

International Conference on **Aquaculture & Fisheries** July 20-22, 2015 Brisbane, Australia

Exploring strategy and strategic planning within Australian commercial fisher micro-businesses

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The small business sector is a fundamental element of national economic performance and provides employment to millions of workers globally. Micro-businesses, a sub-set of the small business sector, are a key contributor to that economic performance. The study examined the Australian micro-business sector. The growth and profitability of Australian micro-businesses can be impacted by a myriad of internal and external business factors which can be viewed through the prisms of strategy and strategic planning. A strategy is developed to achieve a vision; goal or what could be described as a better future for the business. Achieving the business goal is met through the process of strategic planning which may involve the use of methodologies, analytical tools and processes. There is considerable research literature regarding strategy and strategic planning in the context of large, small and micro-businesses. However, there is a paucity of research relating to Australian commercial fishing micro-businesses. This study is focused on exploring the use of strategy and strategic planning at the micro-business level within the Australian commercial fishing industry. Consequently, this study examined themes noted by industry and the extent to which these micro-businesses engage in the use of strategy and strategic planning, if at all. The study begins by exploring the context in which commercial fishing micro-businesses operate. This science setting comprises a discussion of the value of the sector and explores the broader contribution of the sector to the national economy. In establishing the context in which commercial fishing micro-business operate, this study also examines current market structures, industry participants and commercial fishing demographics. The final element of context setting includes a discussion of employment, regulation, gender and family business structures. The study then focused on a detailed, multi-faceted literature review which examines strategy, strategic planning and strategic analysis tools. This process laid a foundation for examining strategic management theories relevant to these micro-businesses. For the purposes of this study, the many competing and complementary theories are grouped into four categories: (1) The classical framework (e.g. design, planning and positioning schools); (2) the environment contingency framework (e.g., power and culture schools); (3) the neo-classical competition framework (e.g. resource-based, competition and entrepreneurial schools); and (4) the post-classical contemporary framework (e.g., learning, emergence and cognitive schools). The implications of these theoretical frameworks are discussed in the context of strategy and strategic planning. Taking into account the industry context and literature review, a set of research questions and objectives were developed. The study design and results were identified and reported from data obtained from participating commercial fishing micro-business operators. The primary data collection process was elicited through qualitative interviews. Within the interview process participants were asked to identify short, medium and long-term issues affecting their businesses. Finally, participants were taken through a process of applying a strategic analysis tool. Results suggest that the family business structure is the dominant business framework amongst participants. It was also found that the regulation was a significant impediment to the operation of commercial fishing micro-businesses. The study's final analysis and conclusions suggest that strategy amongst participants in this study exists, is manifested in an ad hoc manner and is reactive in nature. Government legislation is cited as creating obstacles to the use of strategy or strategic planning. Finally, there was a clear understanding from participants of the salient internal and external factors impacting their businesses.

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