



Gulf of Carpentaria Inshore Fishery: Results of Consultation on Gillnet Free Zones and Fishery Reforms

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Summary

Public consultation on proposed gillnet-free zones and management reforms for the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery was conducted between 12 October 2023 and 10 December 2023. This was done through the release of the discussion paper *Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery – Consultation on gillnet-free zones and fishery reforms*.

In total, 4,104 submissions were received, of which 343 were responses to the discussion paper online survey and 3,781 were written submissions.

Survey respondents included local Gulf of Carpentaria community members, commercial fishers, recreational stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, and Traditional Owners.

Feedback was sought on 6 overarching topics:

1. **Gillnet-free zones** – The majority of survey respondents supported the implementation of the proposed gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria. However, when broken down into sectors there was mixed support. A large proportion of stakeholders provided comments and feedback about extensions to the proposed zones. These comments mostly came from interested community members, recreational fishers and Traditional Owner groups.
2. **King threadfin management measures** – Stakeholders provided a number of comments and suggestions about management measures to support recovery of king threadfin stocks, including:
 - gillnet closures;
 - quotas;
 - changes to recreational bag limits and introduction of a boat limit;
 - increased research, monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities; and
 - non-regulatory approaches such as educational programs about catch and release handling, and marine stocking.
3. **Harvest strategy** – There was mixed support regarding the management measures in a future harvest strategy in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The majority of respondents agreed with the draft list of species tiers presented in the discussion paper; however, there was disagreement on the management of the Gulf under one single management unit.
4. **Management framework** – In regard to the introduction of management arrangements to support an effective harvest strategy, there was limited support for the introduction of quotas (prescribed commercial catch limits and individual transferrable quota). There was majority support from most sectors for the unitisation of the N3 symbol.
5. **General reforms** – The majority of stakeholders supported the need for commercial fishers to mark nets with lights on both ends of the net and removing the net closure for the N12 symbol. There was mixed support for permitting the take of additional species (such as barramundi, black jewfish and king threadfin) under the L4 symbol. The majority of respondents did not support changing the N13 fishery area.
6. **Protected species management** – Overall, stakeholders did not support more restrictive net attendance distances for the N3 fishery, with over 50% of respondents disagreeing (especially commercial fishing). Of the respondents who voted to reduce attendance provisions, the majority suggested a distance of 1 nm.

Background

On 5 June 2023, the Australian and Queensland Governments announced over \$160 million to phase-out gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef and to address other high-risk fishing activities.

Commitments relating to the Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery included the following:

- establish additional gillnet-free zones
- accelerate implementation of the *Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy: 2017–2027*
- introduce legislation to mandate independent onboard monitoring
- all hammerhead sharks to be made no-take species.

The Future Fishing Taskforce was formed to provide expert advice to the Queensland Government on the best approach, design and implementation of a \$100 million structural adjustment package and decisions relating to gillnet fishing in the Great Barrier Reef and proposals for the Gulf of Carpentaria, and an impact mitigation package for changes to the Great Sandy Marine Park Zoning Plan. Due to the inter-connected nature of commercial fishing licences and symbols across Queensland, and the cumulative impacts to seafood supply of these decisions, the Taskforce considered all these initiatives together.

The Taskforce recommended that additional consultation inform the locations and design of gillnet-free zones for the Gulf of Carpentaria. Public consultation on gillnet-free zones and management reforms for the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery was conducted between 12 October 2023 and 10 December 2023 and this report summarises the submissions received.

The feedback from the consultation paper will assist the Queensland government in the decision-making process.

In addition, there are serious concerns about the health of king threadfin (*Polydactylus macrochir*) stocks in the Gulf of Carpentaria. The 2021 stock assessment estimated the biomass to be at 5% of unfished levels. Under Commonwealth and Queensland harvest strategy guidelines, immediate management action is required to rebuild fish stocks when the biomass falls below the limit reference point of 20%. An updated stock assessment for king threadfin is currently underway with new catch, effort and biological data. Feedback and learnings from the 2 independent reviews of the Spanish mackerel stock assessment will also be considered in the revised king threadfin stock assessment. The revised stock assessment will be used to inform future management measures for this species once it is completed in April this year.

This report also provides consultation feedback on other upcoming changes to fisheries management for the Gulf of Carpentaria, which are necessary under the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027. The current management framework does not support modern fishery management controls necessary for an effective harvest strategy or protected species management plan.

It is recognised that future changes to the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery may pose difficulties for certain operators in maintaining their commercial fishing activities without financial assistance and adjustment support for the industry.

Consultation process

A discussion paper and online survey were released on 12 October 2023, with the public consultation running over an 8-week period until 10 December 2023:

- Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery working group members were notified directly via email
- other working groups were also notified of the discussion paper and online survey via email
- commercial fishers with an N3 endorsement were notified directly via email and SMS
- Fisheries Queensland senior officials attended the commercial fishing industry association Annual General Meeting in Karumba on 12 October 2023.
- Fisheries Queensland senior officials met with industry leaders and representatives in Cairns on 23 October 2023.
- meeting with commercial fishing representatives from the Gulf in Cairns on 23 November 2023.
- meeting with First Nations representatives from Kowanyama on 14 February 2024.
- broader stakeholders were notified via social media and the Fisheries Queensland website.

Survey questions were primarily presented with options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and questions with a yes or no option. 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.

Visit fisheries.qld.gov.au to find out more about the:

- > *Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy: 2017–2027*
- > **Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery working group**
- > **Future Fishing Taskforce and UNESCO Reef Monitoring Report.**

Consultation results and analysis

! There were 3,694 responses received in support of Australian Marine Conservation Society and Humane Society International. These responses detailed support for gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, however they did not provide responses on the wider Gulf of Carpentaria fishery reforms. For this reason, they have been included in the 'Respondents' and 'Gillnet-free zones' section of this report, but not in the 'Harvest strategy', 'Management framework', 'General reforms' and 'Protected species management' sections.

Respondents

In total, 4,104 submissions were received via the online survey and written responses. The majority of respondents were interested community members, with submissions also received from commercial fishers, recreational fishers, charter fishing operators, seafood wholesalers and marketers, the hospitality sector, Traditional Owners and fishers, and environmental, industry peak body and other non-governmental organisations (Table 1 and Figure 1). Some respondents had multiple interests in the fishery and identified themselves as aligning with more than one stakeholder group. Some respondents did not align themselves with a stakeholder group.

Table 1: Breakdown of survey respondents

Stakeholder group	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Commercial fisher	68	1.65%
Recreational fisher	109	2.65%
Charter fishing operator	14	0.34%
Traditional fisher / Traditional Owner	4	0.10%
Seafood wholesaler/marketer	25	0.61%
Hospitality (restaurant, café, fish and chip) owner/worker	23	0.56%
Environmental, industry peak body or other non-governmental organisation	44	0.34%
Interested community member	3,813	92.73%
Other	30	0.73%
Not specified	11	0.29%

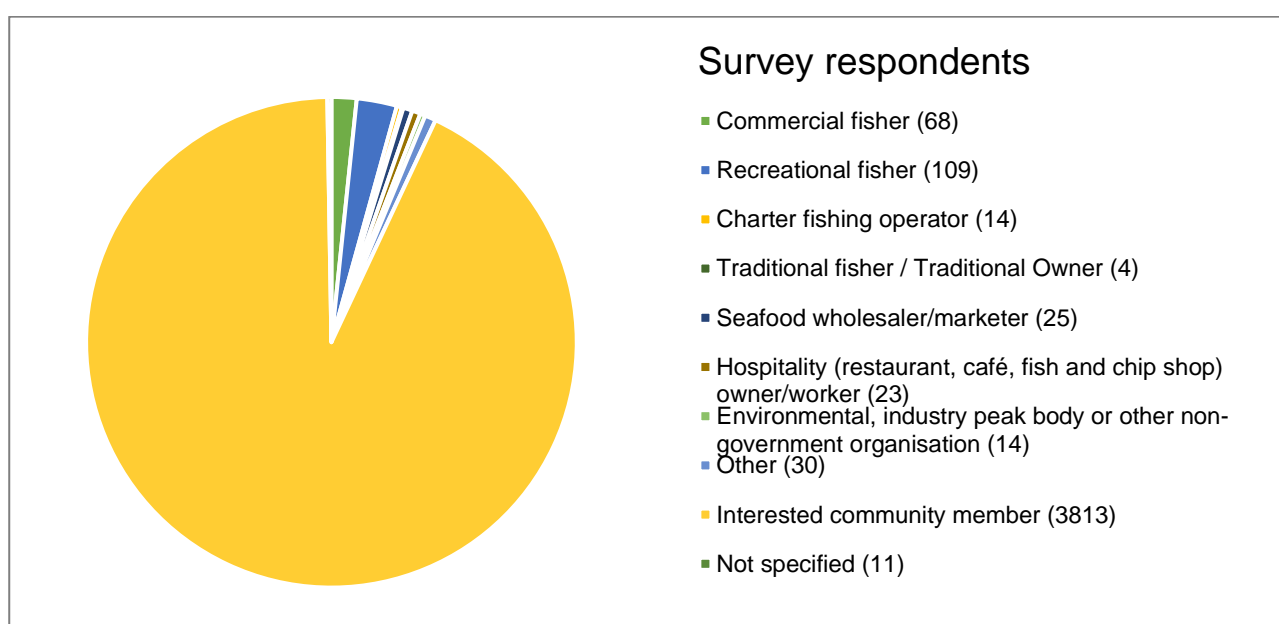


Figure 1: Breakdown of survey respondents by stakeholder group

Gillnet-free zones

Overall, there was strong support for the implementation of gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, with 93% of respondents supporting the proposal (Figure 2).

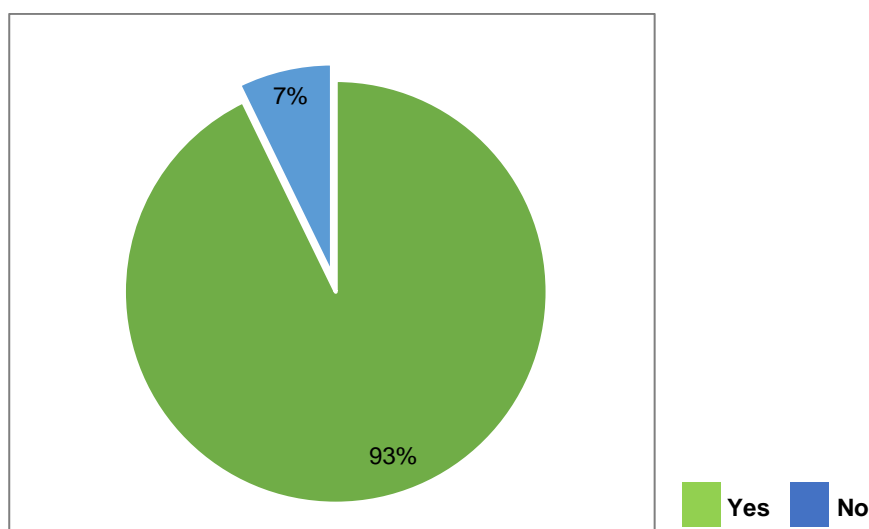


Figure 2: Overall support or opposition to the proposal of gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria

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

- effort shift to other areas of the Gulf of Carpentaria and other fisheries (e.g. crab, mackerel) which may result in increased threatened, endangered and protected (TEP) species interactions
- the impact that reduced gillnetting would have on the small towns in the Gulf of Carpentaria, including lower population numbers, reduced governmental services (including healthcare, schooling and childcare) and effects on small businesses
- reduced income for commercial fishers and for businesses in the supply chain areas of commercial fishing – hospitality, retail businesses, local processing, tackle and supply stores and mechanics
- job security, particularly for businesses in the supply chain areas of commercial fishing – hospitality, retail businesses, local processing, tackle and supply stores and mechanics
- mental health of fishers and the greater community affected by the introduction of gillnet-free zones
- preferred sources of seafood – overall, respondents stated they preferred fish caught from wild-caught fisheries over aquaculture or imported sources of seafood
- sufficient seasonal closures already in place in the Gulf of Carpentaria
- while net-free zones can be an important fisheries management tool, disputed the proposed zones due to 'absence of fair and balanced analysis'
- perceived short consultation timeframe for the changes being proposed.

While these concerns are acknowledged, doing nothing is not an option and would go against the fundamental principles of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy and the taskforce recommendation to consult the public on the locations and design of gillnet-free zones for the Gulf of Carpentaria.

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

- support for a full gillnet closure in the Gulf of Carpentaria, with appropriate compensation and buy-back schemes for commercial licence holders
- building healthy fish stocks in the Gulf of Carpentaria secures future economic growth in the tourism and recreational fishing sectors
- gillnet-free zones will provide areas for recovery of fish stocks and protection for TEP species, including sawfish, spartooth sharks and hammerhead sharks.

However, due to limited information about the distribution and biology of many TEP species in the Gulf of Carpentaria, combined with likely gaps in fishery dependent interaction information, the positive impact of

gillnet-free zones is difficult to quantify. Therefore, a monitoring program to assess the effectiveness of these zones in protecting TEP species should also be implemented.

A large proportion of stakeholders provided comments about extensions of the proposed zones:

- northern Gulf of Carpentaria from Crab Island south to Cape Keerweer and west to the boundary of Queensland State waters
- from Pormpuraaw to Topsy Creek and 30 km offshore, creating a 30 km buffer around the Mitchell River
- from Brannigan Creek to Flinders River and 30 km offshore, creating a 30 km buffer around the Norman River
- from the Leichhardt River north around the South Wellesley Islands, Bountiful Islands, Mornington Island and Wellesley Islands south to Gangalidda.

Extending the gillnet-free zones would not only includes upstream habitat of a river, but also a 30 km radius around a river mouth in order to consider habitat requirements for TEP species present in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Further to these comments, there was very strong community sentiment and support (particularly from Traditional Owner groups) for the inclusion of the following areas in gillnet-free zones:

- Mitchell River and Topsy Creek
- Aurukun River systems
- Albert and Leichardt rivers.

Respondents were adamant the protection of these areas is vital to conserving cultural and conservation values that are impacted by commercial gillnet fishing. Traditional Owner groups expressed a strong desire to develop and increase recreational/charter fishing and environmental tourism activities within their communities.

Proposed zone 1: Northern gillnet-free zone – all rivers and creeks and nearshore waters from Thud Point north to Cape York

The majority of survey respondents supported the implementation of the northern gillnet-free zone (Figure 3 overleaf); 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, hospitality owners/workers and seafood wholesalers/marketers largely did not support the implementation of the northern gillnet-free zone.

In addition to the general comments above opposing gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, stakeholders provided the following comments:

- The northern zone area will be vitally important in the protection of TEP species, including turtles, sawfish and spartooth sharks.
- Sighting data of sawfish indicates that this is an important area and supports the area being gillnet free. The Ducie/Wenlock/Port Musgrave system (included in the proposed northern zone) is the only location in the world where all 4 species of sawfish co-occur.
- The systems in the proposed northern zone are smaller and more at threat from gillnets.
- This zone will help Queensland's charter and recreational fishing tourism industry and will provide economic benefits to the Western Cape and Northern Peninsula Area communities.
- The proposed northern closure is essential to rebuilding king threadfin stocks, along with the introduction of other management measures.
- Closures in zone 1 in the northern region should be sufficient to achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy.

Stakeholders provided comments and support about extending the proposed northern gillnet-free zone south to Cape Keerweer, as it would provide protection for Australian humpback and bottlenose dolphins, numerous species of turtles and sawfish. This extension would include the Archer River system and mouth, which are extremely important for freshwater sawfish. This was supported by Traditional Owner groups, which expressed strong community support to include the Aurukun River systems in the gillnet-free zone.

In addition, there was recreational and charter sector support to extend the proposed zone south of Thud Point to include Norman Creek, False Pera Head, Kirke River and Love River. These areas were identified by respondents due to popularity with charter and recreational fishers.

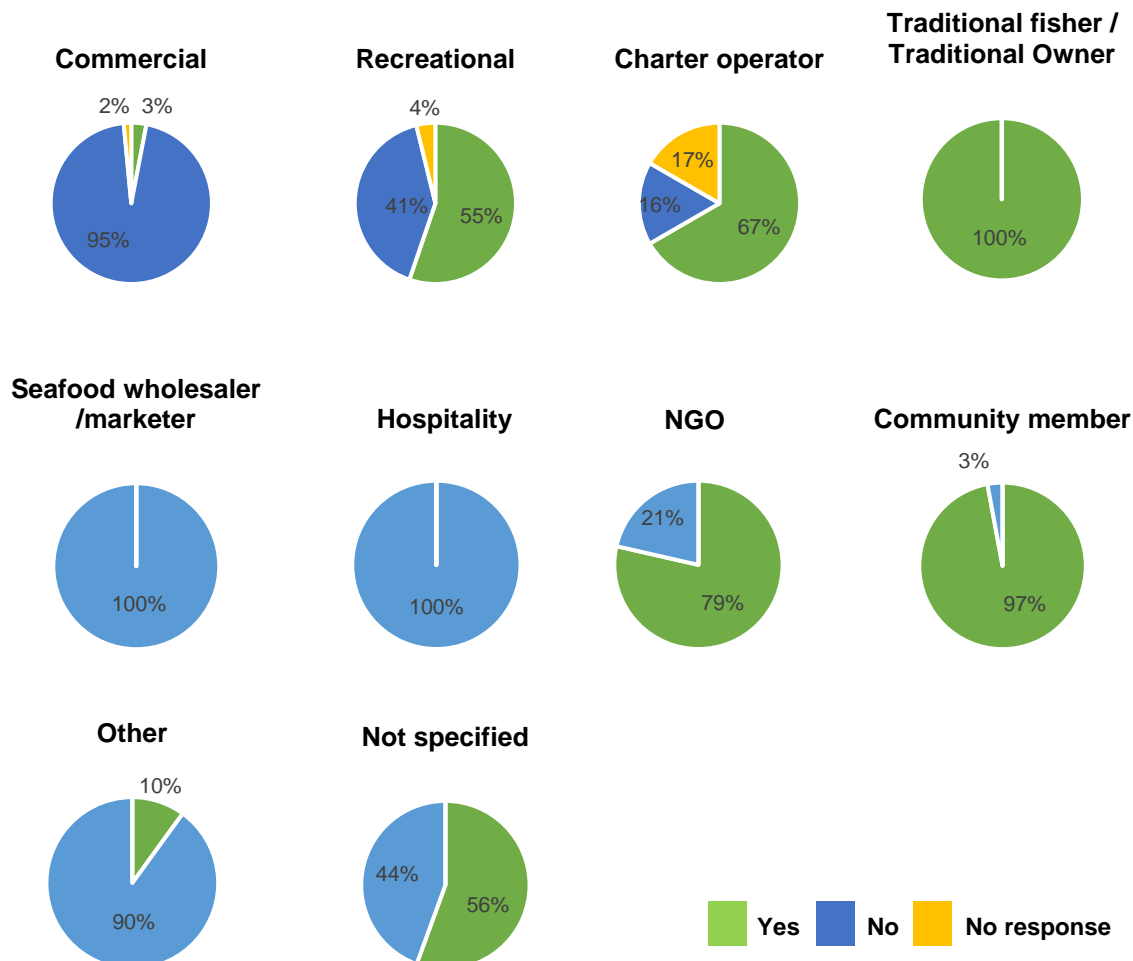


Figure 3: Responses to question 3 – Do you agree with proposed zone 1 in the northern region?

Proposed zone 2: Western gillnet-free zone – all rivers and creeks and nearshore waters from the border with the Northern Territory east to Moonlight Creek, including all N3 waters around the Wellesley Islands

The majority of survey respondents supported the implementation of the western gillnet-free zone; however, there were split levels of support within stakeholder groups (Figure 4 overleaf). 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, hospitality owners/workers and seafood wholesalers/marketers largely did not support the implementation of the western gillnet-free zone.

In addition to the general comments opposing gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, stakeholders had concerns regarding effort shift due to the size of the proposed western closure. Stakeholders reasoned that these concerns could be mitigated by leaving rivers, creeks and the nearshore area open to 2 nautical miles

from the mainland, leaving an extremely large body of water for TEP species protection around islands and traditional fishing.

Stakeholders supporting the western gillnet-free zone stated that:

- it has been identified as one of the areas of potentially the highest biodiversity of marine threatened species in the Gulf of Carpentaria
- the large zone will provide wide-reaching protection for many species of marine animals that travel between river systems.

Stakeholders also provided comments and support about extending the proposed western gillnet-free zone:

- Extending the zone from the Leichhardt River north around the South Wellesley Islands, Bountiful Islands, Mornington Island and Wellesley Islands south to Gangalidda would increase protection for dugongs, dolphins and numerous species of turtles. In addition, the Leichhardt River region is a known pupping area for freshwater sawfish, and a likely pupping area for green and dwarf sawfish.
- There was strong support from Traditional Owner groups to include the Albert and Leichardt rivers in the gillnet-free zone.

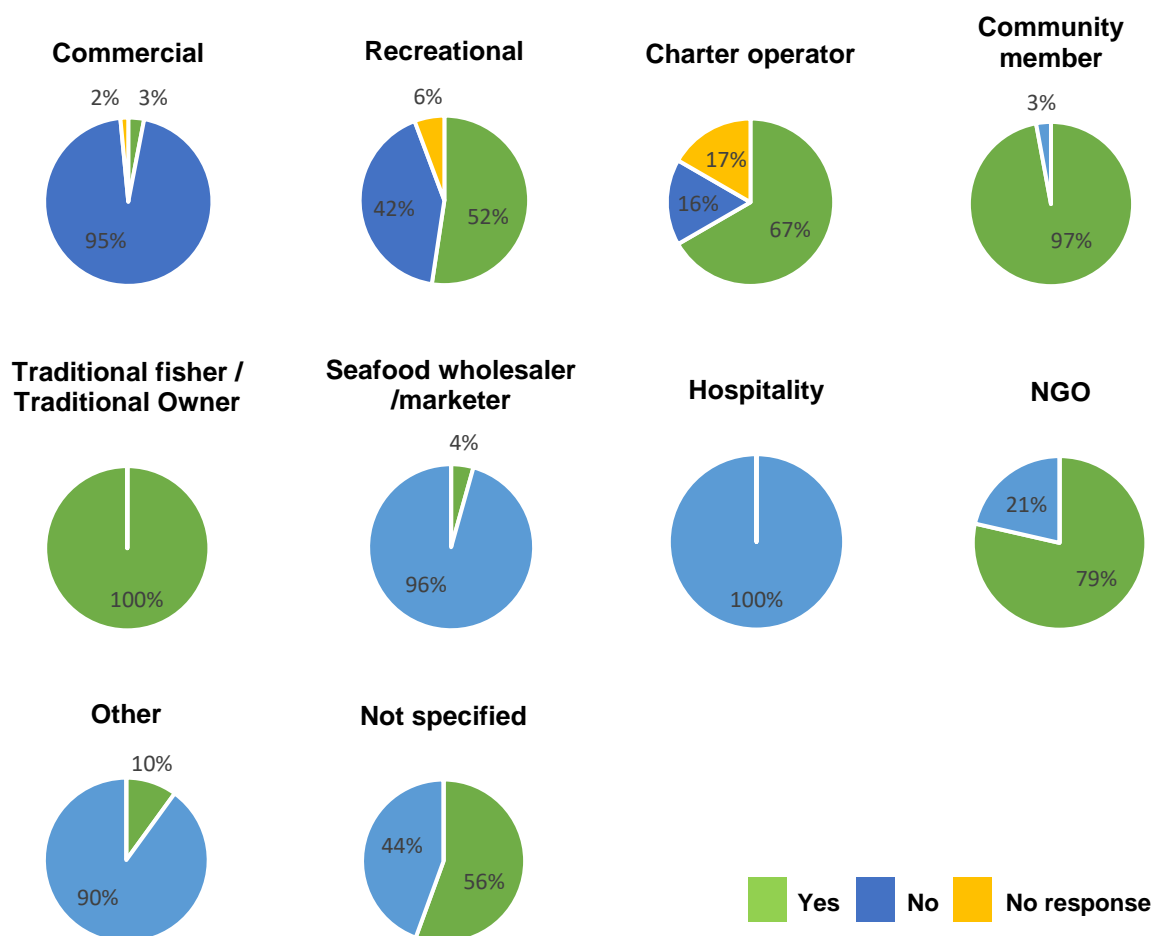


Figure 4: Responses to question 4 – Do you agree with proposed zone 2 in the western region?

Proposed zone 3: Norman River gillnet-free zone – remaining waters of the Norman River and associated tributaries

The majority of survey respondents supported the implementation of the Norman River gillnet-free zone; however, there were split levels of support within stakeholder groups (Figure 5 overleaf).

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, hospitality owners/workers and seafood wholesalers/marketers largely did not support the implementation of the Norman River gillnet-free zone.

In addition to the general comments opposing gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, stakeholders provided the following comments:

- This area is an important support mechanism for industry that offers protection to fishers in bad weather. It is also used by fishers having mechanical or crewing problems and needing to remain close to town.
- The Norman River is the subject of ‘gentlemen’s agreements’ that limit gillnet fishing upstream.
- Fishers had concerns regarding monetary investments in commercial fishing operations, including land bases, vessels and infrastructure.

Stakeholders providing support for the Norman River gillnet-free zone reasoned that this proposed closure would be a huge benefit to Karumba and Normanton. The increase in fish populations in this river would promote more tourism and other business opportunities like charter operations and specialty tackle shops.

Stakeholders also provided comments and support about extending the proposed Norman River gillnet-free zone:

- Extending the zone to encompass an area from Brannigan Creek to Flinders River and 30 km offshore would create a 30 km buffer around the Norman River – which would significantly increase habitat availability for sawfish, as this area is a pupping area for freshwater sawfish and includes important river systems in which pupping is likely to occur for green and dwarf sawfish
- Traditional Owner groups showed support for including additional Gulf rivers, such as the Gilbert, Bynoe, Albert and Leichardt rivers.

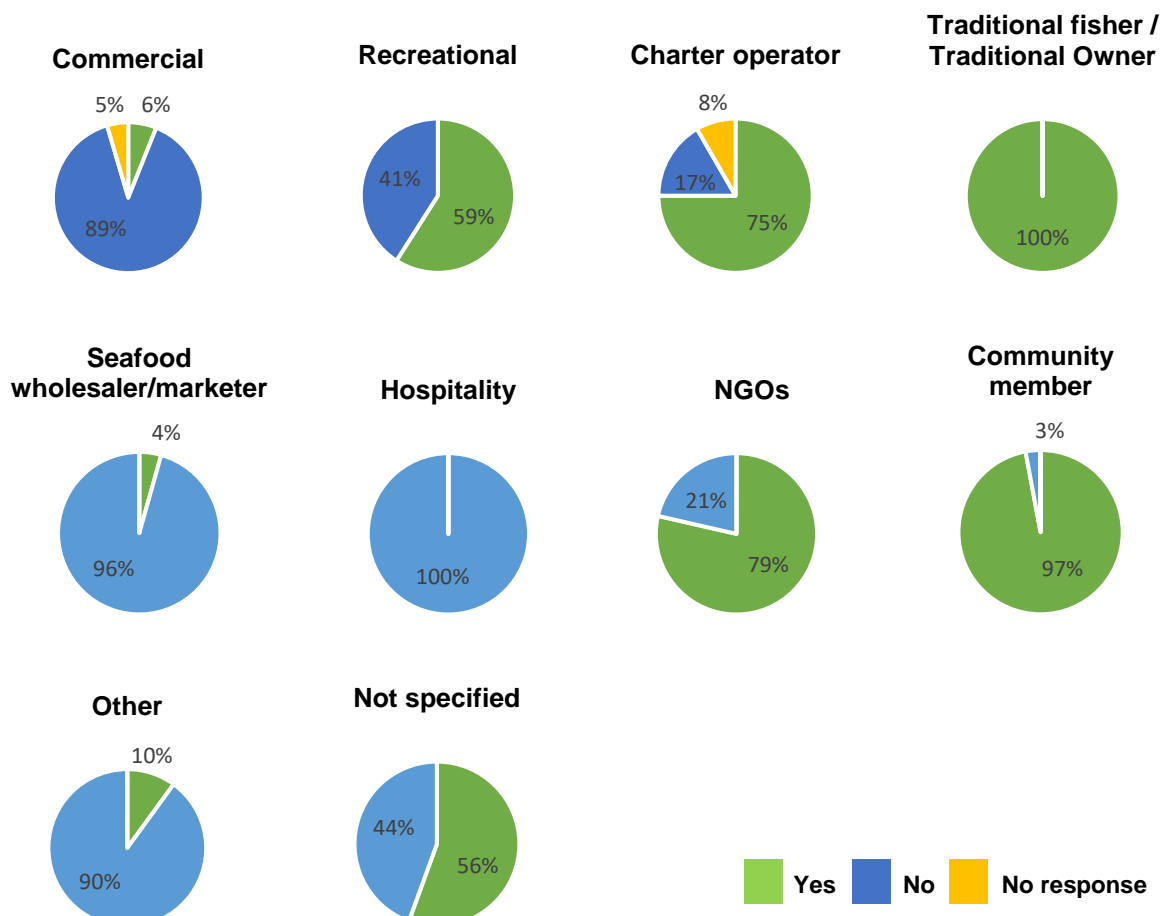


Figure 5: Responses to question 5 – Do you agree with proposed zone 3 in the Norman River?

Proposed zone 4: Pormpuraaw gillnet-free zone – remaining rivers, creeks and nearshore waters between Balurga Creek and the Chapman River, including nearshore waters north of Balurga Creek and south of the Chapman River

The majority of survey respondents supported the implementation of the Pormpuraaw gillnet-free zone; however, there were split levels of support within stakeholder groups (Figure 6 overleaf). 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, hospitality owners/workers and seafood wholesalers/marketers largely did not support the implementation of the Pormpuraaw gillnet-free zone.

In addition to the general comments supporting the implementation of gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, stakeholders supporting the Pormpuraaw gillnet-free zone stated that it would allow the local Traditional Owners increased access and ability to fish their sea country and provide for their families and communities.

In addition to the general comments opposing gillnet-free zones in the Gulf of Carpentaria, stakeholders provided the following comments:

- There was concern regarding monetary investments in commercial fishing operations, including land bases, vessels and infrastructure.
- Significant closures are in place already to enable First Nations people to access economic opportunity.

Stakeholders also provided comments and support about extending the proposed Pormpuraaw gillnet-free zone.

- Extending the zone to encompass an area from Pormpuraaw to Topsy Creek and 30 km offshore to create a 30km buffer around the Mitchell River would ensure significant protection and increased habitat for freshwater sawfish and important habitat and nesting areas for dolphins, dugongs and turtles. This was supported by recreational fishers, NGOs and Traditional Owner groups.

Further to these comments, there was very strong community sentiment and support (particularly from Traditional Owner groups) for the inclusion of Mitchell River and Topsy Creek in the proposed gillnet-free zone. Respondents were adamant the protection of these areas is vital to conserve cultural and conservation values and that the continuation of commercial gillnetting in their traditional sea country will have devastating consequences for their community and ecosystems.

Traditional Owner groups also expressed a strong desire to continue to build on recent state infrastructure upgrades and investments (e.g. the upgraded road to Topsy Creek to facilitate local all-weather access and improved facilities for recreational fishermen), and develop and increase recreational/charter fishing and environmental tourism activities within their communities.

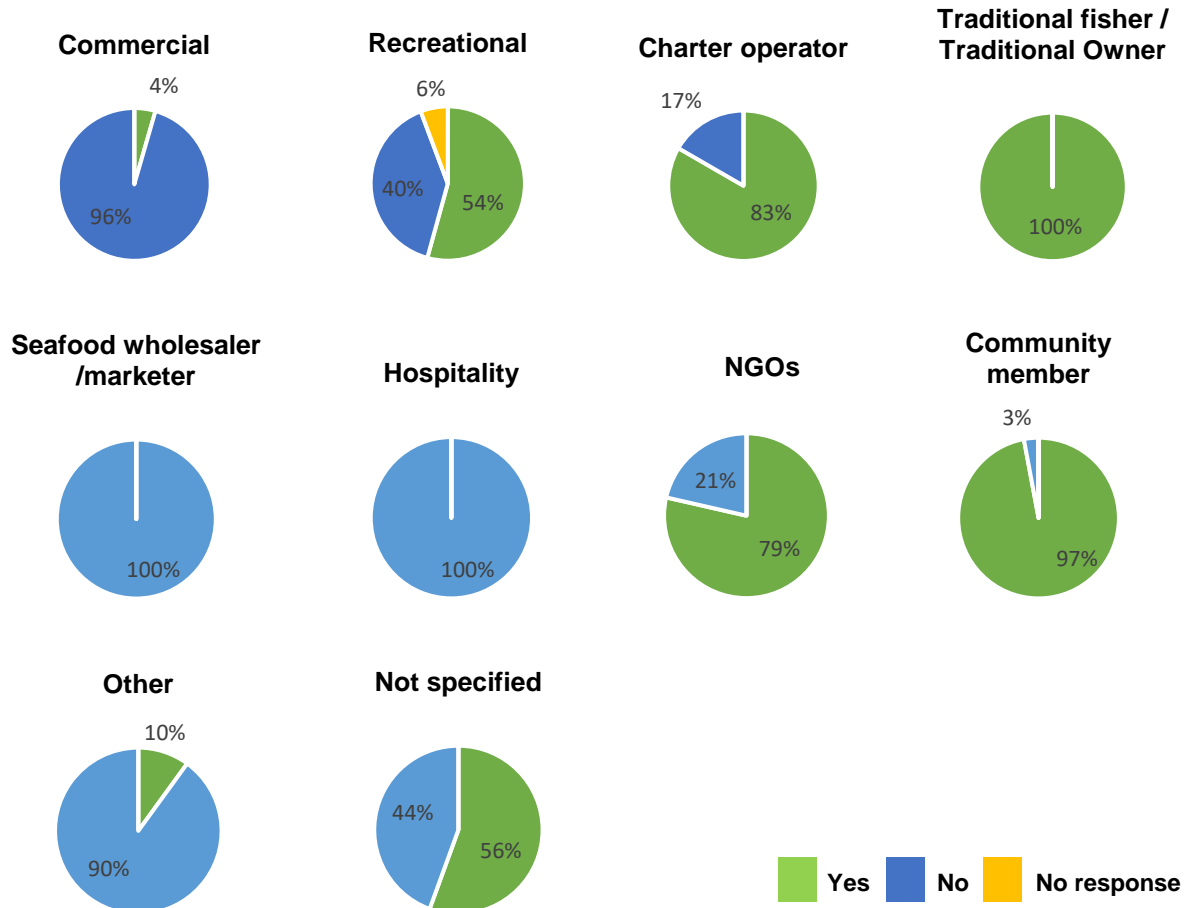


Figure 6: Responses to question 6 – Do you agree with proposed zone 4 around the Pormpuraaw region?

King threadfin management measures

Respondents commented on a number of management measures to support the recovery of king threadfin stocks. These are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of feedback raised in responses to question 9 – What management measures would you recommend to support the recovery of king threadfin stocks?

Management measure	Feedback from stakeholders
Gillnet closures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The N3 commercial fishery immediately close until king threadfin stocks have returned to 20% unfished levels Seasonal spawning closures in areas where fish aggregate Closures in areas known as 'salmon grounds' (e.g. rivers and creeks and nearshore areas between the Bynoe River and Gore Point) Proposed gillnet-free zones from the discussion paper will alleviate the pressure on king threadfin stock
Quotas	Given the non-selectivity of commercial gear in the fishery and the vulnerability of king threadfin in nets, this may not be the best way to recover the stock
Recreational take	<p>A range of sectors (including recreational fishers) provided ideas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> declare king threadfin a no-take species until stock recovers reduce recreational possession limit to 1 per person and introduce a 2 per boat limit increase size limit introduce maximum size limit
Refined research and monitoring	<p>Many stakeholders hold concerns about the accuracy of the latest stock assessment results, data inputs (including recreational harvest estimates and commercial fishing effort data) and assumptions regarding stock resilience and environmental effects.</p> <p>Further research and monitoring should be conducted to support management changes – suggested areas include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> environmental triggers affecting recruitment and spawning behaviour timing and location of spawning aggregations continued engagement with commercial fishers in the stock assessment process socio-economic impacts independent review of stock assessment mandated recreational reporting
Compliance and enforcement	<p>Stakeholders mentioned compliance and enforcement activities to ensure management measures are effective and combat black-marketing, illegal fishing and non-compliance with existing regulations</p> <p>Suggested areas for improved compliance and enforcement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> on-water compliance with gillnet-free zones, possession and boat limits, minimum size limits and commercial fishing rules detection of illegal foreign fishing vessels greater presence at boat ramps and on the water
Non-regulatory approaches	<p>Non-regulatory options should be considered alongside any regulatory changes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational programs (e.g. catch and release handling) marine stocking availability of venting needles to manage barotrauma in fish

Harvest strategy

Species tiers

Over half of the respondents agreed with the draft list of species tiers, with most sectors showing majority support (Figure 7). Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) largely did not support the draft list of species tiers presented.

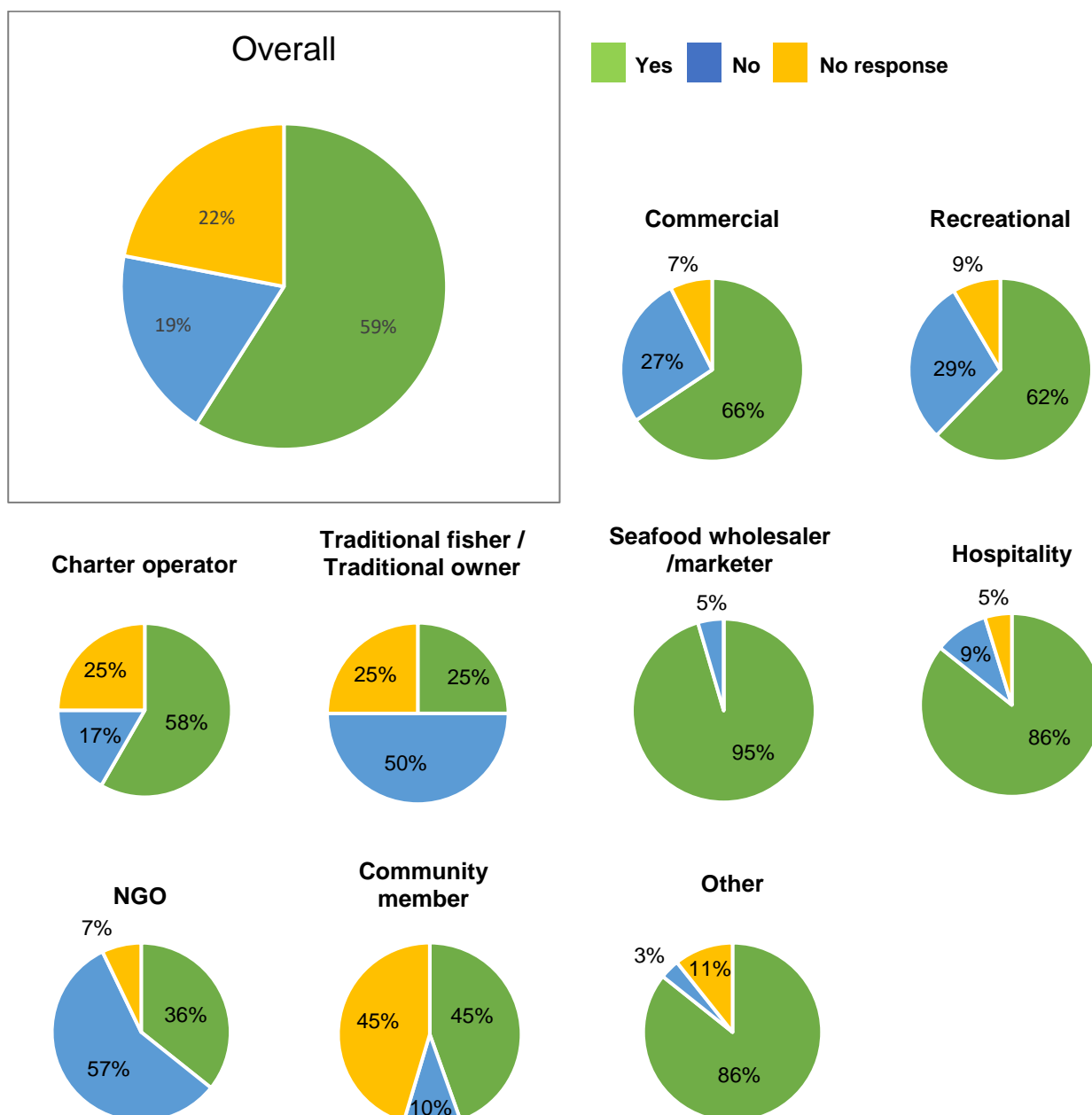


Figure 7: Responses to question 10 – Do you agree with the draft list of species tiers?

Stakeholders provided a number of reasons why they did not agree with the draft list of species tiers:

- Due to the recent stock assessment, king threadfin should be classed as a tier 1 species.
- Only barramundi and king threadfin should be classed as tier 1 species.
- 'Blacktip sharks complex' should include graceful shark (*Carcharhinus amblyrhynchoides*) because of the identification challenges (particularly as juveniles) with other blacktip species in the complex and similar environmental risk ratings.

- The tier system presented in the discussion paper prioritises the status of only the major harvest species. Management status should consider species with high charter/recreational value.
- Refer to tier 2 and tier 3 species as high recreational and social value rather than 'low economic value'.
- There should be no change to current arrangements.
- Wanted more scientific data on how the species make the tier list in order to comment.

Management regions

More than half of survey respondents did not support the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria under one single management unit (Figure 8). There were higher levels of support from the recreational fisher, charter fishing operator and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors, whereas the commercial fisher, seafood wholesaler/marketer, hospitality and community member sectors had higher levels of opposition.

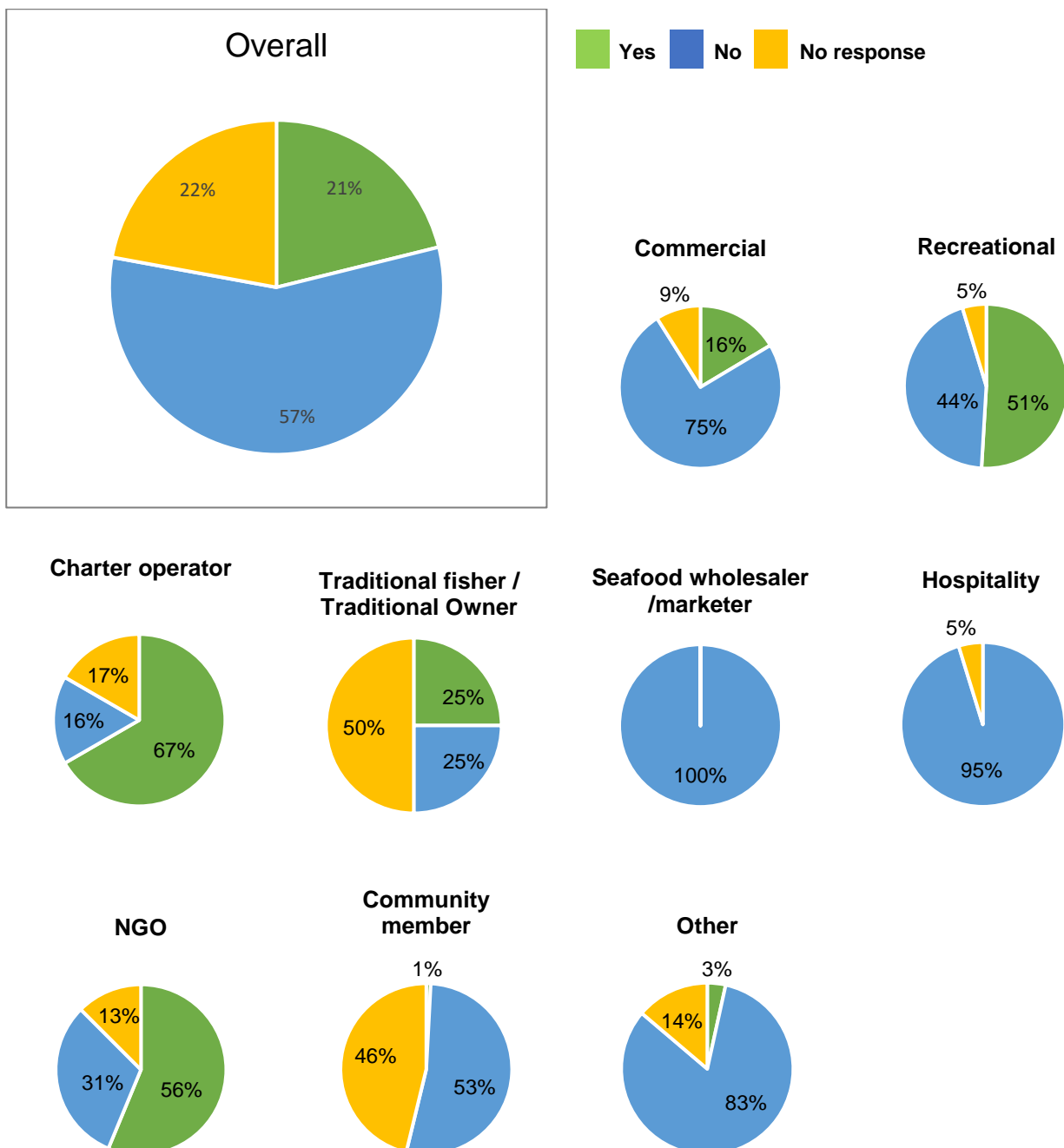


Figure 8: Responses to question 11 – Do you support the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery under one single management unit?

Stakeholders who were not in favour of the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery under one single management unit stated the following:

- The Gulf of Carpentaria should be managed with N3 symbols locked into management regions/licence areas. This would encourage a sense of responsibility for their areas and would boost accountability.
- Operators that are not locked into management areas may make mistakes, resulting in high negative interactions with non-target species or excess viable catch.
- If prescribed commercial catch limits are introduced without splitting the Gulf of Carpentaria into management regions, quotas will be caught in the north before fishers in the southern area have a chance.
- There needs to be mechanisms to close specific areas for specific times to better manage the health of the stocks.
- Geographical zoning based on species distribution, geography and climate must be introduced.
- The 3 separate fisheries (N3, L4 and N12/N13) should be managed separately.

Stakeholders who agree with the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery under one single management unit reasoned that:

- the Gulf of Carpentaria needs to be considered as a single area as any changes/restrictions in one area will impact another area.
- spatio-temporal closures would help protect fish stocks while keeping the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery as one single management unit.

Management framework

Option 1: Prescribed commercial catch limits

Over half of respondents did not support setting prescribed commercial catch (PCC) limits for target species in the Gulf of Carpentaria (Figure 9). Respondents from the commercial, seafood wholesaler and hospitality stakeholder groups largely did not support the introduction of PCC limits as an option. Half of respondents from interested community member and recreational fisher stakeholder groups also did not support the introduction of PCC limits. The majority of charter fishing operators, Traditional Owner groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) supported the introduction of PCC limits.

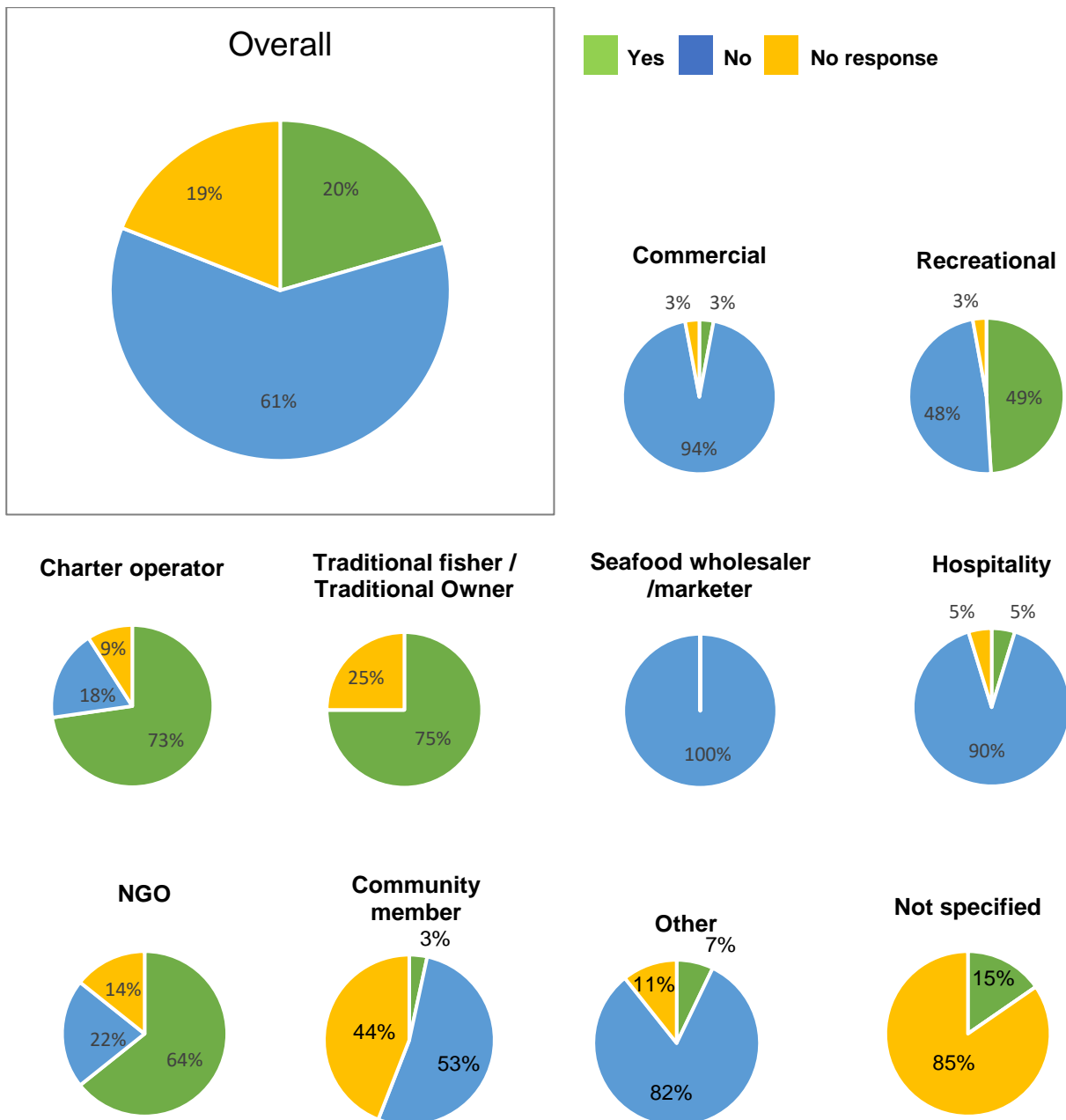


Figure 9: Responses to question 12 – Do you support competitive prescribed commercial catch limits as an option?

Stakeholders that did not support introducing PCC limits stated that:

- they result in issues such as a race to fish and high grading
- there is too much wastage of fish once the PCC limits are reached – gillnets are not selective and fish are not able to be released alive
- introducing quota may be a positive thing but not if it results in a reduction in commercial fishers' available catch limits
- there are concerns that quotas will result in flow-on effects to the market and the consumer
- quotas are not relevant until stock assessments are completed
- the proposed gillnet-free zones will be enough reform for the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Stakeholders that were in favour of introducing PCC limits said that they should be introduced:

- for barramundi, king threadfin, blue salmon, grunter, jewfish and all mackerel species
- for tier 2 and tier 3 species only, with a different management tool utilised for tier 1 species
- alongside individual transferable quota and not be used as a standalone output control for all management tiers.

Option 2: Individual transferable quota

Over half of respondents did not support the setting individual transferrable quota (ITQ) limits for target species in the Gulf of Carpentaria (Figure 10 overleaf). Respondents from the commercial, seafood wholesaler and hospitality stakeholder groups largely did not support the introduction of ITQ as an option. Half of respondents from interested community member and recreational fisher stakeholder groups also did not support the introduction of ITQ. The majority of charter fishing operators, Traditional Owner groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) did support the introduction of ITQ.

Stakeholders that did not support introducing ITQ raised the following issues:

- Quotas are unfair to smaller operators.
- Concerns that quotas will result in flow-on effects to the market and the consumer.
- The fishery becomes a marketplace, with external stakeholders investing in quota and charging fishers.
- Concerns around quota limits set too high due to fishers over-reporting catches prior to ITQ introduction.
- Increased likelihood of institutional investment creating uneconomic conditions for fishers to operate.
- Introducing quota may be a positive thing but not if it results in a reduction in commercial fishers' available catch limits.
- Gillnets are not selective and fish are not able to be released alive once ITQ is reached.
- Proposed ITQ allocations should be informed by stock assessments.

Stakeholders that were in favour of introducing PCC limits had the following comments and suggestions:

- ITQ would improve fishing efficiency and maintain a fisher's economic position in the fishery while addressing overfishing/sustainability challenges.
- During allocation of ITQ, restrict to fishers that have caught a minimum amount of tier 1 species within the time period. This would ensure the most active fishers receive the bulk of the quota and are not attempting to aggregate small parcels of quota after allocation to go fishing.
- Implementation of ITQ must be alongside robust independent data validation to prevent discards.
- Support ITQ for barramundi, king threadfin, giant threadfin, queenfish, barred javelin, shark, jewfish and mackerel species.

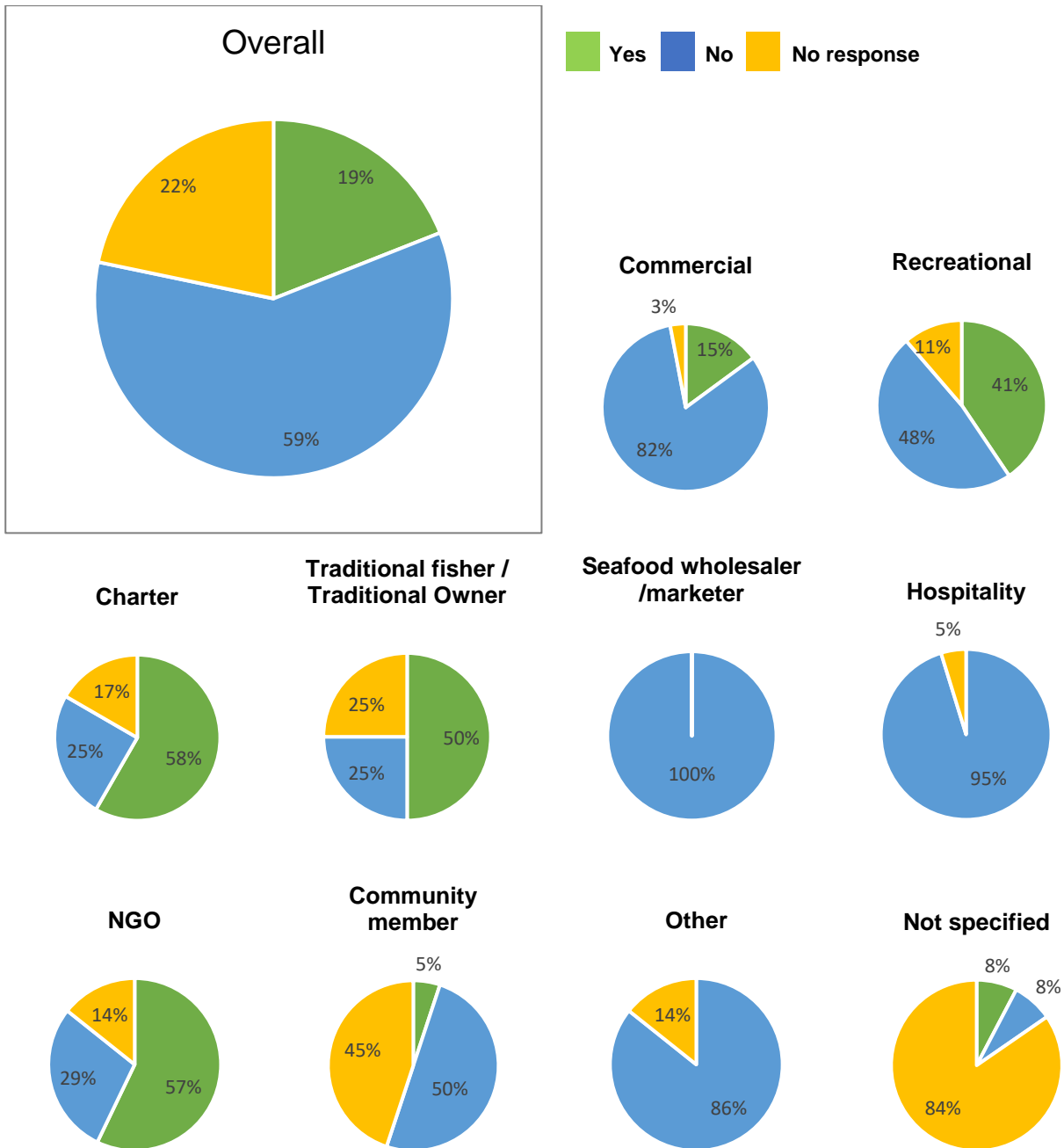


Figure 10: Responses to question 13 – Do you support individual transferable quota as an option?

Option 3: Unitisation

Over half of respondents support the unitisation of the N3 symbol in the Gulf of Carpentaria (Figure 11). Respondents from the commercial, seafood wholesaler, hospitality, traditional fisher/owners and other stakeholder groups largely supported unitisation as an option. Approximately half of the respondents from the recreational, charter fishing operator, NGO and community member stakeholder groups also supported unitisation. The large showing of support for this management option is expected due to this option being an industry-led structural adjustment.

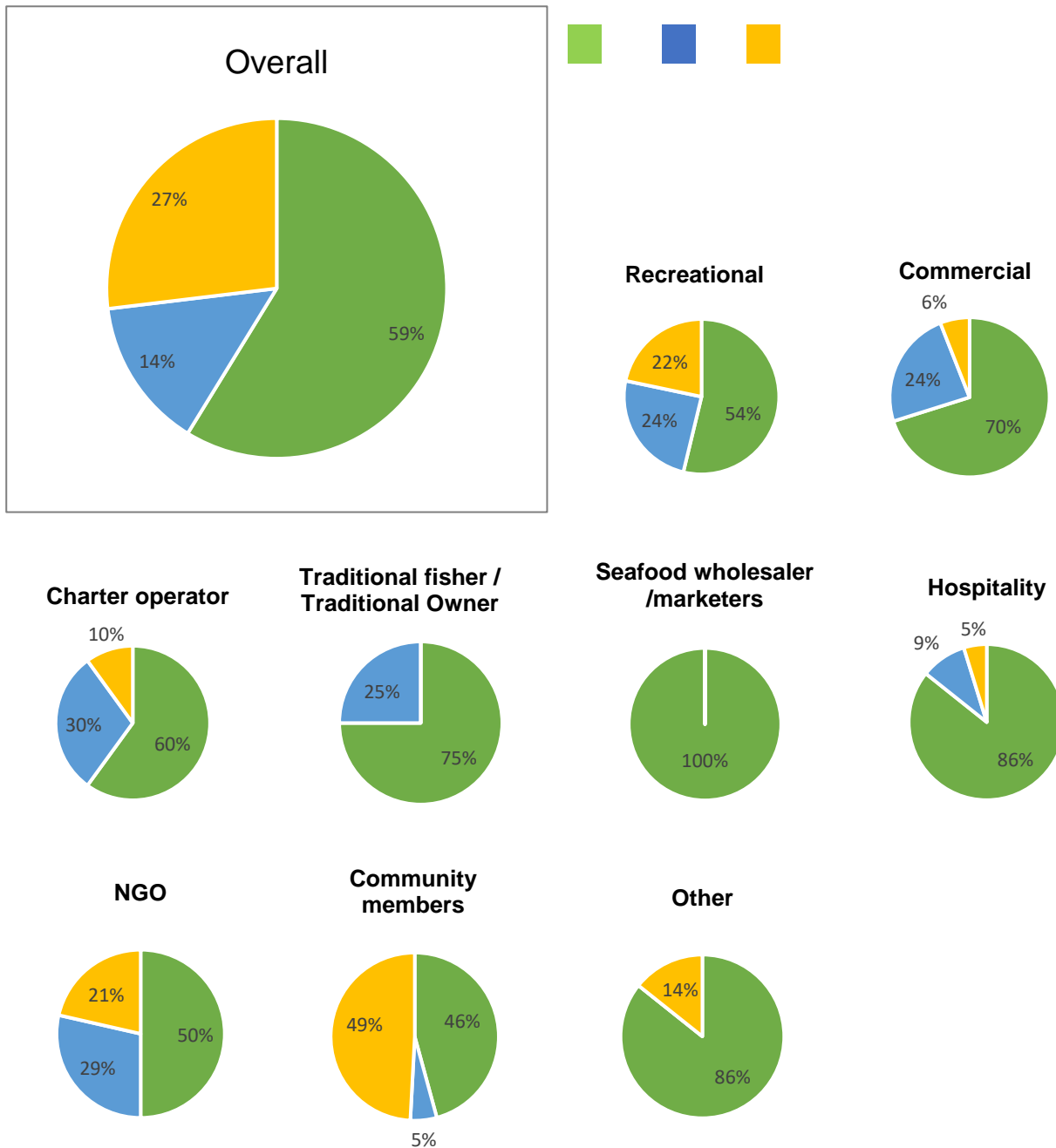


Figure 11: Responses to question 13 – Do you support individual transferable quota as an option?

Stakeholders that supported unitisation provided the following comments:

- Net unitisation addresses TEP species, co-species management, net reduction, community expectations and recreational expectations while still having viable fishing operations supplying wild-caught seafood.
- In order to reduce complexity, reduce the number of nets and introduce a minimum number of net units required to fish.
- Unitisation is a good alternative to catch quotas.
- Fishers need to feel they have some control over their fishery, and this is an industry-led initiative.

Stakeholders that did not support unitisation of the N3 symbol raised the following issues:

- Not convinced that shorter nets would be an appropriate level of reduction in fishing effort.
- This is not a useful strategy while king threadfin stocks are below 50%.
- It is inconsistent with the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy 2017-2027 and will not effectively limit the amount of fish that should be harvested to rebuild populations.
- The commercial fishery should be closed immediately to allow stocks to recover.
- The idea of net unitisation is unrealistic and does not demonstrate understanding of how all individual fishers operate.

Other management measures

Stakeholders suggested a number of other management measures for the management of the Gulf of Carpentaria fisheries (Table 3).

Table 3: Additional management measures suggested by stakeholders

Management measure	Feedback from stakeholders
Minimum quota requirement to fish	In addition to ITQ, stakeholders recommended a minimum quota holding requirement in order to fish. Without this requirement fishers would be able to target species from tier 1 and tier 2 while still catching and discarding the co-caught ITQ managed species. An increase in discarding undermines the quota regime and sustainability of the species, and increases uncertainty in stock assessments.
Non-transferable quota	Stakeholders raised the idea of a non-transferable quota system: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up quotas with ownership retained by Fisheries Queensland and leased to fishers on a yearly, user-pays basis. • Benefits fishers as ITQ leads to monopolisation of a public resource, affecting fishing businesses. Non-transferable quota will allow the government to control price of quota for the fishers. • Fish can be leased by the kilogram (e.g. barramundi, king threadfin, grey mackerel, jewfish, grunter and blue salmon) or by the tonne (e.g. queenfish, dart, pomfret).
Refined research and monitoring	Many stakeholders mentioned suggested areas for further research and monitoring. This included increased information on recreational, charter and traditional fishing catch.
Compliance and enforcement	Stakeholders mentioned compliance and enforcement activities to ensure management measures are effective and combat black-marketing, illegal fishing and non-compliance with existing regulations. <p>Suggested areas for improved compliance and enforcement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase in compliance officers to cover the large area of the Gulf of Carpentaria • greater presence at boat ramps and on the water • on-water compliance with gillnet-free zones, possession and boat limits, minimum size limits and commercial fishing rules • greater fines to deter non-compliance.

General reforms

Marking nets with lights on both ends

The majority of respondents agreed that commercial fishers using nets should be marking nets with lights on both ends (Figure 12). This was consistent across all sectors. Respondents who agreed that fishers should mark nets with lights on both ends stated that:

- the government should be providing fishers with extra lights for the change in policy
- marking nets with lights on both ends would help other fishers with navigation.

Respondents who disagreed with marking nets with lights on both ends of the net stated that:

- the existing legislation is sufficient
- crocodiles already destroy a number of lights making it an expensive practice
- a net should be 100 m or more before 2 lights are required.

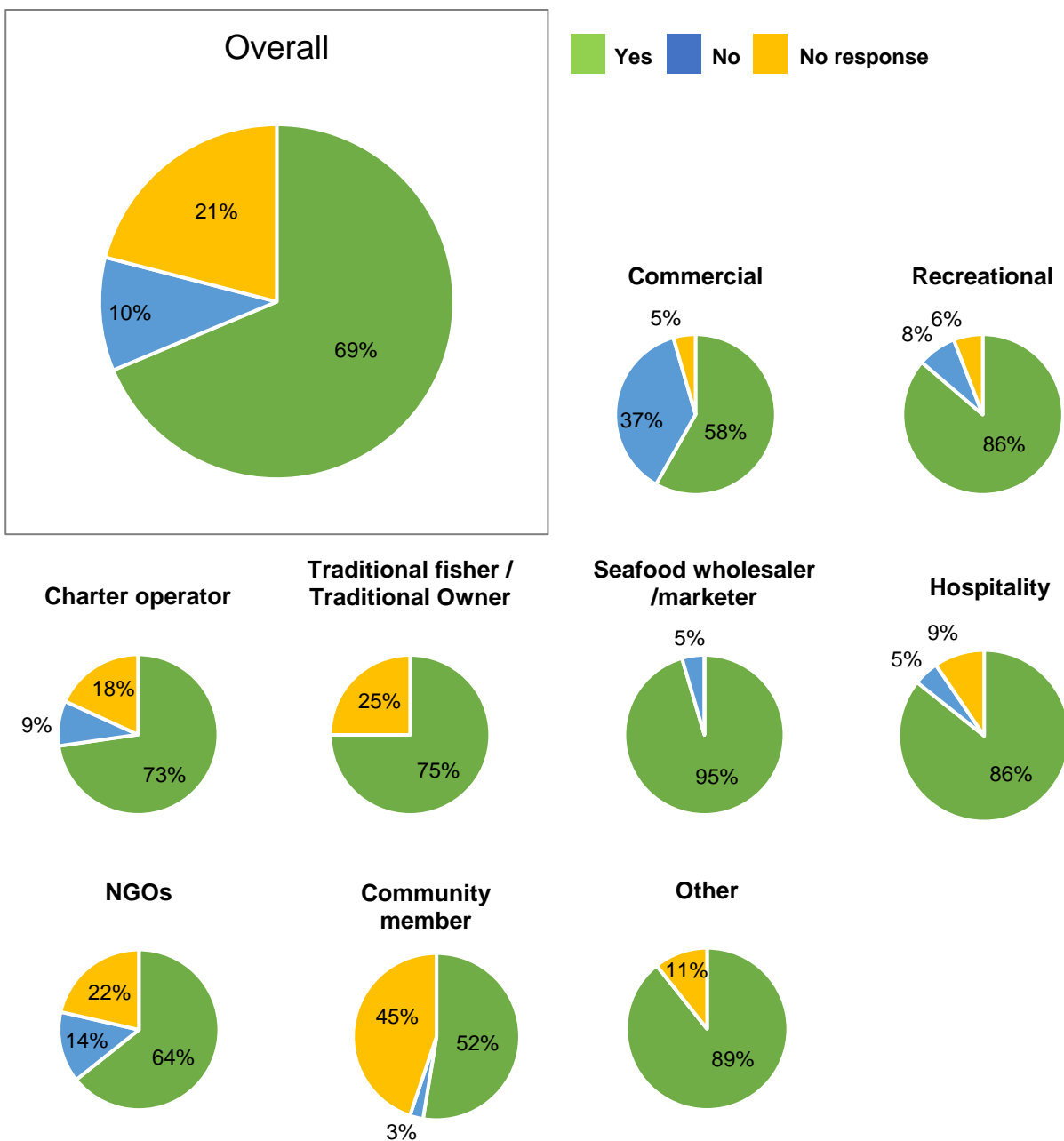


Figure 12: Responses to question 19 – Do you support marking nets with lights on both ends?

Net closure for N12 symbol – 7 October to 31 January

The majority of respondents supported changing the fishing season of the N12 fishery (Figure 13). Stakeholders that supported changing the fishing season of the N12 fishery stated:

- The closure is prescriptive to the N3 fishery and as such the N12 fishery offers no risks to the sustainability of the inshore target species.
- The barramundi spawning closure should be reflected in barramundi netting only.

Stakeholders that did not support changing the fishing season gave the following reasons:

- Changing the fishing season would increase the likelihood of interactions with protected hammerheads.
- The current net closures allow for uninterrupted spawning of grey and Spanish mackerel.
- It would allow for sustained intense fishing pressure year-round.
- What is currently in place works.

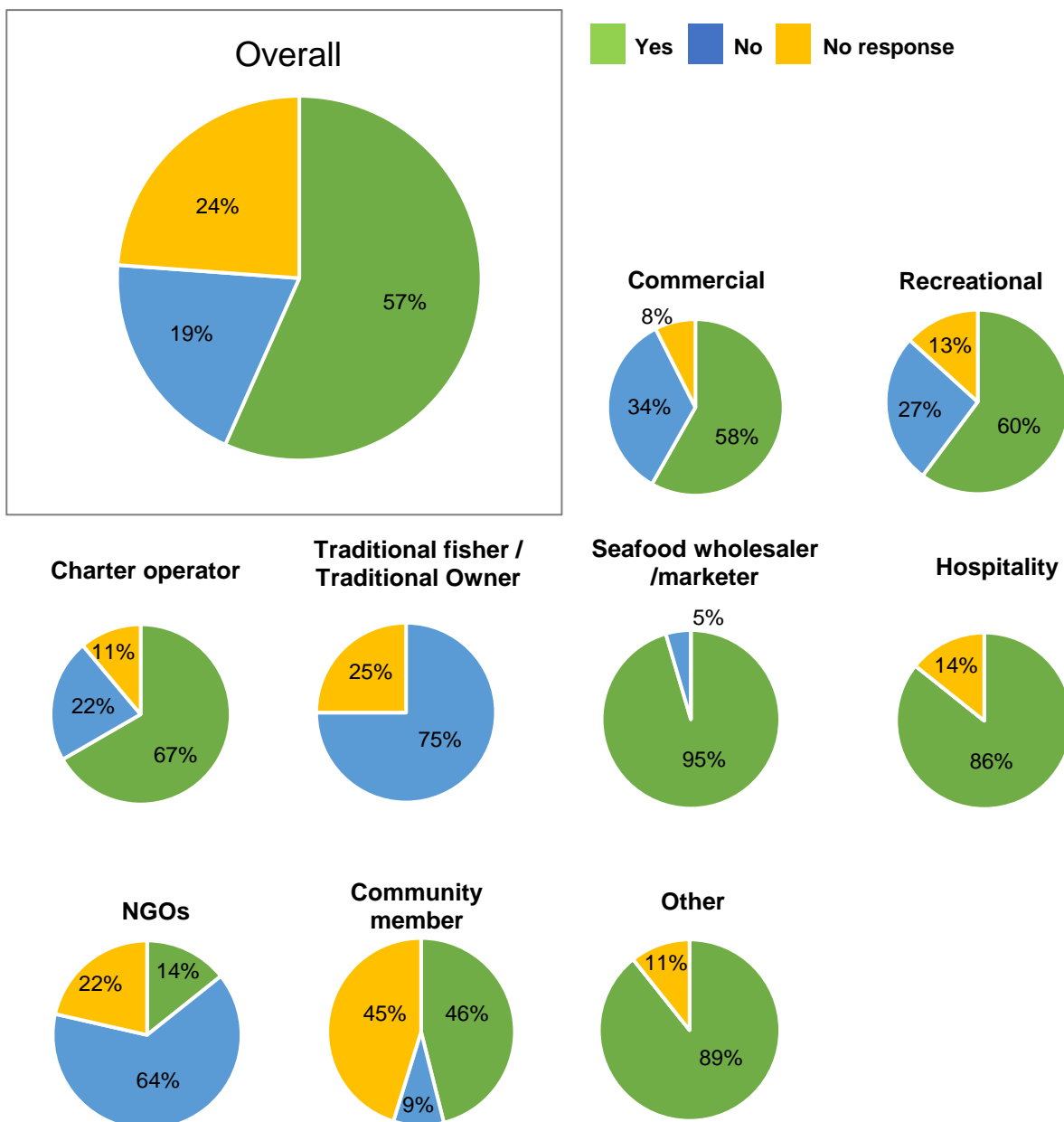


Figure 13: Responses to question 20 – Do you support changing the fishing season of the N12 fishery?

Species that can be retained by L4 symbol

There was mixed support for permitting the take of barramundi, black jewfish, blue threadfin, giant queenfish, king threadfin, scaly jewfish and silver jewfish by the L4 symbol. Overall, 50% of the respondents did not support this reform option (Figure 14). There was majority support from the recreational, charter fishing operator, traditional fisher/owner and non-governmental organisation (NGO) sectors; however, the majority of commercial, seafood wholesaler/marketer, hospitality workers and community members did not support the take of additional species by line.

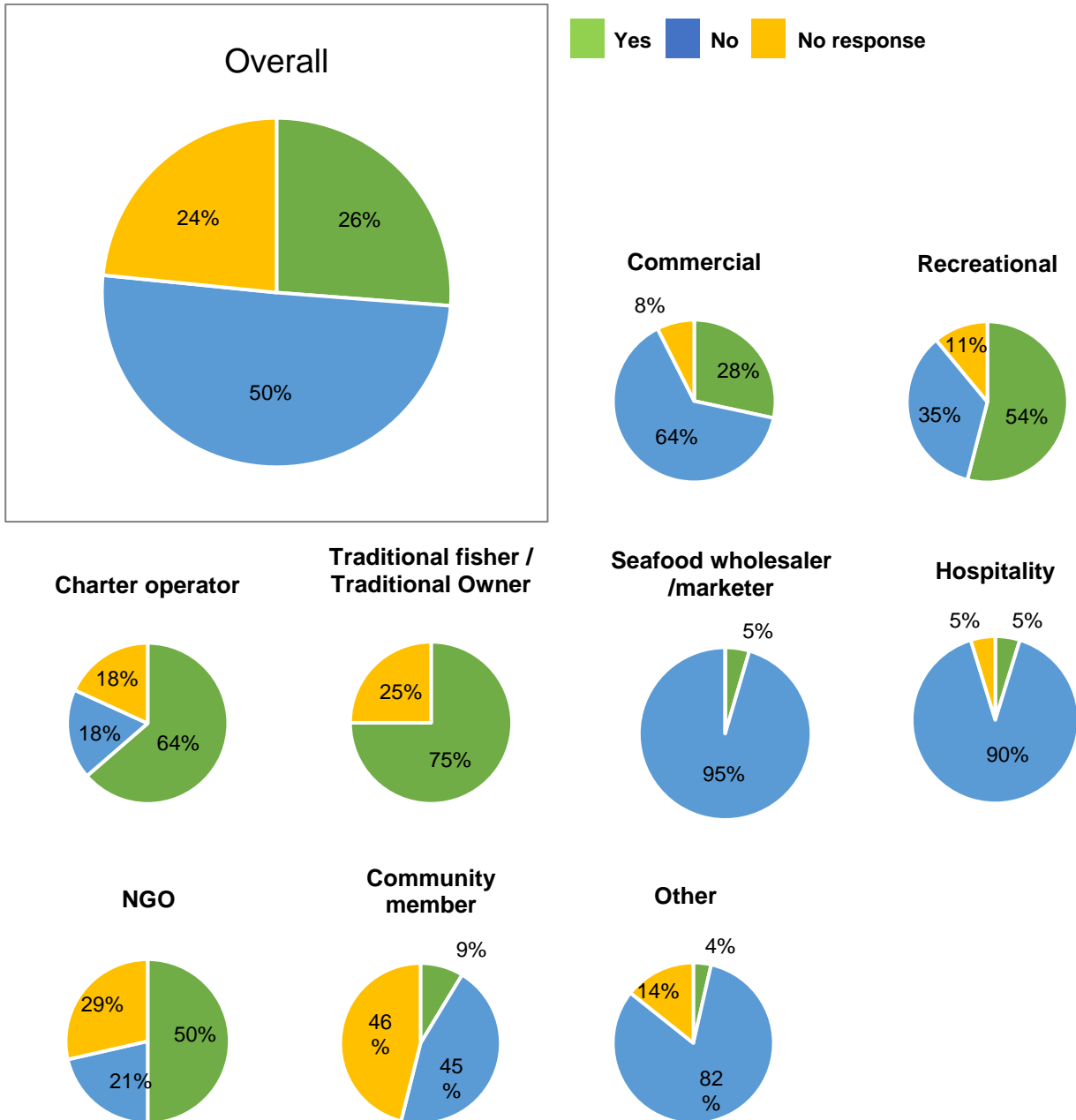


Figure 14: Responses to question 21 – Do you support the take of additional species using line gear?

Stakeholders that supported the take of additional species using line gear made the following comments:

- This would allow for a much better minimum impact fishery with better product and less bycatch.
- Would allow commercial fishers to catch more product to supply Queensland with wild-caught seafood.

- L4 and N11 should be able to take estuary fish by line. By including the N11 there will be an increased number of platforms to access the line fishery.
- This is supported if net fishing for these species is still allowed.

Stakeholders who did not support the take of additional species by line stated:

- It is not commercially viable to target species such as barramundi and king threadfin by line.
- They had concerns over more pressure on other areas of fishing.

Fishery area of N13

There was limited support for redefining the fishery area of the N13 fishery. The majority of most sectors did not agree with changing the fishery area, excluding recreational fishers and charter operators (Figure 15).

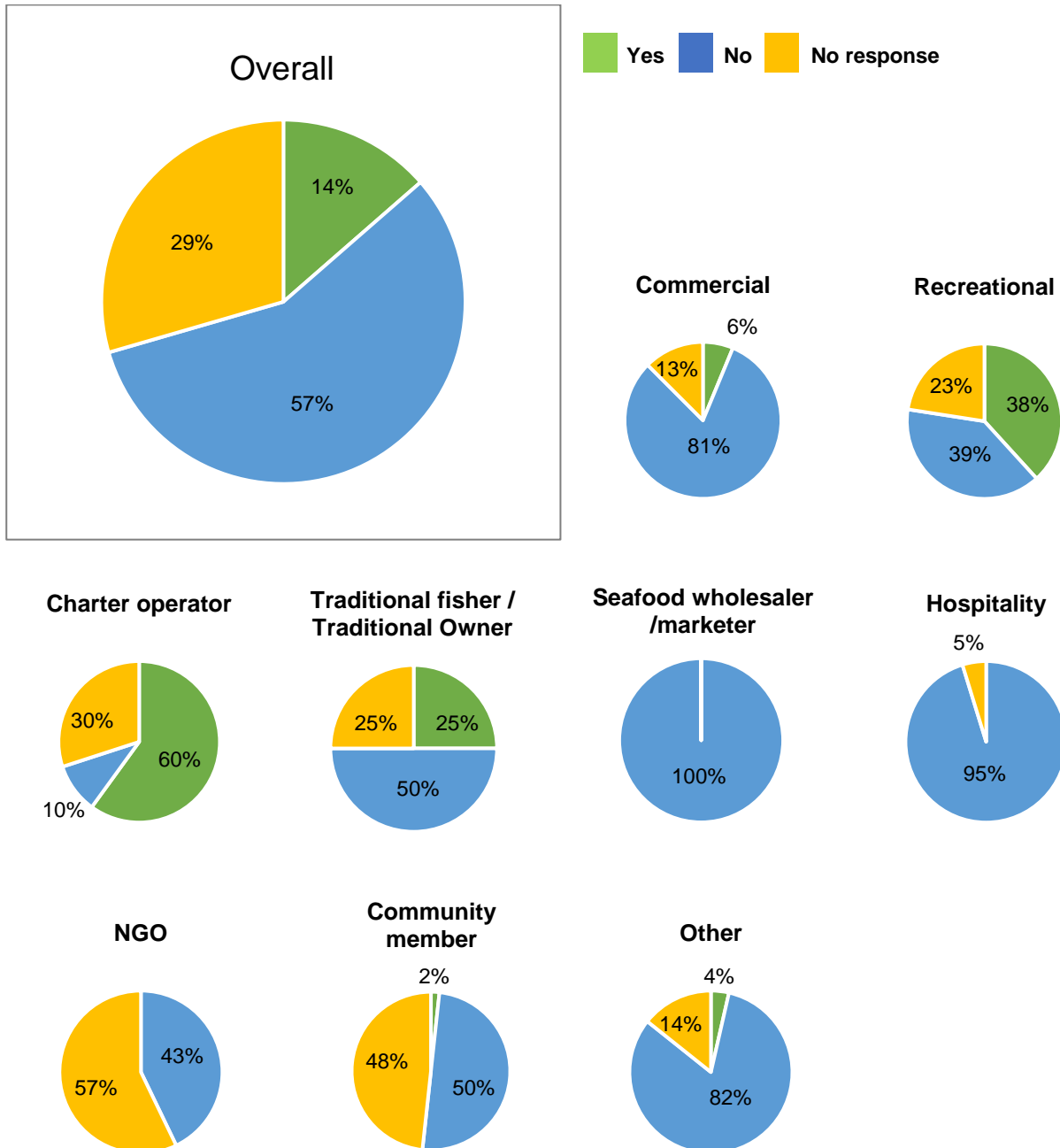


Figure 15: Responses to question 22 – Do you support changing the fishery area of the N13 symbol?

Stakeholders that disagreed with changing the fishery area stated:

- Changing the fishery area risks not only increasing total fishing pressure within the 7–25 nm region (i.e. N12 area) but also at a greater intensity in a shorter period of time if catch limits are being caught 'quickly'. This may increase a 'race to fish' and lead to reduced stewardship within the current N12 management area.
- The symbol should be removed. As it is a jointly managed fishery, the Australian government should compensate the licence holder.

Protected species management

Overall, stakeholders did not support more restrictive attendance provisions for the N3 fishery, with over 50% of respondents disagreeing (Figure 16). Of the respondents who voted to reduce attendance provisions, the majority suggested a distance of 1 nm.

Respondents supporting a change in attendance provisions stated that actively fishing and observing a gillnet is one of the most successful ways to reduce mortality of TEP species.

Respondents that did not support a change in attendance provisions stated:

- The current legislation is fine the way it is.
- Due to the terrain of Gulf of Carpentaria waters, reducing the net attendance provisions would reduce the available area to fish.
- There would be concerns over a saturation of nets in a smaller area.

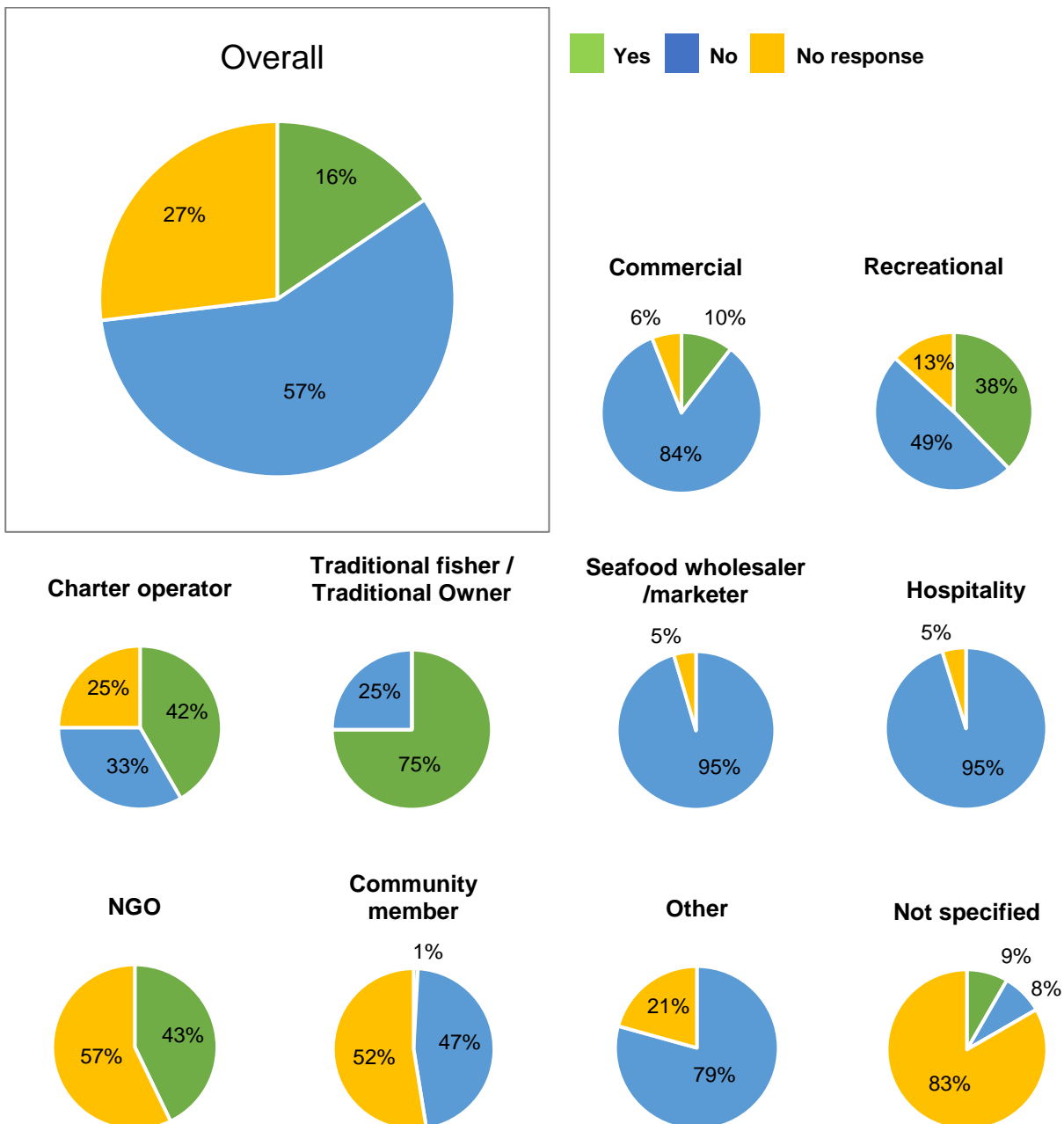


Figure 16: Responses to question 24 – Do you support reducing the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery net attendance provisions?

Other issues, opportunities and solutions

Respondents raised a number of other issues, which are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of feedback regarding question 16 – Are there any other issues, opportunities or solutions that you would like to raise?

Issue	Feedback from stakeholders
Compliance and enforcement	<p>Suggested areas for improved compliance and enforcement include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> greater numbers and presence of compliance officers in the Gulf of Carpentaria greater night-time presence of compliance officer for commercial netting operations train 10 Indigenous Rangers as fisheries compliance officers to assist with monitoring, compliance and enforcement activities in the Gulf region.
Regulations for the recreational sector	<p>Options for regulations for the recreational fishing sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> establishment of a statewide recreational fishing licence with catch reporting and a licence fee to fund further research and monitoring and other fisheries-related programs new recreational and charter possession limits to accompany the implementation of gillnet-free zones.
Additional research and monitoring	<p>Area for additional research and monitoring were identified by stakeholders:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> further research on TEP species, their habitat and population numbers, and the effect gillnet-free zones will have on them increased research and monitoring in the recreational and charter sector peer review of level 2 ecological risk assessment.
Non-regulatory approaches	<p>Non-regulatory options should be considered alongside any regulatory changes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> development and implementation of a TEP species identification and handling training program programs to limit interaction with TEP species (e.g. LED net lights, shark guards for nets) marine stocking.
Compensation and buy-outs	<p>Options should be considered for reducing any adverse impacts of management change, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> buy-outs of commercial fishing licences compensation for affected parties in the harvest and post-harvest sectors.
Transshipment strategy	<p>Development of a transshipment strategy to support the transfer of fishery products to third-party operators or licensed fishing operators for return to designated unloading ports.</p>
Tagging arrangement for black jewfish	<p>Introduction of tagging black jewfish to support retention of the species on board commercial operations.</p>

Next steps

Fisheries Queensland staff aims to convene face to face or online meetings in March this year to meet with Gulf of Carpentaria community members, commercial fishers, recreational stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, and Traditional Owners. A meeting of the fishery working will group will also be convened by Fisheries Queensland.

Feedback from the face to face or online meetings and this discussion paper process will be considered by the Queensland government in the implementation of management reforms for the Gulf of Carpentaria inshore fishery. This feedback will also be used to develop a draft harvest strategy, which will underpin future decision-making for this fishery and ensure that ecological, economic and social objectives are achieved in the long term.