their reliance on leasing to an ageing fishing cohort and under resourced indigenous fishery sector. It should be noted that the investor quota pool was highly underutilized in the 2024 fishing calendar year. (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Any revisions to the Harvest strategy must acknowledge the investor effect to the commercial fishery achieving catch limits set under a TACC. Fishery Manager must clearly understand investor strategies to better inform decision making tools used under the Harvest Strategy.

3. Market and Economic Drivers

The GC1 fishery’s performance is defined by market and supply / demand drivers, high operational costs, and quota utilisation challenges, which collectively explain the 2024 under catch and underscore the need to maintain the current TACC.

3.1 Market Trends and Pricing

The GC1 fishery targets A-grade male mud crabs (*Scylla serrata*), sold live in domestic markets, where they historically fetch a premium due to their high selectivity and quality.

However, market prices for A-grade mud crabs at the Sydney Fish Market in 2022–2024 have declined in real terms, averaging \$36.48/kg in 2022, \$34.69/kg in 2023, and \$36.59/kg in 2024 (Sydney Fish Market, 2025). In addition to pandemic shocks, the fishery faces intense competition from other Australian mud crab fisheries (Northern Territory, New South Wales, and East Coast Queensland) and an increasing volume of frozen imported mud crab products from Southeast Asia, which are stagnated and exerting downward pressure on prices in the domestic market. (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Simultaneously wholesale beach prices, critical for fishers’ profitability, have not risen sufficiently to offset rising operational costs. (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

The declining real value of mud crab influences fishers’ behaviour, incentivising either increased effort to maintain economic yield or selective fishing during high-price periods, such as Christmas or when other fisheries underproduce (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Historical data from 2017–2019 show average prices of \$32.27/kg (2017–18) and \$30.98/kg (2018–19), with a notable drop to \$20.00/kg in 2020 due to pandemic-related disruptions (BDO EconSearch, 2020; ABC News, 2020). The recovery to \$36.48/kg by 2022 highlights market stabilization, but the narrow margins between beach and wholesale prices continue to compress profitability.

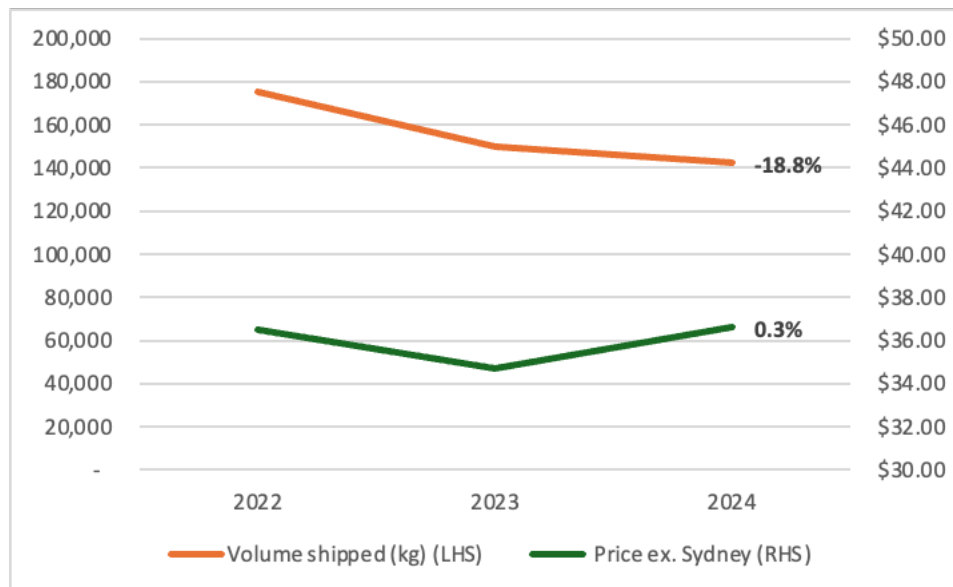
Reducing the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) at this stage would exacerbate economic pressures without addressing market dynamics. Analysis of Sydney Fish Market data shows no significant price response to reduced supply, suggesting that external factors, such as consumer demand and competing imports, dominate price trends (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025). Maintaining the TACC at 108 tonnes would provide fishers with flexibility to optimize catches during high-price windows, supporting economic viability.

Table 1: Historical Economic Indicators for GC1 Mud Crab Fishery

Year	Average Price (\$/kg)	GVP (\$m)
2017-18	32.27	4.7
2018-19	30.98	4.4

Source: BDO EconSearch (2020)

Figure 2: Sales data Sydney Fish Market A grade mud crab all types 2022-2024



Source: Sydney Fish Market (2025)

3.2 Operational and Supply Chain Impacts

Operating in the remote Gulf of Carpentaria imposes substantial costs, which have been exacerbated by inflationary pressures on goods and services since 2022. Key expenses including but not limited to transport, fuel, labour, quota, and other costs such as packaging and bait fishing equipment have all increased since COVID 19 and onward through 2022 to 2024.

These costs collectively effect fishers' profitability and influence the behaviour of active fishers as well as act as a major deterrent to fishers' engagement and new entrants emerging in the fishery.

These outcomes will certainly contribute to future likelihoods of the TACC not being fully utilised.

Below outlines an analysis of several key costs from 2022-2024 which have influenced fisher behaviour and the overall economic viability to fish.

Air freight costs

Fishers rely on road and air logistics to supply fuel, packaging, crew, bait and any other goods and services vital to their commercial fishing needs, as well as to send their live catch to market.

The fishery has endured significant increases to air freight since COVID 19 and onward to 2024. Summarized below is a snapshot for the purpose of demonstrating current cost to send 50 kg of live mud crab from Weipa to Cairns and onward to Sydney and Melbourne. (See Table 2).

Airfreight costs impact operators during extended periods of monsoon activity which results in long periods of road closures and can typically overlap with peak selling periods of Christmas and Chinese New Year. Outside monsoon periods road services can be utilized for the leg from Karumba or Weipa to Cairns. This represents a price saving of \$2.50 p/kg

Table 2: Airfreight Costs for Shipping Mud Crabs (50 kg Shipment, January 2024)

Route	Airline	Cost per kg (\$/kg)
WEI-CNS-SYD	Virgin Australia	9.86
WEI-CNS-SYD	Qantas Airways	9.80
WEI-CNS-MLB	Virgin Australia	10.84
WEI-CNS-MLB	Qantas Airways	10.90

Source: Airways Cairns 2025.

Road freight costs

Road freight costs in Northern Australia increased between 2022 and 2024, primarily driven by rising fuel prices, labor shortages, and global supply chain pressures. Increased fuel costs, exacerbated by global crude oil demand and geopolitical events like the Russia-Ukraine war, significantly raised road freight expenses and like the air freight providers, they implemented floating fuel levies to standard freight rates. Soaring fuel prices in 2022 and 2023 eroded fisher profit margins, where carriers passed costs to fishers to support their revenue base. The main road carriers into the region, Hawkins Freight, Carpentaria Freight, Tuxworth & Woods, Seaswift, as well as other smaller independent carriers surveyed by phone indicated that their rates increased 30% through 2022-2024 period.

Fuel

Petroleum products, particularly unleaded petrol and to a lesser degree diesel, are critical inputs for mud crab operators, powering small craft used to set and check crab gear and supporting transport logistics.

Fuel prices in remote areas like Karumba and Weipa are consistently 20–30 cents per litre higher than national averages due to additional transport and storage costs into remote communities (Woodham Petroleum, 2025).

National average unleaded petrol prices rose from 147.8 c/L in 2021 to 184.2 c/L in 2022, 188.9 c/L in 2023, and 188.1 c/L in 2024, while diesel prices increased from 146.7 c/L in 2021 to 199.8 c/L in 2022, 194.9 c/L in 2023, and 188.2 c/L in 2024, reflecting global oil price volatility and inflationary pressures (See Table 3) (Savvy, 2024; ACCC, 2023–2025). In Karumba and Weipa, estimated unleaded prices reached 208.9–218.9 c/L and diesel prices 214.9–224.9 c/L in 2024, significantly impacting operating margins (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Table 3: National and Estimated Regional Fuel Prices (Unleaded Petrol and Diesel, 2021–2024)

Year	National Unleaded Price (c/L)	Est. Karumba/Weipa Unleaded (c/L)	National Diesel Price (c/L)	Est. Karumba/Weipa Diesel (c/L)
2021	147.8	167.8–177.8	146.7	166.7–176.7
2022	184.2	204.2–214.2	199.8	219.8–229.8
2023	188.9	208.9–218.9	194.9	214.9–224.9
2024	188.1	208.1–218.1	188.2	208.2–218.2

Source: Savvy (2024) for 2021–2022; ACCC (2023–2025) for 2023–2024. Karumba/Weipa prices estimated by adding 20–30 c/L to national averages.

While the cost of fuel experienced a significant spike from 2021-2022, prices have continued to increase by another 3-4% to 2024. Furthermore, a significant amount of fishing occurs in very remote areas away from the Karumba and Weipa communities requiring transportation and access of fuel by mothership. Fishers in these areas have reported changes in fishing patterns in 2024 to prioritise peak periods, rather than fishing consistently throughout the season as they have in prior years. This was notable in the Mitchel River area during 2024, where operators fished more sporadically to the catch to more favourable market conditions, contrary to more full-time fishing during 2022 and 2023.

This change in fishing patterns, which is driven by cost pressures, has also affected catch levels.

Labour

The fishing industry is plagued with crew shortages and labour cost pressures. In addition to escalation in the wage price index of 3-4% between 2022 and 2024, the industry is needing to provide higher incentives to attract a suitable labour pool to the remote fishing grounds in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Aside from increased labour costs and difficulties in attracting labour to the region, the average age of the fishing cohort is a major concern and unaddressed will continue to exacerbate the fisheries ability to catch the TACC.

Retired fishers within the current GC1 quota owner group currently represent 15% of the total quota pool, a statistic which is further compounded by an average age of 55-60 years in the quota pool of active fishers. (See Figure 1)

Quota Leasing

The quota lease price range since the inception has fluctuated from \$3–\$5/kg, and therefore represents a significant cost to operation. A TACC reduction would further compress margins without increasing lease value whilst potentially reducing participation rates in the context of lower average stagnated sales prices (GC1 Quota Holders and Commercial Fishers, 2025).

Other Inputs

In the absence of a formal economic study, the association's research estimates fishers have experienced increases of between 20 – 30 % for other critical fishing inputs over the 2022-2024 period. These inputs include but are not limited to packaging, fishing gear (Crab pots, Rope, Floats Outboards), bait, electricity, and insurance. In addition, general repair and replacement costs whilst traditionally high in this remote setting have also increased due to scarcity of skilled trades people and global supply chain issues.

Any revisions to the Harvest strategy must incorporate, market and economic drivers, as well as be informed by costs to operate to better understand fisher behaviour and ultimately better inform decision making tools used under the Harvest Strategy.

In addition, the Queensland Government should consider initiatives to support the commercial sector, particularly in relation to removal of investment warnings, new fisher recruitment to assist succession planning and future proofing this fishery.

3.3 Industry financial sustainability

The sustainability of the GC1 mud crab fishery is critical for maintaining ecological balance and supporting economic stability in remote Queensland communities. Achieving lasting sustainability requires a collaborative approach between the industry and the government, emphasizing sufficient scale of activity, industry-driven initiatives, and government enablement. This section outlines the industry's efforts to enhance sustainability and the government's role in supporting these initiatives to ensure the fishery's long-term viability.

Industry Initiatives for Sustainability

1. **Enhancing Quality and Grading Standards**

The industry must prioritise tagging and continue to improve uniformity in fisher grading standards to ensure that GC1 mud crab products meet market expectations. Enhanced standards improve market recognition of this premium product and contribute to economic sustainability by ensuring consistent, high-quality products that command better prices.

2. **Pursuing Third-Party Certifications**

Obtaining certifications such as the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) could enhance the marketability of GC1 mud crabs by assuring consumers of sustainable fishing practices. MSC certification often results in a market premium, differentiating the product in competitive markets and aligning the fishery with global sustainability standards. This initiative supports both economic viability and environmental responsibility.

3. **Building Consumer Trust through Transparency**

Initiatives like "ocean to plate" and emphasising product provenance can create a compelling narrative for consumers. By highlighting the journey of the mud crab from the Gulf to the consumer's plate, the industry can foster loyalty and justify premium pricing. These efforts align with growing consumer demand for ethical and sustainable seafood, strengthening market position and supporting long-term profitability.

4. **Export Market Development**

Expanding back to international markets is essential for the fishery's growth and resilience. This requires strategic marketing, compliance with international regulations, and participation in global trade platforms. Developing export markets diversifies revenue streams, reduces reliance on domestic markets, and enhances economic sustainability, particularly in the face of domestic competition pressures.

Government's Role in Enabling Sustainability

1. **Policy and Regulatory Support**

The government should create an enabling environment by revising rigid policies, such as Decision Rule 1.7, to incorporate socio-economic factors alongside ecological considerations. Flexible TACC settings that account for external drivers (e.g., weather, economic pressures) can balance conservation with economic viability, ensuring the fishery remains operational and sustainable.

2. **Financial and Operational Support**

Providing subsidies for operational costs (eg. fuel, freight), can alleviate financial pressures on fishers, particularly in remote areas particularly through high inflationary cycles

3. **Market Access Facilitation**

Participation in global seafood expos and providing market intelligence can help the industry access new markets, boosting export potential and economic resilience.

4. **Research and Development Funding**

Investing in research for stock assessments, economic modelling, and technological innovations is crucial for informed decision-making. Updated data on stock health, recruitment, and economic impacts will enable adaptive management, ensuring that both the industry and government can respond to changing conditions effectively.

Ensuring Scale and Coverage

Sufficient scale of fishing activity and coverage of fishing areas are critical for the fishery's economic viability. The TACC must be set at a level that supports economic operations without compromising stock health, ensuring employment opportunities and community benefits in remote areas.

The government's role in maintaining an appropriate TACC, combined with industry efforts to optimize fishing practices, is essential to achieve this scale. Without adequate scale, the fishery risks economic decline, reduced participation, and long-term unsustainability.

The government should take caution in any further reductions to set net fishing. Any further reduction will negatively impact some full time mud crab fishers who simultaneously participate in the set net fishery to maintain their economic viability as larger scaled operations.

4. Rainfall and Weather Impacts on Fishing Season

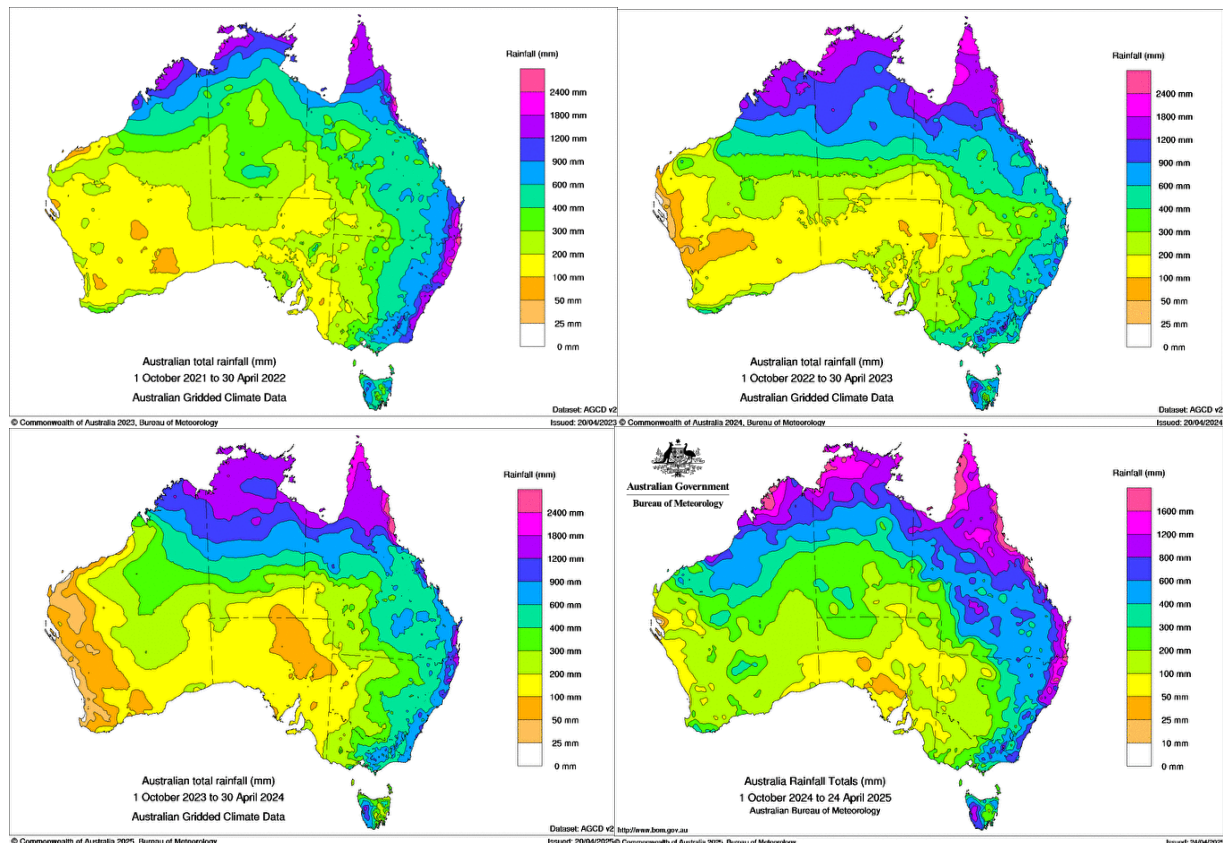
While market & economic drivers are a major decision-making reference for fisher engagement, there are a range of other environmental, operational, and social drivers that influence fishery outcomes. 2024 was no exception to these factors which include fishing variability, illness, crew shortages, and the exit of experienced operators.

It is widely documented that rainfall in the Gulf of Carpentaria strongly influences mud crab habitat, movement, and spawning behaviour. Environmental factors like rainfall explain 30–70% of the variability in commercial mud crab catches, with wet seasons (e.g., La Niña events) often boosting biomass and recruitment 12–18 months later. (J.B. Robins, A.R. Northrop, M.A. Grubert, R.C. Buckworth, M. McLennan, W.D. Sumpton, and T. Saunders, June 2020).

Rainfall charts depicted below published by the Bureau of Meteorology demonstrate that the Gulf of Carpentaria region has experienced favourable monsoon rainfall activity since October 2021 through to and including the current monsoon period through April 2025 (See Figure 3), increasing likelihoods of above average recruitment to the fishery. This should provide confidence to fishery managers that breeding biomass of this single take male fishery is stable if not improving despite the 70% TACC not being caught in 2024.

Despite above average rainfall for the region, the Mapoon and Weipa areas of the fishery from February to June 2024 did experience a drop in catch rates owing to above average river flows forcing key operators to relocate their operations in July 2024. While not unprecedented, this further contributed to the under catch to the 2024 TACC. Catch rates in the region have since returned to normal levels in the 2025 calendar year.

Figure 3 – Summary of rainfall distribution Monsoon period 1st October – 24th April (2021-2025)



Source: Bureau of Meteorology 2025.

6. Conclusion

The GC1 mud crab fishery is a sustainable, high-value industry critical to remote Queensland communities, facing challenges from external economic, operational, and environmental factors rather than stock decline. The following recommendations are designed to maintain ecological integrity, support economic stability, and enhance long-term sustainability, addressing the 2024 under-catch and preparing for the 2026 Harvest Strategy review. They are informed by the Queensland Mud Crab Harvest Strategy 2021-2026, the Fisheries Act 1994, and stakeholder priorities.

7. Recommendations

1. **Maintain the TACC at 108 Tonnes**

Retain the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) at 108 tonnes for 2025/26 to support economic viability and community livelihoods. Evidence of stable crab stocks (biomass at 58% of unfished levels, improving catch rates) and external drivers (e.g., high freight costs, crew shortages) justifies this decision, preventing economic harm to fishers already strained by narrow margins and high costs.

2. **Revise Decision Rule 1.7 for Adaptive Management**

Reform Decision Rule 1.7 to incorporate flexibility for external factors (e.g., weather, economic pressures) by replacing the single-year trigger with a multi-year average (e.g., five years) and allowing discretionary TACC adjustments based on comprehensive socio-economic and ecological assessments. This aligns with adaptive management principles, building on Crab Fishery Working Group proposals, to ensure the rule supports rather than hinders fishery sustainability.

3. **Develop a Tailored Harvest Strategy for GC1 by 2026**

Separate the GC1 fishery from the generic Queensland Mud Crab Harvest Strategy to create a fit-for-purpose strategy that addresses its unique environmental, economic, and social drivers. This should be developed through stakeholder consultation by 2026, ensuring decision-making tools account for the fishery's remote setting and specific challenges, such as quota underutilization and high operational costs.

4. **Implement Targeted Support Programs**

Introduce government-backed initiatives to boost fisher participation, address quota underutilization, and support new entrants, focusing on economic and social equity:

- a. **Financial Incentives:** Offer grants, low-interest loans, or tax breaks for fuel, equipment, and licensing to reduce financial barriers, particularly for new and underrepresented fishers (e.g., Indigenous, women, youth).
- b. **Training and Mentorship:** Fund vocational programs in sustainable fishing and business management, paired with mentorship initiatives to transfer knowledge from experienced fishers.
- c. **Market Access:** Support export market development and marketing campaigns, while investigating measures to reduce competition from imported mud crab products in domestic markets.

5. **Fund Research and Monitoring for Informed Decisions**

Commission updated stock assessments and economic modelling by 2026 to ensure decisions are based on current data. Implement a monitoring plan with key performance indicators (e.g., stock biomass, fisher profitability, employment) to track outcomes and enable adaptive policy adjustments, ensuring long-term ecological and economic sustainability.

6. **Engage Stakeholders for Consensus**

Conduct broad consultations with commercial fishers, Indigenous communities, environmental groups, and other stakeholders to refine the Harvest Strategy and build consensus. This should include transparent reporting of feedback and integration into policy decisions, fostering trust and ensuring inclusive management.

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