



# NSW Research Angler Program

Issue 14 April 2017

Welcome to the “NSW Research Angler Program Newsletter” – providing you, the research anglers and spearfishers of NSW, feedback on the data you are collecting by donating your frames to research.

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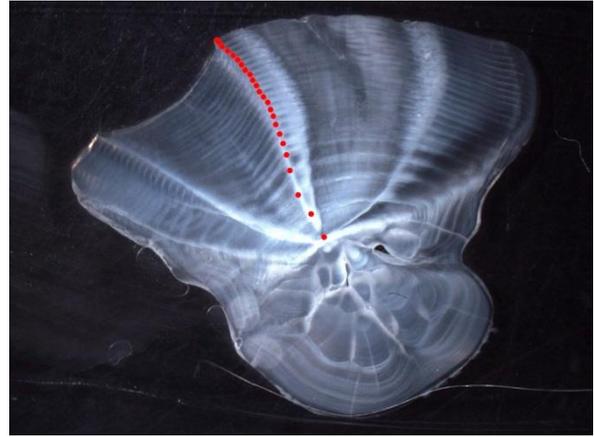
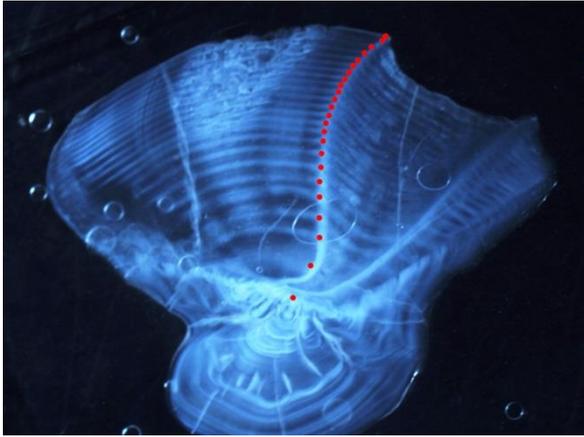
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## Notable Donations from Summer 2016-17!



157 cm of monster Hunter River mulloway caught by Luke Clements. After donation to the NSW RAP, the fish was estimated to be 22 years old! Photo courtesy Luke Clements.

This summer past was one of the hottest on record, but this wasn't just restricted to the temperature of the air! Summer 2016-17 also turned out to be a record for the quality of donations to the NSW Research Angler Program, and the data Fisheries NSW scientists have as a result. 2017 could not have started any better for Newcastle angler Luke Clements when he landed a PB mulloway from the Hunter River in early January. At a whopping 157 cm, Luke's monster mulloway was reward for countless patient hours chasing these elusive trophy fish. Fish this size certainly don't get this big by being easy to catch, and Luke's fish had spent more than 22 years avoiding capture as revealed by analysis of one of its otoliths! At 22 years of age this fish was just the third mulloway of this age recorded in NSW – an awesome capture for Luke and awesome data for researchers who study mulloway here.



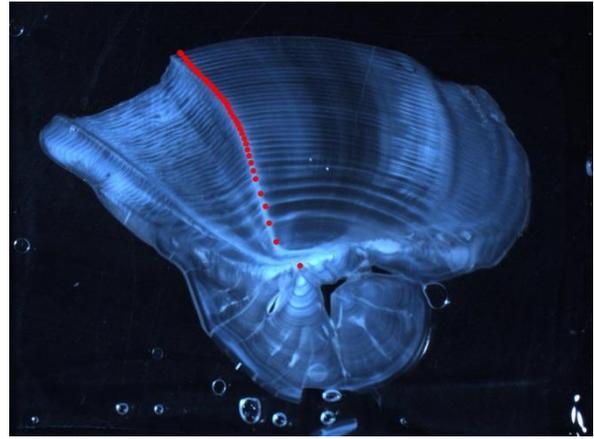
**A fine pair of 22 year old mulloway revealed by a fine pair of otolith sections containing 22 growth rings each. At left the section from Luke Clements 157 cm Hunter River fish and right, from Jay Pilson's 145 cm Central Coast fish.**

As the old saying goes “when it rains, it pours” and as all mulloway fishers know, jewies do love “a bit of fresh”! As if one 22 year old mulloway donated for summer wasn't rare enough, Central Coast research angler Jay Pilson donated a second mulloway estimated to be, you guessed it, 22 years old! At 145 cm long, Jay's fish definitely had the size to match its age, not to mention a matching appetite with its stomach containing a 32 cm luderick and two 40 cm tailor!

As if two 22 year old mulloway donated to the NSW RAP over summer wasn't enough, yet another record breaking fish came through the labs in the form of a truly ancient individual donated by Paul Lennon. Now Paul has seen a lot of mulloway in his illustrious fishing career, but claims that this 149 cm fish was easily the most gnarled, beaten-up, oldest-looking jewy he had ever come across! And he wasn't wrong as analysis of one of the fish's otoliths showed it to be a truly ancient 33 years old!

**Right: Jay Pilson really has a head for mulloway! Jay holds the head from a 145 cm Central Coast jewy estimated to be 22 years old. Photo courtesy Jay Pilson.**





Left: The whole otolith from Paul's 33 year old mulloway (at bottom) along with one from a 130 cm 13 year old fish. Above: The otolith section from the old fella. Photo at left courtesy Paul Lennon.

At 33 years of age, this fish was the second oldest mulloway so far recorded in NSW waters and just one year younger than the oldest, a 156 cm 34 year old fish from the Shoalhaven River donated way back in 2012. In contrast to that fish which weighed in at a staggering 47.5 kg, Paul's old mate tipped the scales at just 25 kg, the exact same weight as a smaller 130 cm fish caught in the same spot the week before. This 130 cm fish also donated by Paul to the NSW RAP was estimated to be just 13 years old and serves as a fair indication that his 33 year old fish was possibly a little past its peak fighting weight!

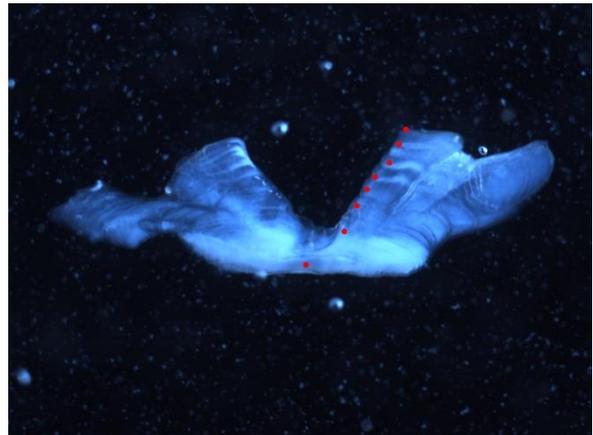
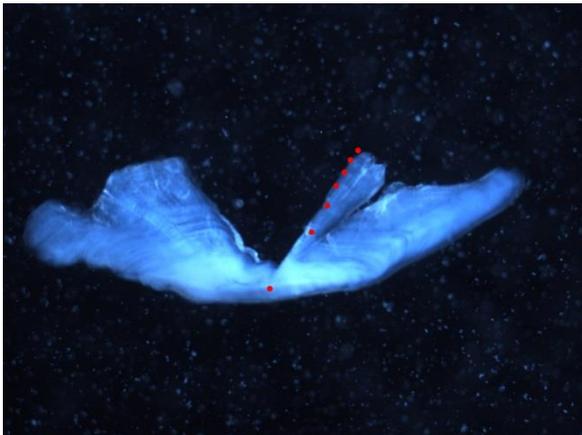


Old codger! Paul Lennon with a 149 cm Port Stephens mulloway estimated to be 33 years old – the second oldest mulloway recorded in NSW to date. Photo courtesy Paul Lennon.



Paul Fox (left) and cousin Peter Naudi (right) with a pair of hefty Broken Bay yellowtail kingfish donated to the NSW RAP over summer. Photos courtesy Peter Naudi.

Maximum fighting weight was definitely not something missing from a red hot yellowtail kingfish session had by Peter Naudi and cousin Paul Fox over summer in Broken Bay, just north of Sydney. The boys managed to nail a couple of serious trophies in the form of a pair of 120+ cm fish. For their size, these two fish were also amongst the fastest growing individuals so far recorded in NSW. Yellowtail kingfish are a remarkably fast growing species reaching on average 50 cm total length after just one year. Average size at age 5 for kingfish in NSW is 78 cm and age 6 is 84 cm putting Peter and Paul's thumping metro Sydney donations well-above the curve!



The otolith sections from Paul and Peter's biiiig kingies. Paul's 120 cm fish was estimated to be just 5 years old (left) and Peter's 126 cm fish was estimated to be only 6 (right), making them an extremely fast-growing pair!

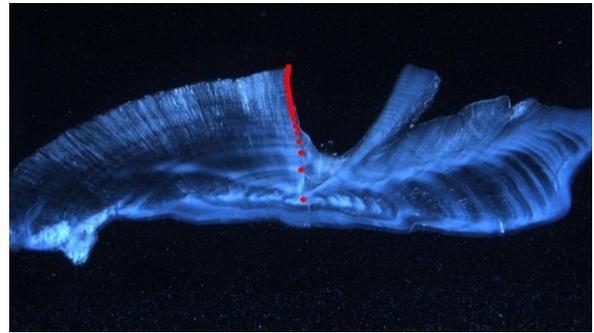


Paul Lennon with 102 cm and 14.5 kg of record-breaking Mid-North Coast snapper caught in early 2015. Photo courtesy Paul Lennon.



The finished product: Paul with a cast of his trophy snapper ready for the pool room! Photo courtesy Paul Lennon.

Our final notable donation for summer 2016-17 was caught waaay back in January 2015, but we didn't get our hands on the otoliths until recently! This was a highly-anticipated donation to the NSW RAP as the fish concerned; an enormous Mid-North Coast snapper caught by Paul Lennon (AGAIN!), measured 102 cm in length and weighed 14.5 kg! Not only was this a NSW state record, but unsurprisingly was also the largest snapper Fisheries NSW have so far estimated the age of, beating a previous best of 94 cm (and 23 years old)! Despite its amazing size, this fish was estimated to be a (relatively) youthful 20 years old, once again demonstrating that the largest fish aren't necessarily the oldest, even when you get a hold of the actual largest!



The otolith section from Paul Lennon's state record snapper –102 cm and as the rings go – 20 years old!

## Project Progress – Summer 2016-17

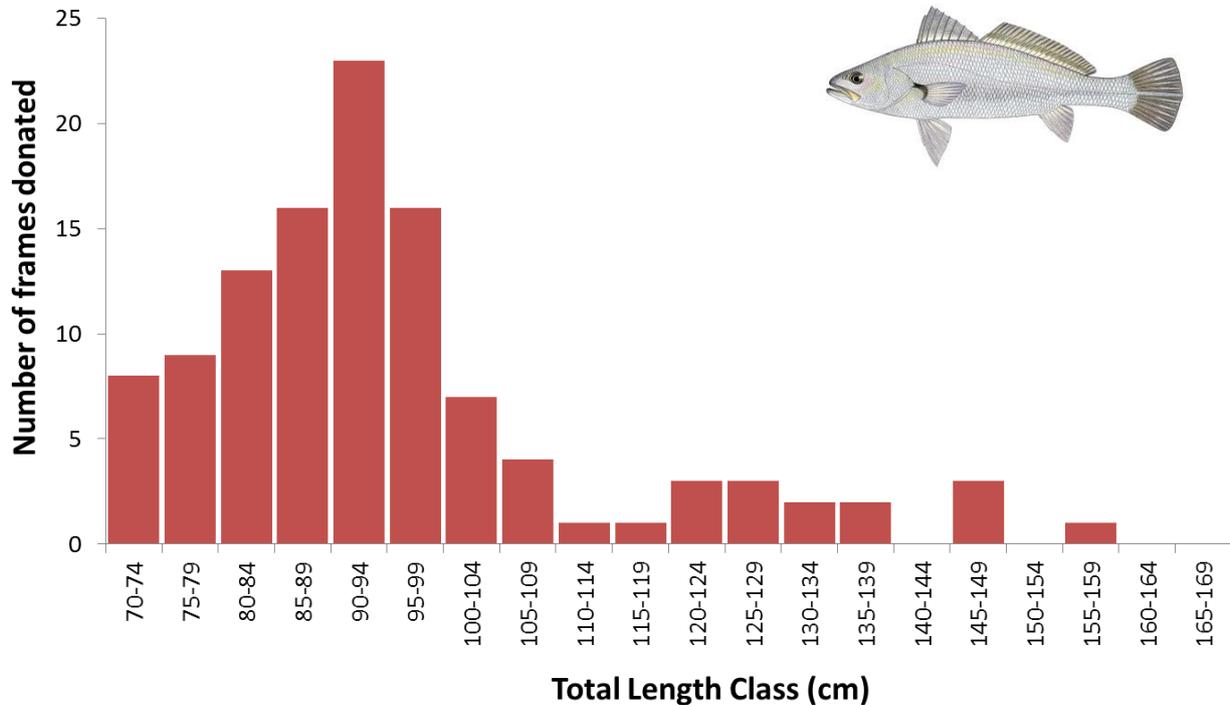
Another top season of donations to the NSW Research Angler Program saw plenty of frames from all our species come through our labs. Mulloway to 157 cm, yellowtail kingfish to 126 cm, tailor to 77 cm, dusky flathead to 84 cm and snapper to 102 cm were just a few of the highlights!!

This season's mulloway frame donations came thick in the 80-100 cm size range thanks mainly to one of our most productive donors catching (and donating) a ludicrous number of fish in this impressive size range. The healthy tail (the right hand end) of large fish in the size frequency distribution was again evident with 26 metre-plus fish donated along with four of 145 cm or larger!

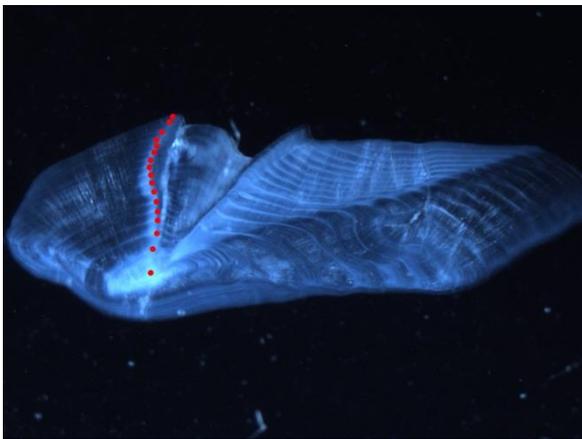
**Right: They're heavy enough even without the fillets! NSW RAP researcher Antony Gould in the lab with a 126 cm yellowtail kingfish frame donated over summer 2016-17.**



**Lengths of mulloway (*Argyrosomus japonicus*) donated to the NSW Research Angler Program in summer 2016-17.**



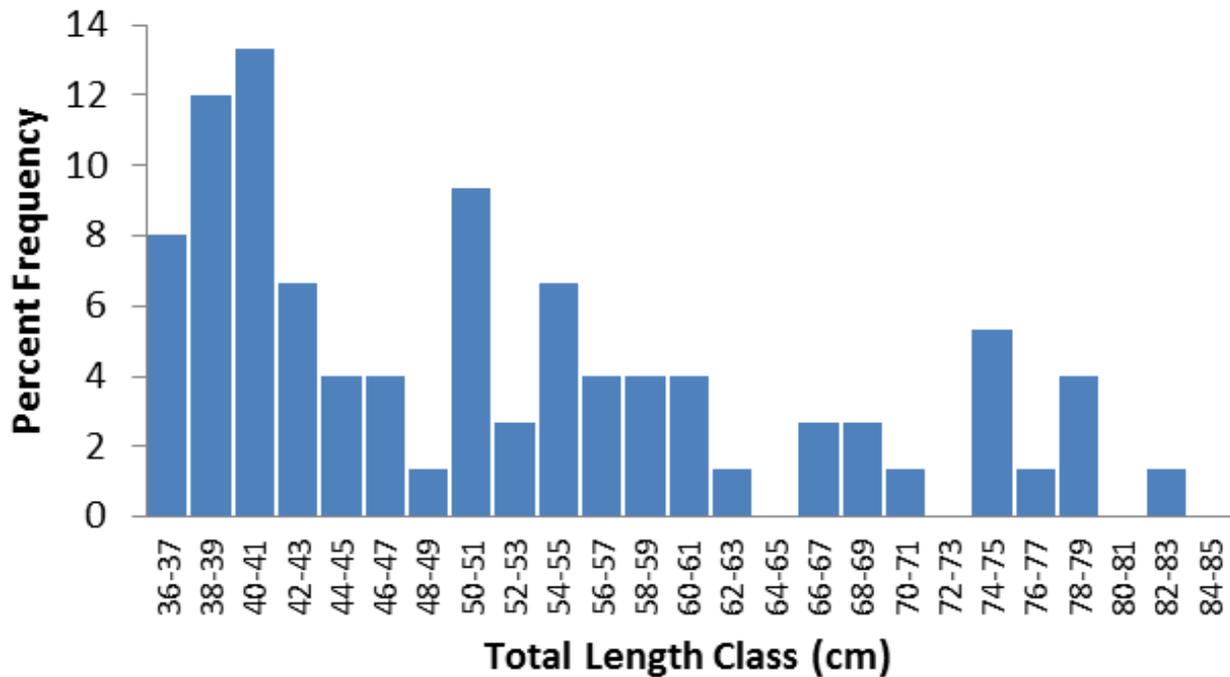
And don't forget that you can now post the otoliths from your mullet catches (or otoliths from any of our species – if you can find them!) to us making donating to the program even easier. All you need to do is contact us at the NSW RAP (T: 9435 4671, E: [research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au)) and we will send you out a reply-paid padded post pack and data label. Then it's simply a matter of filling out the data label and placing it, along with a single otolith from your fish into the post pack (right), seal it, stick it in the nearest Australia Post box and let the postman do the rest!.



The otolith section from an 83.5 cm dusky flathead donated to the program over summer resulted in the Hawkesbury River fish being estimated to be 15 years old!

The graph below shows the sizes of dusky flathead donated to the NSW Research Angler Program from summer. From it you can see that not surprisingly, fish within 10 cm of the legal size of 36 cm are the most commonly encountered size and therefore the most commonly retained and donated. However, based on donations to the NSW RAP, there seems to be a surprising pattern in the retention of fish of between 50 and 60 cm in length, suggesting that this may be an ideal size for a feed of fresh flatty! Also brilliant for our knowledge of the dusky flathead population is that data we get from the larger individuals donated to the NSW RAP (>60 cm in the below graph). These fish, although few in number, have dramatically improved our understanding of dusky flathead age and growth here. A prime example was an 83.5 cm Hawkesbury River fish donated to the program recently estimated to be 15 years old – the second oldest dusky flathead so far recorded in NSW!

Lengths of dusky flathead (*Platycephalus fuscus*) donated to the NSW Research Angler Program in summer 2016-17.



**“Top Five” dusky flathead donors overall (as of 28 February 2017):**

Donor	No. frames donated	Region
Mike Hollis	22	Sydney North
Greg Gowlland	11	Central Coast
Tom Perry	8	Central Coast
Peter Higgs	7	Narooma
Jamie Nicolson	4	Yamba

**Even if it is only one frame, one head, or a single jewel, we are willing to do (almost) anything to get it!**

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## Techo Time!

Welcome to “Techo Time” where our resident Research Angler Program technician, Antony Gould, guides you through some of the nerdier aspects of the information we get from your frame donations and what we use it for!

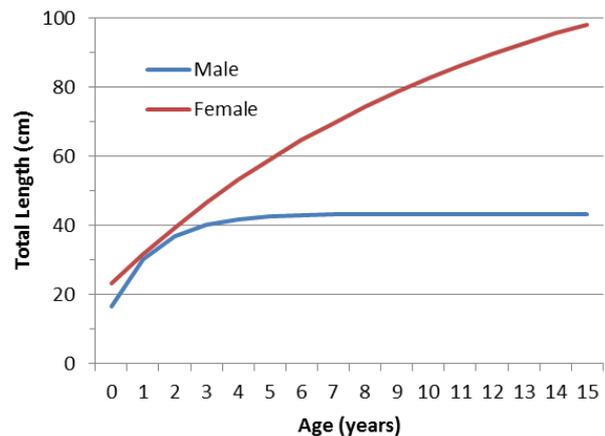
### “Sexing” and “staging”



While length and age are the two most important bits of information we get from a donated frame to be used in monitoring fish stocks, data from the gonads (testes or ovaries) also provides us with some really useful additional information – via “sexing” and “staging” the fish. I know what you’re thinking...and it’s nothing to do with the picture at left! However, when a fisheries researcher says “sexing” and “staging” a fish we mean determining gender (“sexing”) and determining how developed the gonads are (“staging”).

This helps us understand the size at which the fish reaches sexual maturity, time of year they spawn and whether there are sex-specific differences in growth or maturity. So this will be a short guide to help Research Angler frame donors work out the “sex” and “stage” of a donated fish in order to help provide us with some additional information for monitoring the stocks of your favourite species!

**Right: A good example of sexual difference in modelled growth: Dusky flathead (*Platycephalus fuscus*) showing the very different growth trajectories of each sex.**

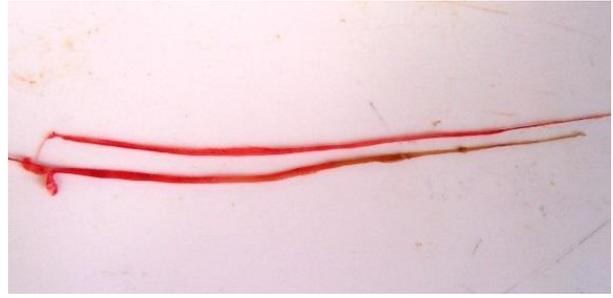


### Finding the ‘nads

When you cut open the fish to clean it, there will be a lot of organs visible, so working out which are the gonads can be tricky. Most of the bits are part of the digestive system, but along with gonads, you’ll find a heart, liver and a swim bladder. You can have a look through the pictures below to see what the reproductive organs (or gonads) look like at various stages of development. But location is the key to finding them. They will be located at the tail end of the gut cavity and attached internally near the anus. They are paired organs and are usually symmetrical.

### Boy or Girl? Immature or Mature?

Once you’ve found the ‘nads, you will need to work out whether your fish is a male (with testes) or a female (with ovaries). The more developed the gonads are, the easier this is to work out, however it is still possible even when the gonads are undeveloped or ‘immature’. Immature gonads are quite hard to tell sex from because of their small size, but male testes are generally flat and strap-like whilst the female ovaries are more round in cross section. At this stage if you cant work out what sex your fish is, it’s almost definitely immature!



'Immature' males testes (left) and female ovaries (right) from mulloway (*Argyrosomus japonicus*).

As the gonads develop, they increase in size becoming much easier to tell testes from ovaries. At this stage, testes retain their flattened appearance but become a distinct creamy white-brown colour. This is in stark contrast to the orange or yellow jelly-like appearance of '**developing**' ovaries.



'Developing' males testes (left) and female ovaries (right) from mulloway (*Argyrosomus japonicus*).

When '**fully developed**', the gonads of both sexes are large, occupying a significant proportion of the gut cavity. Testes are creamy white as they fill with milt (fish sperm) while ovaries remain orange-yellow and may have a "grainy" appearance as the developing eggs become visible through the ovary wall.



'Fully developed' males testes (left) and female ovaries (right) from mulloway (*Argyrosomus japonicus*).

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When spawning is imminent, the gonads are referred to as being **'ripe'** and may occupy almost the entire gut cavity. Ripe testes are easily-ruptured and milt may be expelled from the cloaca (the single opening where everything leaves the fish) when the fish is being handled. Ripe ovaries are full of blood vessels and large hydrated eggs may be visible through the ovary wall. Gentle pressure on the abdomen of the fish may result in the expulsion of eggs from the cloaca. Once the fish have done their thing and the spawning season is over, the gonads return to a 'developing' stage.



**'Ripe'** male testes (left) and female ovaries (right) from mulloway (*Argyrosomus japonicus*).

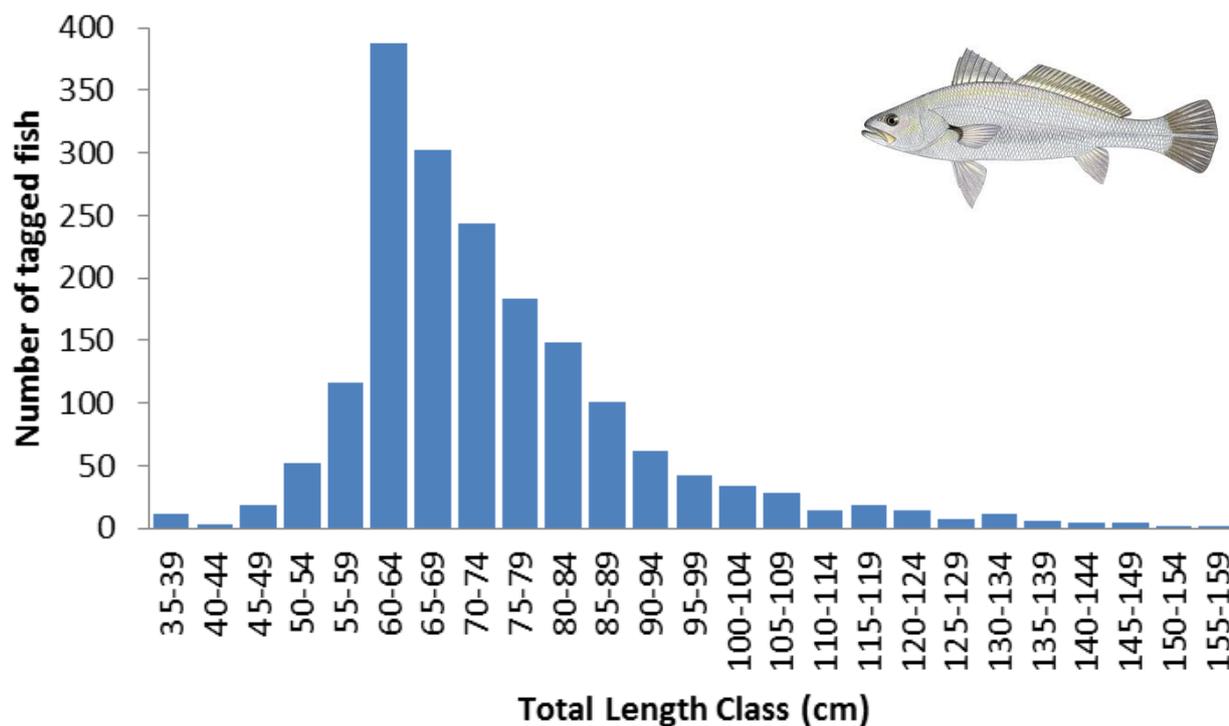
So next time you're cleaning your fish prior to donating the frame (or otoliths) to the NSW Research Angler Program, have a look at the gonads and have a crack at "sexing and staging" your fish! And don't hesitate to send us a photo if you are unsure!

## NSW RAP – ANSA Tagging Project Update

Summer 2016-17 was another cracker for the NSW RAP-ANSA mulloway tagging project with 55 mulloway tagged from all over the state (well, the coastal bit anyway). This brings the current overall number of tagged jewies swimming around out there to an incredible 1822 since March 2014! The graph below shows the sizes of these almost 2000 tagged individuals and, apart from the sheer numbers, the feature that makes this component of the NSW RAP important, is the healthy tail (the right hand end) of the size frequency distribution. Whilst 60% of the fish tagged have between 60 and 80 cm in size, 147 metre-plus jewies have been caught and tagged in just three years. Included in these are 30 fish of 130 cm or larger all the way up to a massive 156 cm! Information on the movements of these trophy individuals is key to our knowledge of the connectivity of the mulloway population in NSW.

Don't forget, you can also now stay up-to-date with all the comings and goings of this component of the NSW RAP by visiting the project Facebook page ([Newtag – NSW Tagging Program – Mulloway](#)).

Length frequency of mulloway tagged as part of the NSW RAP-ANSA tagging project since March 2014.



For the third season in a row, our number one tagger was again Tom Crittenden! Tom's legendary tagging exploits have now seen him tag a staggering 65 fish in the past 9 months from a wide variety of the estuaries and headlands of the Mid-North Coast. Also in the thick of the action were two of Sydney's best metro mulloway chasers, Chris Bahjat with seven fish up to 92 cm, and Gianni LoGuidice with five fish up to 77 cm. Further north, Mark Saxon and [Castaway Estuary Fishing Charters](#) clients tagged 5 fish up to 80 cm from the Hastings and Maria Rivers. A guy who sure knows his patch, Peter Rothwell has now tagged 90 fish out of the Hawkesbury River after a further 10 over summer 2016-17.

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### Top Five taggers for summer 2016-17 (as of 28 February 2017):

Tagger	No. fish tagged	Region
Tom Crittenden	15	Everywhere!
Peter Rothwell	10	Sydney
Chris Bahjat	7	Sydney
Gianni LoGuidice	5	Sydney
Mark Saxon	5	Port Macquarie

### Top Five taggers overall (as of 28 February 2017):

Tagger	No. fish tagged	Region
Chris Cleaver	250	Everywhere!
Ivan Maric	125	Sydney
Dan Selby	111	Sydney
Mark Pirie	94	Yamba
Peter Rothwell	90	Sydney
Paul Blade	85	Coffs Harbour



And speaking of patches, “Tagger 86” continues to be in a big fish purple patch in the Hawkesbury after tagging all “Top Five” largest fish from summer of between 135 and 148 cm in length! With quite a few of our taggers racking up some impressive numbers of tagged fish, it’s hardly surprising that some of these are occasionally recaptured. One of Brad Gibson’s 55 tagged fish from Wollongong was recaptured in Port Hacking by Ben Austin having grown from 64 to 78 cm in just 325 days. Similarly, one of Kyle Worley’s 52 tagged mulloway from Lake Macquarie also went for a bit of a swim being recaptured in the Hunter River after 290 days liberty, growing 13.5 cm in the process. Heading south from Sydney Harbour after being tagged at 63 cm by Gianni LoGuidice was a fish recaptured in Botany Bay by Jose Alex Vidovic 402 days later when 75 cm.

**Left: A cracking 130 cm fish tagged in August 2016 in the Georges River recaptured by Matt Sidebottom at Stockton Beach in January 2017. Photo courtesy Matt Sidebottom.**

### Top Five largest fish tagged for summer 2016-17 (as of 28 February 2017):

Tagger	Total length (cm)	System
"Tagger 86"	148	Hawkesbury River
"Tagger 86"	146	Hawkesbury River
"Tagger 86"	139	Hawkesbury River
"Tagger 86"	135.5	Hawkesbury River
"Tagger 86"	135	Hawkesbury River

### Top Five largest fish tagged overall (as of 28 February 2017):

Tagger	Total length (cm)	System	Season
"Tagger 86"	155.5	Hawkesbury River	Autumn 2016
Josh Anderson	152.5	Yamba	Spring 2016
"Tagger 86"	152	Hawkesbury River	Spring 2015
"Tagger 86"	148	Hawkesbury River	Summer 2016-17
"Tagger 86"	146	Hawkesbury River	Summer 2016-17



This lovely fish was one of 15 tagged mulloway to be recaptured by NSW RAP-ANSA participants over summer 2016-17. Photo courtesy NEWTAG.



This 88.5 cm Lake Macquarie mulloway tagged by Kyle Worley in March 2016 was recaptured 290 days later in the Hunter River and had grown to 102 cm. Photo courtesy Kyle Worley.

Summer 2016-17's champion distance traveller however was following a well-trodden path for mulloway tagged as part of the NSW RAP-ANSA mulloway tagging project as the seventh fish to make a journey north from Sydney to the Hunter Coast. A thumping 130 cm fish caught by Matt Sidebottom on Stockton Beach had been tagged 163 days earlier in the Georges River. Swimming 150 km in 163 days is no doubt impressive, but no less impressive was a 73.5 cm Hawkesbury mulloway tagged by [Sydney Sportfishing Adventures](#) Dan Selby and clients way back in August 2014 recaptured at 84 cm by Warren Ballinger a staggering 853 days later in December 2016! Another fish recaptured over summer which hadn't moved far despite being at liberty for 651 days was tagged by N. McInnes and recaptured by Ashley Deveridge in Newcastle Harbour, however the fish had grown an impressive 26 cm in this time!

### Tagged mullocky recaptures for summer 2016-17 (as of 28 February 2017):

Tagging angler	Total length (cm)	Tagging location	Recapture angler	Recapture location	Total length (cm)	Days at liberty
Brad Gibson	64	Thirroul Beach	Ben Austin	Port Hacking	78	325
<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	Steve McGuire	Newcastle Harbour	67	
<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	Lee Griffiths	Hunter River	60	
Kyle Worley	88.5	Lake Macquarie	<i>n/a</i>	Hunter River	102	290
Dan Selby	73.5	Hawkesbury River	Warren Ballinger	Hawkesbury River	84	853
George Anastasiadis	60	Sydney Harbour	Ryan Doyle	Sydney Harbour	69	422
Peter Rothwell	77	Hawkesbury River	Warren Bold	Hawkesbury River	86	313
Gianni LoGuidice	63	Sydney Harbour	Jose Alex Vidovic	Botany Bay	75	402
<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	Jack Payne	Georges River	75	
<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	<i>n/a</i>	Brett Cartwright	Hawkesbury River	82	
<i>n/a</i>	130	Georges River	Matt Sidebottom	Stockton Beach	130	163
Brenton Spinks	74	Shoalhaven River	Wayne Allan	Shoalhaven River	98	120
B. Paul	62	Tuross Lake	<i>n/a</i>	Tuross Lake	67	414
Tom Crittenden	67	Parramatta River	<i>n/a</i>	Parramatta River	80	107
N. McInnes	65	Newcastle Harbour	Ashley Deveridge	Newcastle Harbour	91	651

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Next time you're out chasing mulloway, keep an eye out for one of our yellow NSW DPI tags. Remember that the tag may be fouled with algae and not quite as clean as this one from a 130 cm fish recaptured by Matt Sidebottom at Stockton Beach after more than 160 days at liberty.



If you are fortunate enough to catch a tagged mulloway, please record the tag number, measure the length of the fish, and contact either the NSW DPI Gamefish Tagging Program (T: 4424 7411, E: [gamefish.tagging@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gamefish.tagging@dpi.nsw.gov.au)) or the NSW Research Angler Program (T: 9435 4671, E: [research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au)). The tag will be yellow, approximately 12 cm long and located just beneath the dorsal spines.

The crucial data collected by this project will help us to learn more about the movements, growth and post-release survival of this iconic fish. Stay tuned for future updates in the Autumn 2017 NSW RAP Newsletter!

Once again, an enormous thank you must go to the [ANSA NSW Branch](#), and in particular **Stan Konstantaras** and **Chris Anagnostou**, for managing this important and fascinating component of the NSW Research Angler Program.

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## “Trophy Dusky Flathead Fishery” Concept

There are few fish species more popular with recreational fishers in NSW than the dusky flathead (*Platycephalus fuscus*). They are found in estuary systems from central Queensland all the way down the east coast and into Victoria where their eagerness to scoff a bait or artificial makes them an easily accessible species to fishers of all skill levels. In addition to their catchability (sometimes!), they also taste great! In recognition of this, the humble dusky is one of the [NSW Research Angler Program](#)'s frame donation species. Regularly caught in 40-50 cm range, females of the species are capable of growing to more than 100 cm in length. A dusky flathead approaching this size can truly be called a 'trophy'.

Few estuary systems contain more of these trophy duskies than the Recreational Fishing Havens of St Georges Basin and Tuross Lake on the south coast of NSW and this attract fishos from far and wide in their attempts to nail a genuine 'croc'! The “Trophy Dusky Flathead Fishery” concept has been set up by NSW DPI in collaboration with the local community to promote the importance of these systems as places where anglers can chase big flathead. Key to the concept is promoting successful catch and release of these 'trophy' fish of greater than 70 cm in length. Dusky flathead have been shown to have very low mortality rates following catch and release angling and a “Code of Practice” has been developed detailing best practice catch and release techniques which can be found in a helpful video [here](#).



Australia's very own international fishing superstar Carl Jocumsen with a trophy dusky flathead complete with tag prior to release in St Georges Basin. Photo courtesy [Jervis Bay Flatty Flickers](#).



Another big tagged dusky flathead goes back into the trophy-rich waters of St Georges Basin, this time via the capable hands of David Johnstone. Photo courtesy [Jervis Bay Flatty Flickers](#).

The “Trophy Dusky Flathead Fishery” concept not only helps ensure the sustainability of recreational fisheries by protecting large female fish, but also provides anglers with the real possibility of catching a monster 'lizard'! As part of the trial, the [NSW Research Angler Program](#) is involved in a small tagging program, the keeping of [Research Angler Diaries](#) and of course any retained dusky flathead frames can be donated to research! The two drop-off points closest to the action are [McCallum's Tackle World](#) (47 Kinghorn St, Nowra, T: 4421 2418) and [Tuross Boatshed and Café](#) (93 Trafalgar Rd, Tuross Heads, T: 4473 8127).

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## Get on the mack attack!



Evan Leeson with a NSW spearfishing record Spotted mackerel (*Scomberomorus munroi*) of 109 cm and 7.25 kg, one of 66 spotties donated to the NSW RAP last year. Photo courtesy Evan Leeson.

Well, it's that time of year again when the warm waters of the East Australian Current bring with them hordes of ravenous Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) and the smaller spotted mackerel (*S. munroi*) which may range as far south as Sydney. These tropical speedsters are one of the more desirable and glamorous species seasonally available to NSW anglers and spearos and the NSW Research Angler Program are again looking for frame donations for use in a joint assessment of the East Coast stocks of these two valuable and highly sought-after fish species with the [Queensland Department of Agriculture & Fisheries](#). So, if you chase these tropical speedsters with rod or spear, we are seeking donations of rec-caught mackerel from NSW waters. As with our other species, the frames (or heads) can be donated to the NSW RAP at any of our participating [drop-off points](#).

All data collected will contribute to the joint assessment of the East Coast stocks of these two awesome fish species, so tie on some wire leader and get out there on the mack attack!

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## NSW RAP Presentations

If you are a member of a fishing club (spearfishing or angling) or a tackle shop hosting regular fishing-related presentations and are interested in having someone from the NSW RAP give a talk on the program (and we now have a bunch more species to talk about!), please don't hesitate to get in contact with us (E: [research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au), T: 9435 4671) and we will send someone out to get you and your audience 'revved-up' about the program!

**Right: NSW RAP scientist Julian Hughes makes a presentation at the monthly meeting of the Northern Suburbs Underwater Club. Photo courtesy Adam Price.**



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## The “Top Fives”!

Our sincerest thanks to the following dedicated mulloway Research Anglers and spearfishers who have made it into our “Top Five” lists of frame donors overall and those for summer 2016-17.

The primary aim of this program is to engage passionate and enthusiastic recreational fishers in contributing to assessment of the stocks of their favourite species. Donations from summer 2016-17 well and truly prove that not only is Newcastle’s David Birt both passionate and enthusiastic, but his favourite species is most definitely mulloway! Incredibly, David managed to donate the jewels from no less than 27 mulloway ranging in size from 71 to 103 cm. More amazingly David also found time to not only help plenty of mates crack their first jewy (and sometimes more!), but also managed to convince these guys to donate an additional 32 fish including nine from Matthew Birt, eight from Neil Cooley and six from Steve Neaves! Talk about a one man show! Everyone’s favourite spearo (well the NSW RAP’s anyway!) James Sakker was again on the money through summer nailing eight fine jewies from around Coffs Harbour including 129, 137 and 139.5 cm fish. We’ve been chasing Ben Hathaway for donations for some time now and his first season did not disappoint with six fish between 110 and 145 cm coming through the lab! Another regular, John St Vincent Welch also came up with the goods for us over summer with six fish from Evans Head.

### “Top Five” donors summer 2016-17 (as of 28 February 2017):

Donor	No. frames donated	Region
David Birt	27	Newcastle
Matthew Birt	9	Newcastle
Neil Cooley	8	Newcastle
James Sakker	8	Coffs Harbour
Ben Hathaway	6	South West Rocks
Steve Neaves	6	Newcastle
John St Vincent Welch	6	Evans Head

### “Top Five” largest fish donated and associated ages summer 2016-17 (as of 28 February 2017):

Donor	Total length (cm)	Estimated age (years)	Region
Luke Clements	157	22	Newcastle
Paul Lennon	149	33	Port Stephens
Ben Hathaway	145	14	Sydney
Jay Pilson	145	22	Central Coast
James Sakker	139.5	13	Coffs Harbour



Gun spearo James Sakker with a fine pair of Coffs coast mulloway. At left is a fish of 139.5 cm and 13 years of age, and at right a slightly smaller 137 cm fish estimated to be 16 years old. Photos courtesy James Sakker.

**“Top Five” largest mulloway donated and associated ages overall (as of 28 February 2017):**

Donor	Total length (cm)	Estimated age (years)	Region	Season
Nathan Debono	168	26	Newcastle	Winter 2015
Adam Price	164	24	Sydney	Spring 2013
Keith Kneebone	160	20	Sydney	Autumn 2014
Mark McCabe	159	21	Sydney	Spring 2013
Sal Nahle	158	18	Sydney	Autumn 2016

Luke Clements’ jumbo Hunter River mulloway from earlier in the newsletter was not only the largest mulloway we had donated to the NSW RAP over summer 2016-17 at 157 cm, but it was also the (equal) second oldest along with Jay Pilson’s 145 cm Central Coast cracker, both estimated to be 22 years old. Paul Lennon’s truly ancient 33 year old from Port Stephens was by far the oldest fish donated from summer and now sits as the second oldest so far recorded from NSW overall! Ben Hathaway’s 145 cm fish from Sydney North came in at 14 years of age and James Sakker’s 139.5 cm from Coffs at 13. Smaller at 137 cm was another of the eight fish donated by James Sakker from summer, but came in at a surprising 16 years old. Another surprise packet was Andrew Sharp’s 15 year old fish from Port Stephens, which despite its impressive age, was just 124 cm in length!

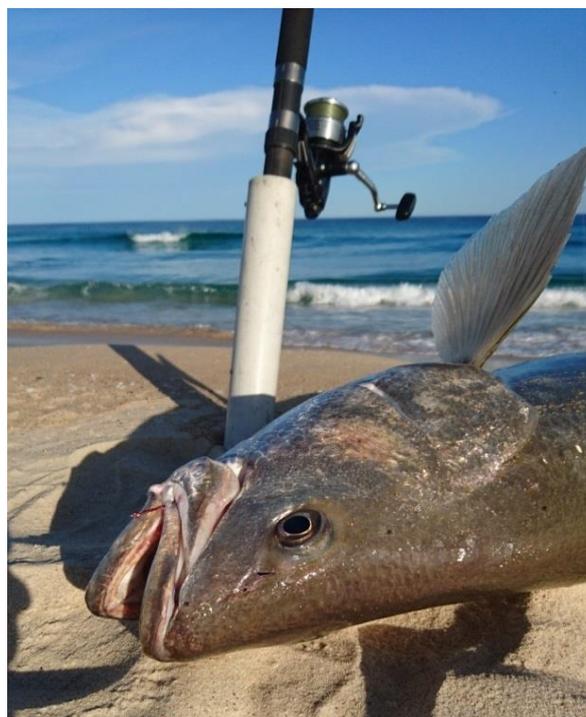
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**“Top Five” oldest fish donated and associated lengths summer 2016-17 (as of 28 February 2017):**

Donor	Estimated age (years)	Total length (cm)	Region
Paul Lennon	33	149	Port Stephens
Luke Clements	22	157	Newcastle
Jay Pilson	22	145	Central Coast
James Sakker	16	137	Coffs Harbour
Andrew Sharp	15	124	Port Stephens
Ben Hathaway	14	145	Sydney



After a torrid battle in the surf, Ben Hathaway was unable to revive this 145 cm 14 year old northern Sydney fish and fortunately for us, donated it to the NSW RAP. Photo courtesy Ben Hathaway.



A ripper 124 cm Port Stephens beach mulloway donated by Andrew Sharp and estimated to be a surprising 15 years of age. Photo courtesy Andrew Sharp.

**“Top Five” oldest fish donated and associated lengths overall (as of 28 February 2017):**

Donor	Estimated age (years)	Total length (cm)	Region	Season
Vaughan Little	34	156	Nowra	Spring 2013
Paul Lennon	33	149	Port Stephens	Summer 2016-17
Scott Robson	26	154	Newcastle	Summer 2013-14
Evan Leeson	26	144	Port Macquarie	Autumn 2014
Nathan Debono	26	168	Newcastle	Winter 2015
Marwan Nasr	25	147	Sydney	Spring 2014
Greg Slater	25	133	Eden	Winter 2016
Adam Price	24	164	Sydney	Spring 2013
Jack Graham	24	<i>Unknown</i>	Eden	Winter 2016
Hari Corliss	24	151	Port Macquarie	Winter 2015

As well as those mentioned above, thanks to all the fishers who donated their summer mullet, kingfish, dusky flathead, snapper, mackerel and tailor to the NSW RAP, here’s hoping for a quality autumn of fishing for all our species!



Adam Price and Justin Delaney from [North Shore Underwater Club](#) with a fine pair of donated dusky flathead. The 79 cm fish on the right was estimated to be an impressive 8 years of age. Photo courtesy Justin Delaney.



A thumping North Coast greenback tailor donated by Australian Surfcaster’s Ben Van der Woude. Photo courtesy [Australian Surfcaster](#).

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## Drop-off Locations

Many thanks must once again go to all participating drop-off locations for their enthusiastic involvement in the program. This program would simply not be possible without your continued support.

For the full and up-to-date list of places where you can drop-off your frames, heads or jewels, please visit:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/researchangler/drop-off-locations>



**Ben Hathaway with 110 cm of bright chrome South West Rocks schoolie – one of six mulloway frames donated by Ben to the NSW RAP over summer 2016-17. Photo courtesy Ben Hathaway.**



**A pair of fine Port Stephens mulloway ready for filleting prior to being donated to the NSW RAP. Photo courtesy Andrew Sharp.**

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## Monthly Prize Draw Winners!

The lucky monthly NSW Research Angler Program prize winners for summer 2016-17 were decided by randomly drawing one frame donor from each month.

Congratulations to the following Research Anglers:

December	<b>Cian Foster-Thorpe</b>	(Sydney)
January	<b>Luke Clements</b>	(Newcastle)
February	<b>Neil Cooley</b>	(Newcastle)



Each winner will receive either:

- a \$50 gift voucher generously donated by [MO Tackle Coffs Harbour](#) (for use in-store or online),
- or a mullet-ready lure pack worth \$50 containing a selection of proven hardbody, soft plastic and blade-style mullet-catchers from Storm, Killalure, Berkley and Ripes.

Future winners will be published in upcoming newsletters and on our website. Don't forget to include your contact details (phone number, postal or email address) on the label accompanying your donated frame to ensure your chance of winning!

Remember, if you're going to catch and keep any of our species (**Mullet, Snapper, Dusky Flathead, Yellowtail Kingfish, Tailor, Spotted or Spanish Mackerel**) for a feed, please fillet your fish and donate the frame, head or a single otolith to research –

## WE NEED THE DATA FROM YOUR FISH!

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT.  
KIND REGARDS AND HAPPY FISHING!**

The NSW Research Angler Program is part of the Resource Assessment & Monitoring Unit of the Fisheries NSW Research Branch and is generously funded by the NSW Saltwater Recreational Fishing Trust and the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

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