

## NSW MULLOWAY HARVEST STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

Chair's Summary – 12<sup>th</sup> Meeting – 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2024

The 12<sup>th</sup> meeting of the NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group was held on the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2024. This meeting undertook further consideration of management arrangements to control catch under the harvest strategy and review and finalise the draft Mulloway Harvest Strategy.

The meeting commenced by welcoming guest speaker, DPI's A/Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture Management to discuss current management arrangements implemented to assist further protection of the Mulloway stock, which has recently been assessed as a recovering stock after previously being classified as depleted/overfished. This includes the protection of observed recent years potential recruitment(s). Discussions highlighted the balance of implementing protective measures to support continued rebuilding, while ensuring an equitable contribution from fishing sectors, whilst also taking into account social and economic factors. Management options available when a prompt response is required are shaped by existing operational systems, regulations, and enforcement requirements, which limited the changes to a daily and boat limits in this case. The members strongly supported improvements to the operational components as a priority and acknowledged that the Department is currently working on system enhancements to provide better opportunities for monitoring, assessment and management for Mulloway.

The Working Group compared commercial fishing catch data under current and previous management arrangements to identify any noticeable change in catch. It was evident catch has reduced since the recent management arrangements commenced, however, assessing the effectiveness of the current arrangements to manage catch appropriately under the harvest strategy will only be confirmed through a more comprehensive data set.

The meeting also welcomed guest speaker, DPI's Director, Fisheries Research who spoke of the ongoing stock assessment process for Mulloway including the draft assessment and determination of the 2023 stock status, due to be published in 2024, as well as work commencing under the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) project towards the new integrated assessment model and future developments underway.

The draft assessment was presented to the group. The presentation outlined potential improvements to the health of the stock, which, although carrying some uncertainty, may indicate previous management efforts to protect the stock are working. Due to a high level of uncertainty from assessment outputs, the Working Group agreed that it is important for management under the harvest strategy to continue with the correct level of precaution until there is enough data to deliver estimates of biomass with a high degree of certainty.

Members discussed the voluntary commercial Mulloway length reporting survey. The survey is supported as a good interim measure to assist building information on Mulloway to strengthen the assessment, while reporting systems are undergoing enhancement and work is commencing under the new FRDC project. I encourage all commercial fishers who actively

catch Mulloway to take part in the survey and liaise with the Departments researchers to get the best assessment for the Mulloway fishery possible.

This meeting revisited discussions about potential management options to manage catch under the harvest strategy. Members discussed several options to manage recreational and commercial catch, and again agreed that there should be an equitable share of catch between sectors, utilising the most practical option(s) available to each sector. However, after a final attempt for consensus on this topic, members views differed as to the most practical solution.

The Working Group completed a full review of the draft harvest strategy, discussing the draft with consideration of the new information provided by the draft assessment and status. Through many discussions, several additional indicators were established into the draft harvest strategy to provide further monitoring against its objectives.

This meeting concluded with several recommendations for preferred management options from the recreational and commercial fishing members to be considered and established by the Department.

The draft Mulloway Harvest Strategy has been developed with the intention of providing a robust management framework for Mulloway, and the Working Group has achieved this. The harvest strategy provides a strong framework to monitor stock health and manage fishing mortality of Mulloway, as well as incorporate new information as it becomes available.

The draft Mulloway Harvest Strategy will now be finalised and provided for review by the Ministerial Fishing Advisory Councils before proceeding to public consultation.

Dr James Findlay, Chair, NSW Mulloway HSWG.