

### **Chair's Summary - NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group 23 May 2022**

The NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group held its third meeting on 23 May online. This was a follow-on meeting that discussed and covered the queries from the previous meeting relating to FishPath, a harvest update, and harvest strategy support measures. All members were able to attend the meeting remotely.

DPI presented an update on the FishPath assessment and developing a shortlist of options for data monitoring, assessment and management measures, which is underway. DPI also presented updated information on mulloway harvest that included data for the two most recent fishing periods. The most recent data showed a modest increase in mulloway catch and a reduction in commercial fishing effort in a key fishery taking mulloway. The working group noted that while this could be a sign of early stock rebuilding, the effort data has not been standardised and the increased catch could partly or entirely explained by other factors such as environmental changes (e.g. recent high rainfall) and/or changes in fishing methods.

The main topic for the meeting was further discussion on harvest strategy support measures. Based on discussion at earlier meetings of the group, these span four general areas for improving data, increasing compliance, reducing mortality and stock enhancement.

The group received an update of investigation and progress underway to improve data and increase compliance. Discussion then focused on minimising unintended fishing mortality of juvenile mulloway and reducing fishing mortality for large spawning Mulloway. As noted in the previous meeting, minimising unintended mortality is an important management objective for all fisheries and sectors, with three general management options available: (1) modifications to fishing gear to improve selection; (2) changes to operational procedures to improve survival of non-retained catch; or (3) spatial or temporal closures to fishing.

The working group discussed using closures as a means of protecting the mulloway stock, including the likely effect of closures on stock recovery. The group identified a number of pros and cons for such an approach. In particular, the group noted the simplicity of such an approach but also noted that considerable unintended mortality would remain in both commercial and recreational fisheries. Unintended mortality could substantially reduce the benefits of a closure for stock rebuilding while at the same time hampering collection of much needed data on stock health.

The group raised the potential for a maximum size limit for Mulloway but agreed further discussion was needed about the pros and cons of such an approach. The working group discussed ways to reduce the mortality of larger adult mulloway given they may contribute disproportionately more juveniles than smaller adults during spawning. The group recognised the potential benefits of changes in gear selectivity and agreed to raise this with CommFish for further discussion. The group also agreed to seek a meeting with trawl operators to discuss current approaches and options to reduce the bycatch of juvenile mulloway.

The next meeting will be focused on draft objectives for the harvest strategy. In the meantime, DPI will continue assembling the FishPath shortlist, and once objectives have been discussed, the harvest strategy document. This will start to bring together all the topics discussed so far, enabling the group to further focus on the final product expected from this process.

Dr James Findlay, Independent Chair, NSW Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group.