Department of Primary Industries

OUT22/18222

Minutes

Meeting	Mulloway Harvest Strategy Working Group		
Meeting Number(s)	6	Dates	19th September 2022
Location	Online via Microsoft Teams meeting	Time	09:00 – 13:00
Members	Independents: James Findlay (Chair), Sevaly Sen (Economist), Bob Kearney (Scientist) Aboriginal fishing representative: Stephan Schnierer Commercial fishers: Johnny Alessi, Stephen Reed, Troy Billin Recreational fishers: David Rae, Paul Lennon, Mark Corbin DPI Fisheries Manager: Heath Folpp DPI Fisheries Scientist: Julian Hughes		
Observers	Rowan Chick (DPI), Ashley Fowler (DPI), Josh Cansdell (DPI, Executive Officer), Nick Giles (DPI, Fisheries Manager, Harvest Strategies), Shane McGrath (DPI Fisheries Manager)		
Apologies	Stephan Schnierer		

Agenda Item	**Issue**	**Notes & Actions**
1.	Welcome and Introduction	1.1 Acknowledgment of county The Chair opened by acknowledging Traditional Custodians and paying respects to Elders past, present and emerging. 1.2 Apologies and Recognition of Observers The Chair welcomed all working group members, observers and meeting guests. 1.3 Confirmation of Agenda The meeting agenda was accepted without modification. 1.4 Declaration of pecuniary interests

		Updates to the register of pecuniary interests were confirmed. 1.5 Progress of other NSW fisheries harvest strategies DPI provided an update on the development of the Spanner Crab Harvest Strategy noting the draft is in its final stages and the working group are continuing to review and refine the draft components. An Expression of Interest was advertised and closed mid-September for appointments to a new Line and Trap Fishery Harvest Strategy Working group, which will commence with developing harvest strategies for snapper and yellowtail kingfish. 1.6 Minutes of the previous meeting The previous meeting minutes were adopted following confirmation that all comments had been resolved.
2.	Updates for ongoing business	DPI provided an update on progress of ongoing business items, including the Mulloway Compliance program, progress on improving commercial and recreational data, additional research proposals, and recent Mulloway stockings.
3.	Introduction to decision rules	DPI provided an introduction to decision rules, which provide a framework for adjusting intensity of fishing activity or levels of catch, with decision (or harvest control) rules linked to indicators and performance against reference point values of the indicator/s as defined in the operational objectives of the harvest strategy. For example, in a healthy fishery if a target reference point (e.g. biomass of a certain level) is reached or exceeded, the decision rules could result in increased harvest to return or maintain the fishery or stock around the target level. If performance is below the target, harvest would decrease to return the fishery or stock to the target level. To improve the health of the Mulloway fishery considering the depleted stock status, harvest must be managed effectively to rebuild biomass towards a future management target, and it will be important for decision rules to consider and apply to all harvest sectors. Given that each sector has different characteristics, management rules and available information, decision rules may apply in different ways between commercial and non-commercial sectors.

		Discussion Members discussed potential decision rule principles, initially focused on rebuilding of the stock to an interim target biomass that represented a significantly improved fishery from its current status. As part of discussions, members revisited fishery data and the current information available to guide operation of the decision rules. Members also requested further information on entitlements and harvest in the commercial sector to consider at the next meeting. Discussions recognised that good data is important for the harvest strategy decision rules to be responsive to changes in future fishery performance. Members continued discussion around several potential assessment methods and indicators required for the harvest strategy to be successful with discussions revisiting the behavioural characteristics of Mulloway and additional influences that may complicate the harvest strategy process including environmental (both natural and anthropogenic), and spatial distribution. The working group acknowledge Mulloway's current stock abundance is not where they want it to be, and discussion recognised the importance for developing harvest strategy decision rules to support rebuilding, also focusing on improving fishery data and improving certainty of stock estimates. It was noted the stock assessment process and reliable indicators will improve to give better accuracy and operational performance of the harvest strategy over time. The current assessment relies on a number of indicators, with data improvements focused on increasing certainty of biomass estimates and providing a package of indicators for the harvest strategy to reduce potential biases such as those that arise from reliance on individual indicators such as CPUE. Discussion recognised that the experience of different fishers may give rise to different views of the current health of the stock, whilst recognising the overall view and formal assessment indicating that the fishery is not in a healthy state. Members agreed to the following principles for further consideration: • Improving data should remain a strong objective,

		• Strong action should be taken to reduce catch if health declines further from current levels, • All sectors should contribute to rebuilding, potentially using different management approaches suitable to each sector, • Catch should be strongly constrained through the rebuilding phase to ensure successful rebuilding and recovery. **Action** 1. DPI update members on numbers of commercial fishing entitlements including those reporting Mulloway catch
4.	Discussion: Decision rule options	Further to the previous meeting discussions for a two-step approach to the harvest strategy-target reference points (an interim rebuilding target and a longer-term harvest strategy objective target), the Chair motivated discussion around members views towards decision rule options for rebuilding the Mulloway stock. **Discussion** The majority of members saw benefit in a rebuilding strategy that allows appropriate levels of fishing to continue which supports rebuilding and recovery for all sectors unless a stronger approach is required to avoid further biomass decline. Rebuilding components of a harvest strategy generally reduce or put limits on catch until stocks reach a predetermined reference point (a value of biomass considered to be a recovered stock) and members discussed several potential management options for reducing catch. Discussion recognised benefit for a precautionary approach consistent with the Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines that would see a relatively low catch limit of Mulloway to assist in the gradual rebuilding of the stock until biomass reached the harvest strategy rebuilding target, while at the same time, increasing confidence with improved data. However, members expressed some concern towards management changes that could affect current data time series and equity of changes that could be applied across harvest sectors, with further consideration required as potential decision rules are developed.

		It was suggested that harvest strategy indicators independent of (or considering) management changes could improve monitoring, particularly given some uncertainty around the level of targeted fishing and as fishers are likely to have become much better at targeting Mulloway over time. It was noted that assessment data will be gathered from all sectors and that several strategies to improve data collection and improve stock assessments in the future are underway. Members discussed differences in their preference for finer scale management of Mulloway under the harvest strategy with regards to potential for regionalised management as opposed to a broader state management that applies under current management arrangements. Longer term targets for the rules may require considering trade-offs between biomass levels (abundance) and catch levels. For example, the common target of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY) generally targets maximum catch with lower consequent abundance levels (with comparatively higher fishing costs for the commercial sector and comparatively lower 'fishing opportunity' for recreational and cultural sectors). While, the common target of Maximum Economic (or Optimum) Yield generally maintains higher abundance with lower catch than MSY (with comparatively lower fishing cost for the commercial sector and comparatively higher 'fishing opportunity' for recreational and cultural sectors). Members also discussed support and potential options for improving commercial catch, effort and length data for key fishers interim to longer term improvements that may be made to online reporting systems, agreeing to continue assessing options. **Action** 2. DPI and commercial members continue developing options for interim commercial data collection.
8.	Next steps for Mulloway Harvest Strategy	The next meeting is proposed to continue the development of decision rules for the harvest strategy.

The next meeting is proposed for 3rd and 4th November 2022.