

Draft Minutes

Lobster Industry Working Group (LIWG) Meeting 21.5.2025

Details

Location: Novotel Sydney International Airport

Date/time: 21 May 2025
0830m-1630pm

Chairperson: Simon Clark (DPIRD)

Additional DPIRD Staff

1. Matt Cartwright (DPIRD Compliance)

Presenters

1. Scott Westley 11-1130am
2. Christopher Melham 11-1130am

Members Present

1. Daniel Stewart (Industry R1)
2. Noel Gogerly (Industry R2)
3. Lee Monin (Industry R3)
4. Mark Cranstone (Industry R4)
5. Oliver Wady (Recreational)
6. Geoff Liggins (DPIRD Research Scientist)
7. Damian Young (DPIRD Executive Officer)
8. Ben McCulloch (CommFish)
9. Hayden Montgomery (DPIRD Compliance)

Apologies

1. Mark Horne (Industry R5)

Previous Meeting

1. Welcome, apologies and introductory remarks

The Chair welcomed members and DPIRD representatives and acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land. It was noted the region 4 member was an apology for the meeting.

The Chair called for any other items to be included during general business; two additional items were tabled:

- (1) Discussion regarding the future structure and functioning of the lobster industry working group
- (2) Discussion regarding delivery of catch records and tag distribution.

2. Confirmation of final minutes from previous meeting

The draft minutes from the 12 March 2025 meeting were emailed to members 14 May 2025 and reviewed out of session.

RESOLUTION Members confirmed the minutes from meeting 12 March 2025 as accurate.

The executive officer reviewed the following outstanding actions from the 12 March 2025 meeting with the group.

The executive officer advised members that outstanding actions:

- 4.9, 4.14, 4.18, 4.20, 4.21, 4.23, 4.24 and 4.26 have been completed
- 4.17, 4.25 and 4.28 are pending
- 4.11 and 4.27 have been deferred until next meeting
- 4.5, 4.7, 4.15, 4.25 and 4.28 are included for discussion during today's meeting.

3. Lobster Industry Working Group membership update

Members were advised the region 1, 3 & 4 member positions will expire on 1 July 2025. DPIRD will call for Expressions of Interest to fill these vacant positions and the vacant conservation member position following the LIWG meeting.

ACTION DPIRD to call for Expressions of Interest for vacant LIWG member positions.

4. Update on the Total Allowable Catch setting program for 2025/26

Members were advised the reports to the total Allowable Fishing Committee (TAFC) have been submitted from management, research, and compliance area of DPIRD. DPIRD provided a summary of the information submitted to the TAFC for review and discussion.

Members were advised the export of eastern rock lobsters into China resumed in December and were provided an update based on advice from industry on the quantity and estimated beach price for eastern rock lobsters sold since the resumption of exports.

5. Draft Management Charge 2025/26

Members reviewed and discussed the draft 2024/25 lobster budget and management charge.

RESOLUTION Members supported the draft 2025/26 management charge.

6. Tags for the 2025/26 fishing period

Members were advised tags for the 2025/26 fishing period will be blue with laser engraved black text and a red NSW waratah. A total of 285,000 tags were ordered for the 2024/25 fishing period. This was consistent with the number of tags ordered for the 2023/24 fishing period as the TACC for the 2024/25 fishing period remained at 200t.

Members raised their frustration with the time it is currently taking to receive additional tags after they purchase additional quota. Members stated it would be more efficient for fishers to be able to request tags prior to obtaining additional quota, particularly towards the end of the season. At this time transactions are often being undertaken while at sea, when it is not possible to retrieve tags. It suggested tags could be kept at local fisheries compliance offices, so they were more readily accessible as needed.

It was discussed for DPIRD to review the parameters or limitations that are in place that may limit the distribution of tags, to cater for the increase in real time quota trading at the end of the season.

The Chair asked members if they believed tags are still needed in the fishery given the high compliance rate. Members unanimously agreed they support the tagging program.

RESOLUTION Members confirmed the use of tags needs to continue in the fishery.

ACTION DPIRD to investigate:

1. whether tags can be made available at fisheries compliance offices towards the end of the fishing period.
2. Amend any rules/policies that may be limiting the number of tags that can be distributed in the later half of the season.

7. NSW Wild Harvest Fisher's Inc. update

The CEO of the NSW Wild Harvest Fisher's Inc. (NSW WHFI) Mr Christopher Melham updated the group on the progress of the organisation.

Members were advised impacts on crustacean migration and potential loss of fishing grounds due to the establishment of wind farms and extension of the Southern Sydney Submarine Cable Protection Zone were current priorities for the NSW WHFI body.

8. Seafood Trade Advisory Group (STAG) update

The NSW Lobster fishery representative on the STAG provided members with an update on the status of Lobster exports into the Chinese market.

The DPIRD research member asked the NSW STAG representative if there had been any decision on making the contaminate level testing results available to the working group and DPIRD, noting this information may be extremely important when considering potential increases to the maximum permitted size for ERL's in the future. He also requested an opportunity to attend the next STAG meeting to discuss this topic.

The NSW STAG representative advised every jurisdiction on the group continues to be requested to keep the testing results confidential but committed to tabling the confidential information sharing at the next meeting and reporting back to the working group.

ACTION The NSW Lobster fishery representative on the STAG to advise the working group of the responses to the questions raised, following the next STAG meeting.

9. General Business

a. MSC

Members were advised first surveillance audit was held 18 March 2025 and the next audit is scheduled for March 2026. Members questioned if Marine Estate Management (initiative 6) funding will be used to fund future audits and if the next surveillance audit could be delayed by six months again.

Members discussed the potential for MSC to protect the fishery against the introduction of future marine parks and other social pressures. Members stated they would like to see evidence of a beach price increase due to MSC, however realise this is unlikely while MSC labelling is not being used to promote/identify lobsters consigned for sale.

DPIRD sought advice from members on incorporating the ongoing cost of maintaining the MSC and MSC labelling on the tags in the management charge. Members did not support this option and requested DPIRD investigate funding options for maintaining MSC into the future.

ACTION DPIRD to confirm whether additional funding is available for future audits, and if the next surveillance audit can be delayed.

ACTION DPIRD to investigate funding options for maintaining MSC into the future.

b. Discussion on lowering the minimum shareholding to support new entrants

Members discussed the option of lowering the minimum shareholding with the objective to encourage new young entrants into the fishery, given the aging workforce and high costs to entry.

One of the concerns raised with respect to a lower minimum shareholding was that new entrants may be less likely to follow the rules as they would have less shares (i.e., financial outlay) to lose under share forfeiture provisions. Members advised the minimum shareholding was set at 55 shares to create a financial deterrent to fishing illegally i.e., due to share forfeiture provisions, but acknowledged there has been a significant increase in the share value since the introduction of a 55 minimum shareholding limit. Members suggested a minimum of 30 shares at the current share price would still be a significant deterrent under share forfeiture provisions.

Members raised concerns that new entrants would be more likely to need additional quota and buy up all the available quota and/or push up the quota trading price. Members discussed the concept of restricting the amount of quota a new entrant operating under a lower minimum shareholding could acquire during a fishing period.

It was agreed that DPIRD draft a discussion paper to share with shareholders, highlighting the key objective for lowering the minimum shareholding and the benefits and risks. The document will be shared with the working group for further discussion prior to consulting broader.

ACTION DPIRD to draft a discussion paper on the objective, options, benefits and risks to reduce minimum shareholding to share with the LIWG before consulting with shareholders.

c. Reporting/returning tags when not used in sequential order due to error

Members sought clarification on the endorsement holder's obligations should they discover they have not used tags in sequential order due to error. Members agreed this is often not a deliberate act but does occur, an example raised was when having to tag large numbers of lobsters in tough sea conditions.

Fisheries compliance advised the current rules state tags that are not used in sequence they must be cancelled. Members were advised where they recognise, they have made an error i.e., not used tags in sequential order, they should notify their local fisheries compliance officer as a first step.

Members advised their current practice is that they typically include a note on their catch and effort log sheet advising of the error and use the unused tags on their next fishing trip.

ACTION. Fisheries compliance to advise at the next meeting whether the practice of recording of the sequential tag error on the catch and effort sheet is

acceptable, otherwise fishers will need to be educated with respect to the rules.

d.Future structure and functioning of the lobster industry working group

The Chair encouraged members to transition to their own association independent of the LIWG and DPIRD. The fishery is successful, is underpinned by excellent science and members are constructive. A transition would provide industry with the opportunity to implement a process to select their board and drive the agenda, which is currently set by DPIRD. It was envisaged this would take place over the next 12 months.

Members questioned how they could afford to run an association. DPIRD committed to reviewing the lobster management charge budget to determine if some funds could be reallocated to the association to assist with the transition i.e., to fund an independent/industry chair and/or administration or to provide some administrative support through the transition period.

ACTION. DPIRD to provide members with a pathway on how to establish an association.

e.Other business

Tag distribution services

Members tabled their concerns of some internal DPIRD restructure that could impact the delivery of services being cost recovered, particularly in light of their being some hiccups in the delivery of the service. DPIRD provided advice that the regardless of the restructure, it is still responsible for delivering the required outcomes.

Trans-Tasman Lobster Conference

Members reminded the group the Trans-Tasman Lobster Conference is being held in Melbourne 19-21 August 2025 and encouraged participation.

Permit

DPIRD was questioned why a commercial operator continues to be permitted to operate using hookah to take lobsters under permit whilst recreational fishers are prohibited from using this apparatus.

DPIRD advised this remains a proposal under the Business Efficiency Program and data being reported by the commercial operator will be used to inform the outcome of this proposal. The use of hookah to take catch in commercial fisheries is not a new method and continues to be permitted in the Sea Urchin and Turban Shell and Abalone fisheries. Other commercial fisheries also provide for commercial fishers to use various methods to take fish that recreational fishers are prohibited from using.

DPIRD also advised any person can apply for a permit under S37 of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* to trial taking lobster using hookah. Acknowledging the concern related to the recreational fishers not being permitted to use this apparatus to take Lobster, the executive office committed to providing the recreational member contact details for a manager in the recreational fishing management team to discuss the request further.

ACTION. DPIRD to provide advice on how it sure up the cost recovered delivery of tag services.

ACTION. DPIRD to provide the recreational member with contact details for a recreational fisheries manager.

Meeting closed 4.30pm.

ACTION TABLE

No.	Action	Responsibility	Outcome
21 May 2025			
4.5	Discuss the benefits and costs of lowering the minimum shareholding to support new entrants at the next meeting.	All	Completed
4.7	LIWG to provide DPI with export sales and price information for inclusion in next year's management report.	LIWG	Completed
4.11	DPI to invite a DPI fisheries service's staff member to the next meeting to discuss options to streamline the process for issuing additional tags.	DPIRD	Deferred
4.15	Discussion on the MSC accreditation to be included as agenda item at the next meeting.	All	Completed
4.17	DPIRD to share the octopus Identification guide compiled by Karina Hall with industry.	DPIRD	Pending
4.25	DPIRD to amend the regulation to require the fishing business number followed by the letter "L" to be used to mark the position of a Lobster trap.	DPIRD	Pending
4.27	DPIRD to extend an offer to a member of the Aboriginal Fisheries team to attend the May 2025 working group meeting.	DPIRD	Deferred
4.28	DPIRD to take steps to facilitate the shareholders request as an interim measure.	DPIRD	Pending
4.29	DPIRD to call for Expressions of Interest for vacant LIWG member positions.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.30	DPIRD to investigate: 1. whether tags can be made available at fisheries compliance offices towards the end of the fishing period. 2. Amend any rules/policies that may be limiting the number of tags that can be distributed in the later half of the season.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.31	The NSW Lobster fishery representative on the STAG to advise the working group of the responses to the questions raised, following the next STAG meeting.	Industry	Ongoing

4.32	DPIRD to confirm whether additional funding is available for future audits, and if the next surveillance audit can be delayed.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.33	DPIRD to investigate funding options for maintaining MSC into the future.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.34	DPIRD to draft a discussion paper on the objective, options, benefits and risks to reduce minimum shareholding to share with the LIWG before consulting with shareholders.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.35	Fisheries compliance to advice at the next meeting whether the practice of recording of the sequential tag error on the catch and effort sheet is acceptable, otherwise fishers will need to be educated with respect to the rules.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.36	DPIRD to provide members with a pathway on how to establish an association.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.37	DPIRD to provide advice on how it sure up the cost recovered delivery of tag services.	DPIRD	Ongoing
4.38	DPIRD to provide the recreational member with contact details for a recreational fisheries manager.	DPIRD	Ongoing

Next Meeting:

TBC
