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## A development plan for the South Coast Inshore Trawl Fishery

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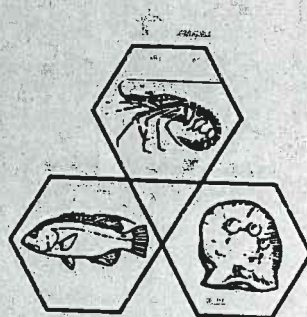
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# **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PAPER**

**No. 13**

## **A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE SOUTH COAST INSHORE TRAWL FISHERY**



**FISHERIES DEPARTMENT  
108 ADELAIDE TERRACE  
PERTH WA 6000**

**November 1987**

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PAPER

NO. 13

A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE SOUTH COAST

INSHORE TRAWL FISHERY

FISHERIES DEPARTMENT  
108 ADELAIDE TERRACE  
PERTH WA 6000

NOVEMBER 1987

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## A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE SOUTH COAST TRAWL FISHERY

### INTRODUCTION

In March 1986 discussions were commenced between officers of the Fisheries Department and the Australian Fisheries Service concerning management measures for a trawl fishery in the Great Australian Bight. These measures were considered necessary as a Western Australian Company (Toskel Fishing Co) had commenced fishing the area. Given the excess fishing capacity in other Australian trawl fisheries it was considered advisable to institute management at an early stage and control development of this deep water fishery.

Concurrent with these development, mainly directed towards the control of larger trawlers in deeper waters, several small Western Australian trawlers operating out of Esperance and Albany had discovered promising beds of saucer scallops, especially within the Recherche Archipelago. The inshore trawl fishery generally had also been identified as a potential developing fishery by the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council during its meeting in Mandurah in April 1986. Thus as part of the development strategy for this fishery the Minister for Fisheries the Hon J F Grill, MLA endorsed a strategy to develop the inshore and deepwater offshore trawl fisheries as two separate fisheries.

As a consequence of the discovery of the south coast scallop resource, considerable interest was developing amongst Western Australian fishermen to exploit this resource. Noting the imminent release of a Commonwealth development plan for the offshore area and the trawling interest in the inshore fishery, the Western Australian Minister for Fisheries introduced a Notice to control trawling in State waters east of Cape Leeuwin. It was thought prudent to issue a Notice for this inshore area rather than a media release to discourage other owners from expending money to gear up their vessels to trawl because historically fishermen have shown they are willing to gamble on being given access to a fishery under



consideration for management on the basis that they have spent money equipping their vessels, notwithstanding that a warning had been issued for them not to do so.

The Minister for Fisheries therefore approved a Notice that limited access to trawl fisheries in State waters on the south coast east of 115°E longitude. He issued a media statement on 1 July 1986 advising that a development plan was being considered and that trawling would be limited to those boats currently using trawl gear in this area, while development management arrangements were being finalised. (Attachment 1). The media statement issue date of 1 July 1986 was taken as the benchmark date for eligibility to obtain an interim endorsement. Eleven vessels were judged eligible for endorsement enabling them to trawl on State waters east of 115°E longitude.

On 15 September 1986, a joint Ministerial media statement by the Commonwealth, Western Australian and South Australian Ministers responsible for Fisheries announced the release of the Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery Development Plan (Attachment 2). This Development Plan divided the Bight region into three zones (see map). Zone B, the inshore zone off Western Australia, would come under State jurisdiction and management while the Commonwealth would manage Zone A. Successful applicants for Zone A were announced by the Ministers on 18 May 1987 (Attachment 3) and the regime for that zone came into effect on 10 July 1987.

Effective management for the whole of Zone B awaits a formal agreement under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement (OCS) with the Commonwealth for jurisdiction to be transferred to Western Australia over demersal trawling inside the 200 metre isobath. In the interim, the Notice concerning trawling in State waters within Zone B confers effective control over this activity east of Cape Leeuwin. Negotiations to accomplish an OCS agreement are still underway. In the meantime it is opportune to canvass the management measures proposed for this developing inshore fishery.

## CONSIDERATION OF ISSUES

Draft proposals were circulated for comment from local fishermen's associations and the existing endorsement holders in September 1987. As a result of comments received the draft proposals were modified to those attached.

### (i) Environmental Considerations

The sea bed inside the Recherche Archipelago has abundant marine sponge and corals, interspersed with sand and mud. It is in these latter areas that most scallops have been trawled. Trawling in sponge and coral areas with existing nets rigged for taking scallops would adversely affect them. The sponge and coral areas are only suitable for appropriately designed fish trawling gear rigged to ride above the level of sponge, although an approach taken in other areas is to chain these bottom types to transform them to sand/mud bottoms more suitable for heavier gear.

However, these sponge areas are considered by operators in other fisheries as crucial to their livelihood, as the fishermen contend they provide vital habitat to the species targeted by the existing wetline and shark gillnet fisheries.

From existing limited knowledge it appears that some suitable trawling ground for trawling with reasonably conventional gear exists within the Recherche Archipelago. However, good trawling ground is generally found in depths of greater than 90 metres, outside the Archipelago. Therefore it is appropriate to curtail all but scallop trawling inside the Recherche Archipelago and make the boundaries for this prohibited area clear cut.

(ii) Gear Conflicts

Concern was also expressed about the effect of fish trawling on the wetline and shark fishermen by direct competition or the taking and of subsequent trashing of juvenile or undersize fish. The specific targeting by trawlers on shark in particular would give rise to a re-assessment of their activities. The by-catch of other commercial finfish and discarding practices will have to be monitored.

(iii) Gear Specifications

In any trawl fishery the major tool to prevent uncontrolled effort expansion is to specify clearly the gear which may be used. Such control is especially important if the size of the available resource is not known as it allows for an adjustment in effort at a later stage.

The resource which has been the subject of most fishing pressure to date has been the scallop resource inside the Recherche Archipelago. In other scallop fisheries in the State the maximum headrope length of the trawl net is not permitted to exceed 14 fathoms and in the three major prawn fisheries the maximum is 16 fathoms. These maxima have allowed a satisfactory level of effort control, as has the specification of the associated boards and chains. However the existing south coast trawl fishermen contend that the fishery is in a development stage and headrope length in particular should not be unduly constrained. As some fishermen are using up to 18 fathoms it appears reasonable to adopt this length for an initial period of two years, after which time the most appropriate headrope length can be determined. In the interim fishermen will also be given the opportunity to phase out existing boards.



Less is known of the appropriate gear specifications for fish trawling nets. The development of gear will be monitored and advice will be provided to help fishermen build gear which will have minimum effect on bottom habitats. More precise specifications may be developed as required.

Given concerns over habitat change by trawlers no beam trawling or bottom chaining will be permitted on the south coast, and no dredging will be allowed inside the Recherche Archipelago.

(iv) Mesh Size

Drawing on extensive experience in other fisheries on saucer scallops it has been determined that the most appropriate mesh size is at least 100 mm, measured as the diagonal stretched internal length. Any lesser size will markedly increase the catch of juvenile scallops, a strategy which is neither biologically nor economically sound.

Less is known of the appropriate size for fish trawling net. No specifications will be set at this stage but the matter will be kept under review.

(v) Seasons

By comparison with other of the State's scallop fisheries and the experience of one year of trawling, some closed season is considered wise to take into account the loss of condition during the post spawning period across the summer months. Dates of opening and closing can become more precise as experience is gained in the fishery, and closing dates in particular can be made flexible ie. the fishery can be closed in Spring rather than Summer if there is a consensus amongst fishermen.

Dates have been proposed for waters inside Recherche Archipelago where scallop trawling grounds are becoming better defined and fishing pressure is relatively high. However to encourage trawlers to explore for other grounds, no season is proposed at present for scallop trawling outside the Recherche Archipelago.

No season for fish trawling is considered appropriate at this stage.

(vi) Vessel Replacements

There is a general policy to limit the size of all inshore Western Australian trawlers to less than 375 units, a size which will accommodate the construction of vessels qualifying for the Commonwealth ship building subsidy. A uniform size allows for the development of an inshore fleet with multiple endorsements to a number of limited entry fisheries, increasing viability.

The average unit size for south coast trawler is 213 units, with a range between 102 and 335. There is thus ample scope for most vessel owners to upgrade to a larger more seaworthy size. As the resource available is not known at this stage it would be unwise to allow unrestrained boat replacement as gear controls by themselves are not sufficient to regulate fishing capacity.

(vii) Boundaries

The present boundary of the Recherche Archipelago is the baselines defining the limits of State internal waters. Upon finalisation of an arrangement under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement more satisfactory boundaries can be adopted which are more easily policed and leave a satisfactory buffer around the major known trawling grounds. These are illustrated on map 2. It is important to also define the eastern boundary to

minimise interference with the central zone of the  
Great Australian Bight trawl fishery.

## MANAGEMENT MEASURES

1. A development fishing zone will be declared off the south coast of Western Australia between latitudes 115°08'E longitude and 125°E longitude in waters out to the 200 metre isobath. Demersal trawling in State waters between 125°E and the Western Australian/South Australian border will be subject to a separate regime.
2. This inshore trawl fishery off the south coast of Western Australia will be declared a development fishery, with a development period to extend until 31 December 1989. This time will be extended for a further year if necessary.
3. Progress in the fishery will be reviewed at the end of 1988 to determine whether the area will support a viable long term fishery and to determine its status. A further review will be held towards the end of 1989 if it is decided to extend the development period.
4. Those vessels currently holding interim endorsements to trawl in State waters off Western Australia east of 115°E longitude will be eligible to be the participants in this development programme in the areas for which they are currently permitted to operate eg adjacent to Albany, Augusta or outside the Recherche Archipelago (for which the boundaries will be adjusted -see 13).
5. Operators of these vessels must submit a fishing plan for the calendar year 1988 outlining their proposed fishing activities off the south coast, including time to be spent fishing, gear to be used, target species, general areas of operation and any other relevant information. Operators must provide detailed logbook data as required and carry observers when requested by Fisheries Department. Renewal of endorsements for 1989 will be determined on the basis of operators successfully undertaking these fishing plans.

6. Interim endorsements will not be transferable and access to the fishery will lapse upon transfers of the State and Commonwealth fishing boat licences.
7. Vessel replacements will be permitted during the development phase. However, vessel size will be limited to no more than 375 units, of which hull units will probably not be permitted to exceed 120 units. This latter question is still under review. These units should be calculated as follows:-

$$\text{Units} = \frac{L \times B \times D \times 0.6}{2.83} + \text{IEP}$$

where

L = Length overall

B = Maximum width

D = Depth from main deck to keel

(All measurements in metres)

IEP = Installed Engine Power in kilowatts

8. Permitted gear for trawling scallops will be a maximum headrope length of 32.9 metres (18 fathoms). This size will be reviewed at the end of the development period. The maximum otter board size will be 2.29 m by 0.91 m with shoes not exceeding 150 mm by 25 mm and a ground chain with links not exceeding 10 mm in diameter. Vessel operators using boards in excess of these limits will be permitted to phase out their use over time.
9. Minimum mesh size for scallop trawling gear will be 100 mm (4") taken as the diagonal internal stretched mesh.
10. Appropriate specifications for fish trawling gear, and mesh size will be kept under review.

11. The open season for trawling for scallops inside the Recherche Archipelago will be from 1 April to 30 November each year.
12. There will be no seasons for scallop trawling outside the Recherche Archipelago at this stage although closures may be instituted as further grounds are discovered and developed.
13. The boundaries of the Recherche Archipelago will be defined as 121°30'E in the west, 34°20'E in the south, 123°20'E in the east and the mainland on the north (see map 2). This is the boundary which will apply for seasonal closures and permitted trawling areas to "outside" vessels.
14. The relationship of this fishery with others in the region will be kept under review, as will the effects of trawling on existing fish populations and the sea bottom habitat. Of special concern would be the targeting by trawlers on shark and excessive catches and subsequent discarding of large amounts of undersize fish.
15. No access fees will be levied for this fishery at this stage. However, participants should be made aware that costs of research may be recouped in whole or part if more permanent access is granted to participants.
16. A Notice or Notices incorporating some of the above measures will be gazetted as soon as possible after Ministerial approval is obtained, and the remainder will be put into place upon finalisation of the appropriate agreement under the Offshore Constitutional Settlement.





## MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE; FISHERIES; AND THE SOUTH WEST

### MINISTERIAL RELEASE

P86/9

July 1, 1986

### TEMPORARY FREEZE ON BOATS ENTERING SOUTH COAST TRAWL FISHERIES

A temporary freeze has been placed on boats trying to enter all south coast trawl fisheries.

Fisheries Minister Julian Grill today said the freeze would remain until a draft management report was considered and a development management plan adopted by Federal Primary Industry Minister John Kerin.

Mr. Grill said the proposed management plan was supported in principle by the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council.

Trawling in Western Australian waters off the south coast would be limited to boats now using trawl gear in the area.

"Fishermen have shown considerable interest in a scallop resource off Esperance and fish stocks within the Great Australian Bight," Mr. Grill said.

"A development plan has been discussed with the Australian Fisheries Service but fishermen should not gear up their vessels for trawling in the region."

Experience had shown that simply warning fishermen against spending money to move into a fishery was not always successful.

"Fishermen have shown they are willing to gamble on being access to a fishery under consideration for management planning on the basis they have spent money equipping their vessels for that fishery in spite of warnings.

'Because of this, I have implemented the freeze on vessels entering south coast trawl fisheries, including scallop areas.'

Access would be granted to only those vessels now trawling in the region.

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**RELEASE**

**MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRY  
CANBERRA**

PI86/201

15 September 1986

GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT TRAWL FISHERY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

A development plan for the Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery was jointly announced today by the Federal Minister for Primary Industry, Mr John Kerin, the Acting Western Australian Minister for Fisheries, Mr Ian Taylor, and the South Australian Minister for Fisheries, Mr Kym Mayes.

The area concerned extends from Cape Leeuwin in Western Australia to Kangaroo Island in South Australia.

Unlike most Australian fisheries, very little development has taken place in the Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery.

"From evidence available, it appears the Bight's trawl fish resources are limited and so a management plan, before any major development takes place, is appropriate," the Ministers said.

The plan provides for three zones. The first is adjacent to the South Australian coast presently exploited by the traditional South Australian marine scale fishery and where trawling will be entirely prohibited. The second is an area off Western Australia, extending from the Eastern group islands to Cape Leeuwin and inside the 100 fathom line. In that area operators will be allowed to trawl provided they meet the established entry criteria. The third zone comprises the remainder of the Great Australian Bight.

The Ministers said people interested in developing the Bight are invited to submit proposals to the Director of the Australian Fisheries Service who would provide details of the conditions under which development would be permitted.

After an assessment of proposals, there would be a total closure of the area to trawl fishing, with only those suitably endorsed permitted to trawl in the fishery.

Information on the conditions under which development would be permitted is available from:

Australian Fisheries Service  
Department of Primary Industry  
Edmund Barton Building  
Barton, ACT, 2600

**RELEASE**

MINISTER FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRY  
CANBERRA

PI87/87

18 May 1987

GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT TRAWL FISHERY DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Fourteen trawlers will be permitted to fish the deep water and central trawling grounds of the Great Australian Bight under a new development plan for the area.

The plan was jointly announced today by the Commonwealth Minister for Primary Industry, Mr John Kerin, the Western Australian Minister for Fisheries, Mr Julian Grill, and the South Australian Minister for Fisheries, Mr Kym Mayes.

The Ministers said an area from Cape Leeuwin off the south-west tip of Western Australia to Kangaroo Island off South Australia would be closed to all trawling except by those fishing vessels with appropriately endorsed Commonwealth fishing licences.

The Commonwealth licences would be issued in accordance with the Great Australian Bight Trawl Fishery Development Plan which was announced in September 1986.

The Ministers said a great deal of interest had been shown in the development of the fishery and a large number of applications for licences had been received.

"The interest in the development of this fishery is part of a general revival within the Australian fishing industry and reflects well for the future prospects of the industry as a whole", they said.

Licence endorsements for the whole of Sector A as shown on the attached indicative map will be issued to the following operators:

Toskel Fisheries Pty Ltd  
Kailis and France Pty Ltd  
A Raptis & Sons  
J & MB Valente Pty Ltd  
Pearson Island Fisheries Pty Ltd  
Sam Blue Seafoods Pty Ltd

In addition, restricted licences for operations in only some areas of Sector A will be issued to the following operators:

' South Coast Fishing Co Pty Ltd  
Mr WE Gordon  
Mr J Collins

The Ministers said that vessels authorised to fish in Sector A would be required to complete logbooks and supply all data on their activities to the Australian Fisheries Service. Their licences would be issued initially for one year with the possibility of an extension for a further year dependent on the development of the fishery. The licences would not be transferable.

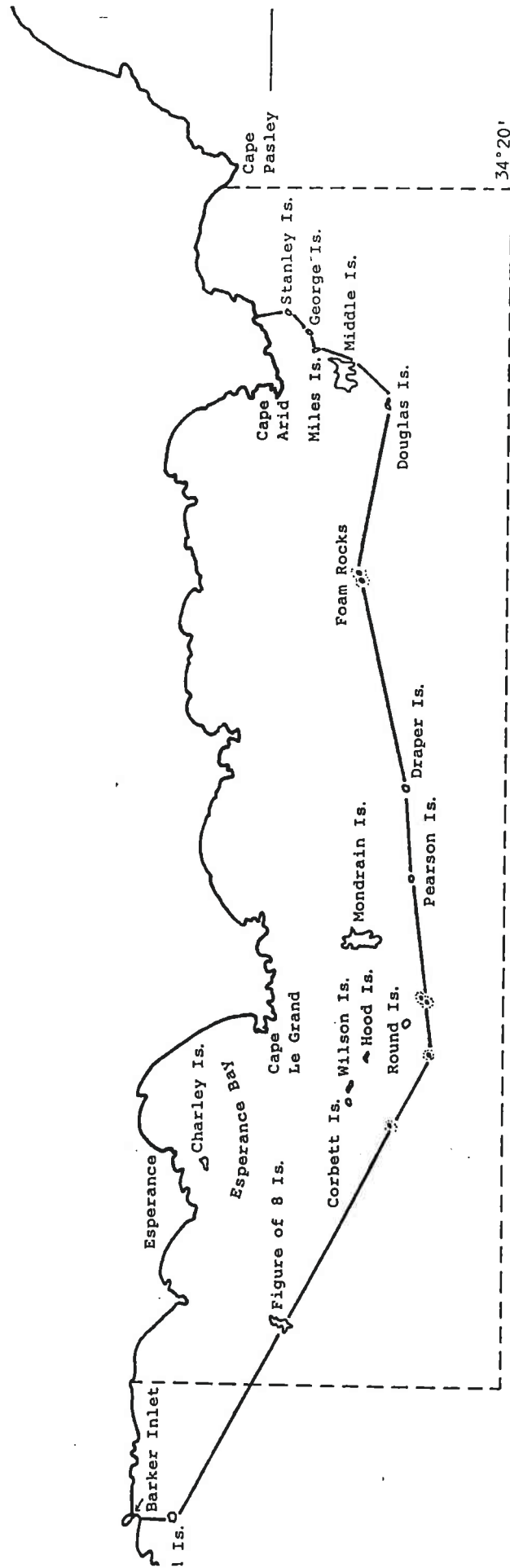
The area indicated as Sector B on the attached map would be managed separately by the Western Australian Government and applications for fishing in this area would be referred to the Western Australian authorities.

No trawling for fish would be permitted in the area designated as Sector C.

Further information: Peter Peterson (062) 72 5091

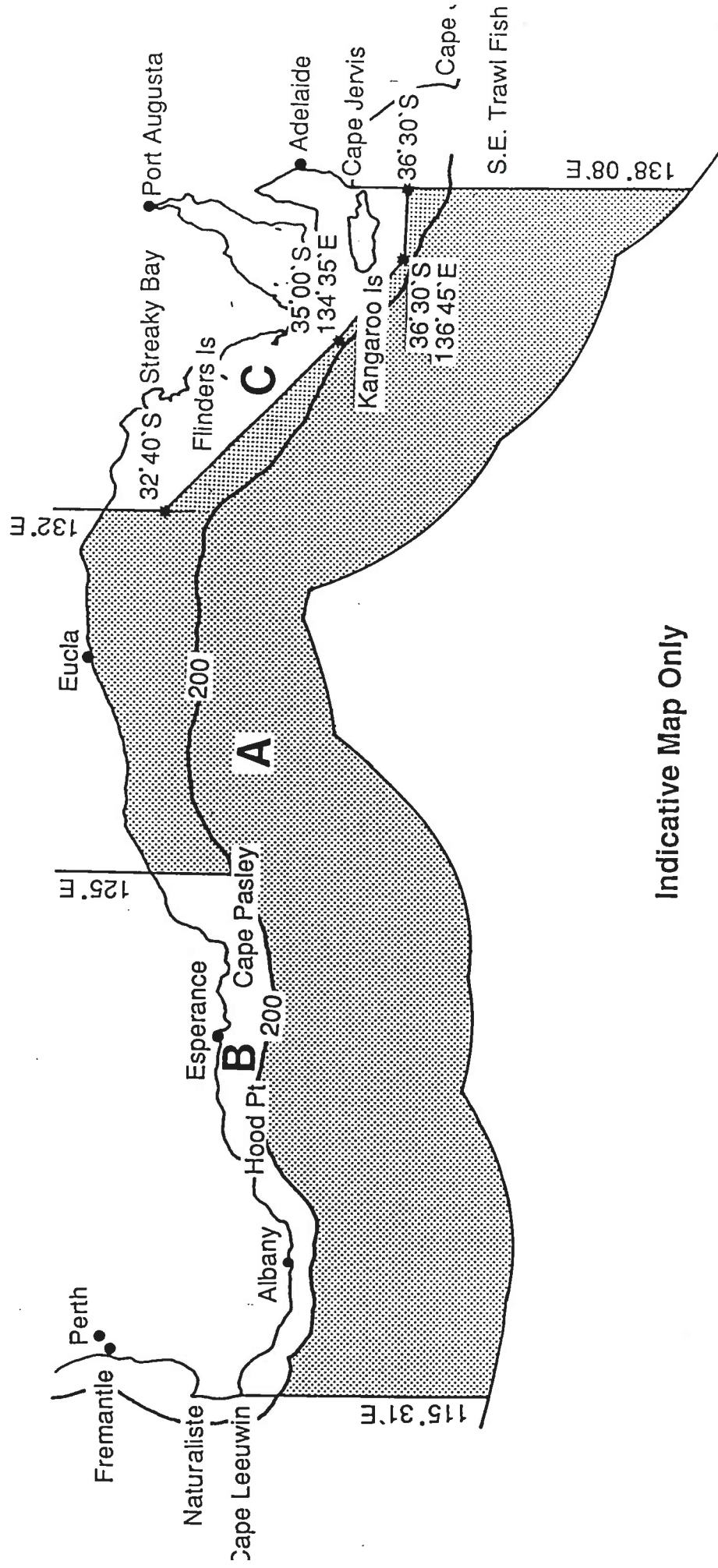
# BOUNDARIES OF THE RECHERCHE ARCHIPELAGO TRAWL GROUNDS

- Current Baseline = Current Boundary
- Proposed Boundary



ARCHIPELAGO OF THE RECHERCHE

# GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT TRAWL FISHERY



Indicative Map Only



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