Marine and Estuarine Recreational Charter Management Advisory Committee Draft Outcomes from 21st meeting St George Rowing Club, Sydney

29 January 2014

Attendees
Brian Beer (Chairperson), Mark Flanagan (Region 2 - Mid North Coast), John Paton (Region 4 - Sydney), Ann Garard (Region 5 - Illawarra), Keith Appleby (Region 7 - Far South Coast), Attila Kaszo (Conservation), Sanchia Glaskin (Recreational Fishing).

1. Welcome
The Chair welcomed committee members and introduced Geoff Barrett, who was recently appointed to the position of Senior Fisheries Management Officer, Recreational Charter Fishing. It was confirmed that a quorum was present and the meeting was declared open at 9:10am.

2. Apologies
Scott Thorrington (Region 3 – Central Coast), Roland Persson (Region 4 - Sydney), Shirley Massey (Commercial Fishing).

3. Confirmation of minutes from previous meeting
Motion: The committee accepts the outcomes as a true and accurate record of discussions from the 20th MERCMAC meeting, held 24 July 2013. Moved: John Paton. Seconded: Ann Garard. Carried.

4. Business arising from the minutes
Issues addressed in the agenda. The committee was advised that DPI’s Charter Fishing Management and Compliance staff will be meeting on 30 January 2014 to discuss a range of fisheries compliance issues, including the level and quality of reporting in the charter fishing logbook monitoring program.

5. Recreational and Indigenous Fisheries Management update
a) Consultative arrangements
   i) Ministerial Fishing Advisory Council (MFAC)

    A copy of the Minister’s response to ACoRF regarding the composition of MFAC, which confirmed that one delegate will be responsible for representing recreational and charter fishing interests, was distributed to members. MFAC has been formed to consider high level strategic policy issues and directions relating to the state’s aquatic environments and fisheries resources, in order to provide consolidated cross-sector fisheries advice to Government.

    MERCMAC continues to be concerned about the lack of a charter fishing sector representative on MFAC. The committee was advised that recreational fishing advisory bodies and working groups will be able to provide information and input on major, high level issues to the recreational fishing delegate through formal communication channels, for potential consideration by MFAC. The MFAC recreational fishing representative will be invited to future meetings to assist communication between the charter fishing industry and broader recreational fishing sector.
ii) Advisory Council on Recreational Fishing

The NSW Government is currently considering changes to existing recreational fishing consultative structures. As previously advised, it is proposed for current recreational and charter fishing consultative processes to remain in place until any new consultative body is set up and becomes fully functional. The committee will be advised of developments.

iii) Working groups

The Committee was advised that Fisheries NSW has also been using task based working groups on an as needs basis to provide advice on specific issues. Once the task assigned to the working group is complete the working groups can then be disbanded. Working group members can be appointed by the Executive Director, Fisheries NSW based on skill and expertise relevant to the tasks assigned.

b) Mulloway Recovery Program

The committee was advised that Dr Julian Hughes, Research Scientist, NSW DPI, is currently undertaking a dedicated Mulloway research program as part of The NSW Research Angler Program. The program enables recreational fishers to be involved in assessment and monitoring of their favourite species by donating the frames (skeletons) from fish they catch.

Length, sex and reproductive state are recorded and by analysing the otoliths (ear bones) the age of the fish can be determined. Age data from collected fish is then used to build a picture of the age structure of the overall population. These combined data detail how many fish there are of each age in the stock, which helps us evaluate the health of the species.

Current data shows that even though Mulloway can live for more than 30 years, the Mulloway catch appears to be dominated by fish that are less than five years old. By collecting data over time we can see how the structure of the Mulloway population in NSW may be changing.

DPI confirmed that ACoRF had written to the Minister regarding commercial bycatch allowance issues.

c) Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT)

The committee was updated on the proposed Fisheries Management (Southern Bluefin Tuna) Order 2013, which will authorise continued recreational fishing for SBT in accordance with applicable regulatory controls. The proposed recreational fishing controls are:

- Recreational bag limit of 1;
- Recreational boat limit of 2; and
- Charter fishing boat limit of 6.

The proposed Ministerial order and Species Impact Statement (SIS) for SBT, as well as advice from ACoRF, will be placed on public exhibition in the near future, prior to the order being made.

d) Spearfisher safety: floats & flags advisory program

The Committee was updated on recent endeavours by Adrian Wayne, ACoRF Underwater Fishing representative and Deputy Chairman of the Underwater Skindivers & Fishermen's Association (USFA) and DPI to improve the safety of spearfishers and water users. The committee noted that ACoRF had written to the Minister to express support of endeavours to improve the safety of spearfishers and water users generally.

e) Recreational Fishing Fee issues

i) Fee increase

The NSW recreational fishing fee increased on 1 September 2013 for each fee category as follows:

- **3 day** - $7.00 (increased from $6.00);
- **1 month** - $14.00 (increased from $12.00);
- **1 year** - $35.00 (increased from $30.00);
- **3 years** - $85.00 (increased from $75.00).

ii) Recreational Fishing Trust revenue

Predicted revenue of $14.5m is expected to be received from the recreational fishing fee in 2013/14.

iii) Fishing Fee Exemption Certificate - Charter Fishing Boats
On 1 September 2013, the annual fee for the certificate increased to $140 for up to 4 persons per year, with a further $35 payable for the fifth and each additional person up to a maximum fee of $350. These fees are placed in the recreational fishing trust to directly fund recreational fishing programs to improve fishing opportunities. The committee encouraged DPI to consult operators during the next round of port meetings on various industry exemption certificates proposals, for example whether the charter fishing exemption certificate should be mandatory for all charter fishing businesses and if the fee should be paid per charter fishing seat covered by the exemption i.e. for exemptions of more than 10 passengers.

**f) Meeting expenses and sitting fee claims**

DPI provided an update on sitting fee and travel expense claims for meetings.

**Action** – DPI to facilitate remittance advices for all payments relating to meeting sitting fees and travel expenses; and investigate potential anomaly re: Superannuation payments.

**g) Fisheries enhancement programs update**

*Marine Stocking* – Approval of the Environmental Impact Statement and associated Fisheries Management Strategy is being sought. The Hatchery Quality Assurance System will be amended to include marine aspects and a stocking plan will need to be developed in 2014.

*FADs and artificial reefs* - Deployment of all 25 FADs will be completed in December for the 2013/14 season. New FAD approvals are being sought for the Clarence on the NSW far north coast and Ulladulla and Port Kembla on the south coast. The GPS tracking of the FADs has proven extremely effective and is being continued this season. Monitoring of the Sydney OAR has approximately 1 year to go (to be completed in Oct 2014) and the final report is due by the end of April 2015. The reef is supporting a diverse fish community and experiencing high usage rates by fishers. A preliminary site east of Kinghorn Point was initially identified as a potential location for construction of the Shoalhaven offshore reef. Angler feedback indicated preference for a site north of the Shoalhaven river entrance. A new site has now been identified and further investigations are being conducted to determine its suitability. The draft environmental assessment is scheduled to be completed by the end of the year and tender for the reefs fabrication, transport and deployment is tentatively scheduled to be released in early 2014.

**6. Review of NSW recreational saltwater and freshwater fishing rules update**

A total of 5,440 submissions were received as a result of the public exhibition of the review of NSW fishing rules discussion paper.

As part of the analysis of these submissions, the Recreational Fisheries section has assigned codes to the various comments received (over 30,000 comments in total) to more accurately assess the feedback received from the fishing public. A summary of submissions report is being prepared, prior to any decisions being made regarding these proposals.

**7. Charter Fishing Logbook Monitoring Program**

Charter fishing sector catch and effort data is considered the most feasible and cost effective option to get ongoing time series catch data for the recreational fishery, rather than periodic surveys, which are costly and resource intensive. A high priority for DPI is for comprehensive and quality charter fishing logbook data to feed into the department’s resource assessment process, similar to the commercial logbook system. The committee was advised of a number of strategies identified, as well as enhancement to existing methods, to improve both the logbook program compliance rate and quality of information received from the sector. Operator compliance with the logbook program is approximately 65% at present and these strategies aim to achieve above 90% compliance. DPI will work in collaboration with charter fishing operators as part of this process.

**8. Charter Fishing Trust**

The committee was provided with an overview of the status of the Trust, including the projected balance at 30 June 2014. The proposed Charter Fishing Trust Fund budget 2014/15-2016/17 was discussed in detail.

The committee is supportive of the proposed budget and notes it will be considered by ACoRF, prior to expenditure recommendations being forwarded to the Minister.

**Motion:** The committee supports the proposed budget 2014/15-2016/17, as outlined. Moved: John Paton. Seconded: Ann Garard. Carried.
9. Fish Online project and charter fishing industry reform update
An overview of major issues and recent progress was provided. The committee was advised that regional
port meetings will be held with NSW charter fishing operators over coming months to update them on the
progress of these issues and to discuss related issues.
Information noted.

10. Economic Survey of the Charter Fishing sector in NSW and NSW Statewide
Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey project updates.
Dr Alistair McIlgorm, Dominion Consulting, provided an overview of these projects.
i) An economic survey of the recreational fishing charter boat industry in NSW
The project aims to evaluate the economic expenditure and contribution of the recreational fishing sector
in NSW and determine the most cost effective approach for future expenditure surveys. In turn, this will
provide a better understanding of the value and importance of the NSW charter fishing industry to
operators, regional and metropolitan communities and the NSW fishing public.
It was confirmed that past studies are limited and therefore this project may provide a platform for further,
more detailed economic assessment of the NSW charter fishing sector over time.
Dr McIlgorm outlined the methodology used for this study and preliminary findings. It was noted that there
was a very low response rate from operators – only 13 out of 211 active (i.e. CFB licence issued) charter
fishing business operators responded to the survey.

ii) NSW Statewide Recreational Fishing Expenditure Survey.
Recreational fishing is an important part of both coastal and inland communities in NSW and it is essential
to have a clear understanding of the benefits it provides to our regional areas.
An independent statewide survey was undertaken using funds from the Recreational Fishing Trust, which
determined that recreational fishing brings around $3.5 billion to the NSW economy each year and that
fishers spent more than $1.5 billion on fishing related expenses, including travel, fishing tackle and boat
related items, in NSW during 2012.
The survey also found:
- employment benefits of 14,254 full-time jobs;
- $877.3 million injected into household income; and
- interstate visitors contributed $186.1 million.
Recreational fishers spent $502 million in the North Coast; $511 million in the Sydney region; $360 million
in the South Coast; and $251 million in the inland region.
The outcome of this survey highlights the benefits that flow from the recreational fishing community. The
NSW Government is supportive of both the commercial and recreational fishing sectors, and this snapshot
shows how valuable recreational fishing is to NSW communities.

11. Issues raised by members
Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture in Marine Parks (Estates)
Information provided by Attila Kaszo
Under the Jervis Bay Marine Park zoning plan, 440ha (2%) of the park is allocated to potential shellfish
aquaculture. This area is designated within the Jervis Bay Habitat Protection Zones only and not
distributed throughout the entire marine park i.e. the allocated area is within Jervis Bay. In December 2012
a proposal was revealed that included an area of 50ha of farming near Callala Beach and off Vincentia.
The proposal is for mussel culture, some algae production and possibly pearl farming.
Update provided by DPI’s Aquaculture section
The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture Leases in Jervis Bay
went on exhibition from 10 October until 13 November 2013. The application has been made for two 20
hectare leases, 1.5 and 1.9km off Callala Beach and one 10 ha lease over the former Blue Mussel leases
at Vincentia, 0.7km off Orion Beach. If approved, the leases would be tendered to commercial shellfish operators.

The project is a State Significant Infrastructure proposal and requires consent from the Minister for Planning. Naval and EPBC Act referrals have also been addressed. NSW DPI is currently preparing a *Response to Submission Report* on the submissions made during the exhibition period.

The full EIS and draft Environmental Management Plans can be seen at:  

**Commercial vessel surveys**

The committee was advised by one of its members of a possible anomaly regarding the maximum number of passengers permitted on a commercial vessel. It was claimed Roads and Maritime Services staff previously advised that if, for example, a commercial vessel surveyed for 9 (8 passengers + 1 crew) has 6 paying passengers on board but another 5 non-paying passengers, then the commercial vessel survey has not been exceeded, as only the 6 paying customers are considered “commercial passengers”.

**Action** – seek clarification from RMS regarding the maximum number of passengers permitted by the commercial vessel/stability survey.

Update - RMS advised this is definitely not the case and that the number of persons permitted by the survey is the maximum number of people permitted on the vessel, due to safety/stability reasons. RMS Commercial Vessels staff offered to contact the committee member to discuss further and clarify any issues.

**Action** – provide the committee with current DPI information relating to fisheries compliance officers boarding vessels at sea.

**Barotrauma research**

The Committee was advised that when many fish species are caught from water deeper than 10 metres (i.e. 1 atmosphere of pressure), they can suffer a range of injuries due to the changes in pressure, known as ‘barotrauma’. Barotrauma results from the expansion of gases in the swim bladder and other organs when fish do not have time to adjust to the rapid changes in water pressure as they are pulled towards the surface. If a fish is excessively buoyant and unable to submerge by itself, a release weight should be used to re-pressurise the fish back to depth. Due to the inherent risk of further (stabbing) injury caused by a venting tool, venting should only be used as a last resort if a release weight is not available, the operator is experienced and other risks such as predators are present.

**Action** – Provide results from recent barotrauma research to MERCMAC.

**13. Correspondence**

a. Letter from ACoRF to the Minister to request a Charter Fishing representative on MFAC.

Issue addressed in agenda item 5.a.

**14. Out of session issues**

a. NSW Water Safety Strategy 2013-15
b. Lifejacket discussion paper
c. Expression of interest for positions on MFAC
d. Modern Fishing Article - Mulloway Stocking
e. Media release - New figures on recreational fishing sector

No recommendations or issues raised. Information noted.

**15. General business**

The committee requested clarification of advice relating to the merchant fee associated with payments made by credit card.

**Next meeting**

Scheduled for Tuesday 19 August 2014 at St George Rowing Club.