

**OCEAN TRAWL MULLOWAY BYCATCH REDUCTION  
WORKING GROUP MEETING  
FINAL OUTCOMES**

**10:00am – 4:00pm  
Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2013  
Jim Thompson Pavilion, Maclean Showground**

**Attendees:**

Robert Toyer (Clarence)  
Donald Anderson (Clarence)  
Graeme Williams (Clarence)  
Stephen Kerr (Clarence)  
Malcolm Kerr (Clarence)  
Chris Bienke (Evans)  
Jay Aleckson (Evans)  
Tricia Beatty (PFA)  
Matt Broadhurst (DPI)  
Matt Taylor (DPI)  
Darren Hale (DPI)  
Jacob Crisp (DPI)

**Apologies:**

Darren Ward (Coffs)  
Phil Ward (Coffs)  
Garry Joblin (Richmond)

**Purpose of meeting**

The purpose of the meeting was to provide industry members an opportunity to discuss their progress developing gear to minimise bycatch of juvenile Mulloway. DPI also took the opportunity to discuss issues relating to the Mulloway bycatch closure program and seek advice to help develop a potential program to survey grounds to better inform future management decisions relating to the use of closures to manage Mulloway bycatch and optimise yield/profitability in the fishery.

**Agenda Item 1: Issues relating to the 2013 Mulloway bycatch closures**

DPI took the opportunity to mention favourable feedback on the efforts of local fishers and managers addressing bycatch of juvenile Mulloway on the north coast. A wide range of additional issues relating to Mulloway and the closure program were briefly discussed including but not limited to;

- Progress of the Mulloway recovery program (all stakeholder group), the outcomes of which are expected to be announced soon.
- The limited information sometimes available to make informed management decisions and the impact, perceived or otherwise, this can have on the integrity of the Mulloway bycatch closure program – also see Agenda item 3.
- Increased interest within some ports in short-term closures to optimise prawn yield and profitability – not only to protect juvenile Mulloway.
- Teraglin and the difficulty accurately identifying juvenile Teraglin versus Mulloway.
- The resource intensive nature (and cost) of the closure program, particularly during previous seasons, and the need to keep costs down where possible.

- Overwhelming positive (and a small amount of negative) feedback from fishers on the SMS service provided by DPI in recent years.
- Local working groups that have been established on the north coast to relieve pressure on those that fisheries manager's have come to rely on quite heavily and to improve communication between shareholders. These informal groups are to be maintained by industry and membership may be modified as industry sees fit. Membership currently includes:

**Richmond:** David Fleming, Mario Puglisi & Garry Joblin.

**Evans:** Chris Bienen, Brett McMahon & Tom O'Grady.

**Clarence:** Donald Anderson, Graeme Williams, Stephen Kerr & Robert Toyer.

### **Outcomes**

Two outcomes of particular importance were agreed; one relating to the management of closures generally and the other relating to the gear development program.

**Input into decisions relating to closures (arising from representations received):** the working group re-confirmed industry's long standing position (as per the Ocean Trawl Fishery Management Strategy) that local fishers/working groups should decide local closures. Given the state-wide nature of the fishery it was, however, agreed that the local working groups would consider representations received from fishers from other ports.

**New working group members and permits (arising from representations received):** Given the limited capacity of working group members to test additional versions of the preferred and feasible alternate gear configurations, members agreed to DPI issuing additional permits on a case by case basis subject to the following:

1. The applicant agreeing to trial the working groups preferred configuration (grids & modified codends) or engaging and receiving the support of Matt Broadhurst, Senior Principle Research Scientist, to test alternate designs expected to be comparable to the working groups preferred configuration in terms of effectiveness;
2. The applicant agrees to abide by the permit conditions that apply to existing permit holders (e.g. requirement to keep records etc); and,
3. The applicant agrees to join the working group and attend relevant meeting etc.

### **Agenda Item 2: Gear development program**

Members discussed the video footage obtained (Mulloway behaviour in nets), the configurations they've built and their effectiveness. Open discussion indicated positive results from the working group's preferred configurations (grids & T90 codends). It was, however, agreed that the following modifications would be worthwhile testing under commercial conditions prior to DPI initiating a formal study to prove (or otherwise) their effectiveness:

- Further reduced the bar spacing in the grid (to between 17 and 20mm);
- Enlarging or adding additional escape holes forward of the grid;
- Shortening the guiding panel to increase the removal of small Mulloway in the 2.5 to 10cm range subject to monitoring prawn loss;
- Maximising the amount of T90 material (or square-mesh) and minimising the amount of diamond-mesh posterior of the grid, even if it means using smaller mesh sizes in the 30 to 35mm range.

Matt Broadhurst also informed the working group of the ongoing FRDC-funded work to reduce bycatch of fish (including Mulloway if present in catches) via modifications to the anterior section of trawls, and in particular recent success optimising mesh size and reducing body taper (i.e. shorter nets) to exclude fish. Other novel modifications involving generating responses to visual and/or tactile stimuli (e.g. vibrating wires at the trawl mouth) are also proposed to be investigated.

The working group questioned the reductions in bycatch required to maintain access to school prawn grounds. DPI clarified that the critical issue is how many juvenile Mulloway are killed and that there are two factors that are important to bear in mind; the abundance of juvenile Mulloway on the grounds concerned and the reductions that can be achieved with any new gear that may be developed. For example, a 60% reduction in bycatch may sound impressive, but if there's thousands of juvenile Mulloway encountered during the shot the numbers killed will still be high. DPI also clarified that, as per the FMS, the fishery is relying on two strategies to minimise mortality (i.e. improved gear and closures) and, theoretically, the more effective that the industry's gear is the less need there should be for closures.

Given the [secondary] social and economic objectives of the Act and issues raised, DPI did however commit to seek further more definitive advice from the Science & Research division on: (a) acceptable collateral damage (i.e. how many juvenile Mulloway may be killed without unduly impacting recovery of the stock) and or (b) how many or what proportion of juvenile Mulloway off the north coast need to be protected to help recover the stock. DPI also committed to work with the group to review the draft 'closure trigger limits' established by the former MAC in light of such advice and if available any other information available at the time including the reductions in bycatch achieved through any new gear proposed to be implemented.

#### **Action**

DPI to provide the working group more definitive advice on the issues above and to review in conjunction with the working group the draft 'closure trigger limits'.

#### **Agenda Item 3: Potential survey work**

During the final session of the day industry representatives provided Matt Taylor, Senior Research Scientist, information to help guide the design of a potential program to survey north coast fishing grounds. The *ad hoc* and potentially a longer term survey work may aim to:

- Help understand the extent of protection that the closures on the north coast (whether permanent or short-term) are providing the Mulloway stock;
- Provide data to inform future decisions relating to the placement of fishing closures to protect juvenile Mulloway;
- Provide data to inform the potential availability of school prawns free of juvenile Mulloway inside the permanent Juvenile King Prawn closures;
- Inform the effectiveness of the permanent Juvenile King Prawn closures in terms of their original purpose to optimise yield and profitability and any other benefits that they may be providing, over the longer term.

All in attendance agreed that the more information that is available the better, with fishers pressing the point that such information is critical if the fishery is to successfully defend the integrity of the measures taken to afford Mulloway stock enhanced protection and improve profitability in the fishery. Further consultation with stakeholders will be required as the scope of the survey work if further considered by DPI.