

Chair's Summary - NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group 25-26 July 2022

The fifth meeting for the Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group was held on the 25th and 26th of July 2022. The aim for this meeting was to discuss harvest strategy objectives and move into discussions around indicators and reference points. DPI introduced a developing draft plan for the harvest strategy prior to the meeting to support discussion and consideration.

The meeting included an overview of compliance issues relating to Mulloway in NSW, providing an informative insight into risks likely to be faced by the fishery and any approaches for management proposed by the developing harvest strategy. Community information was highlighted as a valuable component for targeting illegal fishing activity. It was reported that offences over time have mostly been minor in nature, however, the working group noted the importance of high compliance as risks associated with illegal fishing could impact on what the harvest strategy is trying to achieve.

A further update was provided on ongoing work to improve catch selectivity in the estuary and ocean trawl fisheries, and it is pleasing that significant reductions in incidental catch have been achieved and continue to be pursued. There are benefits to reducing incidental catch, which is controlled by a range of management measures, including through design of fishing gear, ongoing spatial closures, and additional responsive closures following flood events. It is important for this group to consider all sources of potential mortality, and for assessment and mitigation to be pursued to allow effective rebuilding of the depleted Mulloway stock.

The meeting also considered a presentation on historical management changes that directly and indirectly relate to the protection of Mulloway, providing useful information in context of stock health and changes implemented in each fishing sector. It is important to recognise that management of NSW fisheries has changed significantly over time, and a range of tools are available for the group to consider.

Discussions continued around potential objectives for the draft harvest strategy, assisted by presentations including an overview of harvest strategy objectives and the association to NSW legislation, policy and existing fisheries management strategies and objectives, as well as research underway into developing recreational fishing objectives.

Members supported a two-step approach for operational objectives that include an interim or lower target for rebuilding the stock and an upper target reference point set at a biomass where all fishing sectors can confidently benefit from the stock.

Discussions continued on indicators and reference points, including their role in operation of the harvest strategy. The working group recognise data on the Mulloway fishery is limited, however, acknowledge confidence in monitoring stock health will improve over time. Members discussed options for monitoring stock health from currently available information and deliberated over data collection options for increasing certainty.

The working group made significant progress to inform the potential objectives, indicators and reference points for the draft harvest strategy, however more discussion remains to achieve a balance between all sectors.

Dr James Findlay, Independent Chair, NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group.