

## **Marine and Estuarine Recreational Charter Management Advisory Committee**

### **Outcomes from 13<sup>th</sup> MERCMAC meeting Cronulla Fisheries Centre, Tuesday 16 October 2007**

#### ***Attendance***

Brian Beer (Chair), Peter Bolic (Region 1 – Far North Coast), Mark Flanagan (Region 2 – Mid North Coast), Jim Booth (Region 3 – Central Coast), Peter Sayre (Region 4 – Sydney), Roland Persson (deputising for David Cribb, Region 4 – Sydney), Ann Garard (Region 5 - Illawarra), Shirley Massey (Commercial Fishing), Sanchia Glaskin (Recreational Fishing) and Nick James (Departmental Nominee).

#### ***Departmental Observers***

John Diplock, Nick Hannaford and Adam Welfare.

#### ***Apologies***

David Cribb (Region 4 – Sydney), John Stevens (Region 6 – Mid South Coast), Keith Appleby (Region 7 – Far South Coast) and Maria Schreider (Nature Conservation Council).

#### ***Confirmation of minutes from previous meeting***

The Committee was advised that Marine Parks Authority (MPA) staff requested the inclusion of additional information in the MPA agenda item, following the distribution of outcomes from the last meeting. The amended outcomes were distributed at the meeting.

The Committee accepted the outcomes as a true and accurate record of discussions from the 12<sup>th</sup> MERCMAC meeting, held 31 July 2007. **Moved:** Jim Booth. **Seconded:** Sanchia Glaskin. **Carried**

#### ***Business arising from the minutes***

Nil.

#### ***Agenda items***

##### **1. Recreational Fisheries Management update**

John Diplock, Manager, Recreational Fisheries, discussed the following issues with the Committee, some of which were raised by members:

- Bag and size limits

New bag and size limit rules commenced on 3 September 2007. There is currently an extensive advisory period to ensure fishers are aware of the new rules. It was confirmed that the new regulations exempt licensed charter fishing boat operators from the baitfish bag/possession limits - members were provided with a copy of cl.14A of the *Fisheries Management (General) Regulation 2002*, for information.

- Dolphinfish (mahi-mahi) bag and size limit

Deployment of FADs was the primary reason for the introduction of a size limit and lower bag limit. Concern was expressed about the number of small fish that will have to be released, however, it was considered appropriate to have these restrictions.

- Kingfish size limit

Scientific research shows that the size at first maturity is approximately 75cm. The size limit was increased from 60 to 65cm, which took this information into consideration.

- Ocean leatherjackets

It was suggested that CFB operators be exempt from the bag limit due to the number of ocean leatherjackets being caught at present. This proposal was not formally supported.

- Gemfish – proposed recommendation by the Fisheries Scientific Committee for the species to be listed as an endangered species.

Addressed in agenda item 8 (commercial fishing update).

- Tagged/recaptures

Details of some notable tagged/recaptures of various species were distributed for member's information.

- East Coast Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF)

Members received a letter from the Director, Wild Harvest Fisheries on 11 October 2007 requesting comments on the new resource sharing agreement in the ETBF, which was recently announced by the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF). The agreement claims to allocate striped marlin, yellowfin and albacore tuna between the recreational and commercial fishing sectors. The Committee discussed the issues raised and agreed to defer recommendations until the afternoon session, to enable further deliberation.

The following recommendation was made by the Committee after further discussion and consideration:

**Motion:**

The Committee strongly supports that striped marlin be a recreational only species.

Moved: Jim Booth. Seconded: Peter Sayre. **Carried**

**Action item**

Recreational Management to advise the Director, Wild Harvest Fisheries of the committee's position regarding this proposal.

- Grey Nurse Shark issues

The Committee asked for an update on RecFish's legal involvement in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal case initiated by the Nature Conservation Council against the Federal Minister for the Environment. It was confirmed that a decision has not yet been made. The Committee will be advised when this occurs.

- Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs)

FADs are currently being re-deployed after the winter maintenance period. Ballina – Port Macquarie were re-deployed in early/mid-October. Laurieton – Sydney will be re-deployed by the end of October.

- Estuarine Artificial Reef program

Additional estuaries (e.g. Lake Conjola) are currently being considered as part of a proposal to expand the program.

- Information and Advisory

350,000 saltwater and freshwater summary brochures have been distributed to fishing fee agents/bait and tackle stores and stakeholders as part of DPI's advisory campaign regarding the new bag and size limits. A further 200,000 brochures have been printed for distribution. 50,000 sticky rulers were printed and are being distributed. The recreational fishing guide booklets are being updated and will be re-printed shortly.

- DPI website

There was a request for information about the Committee to be directly linked to other charter fishing information on the website, to make it easy for people to learn about the Committee and issues that have been considered at the meetings.

**Action item**

Recreational Management to amend the DPI website to directly link MERCMAC information with other charter fishing information.

*Completed. Go to: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/charter/MERCMAC>*

## **2. Charter Fishing Trust Fund – Economic survey of recreational and charter fishing**

Recreational Management is currently developing a scope of works for the socio-economic survey of recreational and charter fishing in NSW.

Robert Gale, Principal Policy Economist, NSW DPI, will set up a Steering Committee to review the scope of the study and develop specifications. The Steering Committee process is two phased – Phase 1 involves study methodology appraisal by a consultant; and Phase 2 will include a tender process to determine who will undertake the economic study.

## **3. Estuarine fish stocking research projects**

Dr Matt Taylor from the University of NSW provided the Committee with an update on the mulloway and eastern king prawn stocking research projects.

A total of 107,000 mulloway fry have been stocked in various rivers along the NSW coast since March 2006. A total of 220 samples have been provided by anglers over the past 12 months as part of this study.

Dr Taylor and a number of his PhD students recently commenced research into stocking of eastern king prawns (*Melicertus plebejus*). In February 2007, 3 million juvenile king prawns were released in Wallagoot Lake and 1 million in Back Lake, near Bega on the far south coast. These juveniles were reared from a broodstock of 60 adult king prawns. Wallagoot Lake has been a closed system for 9 years, therefore it is a very good sample site. The prawns in this lake have grown approximately 5,000 times bigger, from 0.004 grams to 20g, in the 8 month period since being stocked.

Dr Taylor offered to attend future meetings to provide further information and results over time.

## **4. Sea Bed Mapping Program**

Dr Alan Jordan, Senior Environmental Scientist (Marine Parks), Water and Coastal Science, NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change, provided the Committee with a comprehensive overview of the sea bed mapping program in NSW.

Swath bathymetry mapping can currently be undertaken to depths of around 140 metres and provides a 3-dimensional diagram of the seafloor, including the type of substrate/sediment in particular areas. The Committee was advised there are opportunities for NSW DPI, ACoRF and/or MERCMAC to set priorities for fishing specific mapping, if funding is allocated to undertake further studies.

### **Action item**

Dr Jordan will distribute existing information/reports to members on CD, via NSW DPI.

*Pending.*

### **Action item**

DPI to advise Dr Jordan to submit an application for funding from the Saltwater Recreational Fishing Trust and Charter Trust Fund, for consideration by the relevant committees.

*Pending.*

## **5. Compliance update**

Bradley Harrison, District Fisheries Officer (Central Coast) and Recreational Fishery Team Compliance representative, provided the committee with an update on recent recreational and charter fishing related compliance activities. Glenn Tritton, Manager Fisheries Compliance, also attended the meeting to address questions from members.

Over the past 12 months (October 2006 to September 2007), the DPI Compliance team has conducted the following activities relating to recreational and charter fishing:

*Recreational fishing compliance (excluding recreational fishing on CFBs)*

- 42,354 Fisheries Officer Hours; 36,744 recreational fisher inspections - 30,785 comply, 4,214 non-comply
- 88.5% compliance rate

*Charter fishing compliance:*

- 1551 Fisheries Officer hours; 151 Charter boat inspections - 140 comply, 11 non-comply
- 93% compliance rate

Note: The above figures include charter fishing related offences by persons that do not hold a NSW Charter Fishing Boat licence.

The issue of risk management was raised in relation to DPI staff working on/boarding fishing vessels. The department confirmed that appropriate risk management policies are in place to address these issues.

## **6. Fisheries Business Services issues**

Rob Harris, Coordinator Fisheries Licensing Services, provided the committee with a detailed overview of the recently introduced Commercial Fisheries Fishing Business Card arrangements. Discussions included information on how the concept could benefit charter fishing boat operators, if the concept is formally supported by the charter fishing sector in the future.

It was confirmed that the concept, with necessary adjustments to cater for variations between the two sectors, could provide greater flexibility for operators (e.g. possible use of alternate boats without the need for formal boat replacements) and streamline the existing charter fishing boat licence administration arrangements of the department (which could reduce some transactional costs). The committee informally indicated general support for the concept, particularly the potential for reduced time/costs for some administration transactions and increased operational flexibility.

As discussed with the committee at the previous meeting, it was confirmed that the new "CFIS" database will soon replace the current "FINS" system, to enhance administration of the charter fishing boat licensing information.

## **7. Science and Research – Ocean Leatherjackets**

Marcus Miller, Fisheries Technician, Wild Harvest Fisheries, provided the Committee with an overview of results from his recent research project "Preliminary assessment of life-history parameters and stock status of ocean leatherjackets (*Nelusetta ayraudi*) in New South Wales".

Ocean leatherjackets rank as the 3rd most important species in the NSW Trap & Line fishery by weight (behind snapper and silver trevally) and are also taken in large quantities by fish trawlers and the recreational charter boat and trailer boat fisheries.

The size at first maturity (for 50% of the stock) was found to be 352mm (total length). The biggest ocean leatherjacket caught during the study was 656mm (female). The committee was encouraged to provide details/specimens if any fish are caught that exceed this size.

## **8. Commercial Fisheries Management update**

Dr Veronica Silberschneider, Fisheries Manager, Commercial Fisheries, provided the committee with an overview of current issues. Detailed information was distributed with the agenda. Issues of note include:

*Ocean Trap and Line fishery*

- Trap numbers will be capped at 30 and closures developed to protect aggregations of undersized snapper from fish trapping.
- Escape panels in trap and line gear will be mandatory in March 2008.
- New restrictions on the use of circle hooks and wire trace have been implemented.

### *Ocean Trawl fishery*

- Mapping Reef and Ocean Trawl Grounds

A pilot study exploring techniques to broadly map Ocean Trawl grounds and reef in northern NSW was recently completed. A report is being prepared highlighting the key issues that arose during the project and possible solutions which should be addressed in any future mapping studies, such as the prevention of trawling over reef areas.

- Square mesh codends in prawn trawl nets

The Northern Rivers Catchment Management Authority and NSW DPI recently collaborated in an effort to promote the introduction, uptake and proper use of the 35-mm square-mesh codends in the Ocean Trawl fishery. A research project will use experienced fisheries researchers to accompany participating ocean prawn trawl operators during normal fishing operations and collect scientific data concerning the retained and discarded components of catches from: 1) the new square-mesh codends; and 2) conventional diamond-mesh codends; which will be used concurrently during fishing. This will provide a detailed comparison of the performances of the two codends across a substantial subset of the entire north coast ocean prawn trawling fleet. The data obtained via this research program will be invaluable with respect to quantifying the real benefits of fleet-wide introduction of square-mesh codends in the NSW Ocean Trawl fishery.

### *Abalone fishery*

- The Total Allowable Catch Setting and Review Committee (TAC Committee) determined a total allowable commercial catch of 110 tonnes for the fishing period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 with the following recommendations:
  - none is taken from Region 1 south of Port Stephens, but a catch of up to 3 tonnes would be available for a fishery survey agreed by the Department;
  - none is taken from Region 1 north of Port Stephens, but a catch of up to 5 tonnes would be available for a fishery survey agreed by the Department;
  - none is taken from Region 2;
  - the catch from Regions 3 and 4 be not more than 40 tonnes; and
  - the catch from Regions 5 and 6 be not more than 70 tonnes.

The Fishery Management Strategy for the NSW Abalone Share Management Fishery was approved on 27 April 2007.

### *Lobster fishery*

The Total Allowable Catch (TAC) Committee set a TAC of 124 tonnes for the 2007/2008 fishing period.

### *Gemfish*

The Commonwealth (under the EPBC Act) has a stock assessment for the species pending and the Fisheries Scientific Committee (FSC) has not been re-appointed, therefore, recommendations relating to gemfish have not been progressed recently. It is anticipated that an options paper will be developed in the next 12 months.

### *Size limits*

As a result of the review of fish size limits, bag limits and fishing methods, some saltwater commercial fishing rules have changed. These changes are consistent with size limit changes for recreational fishers.

## **9. Offshore Artificial Reefs**

John Diplock, Manager, Recreational Fisheries, advised the committee about some of the work being undertaken on offshore artificial reefs overseas, particularly Japan and Korea. One notable point is that specific designs are vital to attract different species. The studies and work done in those countries will be used to guide research and preliminary project work in NSW.

### ***Out of Session items***

Nil.

### **Correspondence received**

- *Response from NSW DPI regarding the timeframe for the distribution of meeting agendas.*

A copy of the Director's response was distributed to members. The committee acknowledged the improvement to timeframes for the distribution of the recent meeting agenda and outcomes.

### **Other business**

- *MERCMAC membership*

A number of appointments expire at the end of February 2008:

The State Electoral Office (SEO) will conduct the electoral process for Region 2 - Mid North Coast (Mark Flanagan), Region 4 - Sydney (David Cribb), Region 5 - Illawarra (Ann Garard), and Region 7 - Far South Coast (Keith Appleby). NSW DPI contacted the SEO in August 2007 to initiate the formal nomination and election process.

An Expression of Interest process is being conducted for Commercial, Recreational and Indigenous Fishing representative positions. DPI commenced the EOI process in late September 2007.

- *Charter Fishing Boat compliance poster*

The committee unanimously supported the use of existing funds (WBS 196-1) to update and re-print the existing A4 compliance poster, which advises anglers and the general public of the need for NSW CFBs to be licensed by NSW DPI.

### **Action item**

Recreational Management to update the compliance advisory poster and forward copies to operators.

*Information has been updated and approval to re-print the poster has been obtained – currently being drafted.*

- *Freshwater charter fishing boats*

The committee was advised that freshwater charter fishing boat operators/guides have requested a meeting with NSW DPI staff, to discuss potential management issues for the sector.

- *Status of RSL/Club boats*

This issue is being addressed by the legislative amendment to increase the scope of the definition of charter fishing, as previously supported by the committee.

- *Status of correspondence relating to casual/official business mileage rate*

A response was sent from the Minister to Bruce Schumacher on 16 August 2007, confirming that the issue is still under consideration by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

- *Action items*

An action item list from the meeting is attached, for information.

**Next Meeting** – Meeting 14 (01/08) is scheduled for Tuesday 19 February 2008.