

Minutes

Meeting	Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group		
Meeting Number(s)	13	Date	3 December 2024
Location	Online	Time	14:00 – 17:00
Members	<p>Independent Members: James Findlay (Chair), Sevaly Sen (Economist), Bob Kearney (Scientist)</p> <p>Aboriginal fishing: Stephan Schnierer</p> <p>Commercial fishers: Johnny Alessi, Stephen Reed, Troy Billin</p> <p>Recreational fishers: David Rae, Paul Lennon, Mark Corbin</p> <p>DPIRD Fisheries Manager: Heath Folpp</p> <p>DPIRD Fisheries Scientist: Julian Hughes</p>		
Executive Officer	Josh Cansdell (DPIRD, Fisheries Manager, Harvest Strategies)		
Observers/Contributors	<p>Rowan Chick (DPIRD, A/Research Leader, Marine Ecosystems), Ashley Fowler (DPIRD, Principal Fisheries Scientist), Nick Giles (DPIRD A/Program Leader, Resource Management/Harvest Strategies), Blake Fallon (DPIRD Fisheries Management Officer, Harvest Strategies), Thor Saunders (DPIRD, Director, Fisheries Research), Geoff Liggins (DPIRD, A/Research Leader, Fisheries Assessment)</p>		
Guests	Tony Smith (Independent Scientist), Will Zacharin (Chairperson, Total Allowable Fishing Committee)		
Apologies	David Rae, Stephan Schnierer		

Agenda Item	Issue	Notes & Actions
1.	Welcome and Introduction	<p>1.1 Acknowledgment of Country</p> <p>The meeting opened with an acknowledgment of the Traditional Custodians and paying respects to Elders past, present and emerging.</p> <p>1.2 Apologies and Recognition of Observers</p>

		<p>The Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group (the Working Group) members, observers and guest speakers were welcomed.</p> <p>1.3 Confirmation of Agenda</p> <p>The meeting agenda was accepted by the Working Group.</p> <p>1.4 Declaration of pecuniary interests</p> <p>Updates to the register of pecuniary interests were confirmed.</p>
2.	Update on Draft Mulloway Harvest Strategy consultation	<p>DPIRD updated the Working Group regarding work undertaken since the last meeting, including progression of the Draft NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy (the draft harvest strategy) towards public consultation. Consultation is proposed to include feedback on management measures developed to improve assessment information and manage commercial and recreational harvest levels, which will be used to underpin operation of the harvest strategy and ongoing assessments of stock health. The draft harvest strategy and management measures have been presented to the Commercial Fishing NSW Advisory Council (CommFish) and the Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council (RFNSW) with each Advisory Council endorsing the draft harvest strategy and supporting measures for feedback through public consultation.</p> <p>DPIRD noted development of communications material including a series of harvest strategy animations designed to enhance understanding of harvest strategies and fisheries management concepts.</p> <p>It was noted that the Working Group would meet again following the consultation period to review all feedback and review the draft harvest strategy and its management approach.</p> <p>DPIRD updated the Working Group on progress of modifications to the FishOnline reporting system used by commercial fishers and fishing business owners to report catch and effort data, which is a key data source used in stock assessments. Systems development has been undertaken to modernise and provide a more user-friendly system, simplifying and increasing accuracy and availability of fishery dependent data.</p> <p>DPIRD updated the Working Group on progress of research underway to improve biological information and fill knowledge gaps to improve stock assessments through the</p>

		<p>joint DPIRD research project 'Laying the foundation for Mulloway stock recovery through filling critical knowledge gaps and modelling' (FRDC 2022-140) jointly funded by the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation and the NSW Recreational Fishing Trust.</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>Members expressed support for improvements to commercial reporting, including easier communications between industry and DPIRD.</p> <p>The Working group also discussed their recent experiences for Mulloway currently being caught across NSW, with discussions of good numbers of juvenile and medium size fish, also with recognition of the need to continue strong support for rebuilding of the species.</p>
3.	Update on recommendations from the Total Allowable Fishing Committee	<p>The Chair of the independent Total Allowable Fishing Committee (the TAF Committee) was welcomed to the meeting as a guest speaker.</p> <p>The TAF Committee has statutory responsibilities to determine Total Allowable Catch (TAC) or Total Allowable Effort (TAE) levels considering the ecological, economic and social issues associated with NSW fisheries and make TAC or TAE determinations that pursue the objectives of the <i>Fisheries Management Act 1994</i>. A range of TACs and TAEs are established in most NSW commercial fisheries.</p> <p>Given their expertise, DPIRD requested the TAF Committee to provide advice on catch levels appropriate to meeting the objectives of the draft Mulloway Harvest Strategy.</p> <p>The speaker explained the rationale behind advice provided to the Department, including work undertaken by DPIRD to use the projection capabilities of preliminary developing integrated assessment models to assess the likelihood of achieving the rebuilding objectives. These projections were done under different scenarios to capture the high uncertainty in model outputs. The advice will be considered by DPIRD to support finalisation of the rebuilding components of the harvest strategy.</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>The Chair asked if members had any questions related to the advice given to the Department.</p> <p>Commercial members did not have any questions, however suggested the current commercial management arrangements including a 200-kilogram daily catch and</p>

		<p>possession limit for the major harvest sectors may be suitable for meeting the harvest strategy objectives.</p> <p>Recreational members questioned how the Department would maintain recreational catch at or within the limits advised when there is uncertainty regarding the recreational sectors catch levels. DPIRD discussed how this can be undertaken, noting proposed feedback on measures including introduction of real time reporting to enhance management of catch levels and for use in stock assessments.</p> <p>Members also discussed how often changes to harvest levels would occur. It was acknowledged that precaution is required, and harvest levels would only change through the rebuilding phase of the harvest strategy if it was considered that the rebuilding objectives were unlikely to be met.</p>
4.	Update on stock assessment review	<p>The Independent Scientist guest speaker provided an update on a review of the Mulloway Stock Assessment currently being undertaken.</p> <p>The review is being undertaken to independently review the assessment approach and any improvements required to support future assessments and operation of the harvest strategy.</p> <p>The review process includes reviewing available data and information available for Mulloway as well as discussions with DPIRD scientists and managers, and representatives of the Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working group.</p> <p>To support completion of the review, the guest speaker had questions prepared for the commercial and recreational representative members.</p> <p>Members welcomed discussion on the review and expressed interest in considering the outcomes when finalising the harvest strategy following consultation.</p> <p>Discussion</p> <p>The guest speaker began discussion with commercial members to query the quantity of Mulloway that is sold direct to local retailers, i.e. not through local fishermen's cooperatives or the Sydney Fish Market (SFM).</p> <p>Different marketing approaches are undertaken by different fishers, with some focusing more on local sales and others on main markets, either as a general practice or in accordance with market changes or preference. According to commercial fishers, a significant proportion of catch goes</p>

		<p>direct to local retainers and so is not consigned either through the SFM or local fishermen's cooperatives that are routinely monitored by the DPIRD Port Monitoring Program. It was also indicated that, in general, smaller fish were more likely to be sold locally and larger individuals were more likely to be sold through markets. Fishers noted variations over time in both the quantity and size of fish going through the SFM and co-ops.</p> <p>The likelihood of under-reporting of catch levels was discussed with the commercial members. Members indicated that historical catch estimates may not account for all catch due to several reasons, however, most commercially caught Mulloway is now well reported, and that most fishers and business owners are increasingly aware that misreporting is detrimental to their industry.</p> <p>Commercial members were then asked about their continued support for proposed mandatory reporting for commercially caught Mulloway, with members supporting reporting enhancements to improve Mulloway data, stock assessments and management, including as a mandatory requirement similar to existing quota reporting systems. Fishery managers noted that it may take some time for such mandatory reporting to take effect.</p> <p>Historical commercial fishing gear changes in the Estuary General Fishery were discussed, noting changes in gear has been identified as an acknowledged source of uncertainty in the assessment. Fishers also cast doubt on the usefulness of CPUE due to lack of information on targeting.</p> <p>The possibility of improving discard data for both legal size and under size Mulloway was explored. Members advised that measuring all discarded Mulloway would increase handling time and health impacts to discarded fish, potentially increasing mortality of discards by prolonging the return of discarded individuals to the water. This may outweigh the benefits gained from the data for assessment. However, it was noted that information on the number of discards could be achieved with minimal impact, and would be valuable to stock assessments. Independent observer programs can also be used to obtain discard information on quantities discarded, as well as length measurements of the landed and discarded catch.</p> <p>The guest speaker asked recreational members how well recreational catch of Mulloway has been measured in the past and what could be done to improve this in future. Past estimates were likely missing a lot of catch. Digital reporting</p>
--	--	--

		<p>would help but may take time to implement. Members recommended that a select group of recreational fishers who know how to target Mulloway could be used as an initial approach, subject to implementing real time reporting. A recommendation was also made for a voluntary reporting form that could be accessed on the DPIRD website for recreational fishers to easily report their catch. Charter fishery data was also recognised as an existing avenue for recreational monitoring information. Members then discussed keeping historical records of their own catch.</p> <p>Substantial changes and improvements to recreational fishing gear and knowledge over time (including through social media) were recognised, which has enabled more fishers to successfully target and catch Mulloway, with this trend likely to increase as stock biomass also increases.</p>
5.	Mulloway management options	<p>DPIRD noted management options that had been developed based on working group discussion, which have been reviewed through CommFish NSW and RFNSW.</p> <p>Current management arrangements for Mulloway will be reviewed as part of the consultation process, with feedback on options suitable for incorporation into the management framework proposed through consultation alongside the Draft NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy.</p> <p>Feedback is proposed to be invited on the following areas, noting the likelihood of a phased implementation approach:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introducing real-time reporting requirements for Mulloway by recreational and commercial fishers to improve catch data and effective operation of the harvest strategy in achieving its objectives, and 2. Management options to maintain NSW recreational and commercial harvest of Mulloway against catch levels determined under the harvest strategy and its objectives. <p>Discussion</p> <p>Members discussed the management options, noting different fishers will consider some management approaches more or less suitable to their fishing activities than others.</p> <p>The options have been developed due to a lack of consensus from the working group, acknowledging that these are difficult decisions, that final arrangements should be individually appropriate for the commercial and recreational sectors, and that feedback on options will be</p>

		<p>considered in developing the approach to be implemented to manage rebuilding of the Mulloway stock.</p> <p>Members discussed commercial options, including potential concerns around handling and visibility of catches, and potential to address these issues whilst maintaining high reporting integrity. Different existing reporting structures were discussed, including a suggestion that a tagging system may allow more flexibility in the timing for the reporting structure including validation of catch, noting administrative costs would need to be considered. Potential alternatives to the existing daily limits were discussed, reiterating that the options would impact different fishers differently, particularly under scenarios where catch levels require effective restraint.</p> <p>Members then discussed recreational options, with a suggestion that Mulloway caught in the Charter fishery should be included for mandatory real-time reporting. The flathead slot limit was briefly discussed as a potential component to assist manage recreational harvest, but not agreed as a component.</p> <p>Given existing uncertainty around recreational catch levels, members discussed assessment and application of a recreational fishing closure period as a potential management component. The draft harvest strategy has been designed to manage total and sectoral harvest against defined limits, which may result in temporary closure periods for recreational (and commercial) fishing if these are needed to effectively restrain catch within each sector's share of the harvest limits determined for each annual fishing period, including as biomass increases. A different approach is likely required for each sector for determining how or when closure periods may be needed, dependent on the final management approach and its implementation.</p>
--	--	--

The next meeting will be scheduled following public consultation.