

NSW Lobster Harvest Strategy Working Group

4th Meeting – 7 February 2022 – Held online

Chair's Summary

1. Welcome and Introduction

I was pleased to welcome members to this online meeting. The main tasks were to i) review updated results from Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) and ii) consider submissions on the draft Harvest Strategy made during public consultation. The working group considered if revisions to the draft harvest were necessary before approving it for submission – through the Commercial Fishing NSW Advisory Council (CommFish) – to the Minister for adoption.

2. Management Strategy Evaluation

The working group received a presentation of outcomes of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) modelling. Various scenarios for the application of the draft harvest strategy's decision rules have been explored including recruitment variability and over/under-catch of TAC. The net result is that the decision rules result in responsive management actions, based on stock indicators, that keep the lobster biomass at or around the target reference point. Extreme scenarios were also explored, including a 90% mortality of the exploitable stock biomass. In this scenario, the spawning stock biomass breaches the 25% trigger and the 20% limit reference point and approaches the 15% hard limit; the decision rules then reduce TAC and the stock recovers to the target over 10 years. This demonstrates that the harvest strategy would be capable of rebuilding the stock from a very depleted state. The MSE did not consider some other extreme scenarios that may occur, such as depletion of the spawning stock biomass which could have an initially slow but long-lasting effect on the recruitment and overall stock biomass. It was noted that this scenario would be detected through the fishery independent monitoring of spawning biomass and recruitment, so it would trigger management intervention reasonably quickly through these secondary indicators. As noted in the past, in all but very extreme cases the monitoring and harvest strategy would address declines well before the full impact of such extreme scenarios. A technical report summarising the MSE work will be published in due course.

3. Summary of Submissions

DPI presented a paper summarising the 14 submissions received during public consultation and provided further detail regarding the submissions during working group discussion. The consultation period was widely advertised, including letters to key stakeholder groups. Submissions indicated strong support for the harvest strategy, with comments also provided on issues including the need to improve estimates of Aboriginal cultural and recreational fishing, marine parks, capping lobster exports and on the equity of quota management. The working group recognised that the advertising process was comprehensive, but that the low number of submissions is unlikely to be fully representative of all stakeholder views. The focus of the discussion was then on whether revision of the draft harvest strategy was warranted by any of the submissions. Minor changes were recommended to the Goal and Strategic Objectives of the harvest strategy. There was discussion of the relative merits of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) and Maximum Economic Yield (MEY) as this was raised in one submission. The group recalled that DPI is not strictly committed to MSY or MEY and that the draft lobster harvest strategy commits to neither, instead preferring Optimum Sustainable Yield (OSY) as best reflecting the balance between environmental, economic and social

objectives. The group also again discussed and recognised the value in improving estimates of non-commercial harvest, noting that there are a number of ways to support this.

4. Recreational decision rule options

DPI presented a potential revision to the draft recreational fishing decision rule that would link the recreational bag limit to changes in TACC, noting that inclusion would be tied with any decision on changes to the recreational bag limit following the consultation to increase the bag limit to 3 lobsters undertaken in late 2021. If the change was approved, the bag limit could start at 3 for the current TACC but could rise to 4 if TACC increased significantly; it could also be reduced if biomass falls and TACC is reduced significantly. Members of the working group accepted that under a harvest strategy the benefits and responsibilities of managing fishing impacts on the stock should be equitably shared among stakeholders. Members discussed the relative merits of specifying changes to recreational limits in such detail in the strategy. The discussion concluded with a recommendation that acknowledged a more transparent decision rule for the recreational sector would improve the strategy, with support for maximum recreational bag limit of 3 lobsters as most appropriate for this version of the strategy, which would be reviewed within 5 years from implementation.

5. Review of Lobster Harvest Strategy – Consultation Draft

The group reviewed the draft harvest strategy document section by section. DPI suggested revisions to acknowledge that the introduction of harvest strategies in NSW is supported by the NSW Marine Estate Management Strategy 2018-2028. The group made changes to the Goal and Strategic Objectives to improve recognition that i) optimising utilisation of the lobster resource occurs across all sectors and ii) all stakeholders have continued access to the stock and share responsibility for managing it. The order of strategic objectives was also refined, increasing recognition of the objective to protect access for Aboriginal cultural fishing. It was recognised that it may not be possible for each sector to optimise its own interests while also having regard to the interests of other stakeholders. Various other minor edits were made to the text, with the fundamental components of the harvest strategy unchanged from the consultation draft.

6. Any other business

The representative of the Aboriginal Fishing NSW Advisory Council (AFAC) advised of his departure from AFAC and from the RLHSWG. The draft harvest strategy will retain text developed to date that ensures any decision rules in relation to Aboriginal cultural fishing would be developed in consultation with AFAC. Whilst decision rules for any changes to Aboriginal cultural fishing when the strategy is operating above the zero-catch limit are not established, the working group saw value in the meta rule that would allow Aboriginal cultural fishing to continue even if stock fell to below the zero-catch biomass, where harvest ceases for other sectors. Further rules can be developed in consultation with AFAC during the 5-year life of the harvest strategy. There is also a research project underway to identify how DPI Fisheries should best engage with Aboriginal stakeholders for harvest strategy development.

The group also discussed whether Multi-year Total Allowable Catch (MYTAC) determinations were preferred to annual TAC-setting. The DPI scientist noted that - for a longer-lived species such as Eastern Rock Lobster – use of MYTACs would not pose a risk to the population. Members recognised benefits to reviewing initial operation of the strategy, and then developing clear rules about both commencing and potentially exiting a MYTAC process. As the harvest strategy is new and noting that the recreational bag limit (and associated harvest) may change, members felt that it would be

prudent to continue annual TAC determinations for the first 5 years following adoption of the harvest strategy.

7. Next steps

The group approved the draft harvest strategy in principle. Minor edits will be made as needed prior to submission of the draft to CommFish and to the Minister.