



NSW Research Angler Program

Issue 18 March 2018

Welcome to the “NSW Research Angler Program Newsletter” – providing you, the research anglers and spearfishers of NSW, feedback on the data you are collecting to help us learn more about some of NSW’s key recreational fish species.

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Notable Donations from Summer 2017-18!

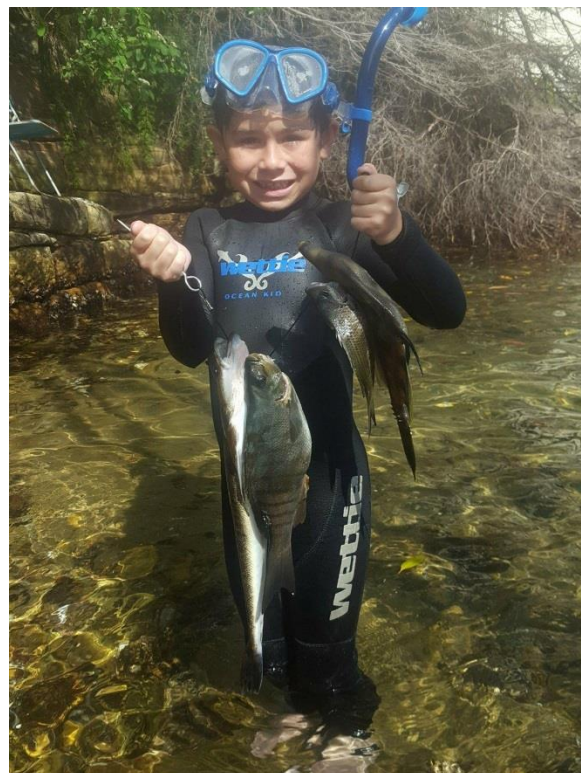


Joel Pease with 61.5 cm and 16 years of knobby Wollongong snapper – fish of this calibre are what summer fishing is all about along the entire length of the NSW coast. Photo courtesy Joel Pease.

Summer is a hard season to beat for the NSW fisho – estuaries are warm, pelagics bust up everywhere, the reefs are firing in close and the blue water action is on out wide! Fortunately for the NSW RAP, our species are found in most of these places guaranteeing a great supply of data for research and monitoring of some of our key recreational fish species. Joel Pease has donated most of our species to the the program at some stage or other, but this summer was in amongst the inshore snapper off Wollongong donating a thumping fish of 61.5 cm in length. Tempted by a well-presented soft plastic, Joel’s fish was estimated to be 16 years old. No doubt providing a delicious feed for Joel, the fish now also makes a small, but important contribution to the ongoing monitoring and assessment of the NSW snapper stock for 2017-18!

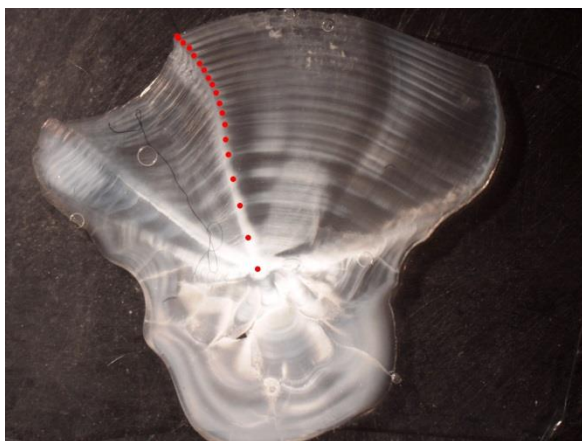


James Sakker with the largest fish donated to the NSW RAP over summer – a gigantic 150 cm Coffs Harbour mulloway estimated to be 17 years old! Photo courtesy James Sakker.



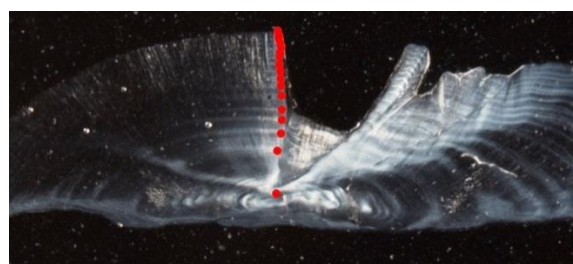
Young Jack Delaney with a fine haul of estuary goodies including a cracking 46 cm dusky flathead donated to the NSW RAP and estimated to be 3 years old. Photo courtesy Justin Delaney.

Coffs Coast spearo James Sakker rarely has a poor season underwater and has been donating material from his passion for hunting some of NSW's most sought-after recreational fish species since the NSW RAP kicked off way back in late 2013. This season however, James may have exceeded even his lofty heights with some epic donations. James donated no fewer than 11 prime mulloway, the smallest going 87 cm (and 4 years old), the three largest fish going 135, 142 and 150 cm (14, 17 and 17 years old, respectively). Not content with all those jewies, James also speared (and donated) a fine 5 kg snapper! Another spearo who enjoyed some of summer's piscatorial bounty was 7 year old Jack Delaney who had one memorable session in Sydney Harbour. A heap of popular recreational species found their way onto Jack's stringer including fanbelly leatherjacket, luderick and yellowfin bream, but one 46 cm dusky flathead was of particular interest to the NSW RAP. Analysis of the otolith from Jack's dusky revealed it to be 3 years old – slightly less than half Jack's age!



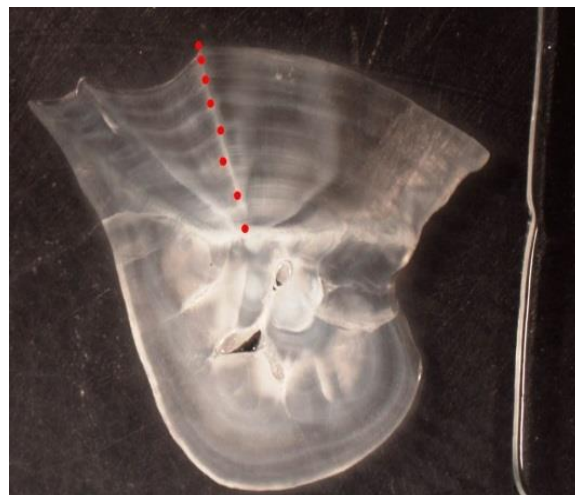
Left: The otolith section from James Sakker's 150 cm 17 year old Coffs Harbour mulloway.

Below: The otolith section from Joel Pease's 61.5 cm 16 year old South Coast snapper.





A great start to 2018 for Jake Leishman who landed the first mulloway of his jewy career! As far as firsts go, 112 cm and an estimated 6 years of age is pretty hard to beat. Photo courtesy Jake Leishman.



The otolith section from Jake Leishman's 112 cm mulloway at left showing the growth rings used to estimate its 6 years of age.

Nailing that first big specimen of a newly targeted species is one of the most satisfying moments in a fisherman's career, whether it be with rod and line, or mask and spear. To work out how to catch a new species often requires considerable time, effort, research, experience and meticulous preparation. The mighty mulloway is a species which well and truly fits into this category being one of the harder fish species in our part of the world to catch consistently. South Coast angler Jake Leishman recently had his golden moment when his mulloway "duck" was broken landing a lovely 112 cm Shoalhaven River jew, his first. Generously donated to the NSW RAP, Jake also got to find out that his first mulloway was 6 years old, a nice little bonus piece of information for a fish which Jake will likely never forget!

Project Progress – Summer 2017-18

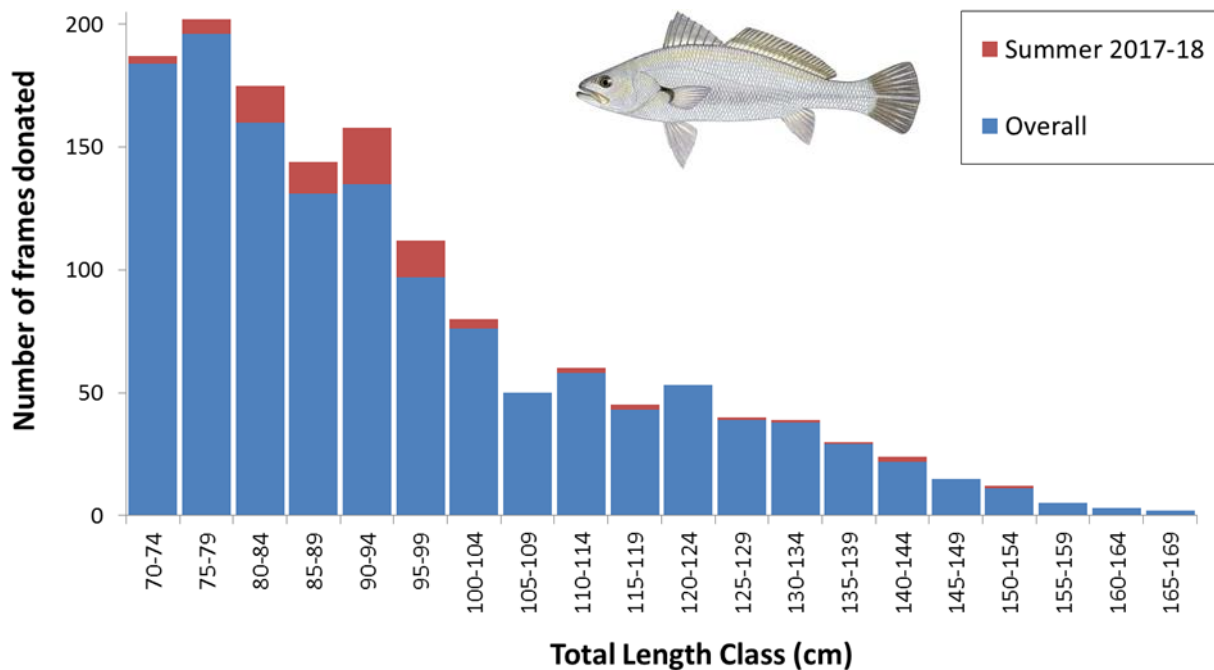
A great summer of donations of biological material to the NSW RAP saw data from a further 89 mullet incorporated into the NSW DPI Resource Assessment and Monitoring System. These were primarily in the 80-100 cm size classes, but donations extended all the way up to 14 fish of more than a metre in length along with a couple of real monsters, both in terms of size (140-150 cm) and estimated age (up to 17 years).

These were joined by more than 100 frames and otoliths donated from snapper, kingfish, tailor and dusky flathead of various sizes and estimated ages making summer 2017-18 one of the most successful seasons ever for donations of biological material to the program!

NSW RAP Fisheries Technician extraordinaire Antony Gould in the lab processing the frame from an 111 cm Lake Macquarie mullet – one of almost 200 frames donated to the program over summer 2017-18.



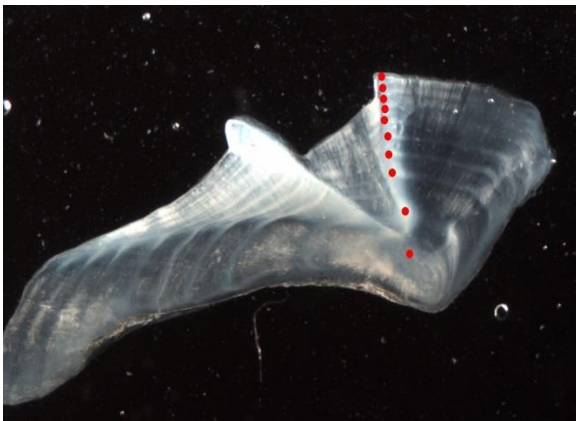
Lengths of mullet (*Argyrosomus japonicus*) >70 cm donated to the NSW Research Angler Program from summer 2017-18 and overall (since spring 2013).



And don't forget that you can now post the otoliths from your mullet catches (or otoliths from any of our species – if you can find them!) to us making donating to the program even easier. All you need to do is contact us at the NSW RAP (T: 9435 4671, E: research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au) and we will send you out a reply-paid padded post pack and data label. Then it's simply a matter of filling out the data label and placing it, along with a single otolith from your fish into the post pack (right), seal it, stick it in the nearest Australia Post box and let the postman do the rest!.



An amazing 54 dusky flathead were also donated to the program over summer 2017-18 with most fish coming from those classic flathead haunts of the Hawkesbury River, Brisbane Water and the Clarence River. A real feature of summer dusky flathead frame donations was the presence of some impressive-sized individuals with 14 frames donated from fish of larger than 65 cm. At this size almost all dusky flathead are female, not because they change sex, but because males grow much more slowly than females from approximately 2 years of age onwards. Highlights were a Clarence River fish of 81 cm estimated to be 6 years old and a Brisbane Water fish of 82 cm estimated to be 8 years old!

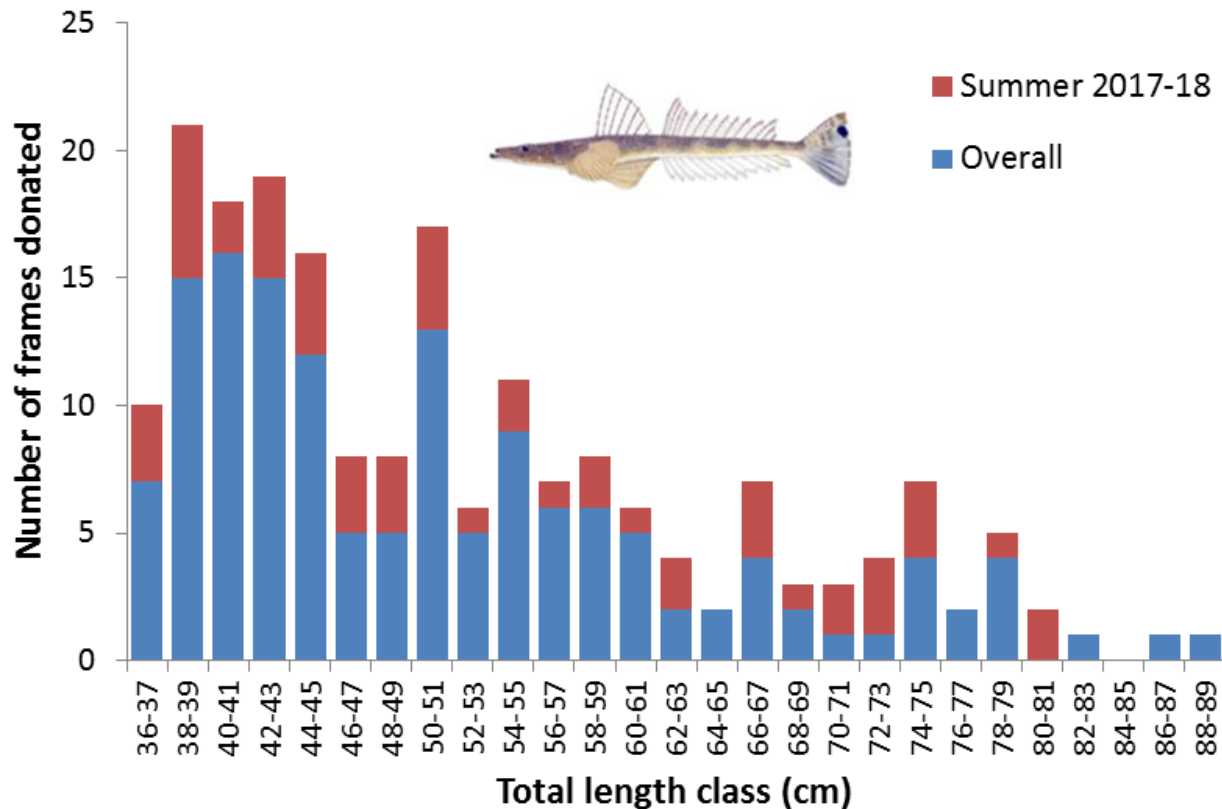


The otolith section from an 82 cm dusky flathead donated to the program over summer resulted in the Brisbane Water fish being estimated to be a surprisingly youthful 8 years old!



Some of the more than 50 dusky flathead frames donated to the NSW RAP over summer 2017-18 ready for processing at the Sydney Institute of Marine Science.

Lengths of dusky flathead (*Platycephalus fuscus*) donated to the NSW Research Angler Program in summer 2017-18 and overall.



“Top Five” dusky flathead donors overall (as of 28 February):

Donor	No. frames donated	Region
Mike Hollis	54	Sydney
Greg Gowlland	26	Central Coast
Tom Perry	22	Central Coast
Jason Szabo	18	Central Coast
Barry Pollock	14	North Coast

Even if it is only one frame, one head, or a single jewel, we are willing to do (almost) anything to get it!

Techo Time!

Welcome to the fourth instalment of “Techo Time” where our resident NSW Research Angler Program technician, Antony Gould, explains how and why the otoliths from tropical fish species are sometimes more difficult to interpret those of temperate species.

Tropical Rings

I recently received a call from a colleague at NSW DPI's [Narrandera Fisheries Centre](#).

“Hi Antony, I’ve got some otoliths collected by a Vietnamese student of mine from the Mekong River Delta. We’ve had a look at them and can’t really see any growth rings”.

I remembered my last holiday, sipping from a coconut on the Mekong River, sweating like a school kid in the principal’s office and wearing a Hawaiian shirt!

It sounded like a challenge, “send some over and I’ll have a look” I said.

As you’ve probably seen from your **Research Feedback Certificates** and numerous images on the pages of this newsletter, rings can be seen in otolith sections just as they can in the trunk of a tree. In both trees and otoliths, the rings present can be used to tell how old the organism is. The reason rings form in otoliths is not fully understood, but basically fish grow at different rates during different seasons. In the winter, water temperatures are low, the fish are less active and the material deposited onto the growing surface of the otolith is deposited slowly and in dense layers. When it’s hot in summer, the fish are active, eat more, grow faster and as a result material is added to the otolith quickly and is much less dense. When we cut a thin section through the core of the otolith and look at this under reflected light, the light reflects brightly off the denser parts of the otolith, which appear light, and the light penetrates the less dense parts of the otolith, which appear dark. By counting the number of bright white bands (the dense otolith material), we can tell how many winters a fish has survived and this lets us estimate how old the fish is!



The otolith section on the left is from a Hawkesbury River mullet (*Argyrosomus japonicus*) and the one on the right is from a Mekong River Boeseman croaker (*Boesemania microlepis*). Both fish are from the same family (Sciaenidae) and both are three years old, but I know which one I would prefer to be trying to estimate the age of!

I began by processing the otoliths of a Boeseman croaker (*Boesemania microlepis*), a tropical member of the very same family that mullet is also a member of. I had hoped that my experience interpreting mullet otoliths would help me when I came to look at the croakers otolith section. After putting the croaker section under the microscope, I could definitely see recurring patterns, but these were a lot less clear than the RAP mullet that I'm used to. On the images on the previous page are section images from a 3 year old mullet otolith section on the left with its magnificently clear rings. On the right is a section image from the Boeseman croaker, which is also 3 years old. As you can see the croakers rings are nowhere near as vivid.

In south-eastern Australia, winters can be cool (the water temp gets down to around 17°C in Sydney) and the summers are warm (the water gets up to about 25°C). This makes for a good seasonal temperature spread, and usually results in nice clear rings in the otoliths of fish which live here. If you've been to the tropics in winter, you'll know that there isn't really a "winter", it's either hot, or hot and wet. This means the water temperature doesn't deviate like it does in say, Sydney, the growth rates of the fish vary much less seasonally and hence their rings are sometimes much harder to interpret. This is why the otoliths of fish from the Mekong are much harder to read, even if they come from fish of the same family!

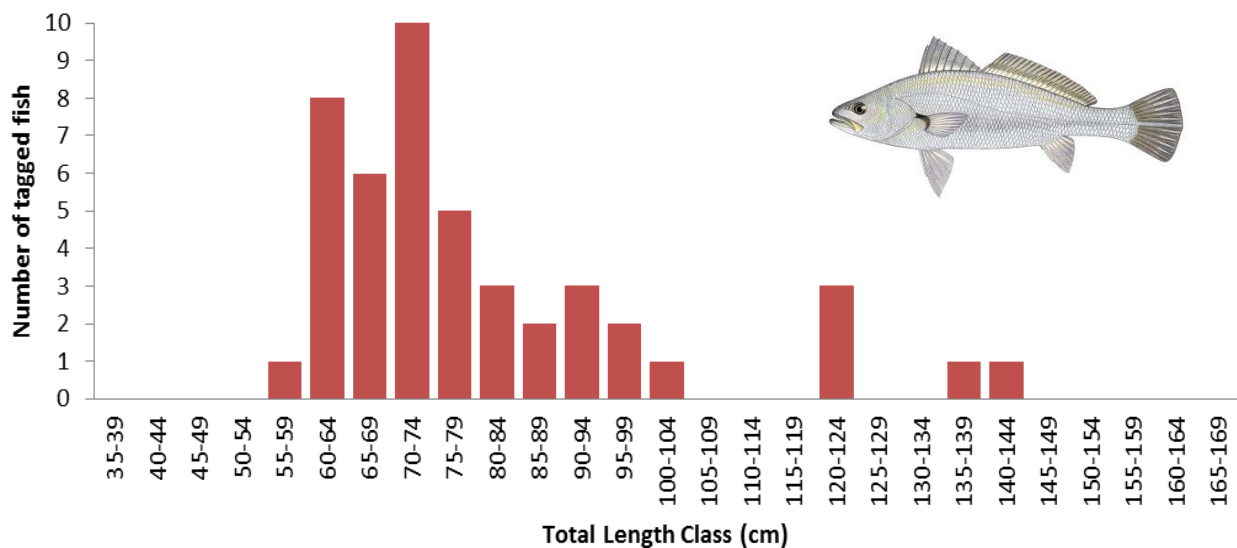
Whilst undoubtedly a member of the family Sciaenidae, the tropical Boeseman croaker has otoliths that are much less simple to interpret. Photo courtesy www.anglingthailand.com



NSW RAP – ANSA Mulloway Tagging

Summer 2017-18 was another ripper for participants in the NSW RAP-ANSA mulloway tagging project. Almost 50 prime summer mulloway were tagged ranging in size from a 55 cm Coffs Harbour pup right up to a 140 cm dinosaur (also from Coffs Harbour)! One of the project's stalwart anglers, Paul Blade, was the number one tagger for summer with 13 fish, including the aforementioned 55 and 140 cm fish from his local stomping grounds along the Coffs Coast. There was no let up from Sydney's metro mulloway hunters either with Ivan Maric, Jamie Gauci and Glenn Mitchell tagging 15 fish between them from some of NSW's most heavily fished estuary systems. Kieran Hil also had a hot summer in Newcastle tagging six fish of between 64 and 85 cm.

Length frequency of mulloway tagged as part of the NSW RAP-ANSA tagging project from summer 2017-18.



As can be seen from the above graph, a feature of summer's mulloway tagging effort was size - with six metre-plus fish tagged. Included in these was Paul Blade's 140 cm Coffs fish, a barely-smaller 139 cm from the Georges River, a 123 cm fish from Newcastle Harbour and two Hawkesbury fish, one tagged by Ivan Maric going 122 cm and the other 120 cm!

Right: 95 cm of summer Nambucca Heads mulloway tagged 176 days earlier in the Nambucca River by Lachlan Monro when 93 cm. Photo courtesy James Sakker.



“Top Five” taggers for summer 2017-18 (as of 28 February):

Tagger	No. fish tagged	Region
Paul Blade	13	Coffs Harbour
Ivan Maric	9	Sydney
Kieran Hill	6	Newcastle
Jamie Gauci	3	Sydney
Glenn Mitchell	3	Sydney

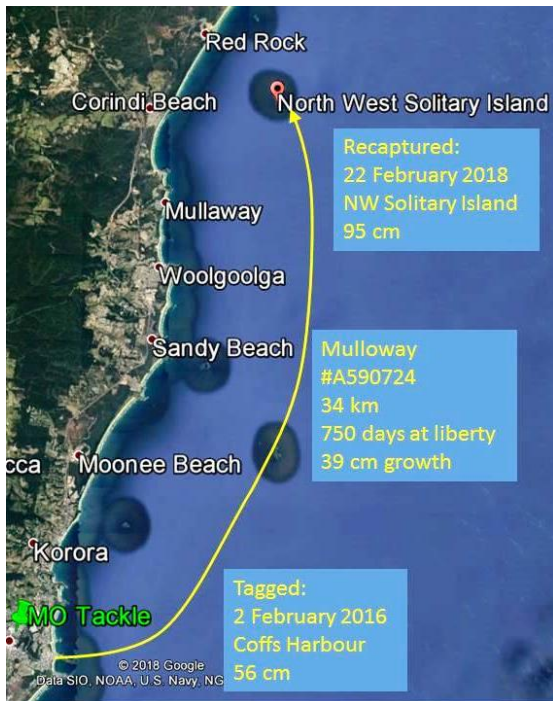


Tag #A597879 – although you’d never know it with all that algal growth! An excellent example of just how fouled a tag can get in just 176 days from tagging to recapture. It’s easy to see how the tags are sometimes missed, especially at night. Photo courtesy James Sakker.

There were quite a few ‘movers’ revealed by summer’s tagged mullo way recaptures, which is one of the reasons this component of the NSW RAP is so valuable to research! A 59 cm fish tagged well up the Hastings River in Port Macquarie by [Castaway Estuary Charters](#)’ Mark Saxon was recaptured at Shelly Headland by John Meehan, a straight line distance of some 3 nautical miles having grown to 80 cm in 19 months at liberty. Another river-to-sea movement was undertaken by a 93 cm fish tagged by Lachlan Monro in the Nambucca River, which was recaptured at Nambucca Heads by James Sakker growing by 2 cm in 176 days. Another Nambucca River fish tagged, this time by Clay Hilbert way up river at Macksville when just 60 cm in length, was recaptured by Andrew Trappel from [The Rocks Fishing Charters](#) at Grassy Head a staggering 1178 days (3 years 3 months) later when 86 cm long! This fish had travelled the 12 km downstream from Macksville to the mouth of the Nambucca River before making the 17 km swim south to Grassy Head!

“Top Five” largest fish tagged for summer 2017-18 (as of 28 February):

Tagger	Total length (cm)	System
Paul Blade	140	Coffs Harbour
Anon	139	Georges River
Nathan Debono	123	Newcastle Harbour
Ivan Maric	122	Hawkesbury River
Anon	120	Hawkesbury River



34 km by sea: the impressive journey of tagged mullet A590724 from Coffs Harbour where it was tagged by Paul Blade to North West Solitary Island where it was recaptured by Lachlan Wray.



12 km by river, 17 km by sea: a mullet tagged by Clay Hilbert at Macksville recaptured after an epic 1178 days at liberty before being recaptured by Andrew Trappel at Grassy Head.

Recaptured at North West Solitary Island by Lachlan Wray was a 95 cm fish which had previously been tagged by Paul Blade some 18 nautical miles south at Coffs Harbour having grown by an astonishing 39 cm in its 25 months at liberty! Botany Bay and the rivers which run into it always feature on these pages, and this summer was no different with an 88 cm fish tagged by Jamie Gauci in the Georges River recaptured in Botany Bay by Abdullah Atlihan 8 months after it was tagged when 92 cm in length. Ben Harris' 66 cm Georges River fish had swum right through Botany Bay and up the Cooks River, a trip of over 10 km, where it was recaptured by Kyle Flood some 566 days later at 71 cm. A pair of fish which hadn't gone far, but had grown plenty were a 66 cm fish which had grown 24 cm in 540 days in Brisbane Water and a 73 cm fish which had grown 18 cm in 443 days in Newcastle Harbour. Our final recapture for summer 2017-18 was an 83 cm fish tagged in Lake Macquarie by Steve Gresham which was recaptured at 90 cm by David Birt in Newcastle Harbour – the second tagged mullet to have been recorded undertaking this estuary to estuary journey on the Hunter Coast!



David Birt and Neil Cooley caught this fat 91 cm tagged mullet in Newcastle Harbour in February. The fish had been tagged by Kieran Hill almost 15 months earlier when just 73 cm in length, also in Newcastle Harbour. Photo courtesy David Birt.

“Top Five” largest fish tagged overall (as of 28 February):

Tagger	Total length (cm)	System	Season
“Tagger 86”	155.5	Hawkesbury River	Autumn 2016
Josh Anderson	152.5	Yamba	Spring 2016
“Tagger 86”	152	Hawkesbury River	Spring 2015
“Tagger 86”	148	Hawkesbury River	Summer 2016-17
“Tagger 86”	146	Hawkesbury River	Summer 2016-17

Tagged mulloway recaptures for summer 2017-18 (as of 28 February):

Tagging angler	Total length (cm)	Tagging location	Recapture angler	Total length (cm)	Recapture location	Days at liberty
Anon	76	Hawkesbury River	Emiel Temmerman	80	Hawkesbury River	214
Luke Reilly	66	Brisbane Water	Andriy Pikhtin	90	Ettalong Beach	540
Jamie Gauci	88	Georges River	Abdullah Atlihan	92	Botany Bay	248
Mark Saxon	59	Hastings River	John Meehan	80	Shelly Beach	576
Unknown	n/a	Unknown	Craig Caulfield	85	Brisbane Water	-
Lachlan Monro	93	Nambucca River	James Sakker	95	Nambucca Heads	176
Clay Hilbert	60	Nambucca River	Andrew Trappel	86	Grassy Head	1178
Paul Blade	56	Coffs Harbour	Lachlan Wray	95	NW Solitary Island	750
Kieran Hill	73	Newcastle Harbour	David Birt/Neil Cooley	91	Newcastle Harbour	443
Ben Harris	66	Georges River	Kyle Flood	71	Cooks River	566
Unknown	n/a	Unknown	Murat Atlihan	91	Botany Bay	-
Steve Gresham	83	Lake Macquarie	David Birt	90	Newcastle Harbour	136

Next time you're out chasing mulloway, keep an eye out for one of our yellow NSW DPI tags like this one A599842 found in a 103 cm fish recaptured on the Georges River. Photo courtesy Brendan Borg.



If you are fortunate enough to catch a tagged mulloway, please record the tag number, measure the length of the fish, and contact either the NSW DPI Gamefish Tagging Program (T: 4424 7411, E:

gamefish.tagging@dpi.nsw.gov.au) or the NSW Research Angler Program (T: 9435 4671, E: research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au). The tag will be yellow, approximately 12 cm long and located just beneath the dorsal spines.

The crucial data collected by this project will help us to learn more about the movements, growth and post-release survival of this iconic fish. Stay tuned for future updates in the Autumn 2018 NSW RAP Newsletter!

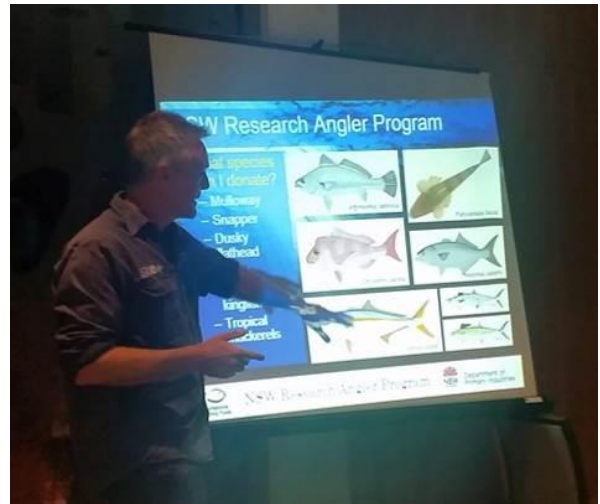
Also don't forget, you can also now stay up-to-date with all the comings and goings of this component of the NSW RAP by visiting the project Facebook page ([Newtag – NSW Tagging Program – Mulloway](#)).

NSW RAP Presentations

If you are a member of a fishing club (spearfishing or angling) or a tackle shop hosting regular fishing-related presentations and are interested in having someone from the NSW RAP give a talk on the program, please don't hesitate to get in contact with us (E: research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au, T: 9435 4671) and we will send someone out to get you and your audience 'revved-up' about the program!

Upcoming dates:

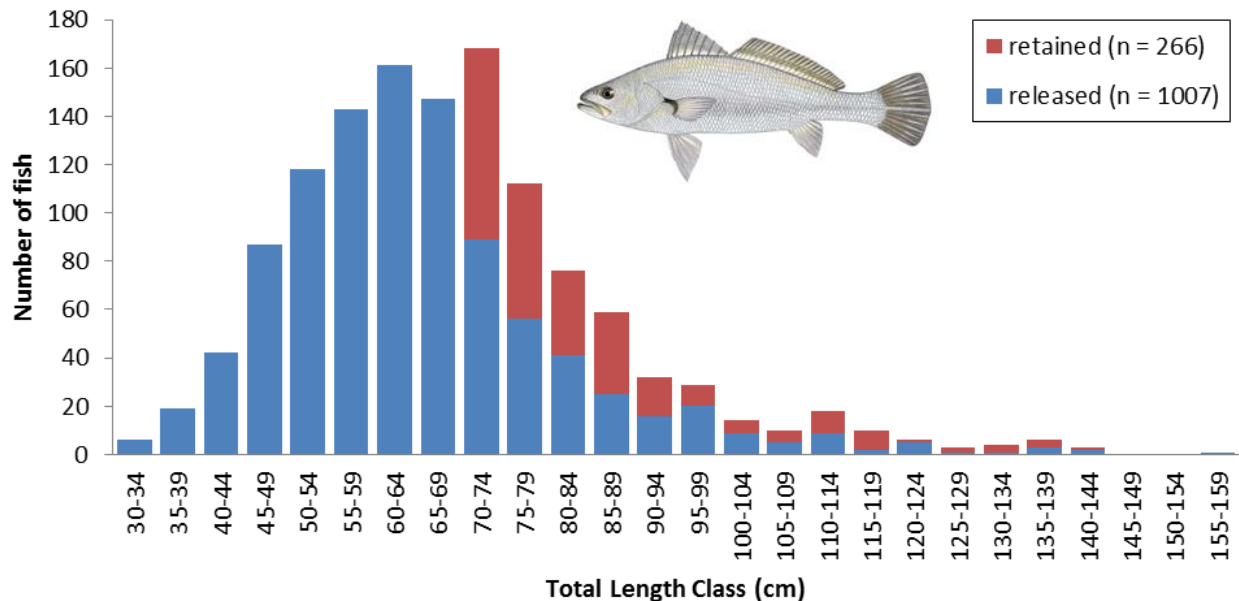
3 April, **Charlestown Anglers Fishing Club**,
Warners Bay Hotel



Mulloway Research Angler Diary Update

Another group of diligent Mulloway Research Angler Diarists dutifully sent in their diaries for analysis over summer 2017-18, bringing the number of mulloway measured as part of this component to 1,273 fish! The below figure summarises the lengths of mulloway retained, as well as those released, from more than 1,500 jewy fishing trips! Of the fish caught, most (70%) were smaller than the minimum legal length of 70 cm and therefore released, with most commonly caught size class of fish between 55 and 75 cm. Of the legal-sized fish caught, just 48% were kept, confirming the enormous value mulloway represent as a catch and release sportfish in addition to their undeniable quality on the plate!

Lengths of mulloway recorded by “Research Angler Diarists” up to the end of summer 2018.

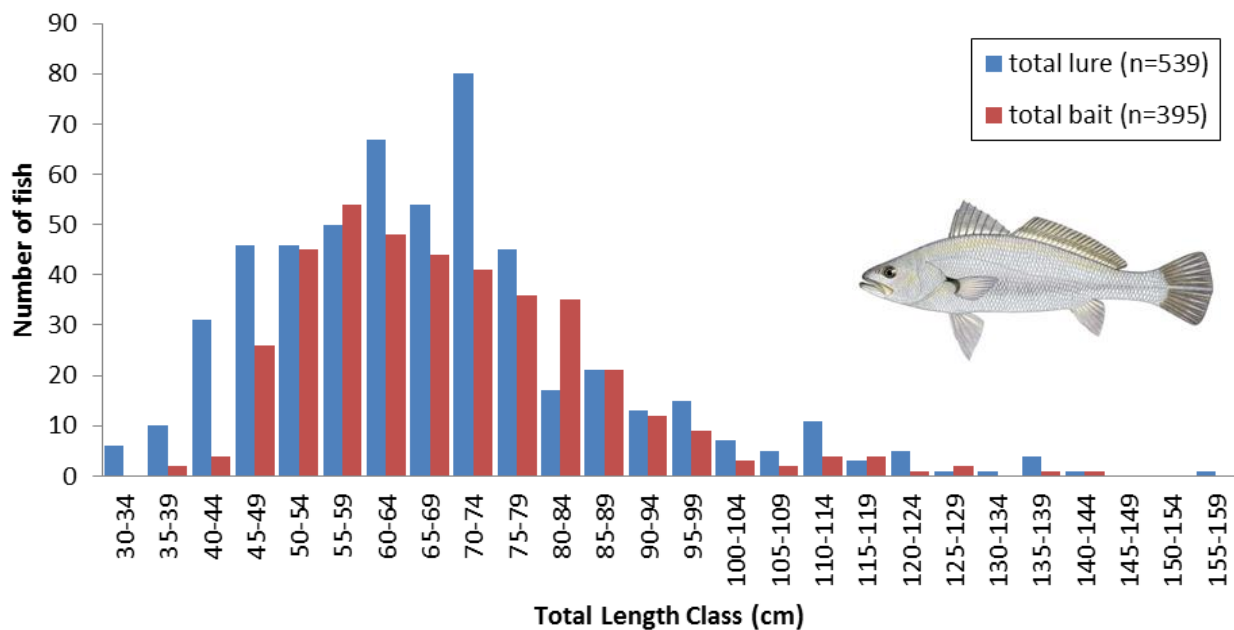


As well as providing key length frequency information for the recreational fishery for mulloway, this component of the RAP has also revealed some interesting trends in the growing popularity of mulloway as a species targeted exclusively with lures. As can be seen on the figure on the next page, lures have so far accounted for many more sublegal mulloway than bait, with 310 fish <70 cm taken on lures compared with 223 on bait. This pattern is even more extreme in the size classes of <45 cm, with 47 fish taken on lures and just 6 on bait. A nice byproduct of catch and release of fish taken by lure is that the fish is more often than not hooked in the mouth, making unhooking a relatively simple affair and reducing the potential for internal injuries as a result of deep hooking in the throat or stomach. Interestingly, the numbers of fish taken using each technique is relatively similar for legal-sized (>70 cm) individuals, and in fact in some size classes (eg. 80-84 cm) bait accounts for more fish than lures!



It doesn't matter whether they're soft plastics or hardbodies, mulloway love lures! Aptly demonstrated by two fine Brisbane Water fish caught by Research Anglers Matt Forrest (left) and Luke Reilly (right). Photos courtesy Matt Forrest and Luke Reilly.

Lengths of mullet according to capture technique (lure or bait) recorded by "Research Angler Diarists" up to the end of summer 2018.



Once we receive the diary from a Research Angler Diarist, we digitise it immediately so that it can be returned to the fisher for further data collection. As you can see above, the data collected provides researchers and managers with the crucial estimate of the sizes of mullet caught by recreational fishers so please keep filling out your Research Angler Diaries! If you have managed to misplace your reply-paid envelope, please contact us (T: 9435 4671, E: research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au) and we will get a new one out to you ASAP.

Research Angler Diary IN STRICT CONFIDENCE

Species: Mullet

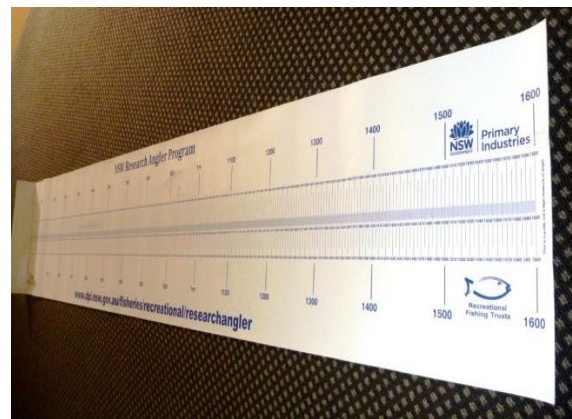
Angler name: _____

Please record the following details each time you fish for mullet, even if you don't catch any:

- Date**
- Location** - can be approximate (e.g. Hawkesbury River, Sydney Northern Beaches, Yamba)
- Zone** - were the fish caught in an *estuary*, from shore (*beach/rocks/breakwall*) or *offshore*? - if fishing session spans more than one zone, please use a new row
- Total lengths** of all mullet caught (to the nearest cm) - if you catch more than 6 fish in a session, just use more rows
- Record whether the fish caught were *kept* or *released* by writing "Yes" or "No" in the "Kept" column
- Please retain the *frame, head or otoliths* (jowels) from any mullet *kept*, along with label detailing date and location information

NSW Research Angler Program

When & Where	Zone	Lengths (cm)	Kept	Notes
<i>Example</i> Date: 12 June 2014 Location: Port Stephens	Estuary	1. 51 2. 64 3. 120 4. 55	No Yes Yes No	All caught on live prawns mullet Released if fish in good condition
Date: _____	Estuary	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	
Date: _____	Beach/Rocks	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	
Date: _____	Offshore	1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____	_____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	



All Research Angler Diarists are provided with a small 20 page waterproof diary to record information from over 100 mullet fishing trips along with a custom-made extra-long 160 cm NSW RAP fish measuring mat for you to accurately measure the lengths of the mullet you catch (above). If you regularly chase mullet on lures or with bait and would like to contribute some crucial data on the recreational mullet fishery, please contact us (T: 9435 4671, E: research.angler@dpi.nsw.gov.au), and we will send you out a Research Angler Diary pack. This is an ongoing component of the NSW RAP so it's never too late to get on board!

Return of the mack!



Freight train-sized Spanish mackerel like this one are seasonally available in NSW waters. Photo courtesy Peter Zeroni.



Don't forget the spearos! And we don't at the RAP, especially when it comes to mackerel. Here, novice spearfisher Heath Folpp shows off a desperately unlucky NSW Spaniard from Coffs Harbour. Photo courtesy Heath Folpp.

All data collected will contribute to the joint assessment of the East Coast stocks of these two awesome fish species, so tie on some wire leader and get out there on the mack attack!

Well, it's that time of year again when the warm waters of the East Australian Current bring with them hordes of ravenous Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) and the smaller spotted mackerel (*S. munroi*) which may range as far south as Sydney and occasionally beyond. These tropical speedsters are one of the more desirable and glamorous species seasonally available to NSW anglers and spearos and the NSW RAP are again looking for frame donations for use in a joint assessment of the East Coast stocks of these two valuable and highly sought-after fish species with the [Queensland Department of Agriculture & Fisheries](https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/commercial-fisheries/species-specific-programs/spanish-mackerel/east-coast). So, if you chase these tropical speedsters with rod or spear, we are seeking donations of rec-caught mackerel from NSW waters. As with our other species, the frames (or heads) can be donated to the NSW RAP at any of our participating [drop-off points](#).

Please check out the most recent mackerel updates here prepared using data collected from frames donated to the NSW RAP:

Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) (<https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/commercial-fisheries/species-specific-programs/spanish-mackerel/east-coast>)



Spotted mackerel (*Scomberomorus munroi*) (<https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/fisheries/monitoring-our-fisheries/commercial-fisheries/species-specific-programs/monitoring-reporting/spotted-mackerel-update>)



The “Top Fives”!

Our sincerest thanks to the following dedicated Research Anglers and spearfishers who have made it into our “Top Five” lists of frame donors overall and those for summer 2017-18.

A great fisherman and a great supporter of the NSW RAP is Newcastle’s David Birt who had an absolutely magical summer in Newcastle Harbour donating no fewer than 43 fish to the NSW RAP! This included 39 mullocky ranging in size from 72 to 111 cm and four dusky flathead up to 61 cm as bycatch! But that wasn’t all, as David also had a hand in the donations of a further 19 frames (again from mullocky and dusky flathead) all caught from David’s boat with David as skipper – that’s 62 frames David was responsible for the donation of! A quite amazing effort and one greatly appreciated by the NSW RAP and fisheries researchers who get to use the information from these generous donations.

“Top Five” frame donors summer 2017-18 (as of 28 February):

Donor	No. frames donated	Region	Species
David Birt	43	Newcastle	Mullocky, Dusky Flathead
Mike Hollis	20	Sydney	Mullocky, Dusky Flathead
Barry Pollock	14	Yamba	Dusky Flathead
James Sakker	12	Mid-North Coast	Mullocky, Snapper
Keith Kneebone	9	Mid-North Coast	Snapper

Also thick in the mullocky and dusky flathead action over summer was Mike Hollis who donated 20 frames to the program. Mike’s mullocky to 81.5 cm and dusky to 71.5 cm came from his favourite stomping ground, the Hawkesbury River. From another mighty NSW river, the Clarence, came 14 dusky flathead kindly donated by Barry Pollock as part of his research into dusky flathead reproductive biology. Keith Kneebone gave the snapper around Coffs Harbour run for their money donating frames from nine cracking reds of between 47 and 82 cm in length.

“Top Five” largest mullocky donated summer 2017-18 (as of 28 February):

Donor	Total length (cm)	Estimated age (years)	Region
James Sakker	150	17	Coffs Harbour
James Sakker	142	17	Coffs Harbour
Damien Vella	140	11	Sydney
James Sakker	135	14	Coffs Harbour
James Sakker	118.5	9	Coffs Harbour



Five kilos of plump Coffs Harbour snapper donated to the NSW RAP by James Sakker – one of 12 frames he donated to the program over summer 2017-18. Photo courtesy James Sakker.



For the second season running, Damien Vella donated a trophy mullet to the NSW RAP – this Hawkesbury fish going 140 cm and an estimated 11 years of age. Photo courtesy Damien Vella.

“Top Five” largest mullet donated overall (as of 28 February):

Donor	Total length (cm)	Estimated age (years)	Region	Season
Nathan Debono	168	26	Newcastle	Winter 2015
Adam Price	164	24	Sydney	Spring 2013
Paul Lennon	161	26	Port Stephens	Winter 2017
Keith Kneebone	160	20	Sydney	Autumn 2014
Mark McCabe	159	21	Sydney	Spring 2013

Not only did Coffs Coast spearo James Sakker donate otoliths from 12 snapper and mullet over summer, but the calibre of fish they came from was quite outstanding. Four of the “Top Five” largest and oldest mullet donated came from James at 150, 142, 135 and 118.5 cm estimated to be 17, 17, 14 and 9 years old, respectively. Messing up James’ clean sweep at the top of the leaderboard was Damien Vella’s 140 cm mullet donation estimated to be 11 years old, and co-incidentally the second season in succession Damian has donated a trophy mullet to the program after a 133 cm fish he donated in spring 2017 which was also estimated to be 11 years old!

“Top Five” oldest mulloway donated summer 2017-18 (as of 28 February):

Donor	Estimated age (years)	Total length (cm)	Region
James Sakker	150	17	Coffs Harbour
James Sakker	142	17	Coffs Harbour
James Sakker	135	14	Coffs Harbour
Damien Vella	140	11	Sydney
James Sakker	118.5	9	Coffs Harbour

“Top Five” oldest mulloway donated overall (as of 28 February):

Donor	Estimated age (years)	Total length (cm)	Region	Season
Vaughan Little	34	156	Nowra	Spring 2013
Paul Lennon	33	149	Port Stephens	Summer 2016-17
Nathan Debono	26	168	Newcastle	Winter 2015
Paul Lennon	26	161	Port Stephens	Winter 2017
Scott Robson	26	154	Newcastle	Summer 2013-14
Evan Leeson	26	144	Port Macquarie	Autumn 2014
Paul Martin	26	148	Batemans Bay	Autumn 2017
Marwan Nasr	25	147	Sydney	Spring 2014
Greg Slater	25	133	Eden	Winter 2016
Adam Price	24	164	Sydney	Spring 2013
Jack Graham	24	<i>Unknown</i>	Eden	Winter 2016
Hari Corliss	24	151	Port Macquarie	Winter 2015

As well as those mentioned above, thanks to all the fishers who donated their summer mulloway, kingfish, dusky flathead, snapper, pearl perch, mackerel and tailor to the NSW RAP, here's hoping for some quality autumn fishing for all our species!

Drop-off Locations

Many thanks must once again go to all participating drop-off locations for their enthusiastic involvement in the program. This program would simply not be possible without your continued support. The list of drop-off locations for donated frames is changing regularly as more tackle retailers become involved in the program.

For the full and up-to-date list of places where you can drop-off your frames, heads or jewels, please visit:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fishing/recreational/resources/fish-tagging/researchangler/drop-off-locations>



Joel Pease with 77 cm of beautifully-proportioned South Coast mulloway donated to the NSW RAP over summer was estimated to be 4 years old. Photo courtesy Joel Pease.



This thumping 15.5 kg Central Coast mulloway donated by Sans Souci Dolphin Paul Marsh was estimated to be 10 years old. Photo courtesy Paul Marsh.

Monthly Prize Draw Winners!

The lucky monthly NSW Research Angler Program prize winners for summer 2017-18 were decided by randomly drawing one frame donor from each month.

Congratulations to the following Research Anglers and spearos:

December	David Birt	(Newcastle)
January	Mike Hollis	(Sydney)
February	Neil Cooley	(Newcastle)



Each winner will receive a \$50 gift voucher generously donated by [MO Tackle Coffs Harbour](#) (for use in-store or online)

Future winners will be published in upcoming newsletters and on our website. Don't forget to include your contact details (phone number, postal or email address) on the label accompanying your donated frame to ensure your chance of winning!

Remember, if you're going to catch and keep any of our species (**Mulloway, Snapper, Dusky Flathead, Yellowtail Kingfish, Tailor, Pearl Perch, Spotted or Spanish Mackerel**) for a feed, please fillet your fish and donate the frame, head or a single otolith to research –

WE NEED THE DATA FROM YOUR FISH!

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ONGOING SUPPORT.
KIND REGARDS AND TIGHT LINES!**

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