

Chair's Summary - NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group November 2021

I was pleased to welcome members of the NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group to the first meeting, which, due to the ongoing pandemic, took place online over three sessions during November 2021.

Mulloway are enjoyed by countless recreational fishers and support a commercial fishery that also brings Mulloway to the dinner tables of the wider NSW community. Mulloway is also highly valued by Aboriginal fishers and their communities. However, the population in NSW is in a parlous state with many indicators at or around historic lowest levels. The population is formally classified as *Depleted* under the Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS) criteria. There would be immediate community- and ecosystem benefits from rebuilding the population and, in the longer term, returning it to levels that would support both higher catches and a *Sustainable* classification. A harvest strategy is one of the best tools available to assist management to achieve these outcomes.

The working group considered a structure and timeline to enable a draft harvest strategy to be delivered to the Minister, through the Commercial Fishing NSW and Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Councils, by the end of 2022. I was very pleased to observe that all Working Group members willingly and openly contributed their extensive knowledge and have shown a strong commitment to reaching consensus on a draft harvest strategy.

Given that the steps required before formal adoption of a harvest strategy for Mulloway can take some time (e.g. public consultation and review of submissions) and it may also take time to implement once adopted, the DDG DPI Fisheries asked the group to identify some monitoring or management measures at this stage that could move the stock and/or scientific understanding in a better direction while the harvest strategy is under development. The working group recognised that any such actions may better support the final harvest strategy.

Following discussion and review by the group, I have now provided the group's initial advice to the DDG around some options to strengthen compliance, improve data, reduce mortality, improve post-release survival, avoid incidental catch and continue Mulloway re-stocking as part of a scientific trial. The working group will continue to discuss and develop these and other more immediate harvest strategy support options alongside the harvest strategy itself and provide further advice to the DDG for consideration.

At the meeting, DPI also informed the group that a broader Ecological Risk Assessment would be done, looking into all threats to Mulloway, not just fishing. This will really help inform harvest strategy development, especially in identifying any environmental risks to its success.

The group will meet again in February and regularly thereafter during 2022. I will keep everyone informed about progress through these Chair's Summaries, which will be publicly released as soon as possible after each meeting.

James Findlay – Independent Chair, NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group