



# INDUSTRY CONSULTATION

## Commercial Harvesting of Papis

### Introduction

A majority of industry participants from Region 4 collectively wrote (facilitated by the Professional Fishers Association) to Department of Primary Industries (DPI) raising concerns about the stock level (biomass) across Region 4 and specifically Stockton Beach. It was requested DPI consider their concerns and discuss possible solutions. As a result, DPI coordinated an independently chaired workshop.

All Region 4 Papi hand gathering shareholders including their endorsement holders and local Biotoxin Plan managers from across the state were invited to a workshop on 28 April 2023 to discuss industry concerns with the current abundance of papis on Stockton beach and to consider potential management options.

Industry participants identified issues and recommended several potential new management arrangements. The DPI would like to facilitate another opportunity for region 4 hand gathering shareholders and endorsement holders to comment on the proposed management arrangements discussed at the workshop.

There were some issues raised, that require broader consultation with the papi industry in all regions. These items have also been included for your feedback.

The items are classified according to whether they are specific to Stockton beach fishers, Region 4 operators or all papi fishers across the state.

### NSW commercial papi fishery

The NSW papi fishery is carefully managed, in the interests of fishers, the environment and the people of NSW. Commercial fishers in NSW harvest papis for the whole community to enjoy and make important economic and social contributions to their regions.

The NSW commercial fishing industry has undergone significant reform in recent years. New management regimes were introduced including catch quotas directly controlling the amount of catch that can be taken from the fishery.

Each year the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) is determined, based on the best science available, along with market data and other factors. The TAC is then allocated amongst shareholders as quota. The level of catch by other sectors, such as recreational and Aboriginal fishing, is considered when setting the TAC.

When quotas were introduced in 2018, the daily catch limits and seasonal closures that applied were removed. These were removed on the basis that quota management typically drives fishers to focus on maximising profit, including by working when catch rates and market prices are high, rather than the old system of racing to catch fish.

## Have your say

DPI is seeking feedback on the following management options that were discussed by industry during the meeting on 28 April 2023:

## Stockton Beach

### *1. Annual Stockton Beach closure 1 October to 31 March*

It was recommended by the workshop participants that a closure be implemented at Stockton Beach from 1 October to 31 March each year, with an option to review it in the future. The group discussed the relatively low stock on Stockton beach was a concern for commercial harvesting. The biotoxin plan had been halted for the spawning season in 2022/23, which limited any commercial harvest. Anecdotal feedback indicated a healthy abundance of recruits to the stock this season. There was unanimous support for this proposal at the workshop.

The reasons for the recommendation were:

#### *Biomass improvement*

- protect spawning pipis and their spat to improve recruitment,
- build biomass,

#### *Economic performance of fishery*

- counteract the increase in mortality that can occur during summer (including reduced shelf life),
- reduce competition with supply from other States, and potentially maintain higher prices,
- reduce the biotoxin testing costs,

#### *Social Licence*

- avoid interactions with the increased presence of recreational vehicles during the summer months.

It was suggested that while a fixed closure period is preferable, there would need to be some flexibility to move the dates in the event the beach is closed due to biotoxin issues that reduce the time to harvest pipis during a year.

For example, if the beach was closed for months leading up to the closure, the closure date for the next period might be delayed. If a closure and flexible approach is supported, there will need to be additional processes in place. There will need to be either an inclusive and

transparent process for industry to provide advice to DPI or a set of rules to guide closure amendments.

### *2. Spatial closure on Stockton Beach*

It was recommended by the workshop participants to re-introduce a closure on the taking of pipsis from the northern 1.5 km of Stockton Beach, extending northwards from the entrance point to the beach, which is accessed from Old Man Road.

It was viewed as an opportunity to build social licence for local pipi harvesters given recreational fishers can take pipsis from this section of the beach.

### *3. Daily or weekly limits*

It was recommended by the workshop participants that a daily or weekly limit should be introduced for Stockton Beach.

This would mimic past management practices, prior to quota being introduced. There were several proposals discussed at the meeting, which included 30 kg/day, 40 kg/day to 200 kg/week, however a single value was not proposed.

There were two drivers for this suggestion.

- One was based on past practice, during a period of high pipi biomass on Stockton Beach.
- The other was to manage supply to the market, which strongly correlates to the value of the product.

There was discussion between operators on potential reduced business efficiency for fishers to exercise their quota if a daily or weekly limit is introduced, particularly with the rising cost of travel. There are also additional operational complexities for DPI to effectively manage compliance with a daily and weekly limit, which may only be resolved through additional management requirements (such as prior reporting etc).

## **Region 4**

### *4. Annual closure 1 October to 31 March for all region 4*

It was recommended by the workshop participants that the annual closure from 1 October to 31 March be applied to Region 4.

There were concerns raised that the proposed closure of Stockton Beach will shift effort to other beaches in Region 4 during the closure period. Given those concerns along with the logic provided to support a closure (item 1), shareholders at the meeting recommended same closure be applied to all beaches in Region 4.

### *5. Daily or weekly limits*

It was recommended by the workshop participants that any potential daily or weekly restrictions for Stockton beach also be applied to Region 4.

It was suggested at the workshop a daily or weekly limit could be considered for all Region 4 beaches to ensure a consistent approach.

## **Broader Industry**

## 6. Independent research

It was recommended by the workshop participants to support the development of a relative abundance index (RAI) to underpin future stock status reports.

The stock assessment for Pipsis in NSW would be improved by the development of a time-series of estimates of relative abundance as a fishery performance indicator. A relative abundance index (RAI) will improve confidence in future Pippi stock assessments. Fishery-independent estimates of relative abundance will validate commercial CPUE (i.e. log book data, and would complement the current fishery dependent (logbook) data used in the stock status reports.

The data collected through an RAI will provide information on size distributions which can provide information on the mechanisms underlying the resource status across the fishery and an indication of recruitment to the fishery.

The RAI would be coordinated for the following main beaches:

Region	Beach name
Region 1	South Ballina
Region 2	10 Mile
Region 3	Killick Gooloowah North Port
Region 4	Stockton Yagon/Treachery Crowdy

To be successful, the independent research program will require the support of industry to undertake the surveys in partnership with scientists. This will mean working together on the beaches to collect samples.

DPI has indicated it is willing to support an independent stock assessment research program for at least three years (budget dependent). This includes payment for fisher participation in the surveys. While DPI will support the initial costs of the assessment, a cost sharing arrangement with industry will be needed to fund the research on an ongoing basis past the initial investment.

There was support for the commencement of the project at the workshop, given the future of the program will be reviewed before a cost recovery program is negotiated.

## 7. 'Popping' pipsis

It was recommended by the workshop participants that the practice of 'popping pipsis' should be prohibited.

Concerns were raised about 'popping' pipsis by driving excessively and repeatedly in one area until the pipsis come to the surface. It was indicated at the workshop that this can also be a sign of poor abundance.

Recent research demonstrated that continuous traffic over a beach can lead to large scale mortality of juvenile pipsis. There are also concerns for public safety and damage to social

licence as the “popping” activity requires speed, braking and swerving (erratic driving) to draw the pipis to the surface. General road rules apply when driving on a beach including the requirement to maintain control of the vehicle. Most beaches require a vehicle permit for access which have additional requirements including a maximum speed of 40 km/h, or 20km/h within 100 m of other vehicles or pedestrians. Each council sets rules for beach driving.

There was support at the workshop that this technique should be prohibited.

## Sydney Fish Market (SFM) opportunity

The Sydney Fish Market and NSW DPI have initiated a conversation on working with industry on options to improve the consistency in value for NSW Pipis. SFM has committed to work with interested industry members to develop a quality assurance program for Pipis. The advantage of a quality assurance program is that customers will receive consistent product, which generally leads into consolidated demand and solid consistent prices. The program will develop consistent specification for different quality product, which will improve buyers confidence in the product, but will also assist fishers to target specific sizes based on value and likely reward product that is well managed post-harvest. A key component of the program, based on fisher’s interest and support, is that SFM is looking into investing in a purging tank or transportable live bins to support lifting the quality of Pipis moving through their market.

If you are interested in the program, please contact SFM project lead Jen Elliot (Regional Manager) [jene@sydneyfishmarket.com.au](mailto:jene@sydneyfishmarket.com.au) or 0405 764 081.

## Submissions

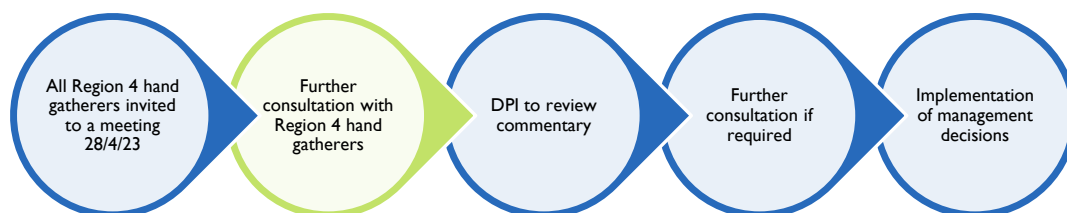
DPI are seeking your views on each of the above seven points. It is requested you indicate how your business may be improved or impacted, and any changes you would recommend to the proposals being tabled. Please also include the reason for your decision. Feedback will be considered by DPI prior to any decisions being made.

Submissions may be made via:

- Online submission form
- email: [commercialfisheries@dpi.nsw.gov.au](mailto:commercialfisheries@dpi.nsw.gov.au) or
- mail: PO Box 4291, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450.

Submissions close **12 September 2023**

## Next Steps



## More information

Commercial Fisheries Hotline - 1300 726 488.

---

© State of New South Wales through the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, 2023. You may copy, distribute and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you attribute the NSW Department of Primary Industries as the owner.

**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding at the time of writing (June 2023). However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to ensure that information upon which they rely is up to date and to check currency of the information with the appropriate officer of the Department of Primary Industries or the user's independent adviser. OUT23/9866