



East coast and Gulf of Carpentaria crab fishery (C1)

Commercial fishery management proposals
consultation report

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Summary

Public consultation on a range of industry proposed management options on the commercial crab (C1) fishery was conducted between 14 March and 9 May 2024. This was done through the release of the discussion paper *East coast and Gulf of Carpentaria crab fishery (C1): Consultation on fishery reforms*.

In total, 207 submissions were received, of which 201 were responses to the online survey and six were written submissions.

Survey respondents included Traditional Owners, commercial fishers, recreational stakeholders, charter fishers, environmental groups and other interested community members.

Feedback was sought on the following overarching topics:

1. Management proposals for the transfer of fishing effort

- Decrease the total allowable commercial catch of mud crab
- Increase the minimum quota entitlement for mud crab
- Introduce requirement for two C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence

2. General fishery management proposals

- Increase number of crab pots permitted on a single trotline
- Close all crabbing and ban the use of crabbing gear in Eurimbula Creek
- Clarify the scope of the C1 fishery
- Review escape vent sizes for commercial crab pots

Background

The crab fishery resource is of immense social, cultural and economic value to Queenslanders. The fishery is subject to a suite of management controls, including limited commercial licensing and quotas, recreational catch limits and size and gear restrictions.

On 5 June 2023, the Australian and Queensland governments announced over \$160 million to significantly reduce gillnet fishing and other high-risk fishing activities impacting protected species.

Parts of the commercial fishing sector, as well as conservation groups and recreational fishers, have raised concerns and proposed a range of initiatives for managing impacts associated with the transfer of fishing effort into the crab fishery due to the phase-out of gillnets in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the rezoning of the Great Sandy Marine Park.

Public consultation on management proposals in the commercial crab fishery on the east coast of Queensland and in the Gulf of Carpentaria was conducted between 14 March and 9 May 2024, and this report summarises the submissions received.

Consultation process

A discussion paper and online survey were released on 14 March 2024, with the public consultation running over an 8-week period until 9 May 2024.

The following communication activities were undertaken to inform stakeholders about the consultation process:

- Crab fishery working group members were notified directly via email.
- Other fishery working group members were also notified directly via email.
- All primary commercial fishing licence holders were notified directly via SMS.
- Broader stakeholders were notified via social media and the Fisheries Queensland website.

Survey questions were primarily presented as multiple choice. An opportunity was provided at the end of each question to add comments and suggest practical alternatives and viewpoints.

! No decisions have been made at this point in time.

Find out more about the sustainable management of Queensland fisheries:

> [Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy: 2017–2027](#)

> [Harvest strategies](#)

> [Fishery working groups](#)

Next steps

Feedback from this consultation and the range of management options proposed by a group of industry participants will be used to guide future sustainable management strategies – underpinning future decision-making to ensure the ecological, economic and social objectives of this fishery are achieved in the long term.

Results from this report will be discussed with the crab fishery working group and Sustainable Fisheries Expert Panel before any decisions are made.

The harvest strategy is due for review at the end of the 2025–26 fishing season.

Consultation results and analysis

! The Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) and Gulf of Carpentaria Commercial Fisherman Association (GOCCFA) provided written submissions, including results from QSIA's own survey.

GOCCFA and QSIA submissions, along with 24 endorsements from industry members, have been included and considered in this report.

To ensure consultation data is consistent with Fisheries Queensland consultation processes, QSIA's survey results have not been included in this report.

Respondents

In total, 231 submissions (including 24 endorsements from QSIA) were received. Survey respondents included commercial fishers, recreational stakeholders, charter fishers, Traditional Owners, environmental groups, non-governmental organisations and other interested community members.

Many respondents had multiple interests in the fishery and identified themselves as aligning with more than one stakeholder group. Some respondents did not identify with any of the specified stakeholder groups.

Table 1: Breakdown of submissions

Stakeholder group	Number of submissions
Commercial fisher	135
Recreational fisher	56
Charter fishing operator	4
Traditional fisher / Traditional Owner	1
Seafood wholesaler/marketer	13
Hospitality (restaurant, café, owner/worker)	0
Fishing tackle retailer	0
Environmental, industry peak body or other non-governmental organisation	4
Interested community member	10
Not specified	8
Total	231

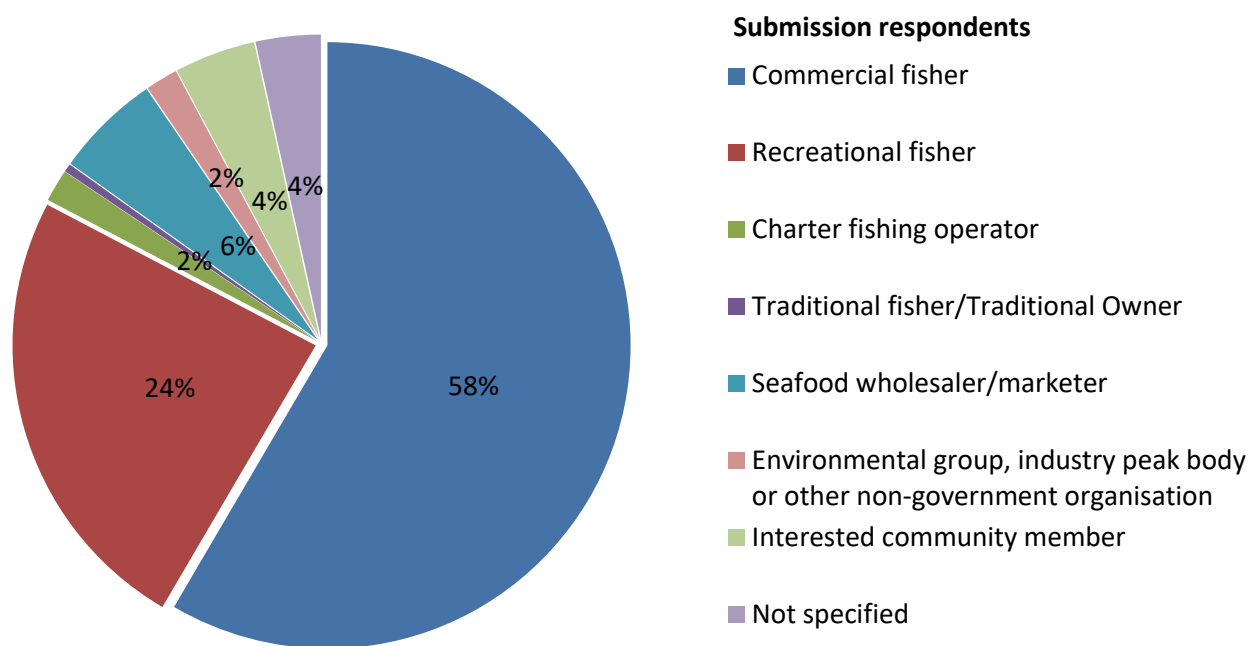


Figure 1: Breakdown of submissions by stakeholder group

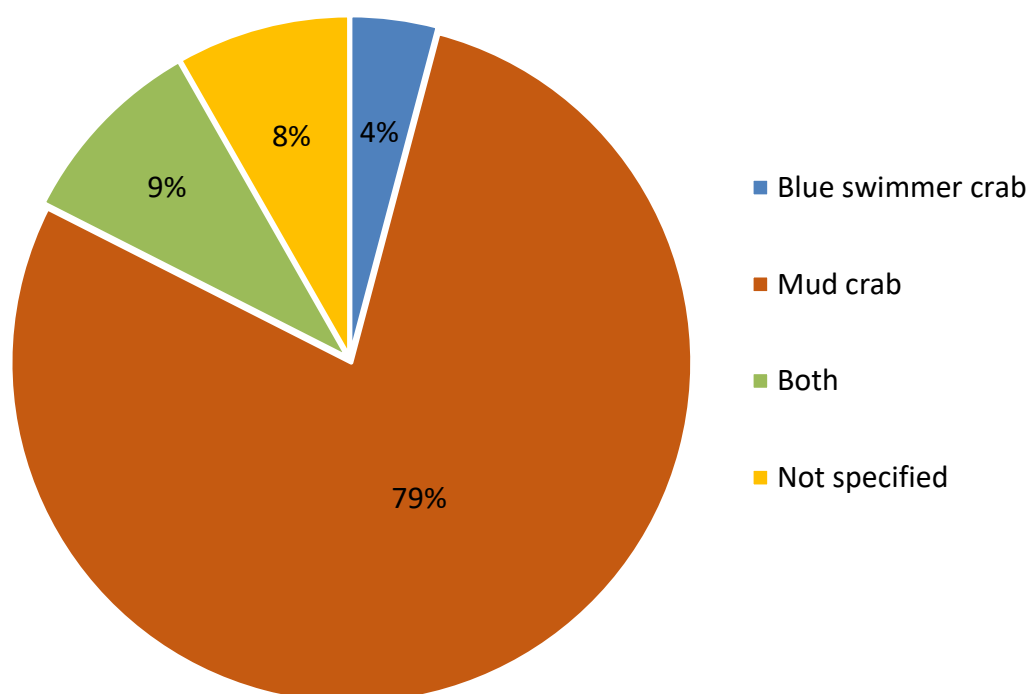


Figure 2: Responses to survey question - If you are a Queensland commercial fisher in the C1 fishery, which crab species do you currently fish for?

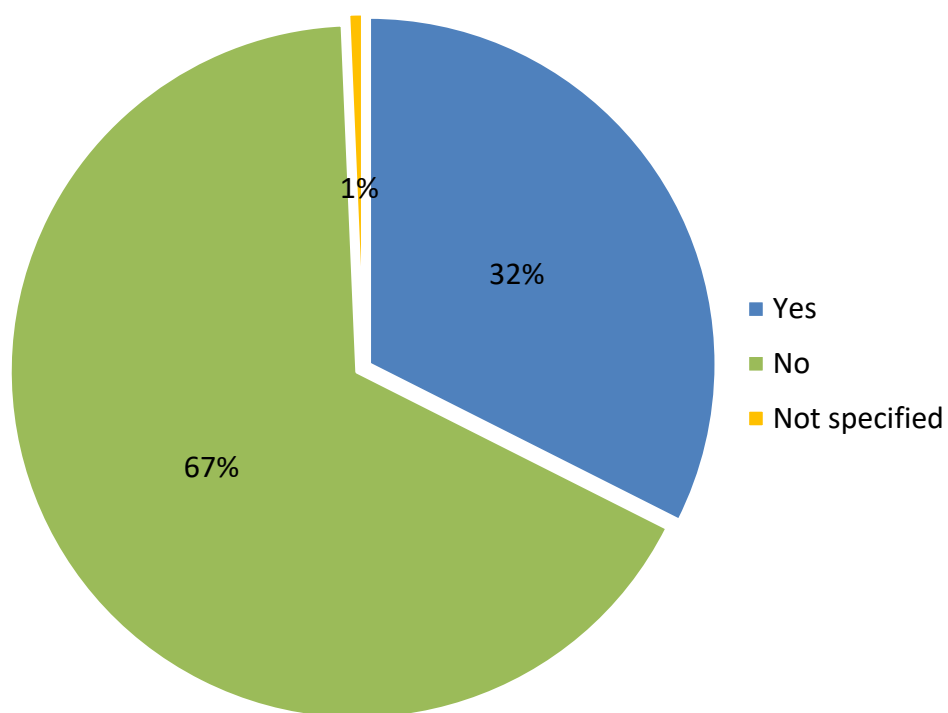


Figure 3: Responses to survey question - If you are a Queensland commercial fisher in the C1 fishery, do you have more than one C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence?

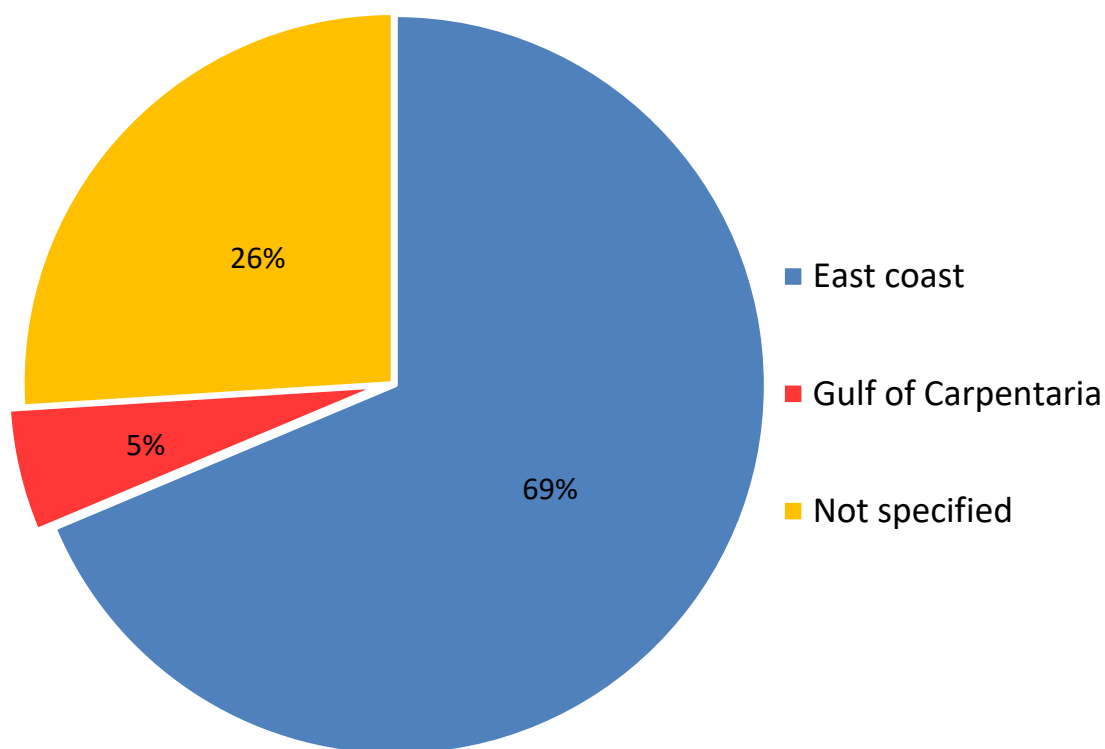


Figure 4: Responses to survey question - If you are a Queensland commercial fisher in the C1 fishery, do you operate in the east coast or Gulf of Carpentaria management region?

Decrease the total allowable commercial catch of mud crab

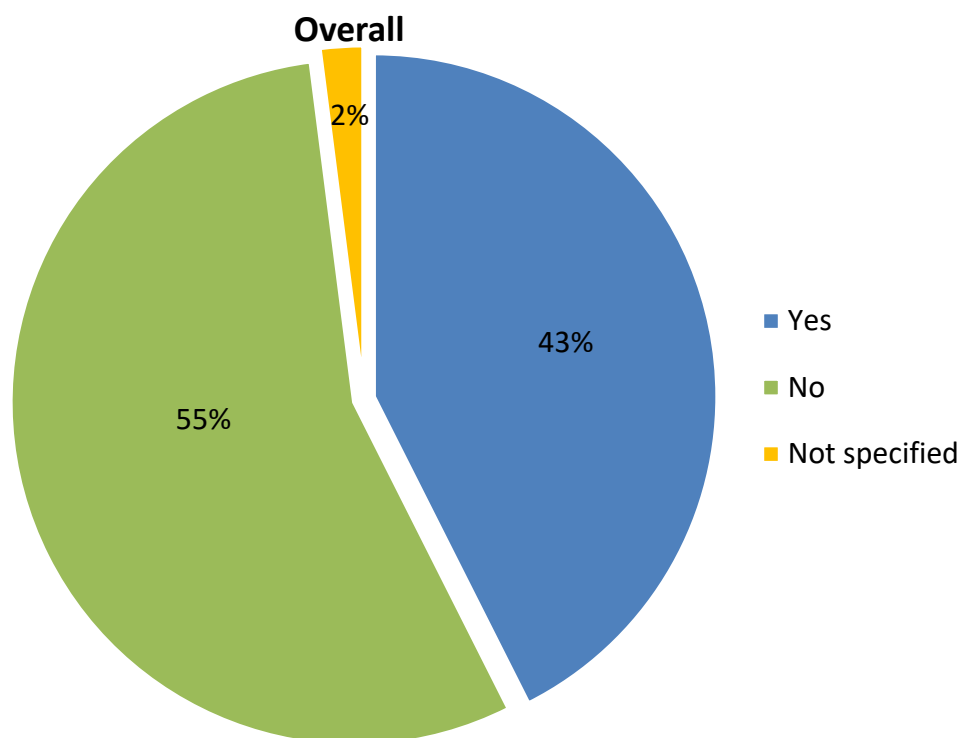


Figure 5: Responses to survey question – Do you agree with the industry proposal to decrease the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) of mud crab?

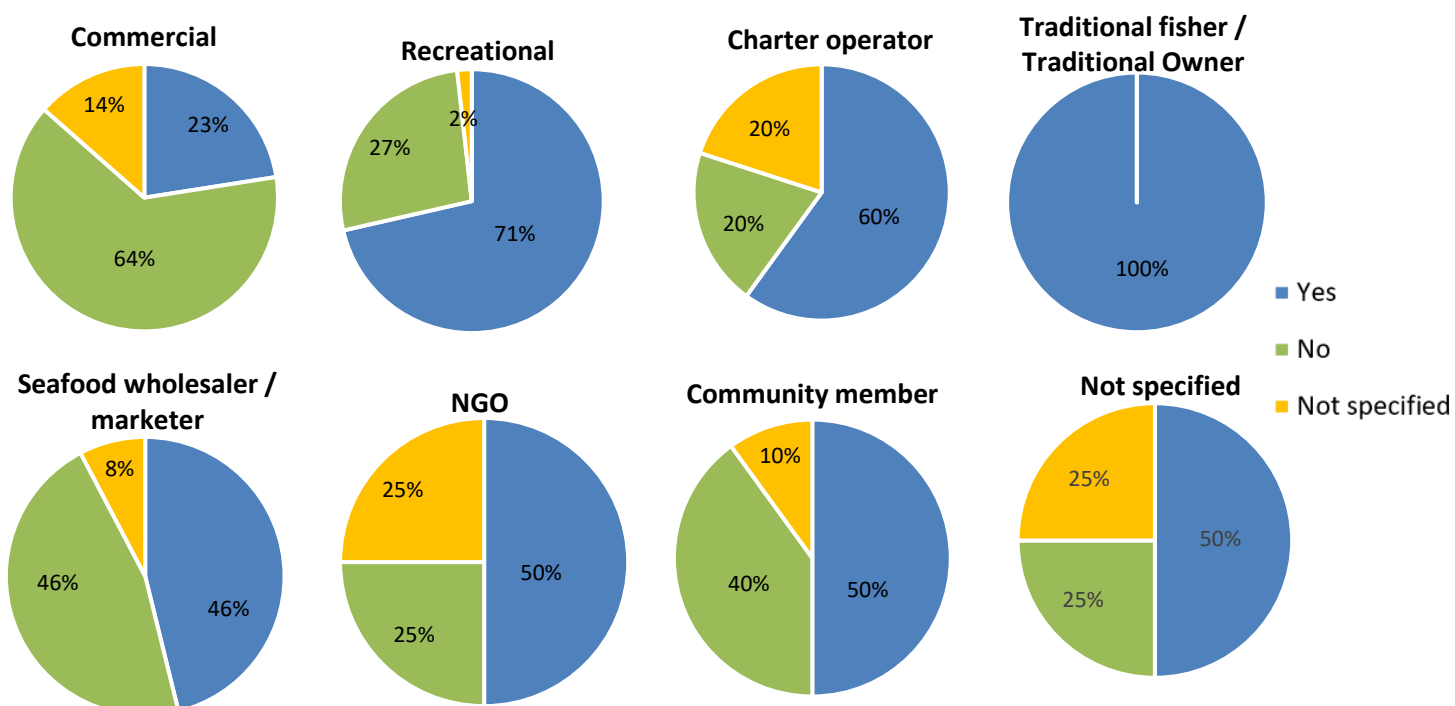


Figure 6: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you agree with the industry proposal to decrease the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) of mud crab?

The proposal to decrease the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) was raised by some industry members. Due to potential historical overreporting, there are concerns the mud crab TACC may have been overallocated and above the level that achieves maximum economic yield. Due to this, the current TACC may not be achieving the primary harvest strategy objective. The mud crab TACC has only slightly exceeded the 70% minimum catch required to avoid triggering decision rule 1.7 of the fishery harvest strategy for the last two seasons (the breakout rule). The breakout rule ensures the TACC can be reduced if the stock is not performing, and that stock biomass levels are set at the appropriate level to achieve maximum economic yield.

The majority of survey respondents (55%) did not support the industry proposal to decrease the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) of mud crab; however, there were split levels of support within stakeholder groups.

The strongest levels of support came from interested community members, recreational fishers, charter fishing operators, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and Traditional Owner groups.

In contrast, commercial fishers largely did not support the decrease in the total allowable commercial catch.

Stakeholders provided a number of reasons why they did not support the proposal, including:

- The mud crab fishery harvest strategy is only in year three out of six and should be able to 'run its term' and continue until decisions rules are triggered or sustainability and economic inputs are considered.
- The mud crab TACC has reached its 70% quota as per the harvest strategy decision rules and therefore there is no reason to trigger the breakout rule and cut EC1 quota.
- Further reductions appear to only be beneficial to larger operators and may put further financial pressure on leaseholders as well as small operators.
- May cause an increase to consumer costs and cause further financial pressure to the cost-of-living crisis.

Stakeholders provided several comments in support of the proposal, including:

- Decreasing the TACC may provide a higher likelihood of achieving maximum economic yield and achieving the objectives of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy.
- A reduction in quota will also likely lead to an increase in quota sale and lease prices discouraging effort shift following the phasing out of gillnets and providing additional security for existing operators.

Increase the minimum quota entitlement for mud crab

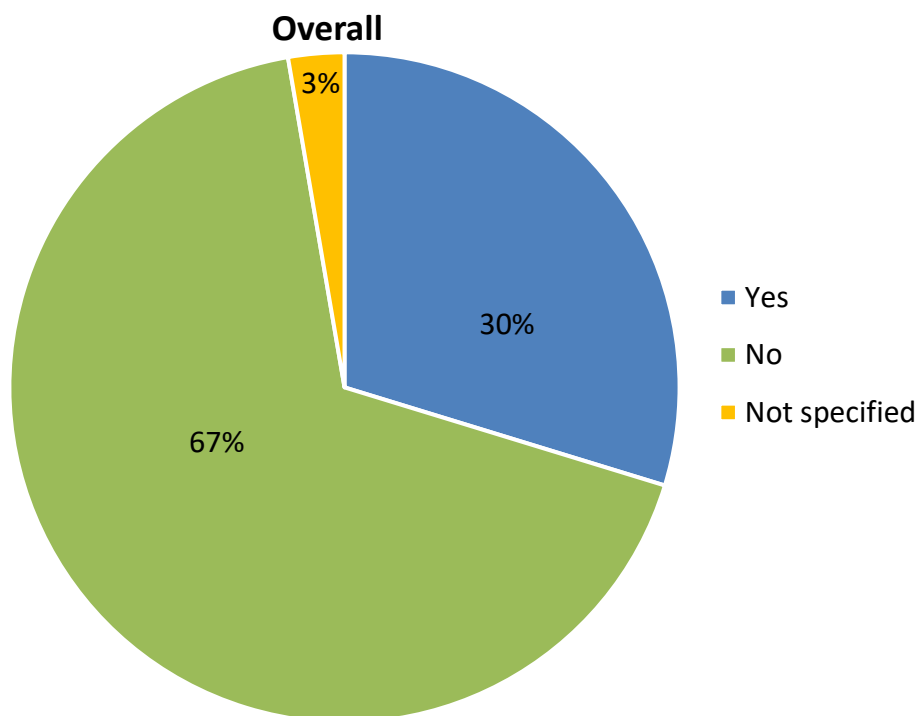


Figure 7: Responses to survey question – Do you agree with the industry proposal to increase the minimum quota entitlement for mud crab to 3 tonnes?*

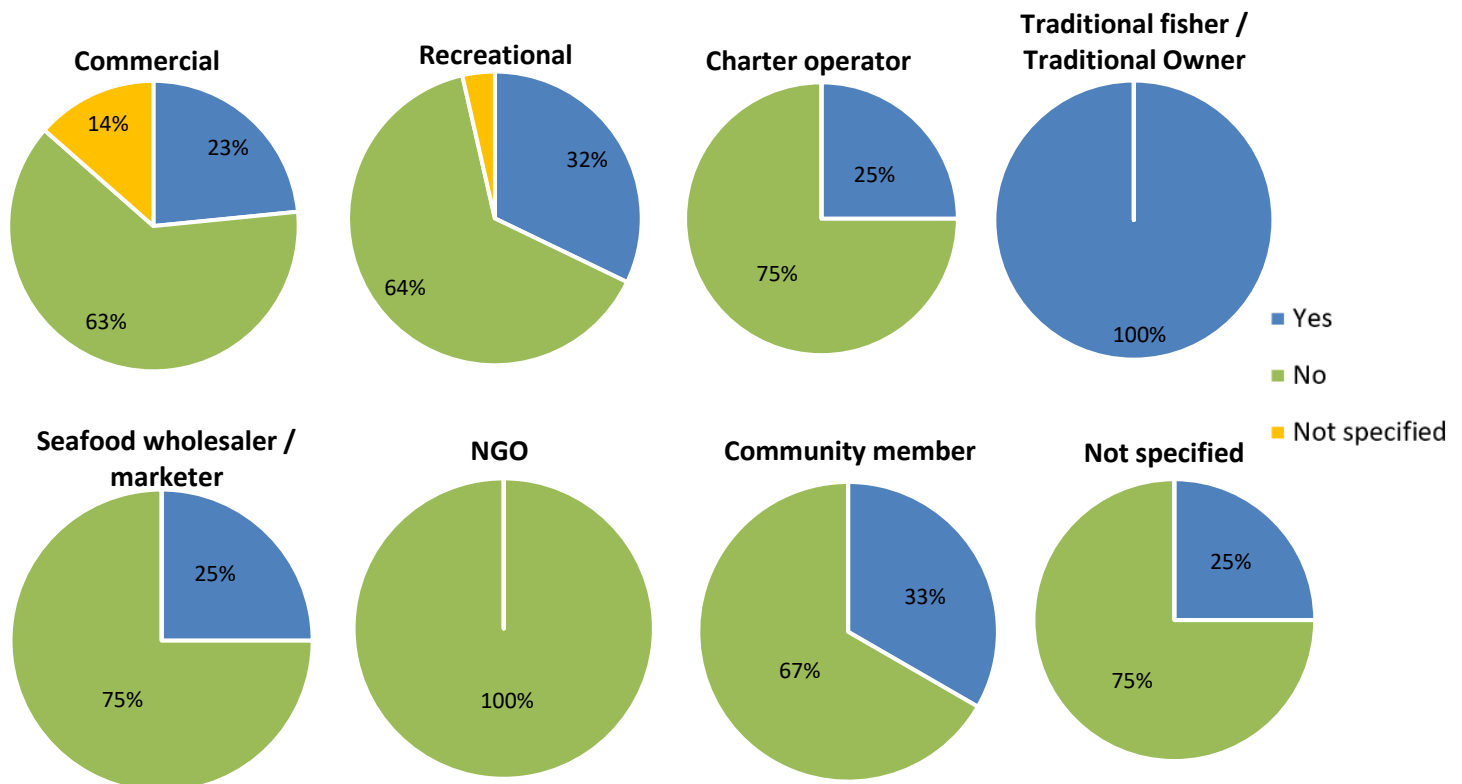


Figure 8: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you agree with the industry proposal to increase the minimum quota entitlement for mud crab to 3 tonnes?

To promote responsible fishing practices and support viable commercial operations, the primary management method for the east coast and Gulf of Carpentaria mud crab fishery is a minimum quota entitlement of 1.2 tonnes for operators to participate in the fishery.

This management method is intended to allow fishers to arrange their fishing operations at the least possible cost while meeting objectives under the *Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy: 2017–2027*. The intent is also to ensure the consolidation of quota occurred amongst those who were to remain active in the fishery and that fishers remain reasonably invested and reduce the risk of threatened, endangered, and protected species interactions.

Some industry members have proposed an increase to the minimum quota entitlement to 3 tonnes to discourage unsustainable and inconsistent operations and provide more economic assurance for those that remain active and invested in the fishery.

The majority of survey respondents (67%) did not support the decrease the industry proposal to increase the minimum quota entitlement for mud crab to 3 tonnes.

Among stakeholder groups, the greatest levels of support came Traditional Owner groups.

In contrast, commercial fishers, recreational sector, charter operations, seafood marketers, NGO's and interested community members largely did not support the industry proposal to increase the minimum quota entitlement for mud crab.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments as to why they did not support the proposal, including:

- Given there are investment warnings on the fishery, requiring further investments into the fishery in the current economic climate is unreasonable for small businesses and leaseholders.
- Could lead to an increase in taking low grade crab.
- Reduces economic flexibility and disadvantages small operators as well as potentially reducing accessibility to fishers entering the fishery.
- Disproportionately affects older generational fishers which could result in loss of experience, knowledge and skills in the fishery.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments in support of the proposal, including:

- May address shift in effort due to limiting the number of viable operators as well as address the concern of commercial operators catching low grade crab.
- Could address concerns of overreported crab and allocating too much quota when the reforms were introduced to meet the intent of the sustainable fisheries strategy.
- Address latent quota and unused quota in the fishery.

Sustainability and industry viability of taking B and C grade mud crabs

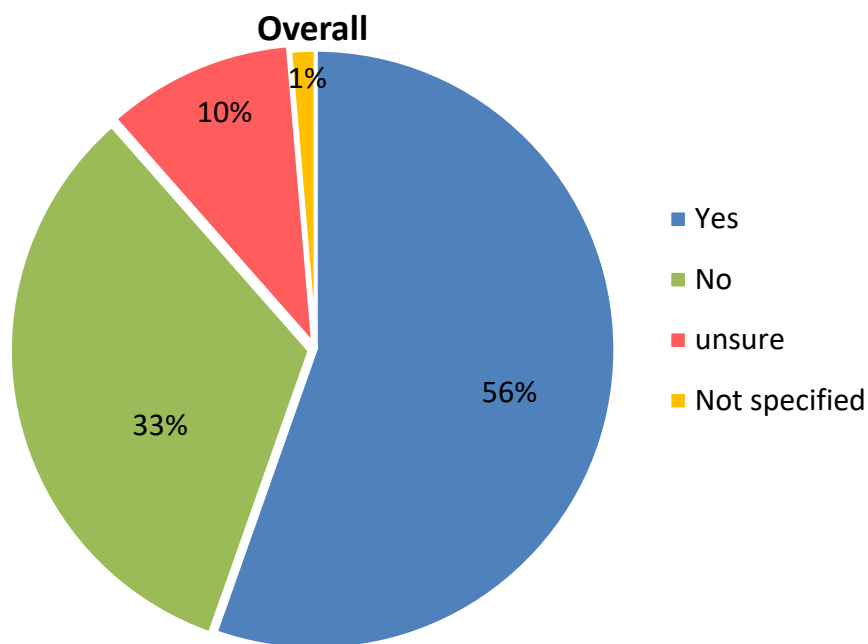


Figure 9: Responses to survey question – Do you think the commercial take of B-grade and C-grade mud crab is impacting stock sustainability and industry viability?

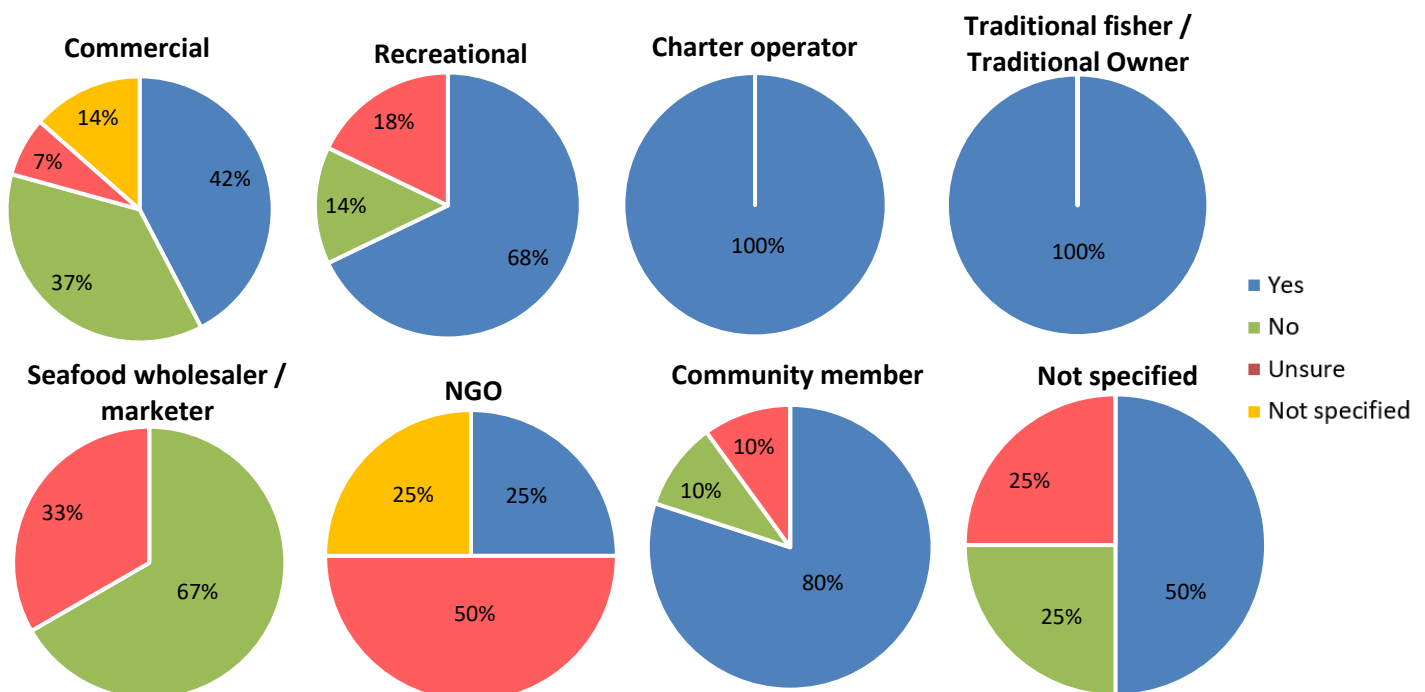


Figure 10: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you think the commercial take of B-grade and C-grade mud crab is impacting stock sustainability and industry viability?

There are ongoing concerns that excess B-grade and C-grade crabs are being taken to ensure the 70% target is met, to avoid reducing the TACC. Implementing the breakout rule ahead of the harvest strategy review timelines is being considered to ensure the TACC can better achieve the primary objective of the harvest strategy.

The majority of survey respondents (55%) think the commercial take of B-grade and C-grade mud crab is impacting stock sustainability and industry viability.

Among stakeholder groups, the strongest levels of support came Traditional Owner groups, recreational fishers, charter operators, and interested community members.

In contrast, commercial fishers and seafood marketers largely did not think the commercial take of B-grade and C-grade mud crab is impacting stock sustainability and industry viability whereas NGO's showed mixed support and were largely unsure.

Stakeholders provided several comments as to why they did not support the proposal, including:

- B- and C- grade crabs are important economically and there are, in our multicultural society, established markets for these crabs.
- Do not see issues given there is no scientific evidence that the take of low-grade crab is unsustainable and the existing output measures are meant to ensure sustainability.
- The recreational sector should be educated and regulated against the take of low-grade crab.
- By establishing a market of low grade and low-quality crab, consumer confidence also decreases.
- Low grade crab are cheaper for consumers.

Stakeholders provided several comments in support of the proposal, including:

- The take of C grade mud crab is unsustainable and impacts the future generation of crab however, taking B grade does not appear to cause significant impacts and there is an established market for them.
- The price for C grade crab is not worth taking to market and is unsustainable practice.
- The take of B and C grade crab impacts population growth and education program for recreational fishers should be implemented.
- By reducing the TACC, the take of low-grade crab may be addressed as operators will not be fishing to reach the 70% target.
- Experienced fishermen know not to take low grade crab so they can mature and contribute to reproduction and to also get the highest profit margin.
- The take of low-grade crab is particularly concerning in high effort areas.

Introduce requirement for two C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence

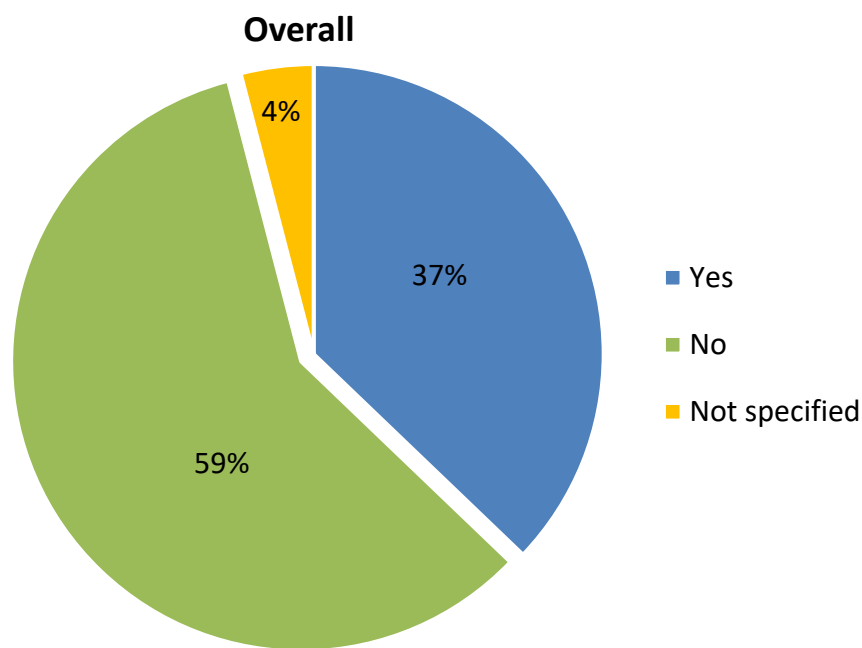


Figure 11: Responses to survey question – Do you agree with introducing a requirement for two C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence?

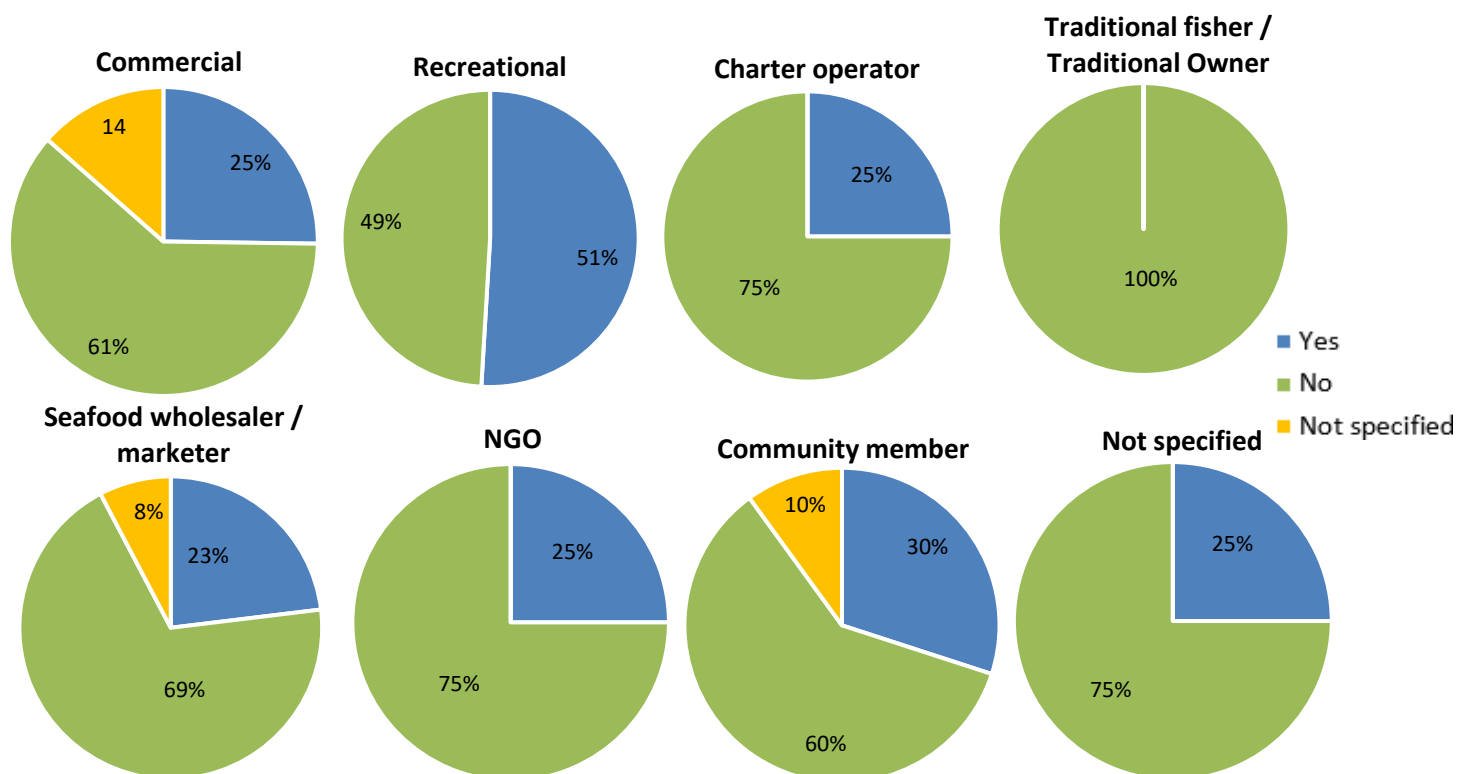


Figure 12: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you agree with introducing a requirement for two C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence?

Two-for-one licensing policies have been used in several different commercial fisheries around Australia and the world to address excess capacity. Under the current management arrangements, an operator is required to have one C1 symbol attached to a primary commercial fishing licence to participate in the fishery and use up to 50 pots. Multiple C1 symbols on a licence allows the use of additional pots, with a maximum of three C1 symbols permitting the use of 150 pots (in some areas).

A requirement for two C1 symbols on a licence could:

- have similar economic benefits as the proposed increase to the minimum quota entitlement;
- consolidate operators in the fishery.

The majority of survey respondents (59%) did not support introducing two C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence.

Among stakeholder groups, the strongest levels of support came from recreational fishers although at an almost even split.

In contrast, all other stakeholder groups largely did not support the requirement for two C1 symbols on a primary commercial fishing licence. Comments provided were similar as the comments to increase the minimum quota entitlement to 3 tonne.

Stakeholders provided several comments as to why they did not support the proposal, including:

- Not sustainable and allows operators to run more pots in an area which could lead to localised depletion and further threatened, endangered, and protected (TEP) species interactions and entanglements.
- Appears to only be beneficial to larger operators and intend to push out smaller legitimate operators and leaseholders from the industry.
- Further financial burden and reduces accessibility to fishers entering the fishery at such high operational costs.
- Allowing operations to increase their number of pots is incredibly onerous particularly with the 7-day rule (Crab apparatus that is in use must be checked at least every 7 days after being set).
- The fishery is already managed by output controls and a harvest strategy. Further reforms are not necessary without scientific cause.
- Suggest resolving latent licences and quota before further restrictions.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments in support of the proposal, including:

- Reducing the number of fishers who operate under best practice may lead to a more sustainable fishery while preventing effort shift into the industry.
- Reducing operators in the industry would lead to less effort and preventing TEP interactions.

Increase number of crab pots permitted on a single trotline

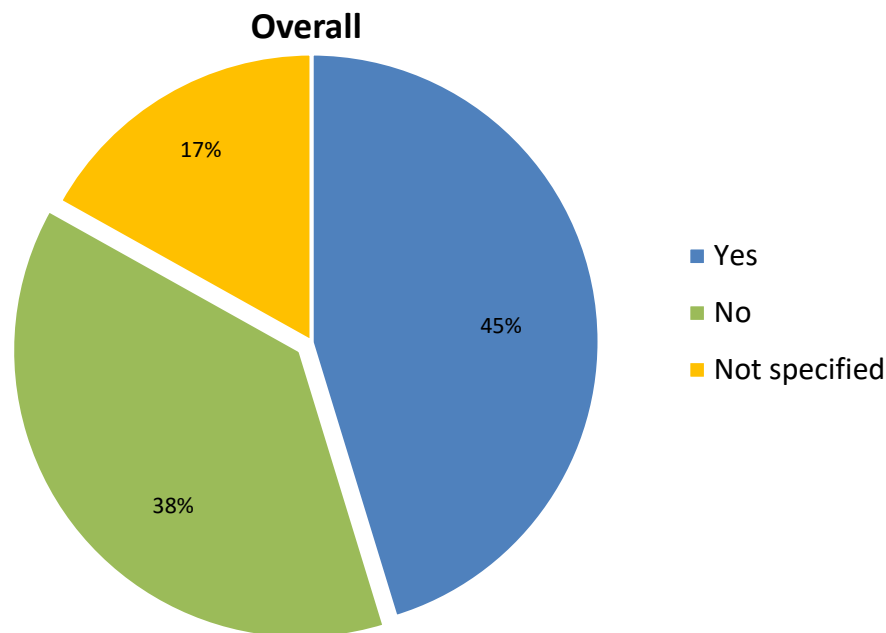


Figure 13: Responses to survey question – Do you agree with increasing the number of pots permitted on a single trotline to no more than 15 pots?

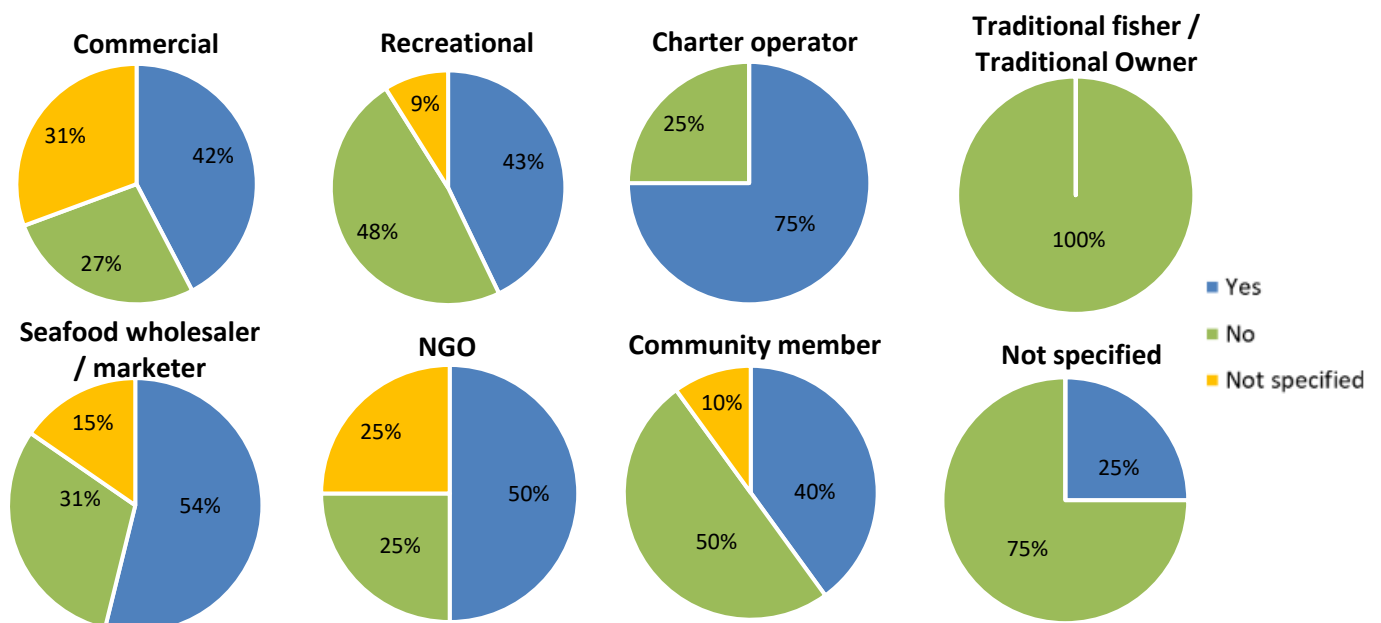


Figure 14: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you agree with increasing the number of pots permitted on a single trotline to no more than 15 pots?

Under the current management arrangements, no more than 10 crab pots can be fixed to a single line or attached to each other in sequence (e.g. on a trotline).

The majority of survey respondents (45%) agreed with increasing the number of pots permitted on a single trotline to no more than 15 pots.

Among stakeholder groups, the strongest levels of support came from charter operators. Other stakeholder groups showed a fairly even split between supporting or not supporting the proposal, or not providing a response. Many responses from various stakeholder groups involved not knowing what a trotline was and that educational measures should be undertaken.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments that did not support the proposal, including:

- Health and safety concerns using large amounts of operational gear particularly when weather is not favourable in offshore fishery areas.
- In contrast to possibly improving efficiency, increasing pots on a trotline could cause excessive effort and result in an effort creep.
- Could cause an Increase in ghost fishing as a result of lost lines and pots particularly when trotlines are used in deep waters and often rough conditions.
- From a compliance perspective, the offshore fishery is already difficult to manage with the current management arrangements.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments in support of the proposal, including:

- May improve economic viability and efficiency of fishing operation by increasing catch rate as well as possibly reducing cost of gear such as, prescribed flagpoles and amount of line required.
- May reduce TEP interactions by reducing the amount of line required to be in the water.

Close all crabbing and ban the use of crabbing gear in Eurimbula Creek

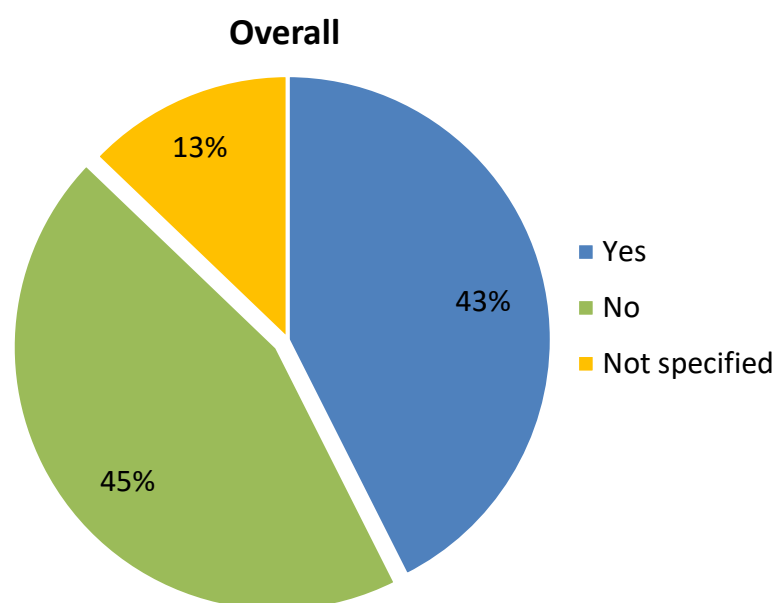


Figure 15: Responses to survey question – Do you agree with closing all crabbing and banning the use of crab gear in Eurimbula Creek regulated waters?

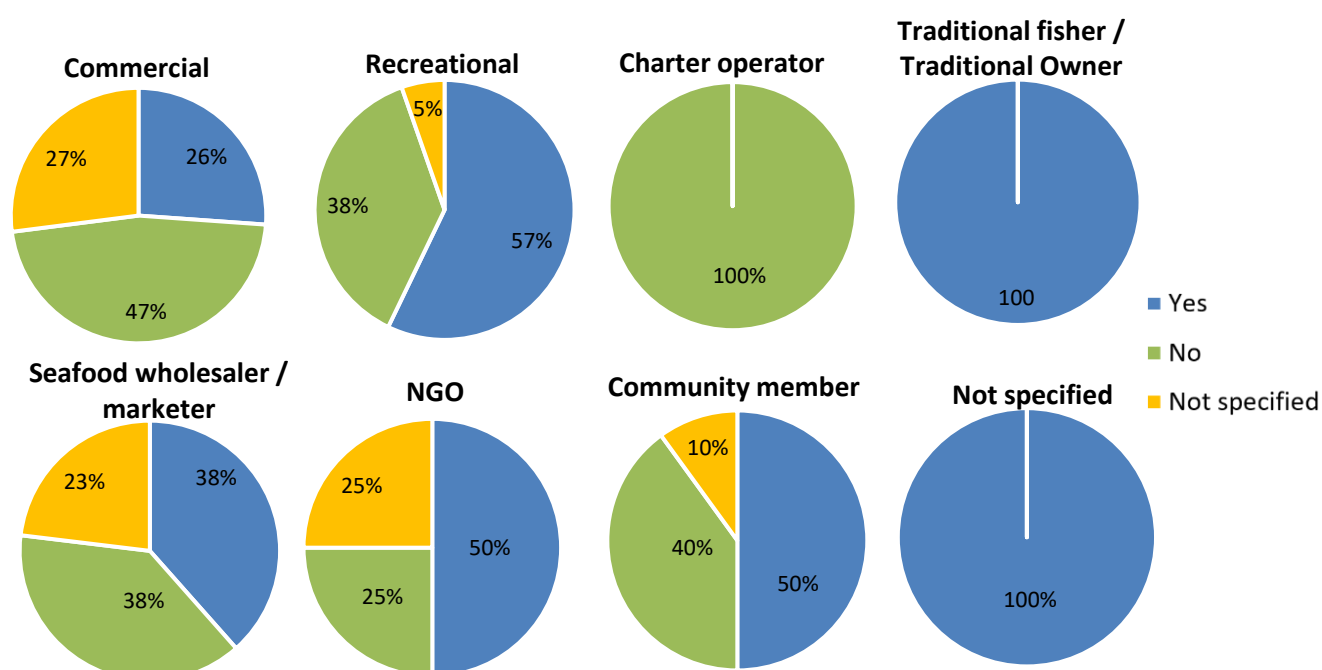


Figure 16: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you agree with closing all crabbing and banning the use of crab gear in Eurimbula Creek regulated waters?

Eurimbula Creek (Eurimbula National Park on the Central Queensland coast) includes waters closed to taking mud crabs. See Schedule 1 of the [Fisheries Declaration 2019](#) for regulated waters in Queensland.

It is proposed to close all crabbing and restrict the use of crab gear in Eurimbula Creek. This complete closure is intended to ensure mud crabs are protected and improve environmental outcomes for Eurimbula Creek by reducing the risks of marine debris and ghost fishing.

The majority of survey respondents (45%) did not support the proposal to close all crabbing and banning the use of crab gear in Eurimbula Creek regulated waters however, a close second majority (43%) supported the closure whilst 13% did not answer.

Among stakeholder groups, the strongest levels of support came from Traditional Owner groups, recreational fishers and NGOs.

In contrast, commercial fishers and charter operators largely did not support the proposal.

Interested community members and seafood marketer stakeholder groups showed a fairly even split between supporting or not supporting the proposal, or not providing a response.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments that did not support the proposal, including:

- Further taking fishing ground from recreational and commercial operators increases pressure on other areas.
- Further putting financial pressure on operators in that area.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments in support of the proposal, including:

- Taking mud crabs from Eurimbula creek is prohibited in existing regulation, this should continue to be the case and closed to all crabbing activities due to the area being a sanctuary for mud crabs to replenish the stock.
- Crabs require more sanctuaries and closure areas because they do not disperse like other species.

Clarify the scope of the C1 fishery

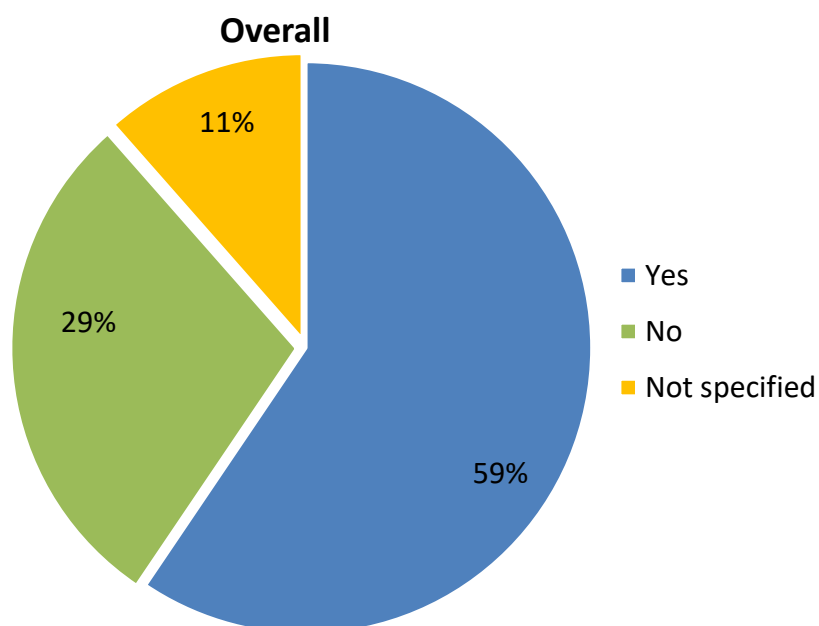


Figure 17: Responses to survey question – Do you agree with clarifying the scope of the C1 fishery to focus its management arrangements on the inshore part of the fishery?

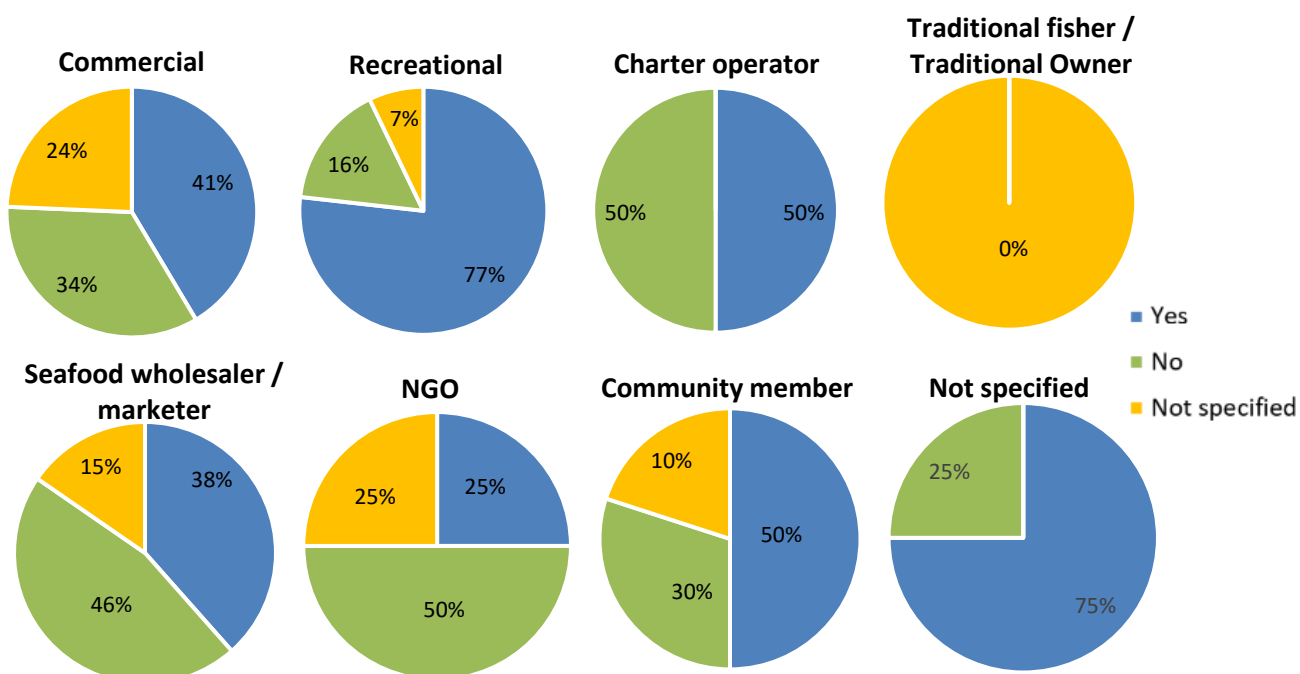


Figure 18: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you agree with clarifying the scope of the C1 fishery to focus its management arrangements on the inshore part of the fishery?

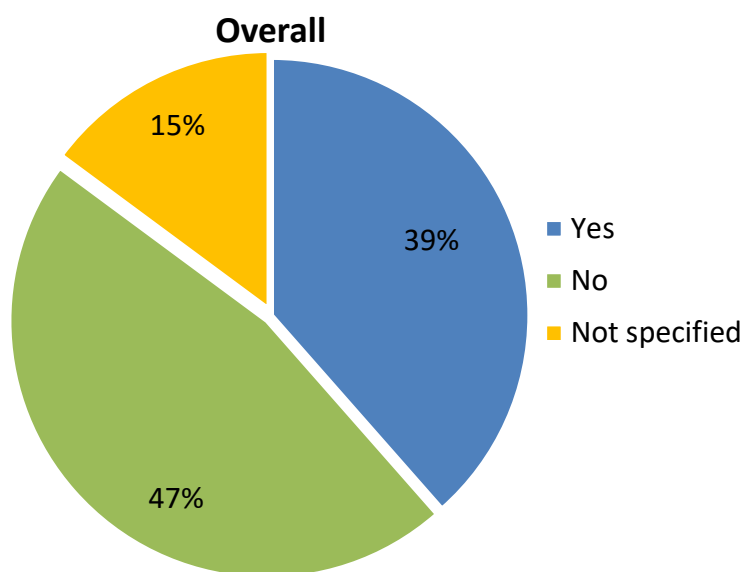


Figure 19: Responses to survey question – Do you think the management arrangements for the C1 symbol enables sustainable development of the deep-sea part of the fishery?

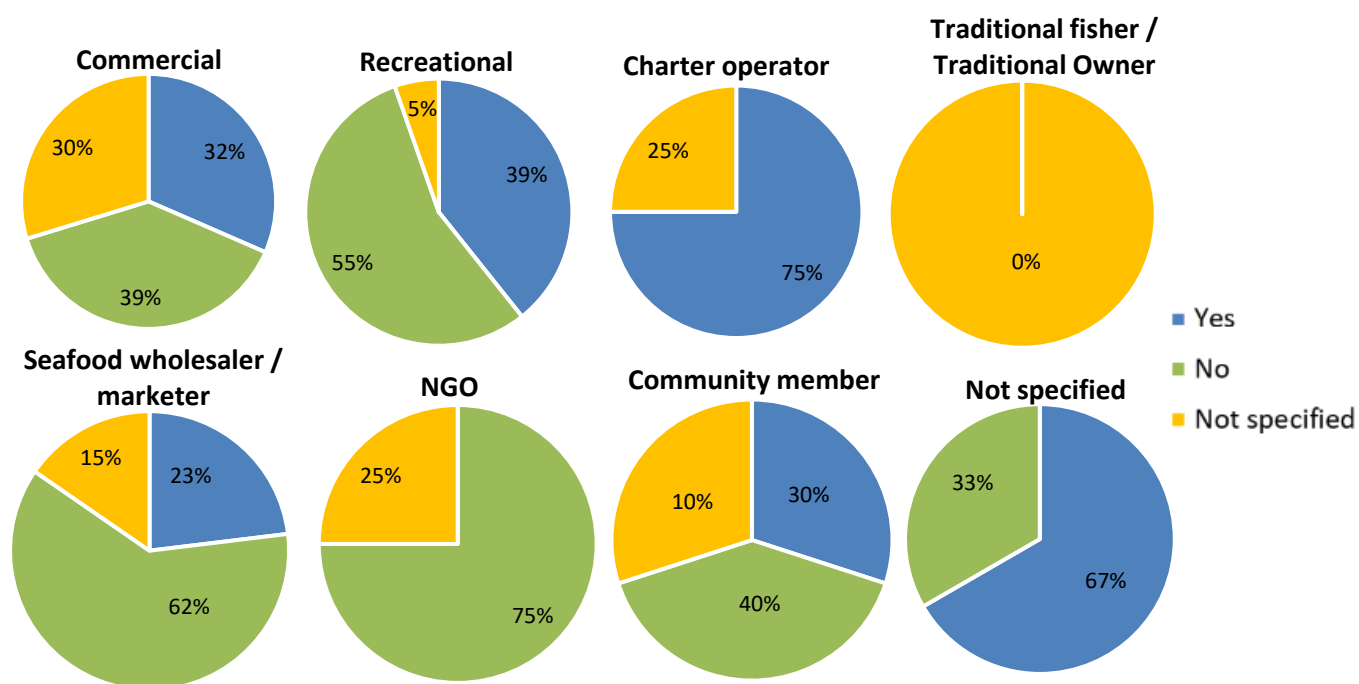


Figure 20: Breakdown of responses by stakeholder group to survey question – Do you think the management arrangements for the C1 symbol enables sustainable development of the deep-sea part of the fishery?

Under the C1 symbol, commercial fishers can fish for prescribed inshore and offshore crab species within the C1 fishery area.

Different gear and operational mechanisms are required to carry out efficient deep-sea fishing operations, which have different risks and interactions with TEPs (such as humpback whales). The intent of the C1 symbol is to manage the commercial harvest of inshore crab species.

There are concerns that the current C1 management arrangements constrain developmental fishing and exploration into the viability of deep-sea commercial fishing activities. The intent of the C1 symbol is being considered to focus of management arrangements on the inshore part of the C1 fishery.

The majority of survey respondents (59%) supported the proposal to clarify the scope of the C1 fishery to focus its management arrangements on the inshore part of the fishery. In addition, 47% of survey respondents did not think the management arrangements for the C1 symbol enables sustainable development of the deep-sea part of the fishery.

Among stakeholder groups, the strongest levels of support came from recreational fishers, interested community members and commercial fishers.

In contrast, other stakeholder groups showed a fairly even split between supporting or not supporting the proposal or did not provide a response.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments that did not support the proposal, including:

- Current C1 licence holders have access to offshore crab species currently and should be given priority or compensated if fishery access changes.
- Current C1 licence holders and operators should be allowed to continue to target a diverse range of crabs.
- Risks to interaction and entrapment to threatened, endangered and protected species such as humpback whales during their annual migration.

Stakeholders provided a number of comments in support of the proposal, including:

- The deep-sea crab fishery in Queensland waters currently lacks research in regards to stocking levels of species and the sustainability of those species from potential commercial fishing activities and cannot be explored under the current C1 licencing management arrangements.
- Due to the significant difference in the operations of both fisheries, they should in turn be managed differently and appropriately.
- The C1 symbol is not designed or intended to manage a fishery in 800 meters of water and should therefore be managed differently to prevent adverse impacts on the existing fishery and TEP interactions.
- The current regulations are not fit to manage offshore species (blue swimmer crab) or deep-sea crab species and have way too much potential effort available threatening stock sustainability as well as risking TEPs interactions such as whale entanglements.
- Developing a deepwater crab fishery must be subject to rigorous risk assessment and independent monitoring.

Other management proposals raised for consideration

Respondents raised a number of other issues, which are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of feedback regarding survey question – Are there any other management reforms in the C1 crab fishery that should be considered?

Issue raised	Feedback from stakeholders
Review of investment warning	Removing investment warnings would address the following: • Lack of confidence to investment in the fishery • Improves accessibility of the fishery.
Regulations for the recreational sector	• Establish statewide recreational fishing licence with catch reporting and a licence fee to fund further research and monitoring and other fisheries-related programs before further regulating the commercial sector. • Address overfishing and pressure in crab industry. • Require education on responsible and sustainable fishing.
Compensation and buy-outs	Options should be considered for reducing any adverse impacts of management change, including: • Voluntary buy-out packages of latent licenses, symbols and quota to reflect current market value.
Compulsory tagging of commercial crab	• Improve traceability and marketability of crab, with economic opportunities for fishers. • Increase consumer confidence in quality and sustainable product and demand for local produce at retail venues. • Increase the value of product, ensuring increased returns and profitability for commercial mud crab fishers. • Would assist in working towards third-party certification and reinstating exporting conditions for mud crab.
Permitting the take of female crab	• There would be a significant economic advantage to permitting female take. • Improve Queensland's competitiveness with New South Wales and Northern Territory crab fishers who flood Queensland markets with female crab. • To achieve the sustainable harvest of female crab, propose management controls for the recreational and commercial fishery.
Trial mud crab closures and zoning	• Seasonal closure should be trialled when crabs are abundant and low-grade based on available science. • Zone areas to prevent effort shift and localised depletion as well as competition between operators.