

Initial results on ‘what’s stopping you from keeping you and your mates’ safe?’: it’s a community effort of working together - regulators and fishers.

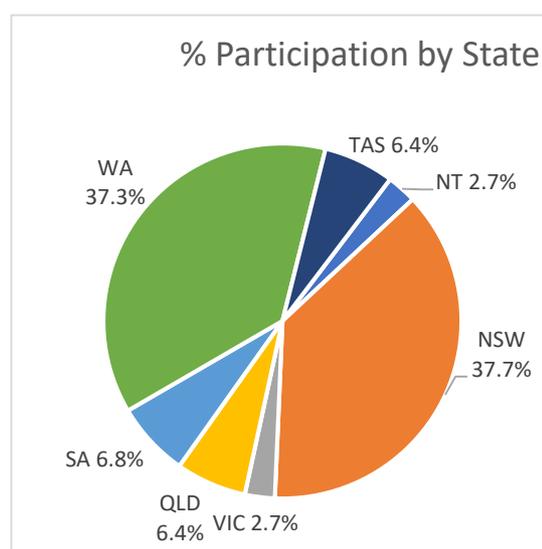
As a result of the ongoing high levels of accidents and incidents in the fishing industry, an FRDC funded survey was released in April 2018. It was both an on line and face to face survey to explore the safety culture of the fishing industry across Australia. The following summarises the initial findings from the survey analysis, which will be discussed with fishers in the case study locations, face to face, in meetings in October and November.

Completed between April 3rd and June 30th 2018, by 219 people in the industry, it covered a range of sectors including Dive, Hand line, Abalone, Shore fishing, Beach hauling, Aquarium, Estuary and Co-ops, but with the majority being from Offshore trawl (30.6%), followed by inshore trawl and estuary fishers. 72.9% of respondents were under the age of 55, and had more than 10 years’ experience in both their current position and the industry. 57% were Skippers (inc. Master) and 33.4% of respondents were ‘crew/deckhand’ or ‘Mate’. 129 of the responses were as a result of direct approaches in case study areas of WA (Shark Bay Prawn Trawl, N=64) and NSW fishers (N=65), between Sydney and Ballina.

Overall the survey found that there is a positive culture of safety in the industry across all categories tested - management, supervision, co-workers, participation and competence.

The results for culture were consistent by both case study area and nationally.

The categories of ‘supervision’ (by skippers of crew or other skippers/co-workers), ‘co-workers’, and ‘competence’, were consistently highest three categories in regard to perceived attitudes to safety. The categories of ‘management’ and ‘participation’ (in the development or design of safety systems for their work place) were the lowest perceived categories - again, regardless of respondent group (See Fig. 1)



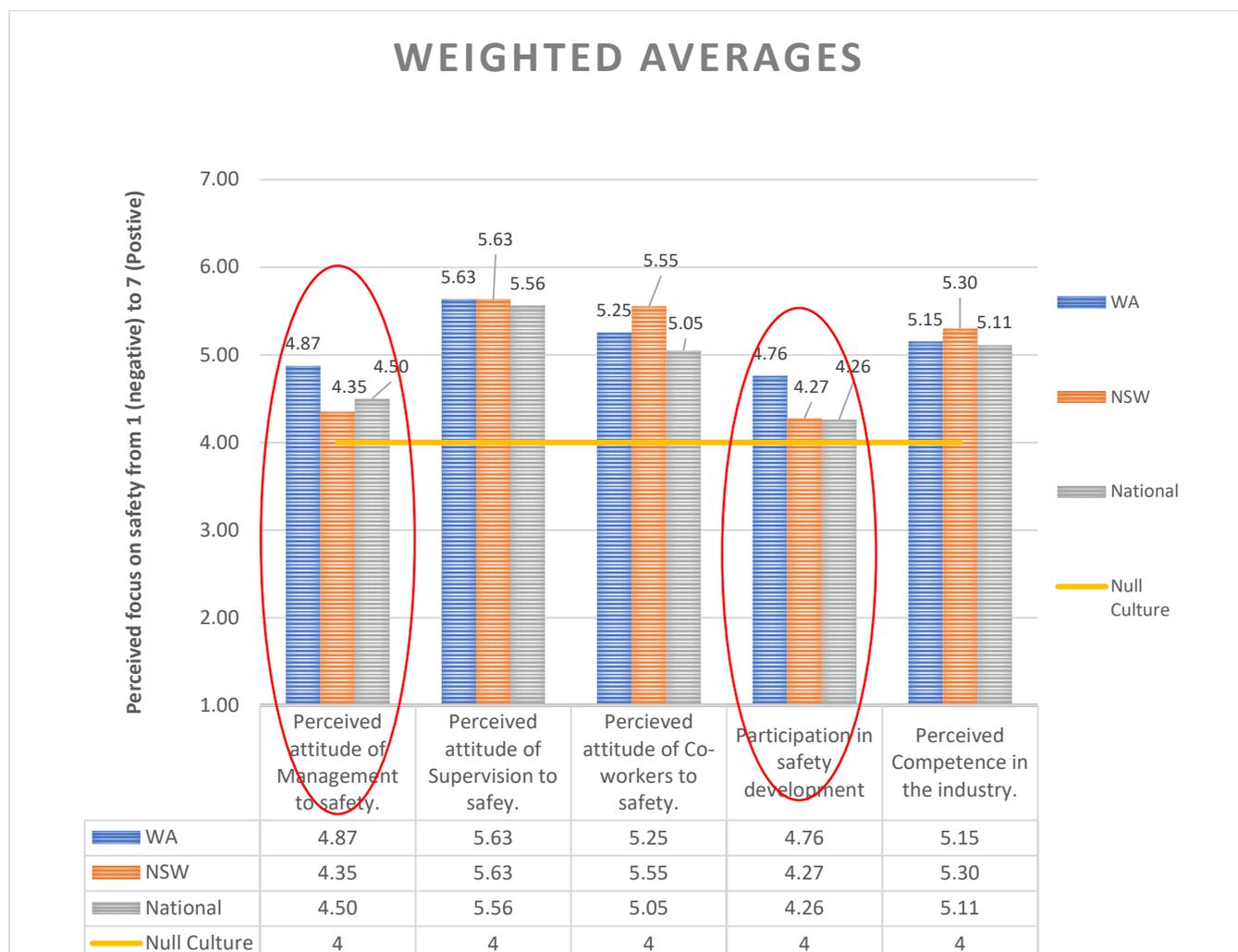
Fishers generally perceive that skippers and fellow crew undertake their work as safely as possible (with 46.4% reporting that they had undertaken safety training within the last three months), and are competent to do their work safely. It was acknowledged that one challenge of training is that it is mostly ‘on the job’ - with it being noted that there is a “Need [for] more hands-on stuff for people coming into the industry.” (NSW Fisher, June 8, 2018).

The lower scores in the categories of management and participation, are explained somewhat through the comments such as; “We are not recognised... for demonstrating safe practices; recognition is through vessel survey, but this is more like a tick box/pink slip for a car” (NSW Fisher, June 8, 2018).

The management culture of safety in the industry was perceived to be more about administrative requirements (seen as costly to fishers) than improved safety (NSW Fisher April 2018) and that “.. proposed new regulations have no consideration on how this sector

has to operate safely, I get the feeling they don't have a clue and don't want to know" (QLD Fisher April 25, 2018).

Figure 1: Weighted Averages for Responses to survey categories



NB: The above national statistics also incorporate the WA and NSW case study responses.

Fishermen recognise that they do have control of their immediate environment, with it being acknowledged that “...the skipper has the crew’s safety in his hands” (NSW Fisher June 8, 2018). However, fishers also recognise that weather is one of the biggest and most unpredictable factors in their safety (weather and fatigue were the two most commonly cited reasons for accidents in the minds of respondents). In line with this, an opportunity was identified through perceived possible safety implications of some fishing regulations that contribute to the ‘pressure to fish’ (NSW Fisher June 8, 2018: WA Fisher April 4, 2018) or contributed to fisher fatigue (NSW Fisher April 24, 2018; WA Fisher April 3, 2018), resulting in fishing in unsafe conditions, environmentally (weather) and/or personally (fatigue), despite the safety objectives of fishers and AMSA.

It was acknowledged that some skippers and crew do contribute to these issues; “My skipper’s boat wouldn’t pass survey... he is always drinking or on drugs” (SA Fisher, April 2018), however some did note anecdotally that ‘uppers’ and then ‘downers’ are known to be used to deal with fatigue, caused by long hours.

With recognition of and thanks for project funding provided by Fisheries Research and Development Corporation, (FRDC Project: 2017-046)

In regard to participation in training, it was noted that there is a “*need [for] practical training on how to deal with unforeseen issues rather than having work safe procedures for every day jobs..*” (SA Fisher May 14, 2018). Further, fishers don’t feel they “*have a big impact on safety programs ‘cause other people make the decisions about what our SMSs will include... this means we don’t have any control over safety in our workplace, ‘cause documents aren’t relevant to us.*”(NSW Fisher, June 7, 2018)

This focus on a review of training and compliance approaches was also reflected in comments received regarding the need to know how to manage fatigue (WA Fisher, April 4, 2018; QLD Fisher April 10, 2018; NSW fisher, April 30, 2018), rather than safety focus being through a reliance on paper SMSs of standard procedures, that are often too broad. It was often perceived that current SMSs, are largely irrelevant except at a very high level, particularly to smaller operators (single or small - up to 6 - crew operators).

The survey is to be followed up with meetings with fishers in the case study areas in WA early in October and NSW in November, to gain fisher input on the interpretations of these findings, and to explore the issues raised particularly in relation to how fishers would improve, their participation the development of safety systems to increase relevance to them, and their suggestions for management actions to increase collaborative effectiveness in safety outcomes.