

## **Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council outcomes**

### **Meeting 33, 20-21 November 2024 Rydges Sydney Central**

|                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Members Present | Johann Bell<br>Patrick Linehan<br>Paul Lennon<br>Anna Clark<br>Grahame Williams OAM<br>Matt Hansen<br>Karl Mathers<br>Ray Tang<br>Bill Blair<br>Peter Dugan<br>Ian Puckeridge<br>Matt Tripet<br>Darren Reynolds | Independent Chair<br>Region 1 – Mid & Far North Coast<br>Region 2 – Lower North Coast<br>Region 3 – Sydney & Central Coast<br>Region 3 – Sydney & Central Coast<br>Region 6 – North West Inland (and MFAC rep)<br>Region 7 – South West Inland (Deputy Chair)<br>Region 8 – Central & Southern Tablelands<br>Region 8 – Central & Southern Tablelands<br>Charter Fishing<br>Spearfishing<br>Social Benefits of Recreational Fishing<br>A/Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture<br>Management |
| Apologies       | Dean Hamilton<br>Vicki Lear                                                                                                                                                                                     | Region 5 – South Coast<br>Region 4 - Illawarra                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

#### **1) Welcome, introductions and housekeeping**

##### **a) Introduction by the Chair, including Acknowledgement of Country**

###### **NOTED:**

- The Chair opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country and welcomed members to the 33rd meeting of RFNSW.

##### **b) Register of Interests**

NOTED:

- Member Karl Mathers declared his involvement in a Charles Sturt University project undertaking additional research relating to the carp virus (Cyprinid herpesvirus 3).
- No further updates.

**c) Agreement on the agenda and adoption of previous meeting record**

NOTED:

- RFNSW members agreed on the agenda for the meeting. The outcomes of the 32<sup>nd</sup> meeting of RFNSW were accepted without change as a true and accurate record of that meeting by the previous Council members in attendance.
- Mr Bill Blair requested an update regarding the Peak Recreational Fishing Body be provided at the next meeting.

**2) Draft Aboriginal Cultural Fishing Regulation**

NOTED:

- Council noted the intention for DPIRD to undertake community consultation in the near future on the draft Cultural Fishing Regulation. The draft Regulation will define specific limits for Aboriginal fishing guided by the current Aboriginal Cultural Fishing Interim Access Arrangements, which has been in place since 2010.
- DPIRD thanked Council for their previous feedback in relation to the proposed Regulation. Once public consultation commences, members committed to advising their recreational networks about the consultation process and promotion of key messaging.

**3) Open Day Events Idea & VFA Trout Talk Summary**

**a) Concept Idea of Open Day Events**

NOTED:

- RFNSW acknowledged the recent success of the Gaden Open Day, which had over 700 visitors, as part of Gone Fishing Day celebrations. Matt Tripet advised significant local positive feedback had been received about the event.
- Council acknowledged the efforts of staff and volunteers involved with the event and discussed opportunities to extend open days to the other NSW fish hatcheries to highlight stocking outcomes.
- The concept of annual open days at Gaden, Ebor and Narrandera fish hatcheries was supported by RFNSW.

**b) Summary of VFA Trout Conference**

NOTED:

- Mr Matt Tripet updated Council members on his attendance at the recent Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) Trout Conference. Topics discussed included habitat restoration works, management of the trout fishery, seasonal impacts of cormorants on the fishery and social licence opportunities.
- Mr Tripet highlighted the extensive promotional work that the VFA undertakes to highlight the

benefits of Victorian recreational fishing projects, including the recent conference. Further discussion on this topic of project outcomes promotion is provided in item 5.

#### **4) Collection of invertebrates on rock platforms**

##### NOTED:

- DPIRD provided an update on the collection of invertebrates from intertidal rock platforms, which remains a popular activity.
- It was noted that harvest was historically concentrated in metropolitan areas, however the activity is now widespread along the whole NSW coast. This is supported by Compliance observations.
- DPIRD advised that some stakeholder concerns, including anecdotal accounts, had been raised over time regarding sustainability and localised depletion of shellfish stocks.
- Members noted current management arrangements in other jurisdictions, including in Victoria where all intertidal zones are classified as protected areas. Other states have varying rules to limit harvest of shellfish.
- It was noted that any management responses focusing only on metropolitan areas could lead to shift of effort and pressure in other regions.
- RFNSW noted there had been an increase in invertebrate collection offences in recent years and whether, based on this data, there was an immediate need for a statewide intertidal rock platform harvesting restriction. It was noted that further community consultation on this issue could be undertaken as part of Fisheries regulation review processes.
- Members concluded that any future discussions on management of this hand gathering activity to ensure sustainability of rock platform shellfish resources into the future should ideally be guided and informed by the best available scientific information.
- RFNSW recommended that DPIRD commission a desktop review of available scientific information on the impacts of recreational hand gathering on intertidal rock platforms, focusing on biodiversity and invertebrate abundance. An application to the Recreational Fishing Trust could be made if necessary, and relevant scientific partners should be consulted to identify the most suitable research team.
- Members also noted the merits of the NZ 'Fish Heads' initiative and requested further information be provided at the next meeting.

#### **5) Recreational Fishing Trust matters**

##### NOTED:

- RFNSW was advised that the current funding round for Recreational Fishing Trust grants opened on 6 November and closed on 18 December 2024.
- Council also received an update on the implementation of the Recreational Fishing Trust Audit recommendations, all of which have been supported by the NSW Government.
- RFNSW noted a summary of the status of active Recreational Fishing Trust projects. Members requested future meeting summaries include project value with projects grouped into platforms and DPIRD/external projects.
- DPIRD provided an update on 2024 Gone Fishing Day, which involved 111 fishing organisations holding their own events around NSW. 62 organisations received fishing packages and the remaining 42 organisations received grants of up to \$2,000 to assist with their events. DPIRD also hosted 8 community events across the state.
- DPIRD advised that a recreational fishing licence holder survey to seek feedback on current Trust programs and priorities for future expenditure had recently commenced, with survey invitations sent to approximately 350,000 licence holders.

- DPIRD outlined a proposed new Trust expenditure review structure, as a result of the Audit recommendations. The Chairperson recommended that the new structure should have a process for information sharing with RFNSW and include resourcing to ensure for adequate peer review of Trust research applications, particularly for large and complex projects.
- Members noted recreational fishing licence fees have not increased since 2013, and the costs associated with running Trust projects have risen significantly since then with associated inflation. RFNSW was supportive of an increase in fees in line with consumer price indexation to ensure ongoing capacity for the Trusts to support the wide range of projects that promote quality recreational fishing. It was noted that Victoria has regular, periodic CPI based increases to recreational licence fees and a similar process should be adopted in NSW into the future (to avoid large price increases). An increase in fees should be accompanied by key messaging about the significant benefits and outcomes of the many Trust projects.
- Following on from discussion under agenda item 3b, RFNSW identified the need for encouraging more effective 'real time' promotion of the many excellent outcomes across various Trust programs and projects, DPIRD projects and the wider recreational sector. RFNSW explored the concept of gaining appropriate resourcing for a dedicated recreational fishing sector communications and promotions officer to boost promotion and information flow to the recreational sector. Council recommended that DPIRD prepare a Trust funding application to support a dedicated communications and promotions officer as part of the next funding round.
- Members agreed it may be beneficial for the Chairperson to arrange a meeting with the Minister in December to discuss the need and associated benefits of a recreational fishing licence fee increase. This meeting would also provide opportunity for the Chairperson to discuss the Recreational Fishing Action Plan noting the Plan would also need to account for key feedback from the current recreational fisher licence holder survey, resourcing for the dedicated recreational fishing sector communications and promotions officer, an update on the Minister's consideration of additional information of five research Trust applications and set times for Trust rounds in the future. The Chairperson confirmed he would submit a meeting request to the Minister's office.

## **6) Charter Fishing Matters**

### **a) Grey Nurse Shark Critical Habitat – Recreational Fishing Access**

#### NOTED:

- RFNSW noted that some concerns from stakeholders had been raised regarding different fishing arrangements for commercial fishers at the Grey Nurse Shark Critical Habitat Site at Fish Rock (South West Rocks) compared to charter operators. Currently bait fishing by commercial fishers was permitted while charter fishers were restricted to using lures in the same zone.
- RFNSW recommended writing to the Minister to raise this issue and express support for charter operators to operate under the same provisions as commercial operators at Fish Rock.

### **b) Land Based Guide Policy in NSW**

#### NOTED:

- DPIRD advised Council that an out of session meeting had been held with relevant RFNSW members on 4 November to discuss equity, sustainability and competition concerns raised by some members at the previous meeting. A desktop social media review had identified around 21 coastal land-based operators with varying levels of activity.
- Council identified the need to monitor land-based activity over time to enable estimates of

activity to be made and any associated impacts on fisheries resource sustainability.

- RFNSW requested that DPIRD compile further information on this issue and to prepare a detailed background paper for further review and discussion by Council. This should include information on freshwater guides and charter operators.

## **7) Fish Stocking Update**

### **a) Update on Trout Stocking plans and review of fish stocking FMS**

#### NOTED:

- DPIRD advised Council that the Department was proposing to undertake an independent targeted review of the Fish Stocking Fisheries Management Strategy (by an external expert) in response to recent new threatened species listings and to ensure the FMS remains effective and fit for purpose.
- Members noted that this work is critically important to ensure current stocking activities continue to follow world's best practice

### **b) Update on fish hatcheries and 2024/25 native fish stocking plan**

#### NOTED:

- DPIRD provided an update on hatchery activities at Narrandera, Dutton, Gaden, Port Stephens and Grafton Hatcheries.
- Members noted the positive feedback that had been received from stakeholders across NSW about stocking activities and the quality recreational fishing opportunities that were being experienced.
- Karl Mathers requested updates on the advanced Murray Cod stocking project, Golden Perch stock assessments and Copeton Dam Murray Cod movement project research be provided at the next meeting.

## **8) Joint Session with CommFish on improving water quality**

#### NOTED:

- RFNSW and CommFish held a joint session to discuss the important issue of improving water quality in our estuaries and rivers to boost fish stocks and explore how the commercial and recreational sectors can work together on new initiatives to boost water quality and associated environmental outcomes.
- The two Councils received a presentation from Duncan Leadbitter (Visiting Fellow, University of Wollongong) who provided a short video on the impacts of acid sulphate soils on water quality on floodplains.
- Ian Lyall, DPIRD Program Leader Aquaculture, provided both Councils an update on various aquaculture-based projects underway to improve water quality. This was followed by a short presentation from Anthony Zammit, NSW Food Authority, who gave a short presentation on monitoring of water quality under the NSW Shellfish program and the importance of water quality for aquaculture industries.
- RFNSW and CommFish both highlighted how they can advocate and play a role in initiating new water quality initiatives in partnership with DPIRD and other government agencies, particularly in key affected catchments such as the Clarence and Richmond rivers.
- The Councils agreed to prepare a joint Communique to advise the Minister about suggested next steps on this important issue.

## 9) Fisheries Management Regulation Amendment proposals

- DPIRD presented information on the following proposals for updating recreational fishing rules as part of future Regulation amendment processes, which would include community consultation. Some are long standing issues in response to stakeholder concerns and others are about standardising rules across jurisdictions.
- New rules for wanton harm or destruction/discarding of species – this would prohibit fishers from harming, destroying or mutilating any fish or marine organism that the person does not take for a specific purpose such as consumption, bait, a trophy etc. (that is, an intentional waste of fish). Such provisions exist in other states and in North American fisheries. RFNSW acknowledged this was both a sustainability and a social licence issue and were supportive.
- Greater protections for rays – this proposal would prohibit take or harm to rays within 100m of infrastructure like boat ramps and fish cleaning tables. DPIRD advised that despite educational initiatives and a signage program, ongoing concerns have been raised about harm to rays, especially near boat ramps and fish cleaning tables. RFNSW acknowledged that rays, common in these areas, play a vital scavenging role and support ecosystems, while also being popular with locals and tourists. Similar measures have been introduced in SA and Victoria to address these issues. RFNSW advised that any rule change should apply to all sectors and that certain ray species taken for consumption may need to be excluded e.g. fiddler rays. This was also recognised as a social licence issue.
- Fish mutilation rules – DPIRD advised that current mutilation rules only to apply to species with a size limit. This can be difficult to enforce at times because if a fish is mutilated (e.g. skinned or filleted), a Fisheries Officer may be unable to identify the fish and determine whether the fisher is within the bag or possession limits. It is proposed to expand mutilation provisions to include all species and retain the current exemptions for fish used for immediate consumption or as bait. RFNSW identified that this could lead to increased disposal of frames at boat ramps or fish cleaning tables and also questioned how this may affect charter operators, many of which provide filleting services. Some additional species may also need to be considered for exemption. Council recommended that additional information be provided to members to enable further consideration.
- Increase in penalty infringement notice (PINS) amounts - RFNSW was supportive of increased fines via PINS for fisheries offences to further deter illegal fishing.

## 10) Fish For Life update

### NOTED:

- DPIRD provided an update on recent 'Fish For Life' program outcomes.
- The 'Keep It Clean' initiative has focused on raising awareness about the impact of fishing-related litter and engaging recreational fishers in cleanup activities across NSW, in partnership with OzFish.
- The content encourages fishers to do the right thing when it comes to litter and the environment. High-quality video and social media content under 6 themes have been promoted through various media channels resulting in over 2.5 million impressions.
- Additionally, 29 'Keep it Clean' events have been held resulting in over 7.5 tonnes of litter being removed from fishing spots and fish habitats.
- The 'Take a Mate Fishing' initiative was launched on R U OK? Day on 12 September and highlights the wellbeing benefits of fishing, while promoting fishing as a pathway for people to relax and have meaningful conversations about mental health.
- Various subprograms are underway to promote fishing as an inclusive and welcoming activity for women and people with disabilities on various Fish for Life initiatives, including Take a Mate fishing, disability workshops and the new accessible fishing platform

webpage.

## **11) Fisheries Compliance**

### NOTED:

- DPIRD provided a short update on a proposed regulation amendment to ensure that commercial and charter fishing licence holders meet a 'fit and proper person' requirement. RFNSW expressed support for the proposed regulation amendment which will boost industry professionalism.
- Members noted current Fisheries Officer industrial action was underway. Council was highly supportive of the ongoing work commitment of Fisheries Officers in ensuring the sustainability of our fisheries resources.

## **12) Game Fish Tagging Interactive Mapping Website Update**

### NOTED:

- DPIRD provided an update on the Game Fish Tagging interactive mapping webpage, which has recently been uploaded to the DPIRD website. DPIRD highlighted the various mapping function and data extraction tools to access relevant tagging data.

## **13) General Business**

### NOTED:

- Member Peter Dugan advised he had observed several safety incidents where boats supporting spear fishers in the water were not displaying dive flags. Mr Dugan recommended additional advisory activities to promote spearfishing safety.
- Member Matt Hansen recommended a future RFNSW meeting be held at one of the DPIRD fish hatcheries given recent upgrades at Gaden and Narrandera hatcheries.

## **14) Online session with the Minister**

### NOTED:

- RFNSW appreciated the opportunity to meet online with the Minister to report on the discussions with CommFish regarding improving water quality.
- The Minister acknowledged the proactive and positive efforts of RFNSW to initiate further action on this important issue, noting good water quality is critical for sustaining fish populations and our marine and freshwater ecosystems.

Meeting closed.