

MFAC Chair's Summary

Council met in Sydney on 29 June 2023. The following were the key matters discussed at the meeting:

1. An extensive discussion took place on White Spot affecting prawn fishers in the Clarence River. The discussion included the emergency response efforts led by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) and the NSW Government's \$21.4 million recovery package for Clarence River prawn fishers, prawn farmers and the Clarence River Fishermen's Cooperative. The Council provided its strong support for the government's White Spot response and recovery program, in particular providing support for education programs to raise awareness and educate the community about the risks of spreading White Spot.
2. The Council was provided with updates on progress with a Draft Policy for the Co-Management of Fisheries in NSW. The policy has been developed to provide an overarching framework to promote further co-management of fisheries in NSW and proposes that progress towards co-management should be through a phased approach that allows commercial, recreational and Aboriginal fishers, aquaculture farmers and other key stakeholders including the conservation sector to build their capacity over time, particularly in governance and leadership. The policy will be provided to the Minister for consideration and approval and will then be released for public consultation.
3. A significant discussion took place on water quality, noting this is fundamental to the oyster industry. With more than six million people living within 50 kilometres of the NSW coastline and associated factors at play that can affect the estuarine environment, industry is faced with having to undertake around 10,000 tests a year to monitor water quality and react accordingly in their farming practices. There are opportunities to provide a whole of government response to water quality such through the Marine Estate Management Strategy (MEMS), where Initiative 1 is focused on improving water quality and reducing litter.
4. Council notes issues raised by the Commercial Fishing Sector in relation to the rising cost of doing business, interest rates, inflation and cost of holding and accessing equipment which have all increased significantly. Variable costs, in particular fuel, freight, power and all supply chain costs have also increased. Consumer spending is down, with an estimated 40% downturn in restaurant consumer demand since the last interest rate rise. It was noted the commercial industry is finding it difficult to operate in an economically sustainable manner.
5. The Council also discussed other key matters including setting of total Allowable Catch Limits, the importance of continuing to progress formal Harvest Strategies for all major fisheries, the Menindee Fish Death Inquiry and its response, the impacts on fisheries access associated with proposed offshore energy sites off the east coast namely Newcastle, a marine heatwave being predicted by CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology this summer, initiatives to support Aboriginal fishing and the Draft Cultural Fishing Regulation Roundtable, to be held the following day a tri-State approach to management of sea urchins, freshwater cold water pollution trial, native fish passage strategy, data collection.

Council will next meet on 5 September 2023 online.

Yours sincerely,



Ministerial Fisheries Advisory Council

Dr James Findlay
Chair
Ministerial Fisheries Advisory Council