

2nd Meeting of the NSW Lobster Harvest Strategy Working Group

Sydney, 14-15 April 2021

CHAIR'S SUMMARY BY IAN CARTWRIGHT

I was pleased to welcome members and DPI Fisheries staff to the 2nd Meeting of the Lobster Harvest Strategy Working Group (HSWG).

DPI provided some initial clarifications on the relationship between NSW fisheries harvest strategies and the existing Fisheries Management Strategies (FMSs) and Share Management Plans (SMPs). Additional clarifications were provided on the extent to which an Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) assessment and/or Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) should be undertaken and included in the harvest strategy, and how outcomes of harvest strategies relate to determinations of the Total Allowable Fishing Committee (T AFC).

DPI confirmed that harvest strategies currently under development align with FMSs that have been completed for most commercial fisheries, providing an improved decision framework to adjust catch and/or effort that can apply to all sectors. The HSWG formed the view that the harvest strategy outcomes should have primacy over the existing FMS and should be incorporated into any future revised FMS.

ESD/ERA assessment is required for each harvest strategy, including the lobster fishery. This can be developed concurrently with development of the harvest strategy and will evolve over time as data and information improves, to enable the integration of ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of fisheries management. As appropriate, the ESD/ERA will integrate responses to risks, using mechanisms to address risk in addition to risks identified and covered in the harvest strategy.

In arriving at a TACC determination, the T AFC will be obliged to refer to a harvest strategy alongside various other information, including stock assessment advice, fishery performance indicators and public submissions. It is expected that the T AFC will adhere to the TAC recommendations arising from the application of harvest strategy's decision rules. i.e. it would be 'obliged' to give effect to the harvest strategy decision rules under normal circumstances. If the T AFC makes a determination that is clearly contrary to the harvest strategy, then a very clear rationale for doing so should be provided. In this way The T AFC would have a key role in deciding on appropriate actions if a harvest strategy's 'break-out rules' were triggered. The relationship between the T AFC and the harvest strategy should ideally be laid out in legislation.

The HSWG confirmed that the scope of the NSW Lobster Harvest Strategy operates across the three main fishing sectors, namely commercial, recreational and Aboriginal cultural fishing. It was agreed in principle that commercial and recreational fishing sectors should share the benefits and the costs associated with potential rises and falls in stock health. Recreational bag and possession limits should therefore be reviewed by DPI with this in mind. It was noted that the recreational bag limit has remained at two, having been reduced for stock rebuilding purposes and, given the substantial increase in biomass there was now a case for reviewing those limits.

For Aboriginal cultural fishing, it was recognised that there are historical cultural rights to fish for lobster and that the *NSW Fisheries Management Act 1994* commits 'to protect, and promote the continuation of, Aboriginal cultural fishing.' The concept that Aboriginal cultural harvest be unconstrained by changes in lobster stock health, so long as the stock is above the 20% biomass limit reference point was discussed. It was suggested that this may be an appropriate proposal for consultation with the Aboriginal Fisheries Advisory Council.

The group agreed on draft objectives and preliminary reference points, which will be subject to review by the advisory councils, industry and the public when the draft harvest strategy is released for consultation. There was detailed discussion on specification of objectives and reference points and associated risk settings; this will be explored through a modelling exercise called Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE), which will now commence.

An indicative timetable for harvest strategy development, including MSE and further work on the draft document, was developed by the group and is attached to this summary (Appendix 1). The group recognised that MSE is a significant technical exercise and that DPI would need to ensure that an appropriate amount of time and resources are applied to ensure thorough testing of the draft harvest strategy to meet the proposed timetable for completion. The DPI scientist member will undertake this exercise in consultation with the independent scientist member. They will bring the preliminary results of the MSE back to the group for consideration and further testing before finalising a draft harvest strategy for consultation and final decision by the Minister.

The group identified the need to support the draft harvest strategy document with targeted communications (e.g. leaflets, videos, workshops etc.) pitched at an appropriate level to develop understanding among stakeholders of how the harvest strategy is intended to operate and what its intended benefits are. DPI is developing a range of general communications products on harvest strategies and should also consider how best to build understanding and allow for meaningful consultation with stakeholders in any fishery for which a harvest strategy is proposed.

Using a consistent template for all harvest strategies developed under the NSW Harvest Strategy Policy would also assist stakeholders to understand the purpose and benefits of each strategy and provide a good level of policy coherence between harvest strategies.

It was also noted that there is a need for more robust estimates of harvest across all sectors, and in particular the recreational and aboriginal sectors.

The group will meet again in early July for 1 day and in mid-August for 2 days to assess progress and key decision areas. The overall aim is to have a harvest strategy that can be used by the TAFC to make its statutory TAC determination in 2022.

