

**NSW Advisory Council on
Recreational Fishing**

Final Minutes

**19th MEETING
9:30am, 27 September, 2001**

<p>Conference Room, Cronulla Fisheries Centre 202 Nicholson Parade, Cronulla</p>

Attendance

Chair

Bruce Schumacher

Members

Scott Mitchell

Peter Goadby

Lionel Jones

Robert Cooper

Mark Smith (deputising for Lisa Terry)

Terry Maloney

Mel Brown

Graham Moore

Ann Lee

Margaret Dodson

NSW Fisheries (observers)

John Diplock, Principal Manager Recreational Fisheries

Dr Steve Kennelly, Chief Scientist

Andrew Read, A/Principal Manager Aquatic Protected Areas

Dr Bob Creese, Principal Scientist Conservation

Dr Andrew Sanger, Regional Manager Western Division

Dale Gollan, Manager Recreational Fisheries

Darryl Sullings, Manager Commercial Fisheries

Nick James, Manager Recreational Fisheries

John Spyraakis, Fisheries Management Officer, Recreational Fisheries

Apologies

Elaine Garvey

Mark Umbers

Steve Dunn, Director of Fisheries

Business

Welcome by Chair

Apologies

Minutes of previous meeting

The minutes of the 18th meeting, held 22 June 2001 and the out of session meeting, held 20 August 2001 were confirmed, following minor amendments.

Business arising from the minutes

Nil.

Agenda Items

1. Director's report (9:45 – 10:30)

2. Marine Protected Areas (10:30 – 11:00)

Morning Tea (11:00 – 11:15)

3. *Caulerpa taxifolia* update (11:15 – 11:45)

4. Cockle harvesting (11:45 – 12:15)

5. Freshwater Review update (12:15 – 12:45)

Lunch (12:45 – 13:30)

6. Recreational Fishing Trust Expenditure (13:30 – 14:15)

(a) Recreational Fishing Areas proposals

Region 1 (Tweed and Richmond Rivers) and Region 7

(b) Proposed closure of estuarine waters

(c) Consideration of RFSTEC and RFFTEC recommendations

7. Baitfish Working Group update (14:15 – 14:30)

8. Richmond and Macleay River fish kills – update (14:30 – 14:45)

9. Macquarie Perch research (14:45 – 15:00)

Afternoon Tea (15:00 – 15:15)

10. Other Business (15:15 – 15:30)

Agenda Item 1

Director

Issue Director's report

Discussion No report.

Recommendation

Issue

Marine protected areas update (marine parks and aquatic reserves)

Background

Habitat loss has been one of the most significant factors affecting our fisheries in recent times. As our population has grown and spread, many aquatic areas have been damaged or changed.

One of the best ways to protect sensitive fish habitats is to create marine protected areas in areas of special environmental importance. NSW Fisheries has created eight marine protected areas and more are planned. Aquatic reserves are another form of marine protected areas, as is the use of the Critical Habitat protection provisions of the Act.

Each aquatic reserve area is unique, and the type of protection varies. In some areas, diving and observing are the only activities permitted. In others, activities such as fishing are also allowed.

Marine protected areas preserve many different types of marine environments, and the animals and plants that live in them. They allow fish to spawn and grow. They provide unspoilt natural sites for people to visit and offer areas for education and research.

The consultation period for the aquatic reserves discussion paper has now ended and submissions are being reviewed. Options were proposed for a number of estuary and rocky shore aquatic reserves. The consultation period for the Solitary Island Marine Park zoning plan ends on 5 October. An economic assessment is being undertaken.

Discussion

ACoRF was provided with a general update on the current situation regarding proposed marine protected areas in NSW.

Solitary Island Marine Park – the current three-month community consultation process ends on 5 October 2001. Angler consultation meetings held in the surrounding areas (e.g. Coffs Harbour and Woolli) have proven to be very constructive. Very careful consideration of other angler concerns will take place before the plan is finalised.

Jervis Bay – The draft zone and operational plans are currently with the advisory committee and will be released for 3 months community consultation in the near future.

Lord Howe Island – Stakeholder meetings will be held soon and the draft zone plan will be out by the end of the year.

Other areas under consideration – Byron Bay has been identified as a suitable area. Community consultation is required to identify the associated issues. Manning – the bioregional assessment will be finalised prior to a further round of community consultation.

Aquatic reserves – community consultation has taken place in relation to 22 sites being considered (7 estuary and 15 rocky shore types).

Members of ACoRF suggested that the Aquatic Reserves process should be postponed until the RFA process is completed. Council was informed that only a few proposed aquatic reserve sites were the same as RFA sites and that these issues are being considered during the aquatic reserve consultation process. Similarly, council members suggested that the EIS for recreational fishing should be finished before the aquatic reserve process proceeds. Council was informed that the consultation process incorporates these issues. NSW Fisheries staff emphasised that, with the exception of Cabbage Tree Bay, the proposed restrictions in the candidate aquatic reserves did not relate to recreational line or spear fishing.

Members stated that the recreational fishing community has expressed concern that they feel as though they are losing out after each review. Each review (eg SIMP) seems to take more access and areas away from anglers.

Zone plan objectives and guidelines aim to protect all habitat types, for example mud flats, mangroves, reefs etc. Any change of substance to marine park zone plans can only take place following a transparent 3-month community consultation period and any change is subject to Parliamentary scrutiny.

ACoRF was advised that marine park legislation incorporates all animals including fish, ie. all species will be protected. A large amount of worldwide science is available on the benefits of aquatic reserves and marine parks. Bob Creese has been heavily involved with marine parks in New Zealand.

Recommendation: To advise the Minister that the Council believes the aquatic reserve process should be put on hold until all Recreational Fishing Areas have been declared.

Issue*Caulerpa taxifolia* update**Background**

NSW Fisheries works to conserve fish and fish habitats, and to promote opportunities for recreational and commercial fishing, and aquaculture. NSW Fisheries is the agency responsible for managing marine pests in NSW. The invasive marine plant, cold tolerant *Caulerpa taxifolia* threatens coastal ecosystems in NSW. By growing quickly, it over runs seagrasses and alters marine habitats. *Caulerpa taxifolia* can easily be spread. Pieces that break off can start whole new plants. Even after a week out of water, if in a warm damp place such as a wetsuit or anchor well, pieces can start a new plant.

How to recognise it:

Caulerpa taxifolia is bright green seaweed with a characteristic 'creeping' stem called the stolon. The stolon can measure over 1m in length and is fixed to the bottom by the 'roots' called rhizoids. The stolon bears 'leaves' or fronds. The fronds can be 5 to 65 cm in length.

What you can do:

Avoid boating near *Caulerpa taxifolia* outbreaks - propellers cut the plant into many fragments that can drift into areas and establish new outbreaks; inspect anchors, ropes and chains before leaving an area; inspect fishing equipment, nets, traps and fishing lines before use; inspect dive gear such as wetsuits bags and other equipment before use; collect fragments of *Caulerpa* you have accidentally picked up, seal the pieces in a plastic bag and dispose of them in a bin where they can not re-enter a waterway; collect information on where you have seen *Caulerpa* - an accurate map, size of the outbreak, depth, habitat type (seagrass, bare sand, rocky reef) are important details; report sightings of *Caulerpa taxifolia* to NSW Fisheries.

Overseas, divers and fishers have reported most *Caulerpa* locations. If you think you have found *Caulerpa taxifolia* in an area other than Port Hacking or Lake Conjola, take the piece or pieces home. Carefully dry a specimen between two sheets of blotting paper and forward it (in a jiffy bag) to the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney for identification. They will refund the postage.

There are at least three different strains of *Caulerpa* in NSW:

- Lake Macquarie, Lake Conjola, Burrill, Narrawallee – plants the same as those found in Moreton Bay
- Port Hacking and Botany Bay – similar to the strain located in North Queensland
- Pittwater - variable strain

It was first sighted in the Mediterranean and reported to have been accidentally released from the Monaco Aquarium. In Australia, the weed is spreading quite rapidly, with confirmation of at least 3 hectares in Port Hacking and 10 hectares in Lake Conjola. Extensive *Caulerpa taxifolia* beds are now also found in Pittwater, Burrill Lake, Botany Bay, Narrawallee Inlet and Lake Macquarie.

Response actions:

1. Trial eradication techniques – investigate constraints - possible large scale techniques
2. Vector controls – meet with stakeholders regarding appropriate fishing and boating controls/closures – education and awareness
3. Detailed survey and assessment – prospectus for eradication

Some possible ways to control the weed include:

- Dredging – involves hand picking, slurp gun (underwater vacuum) and dive teams. Not very efficient and causes fragments to break off, which can then grow as a separate plant.
- Smothering – not very effective because the weed has to be covered for at least six months to kill the stolons in the sediment and it is not easy to remove the entire weed.
- Poisoning
- Hand picking
- Bio-controls

Discussion

ACoRF were provided with updates on issues and the current situation associated with the exotic weed *Caulerpa taxifolia*.

General biology and background information were provided. *Caulerpa taxifolia* is a very widely used plant in aquariums because it reproduces asexually (grows very well in tanks) and fish do not eat it. It tolerates dirty water, temperature fluctuations and grows amongst sea grasses or on bare substratum. The exposed plant cannot tolerate freshwater, but its roots are not effected and can survive indefinitely.

Extensive surveys are currently being conducted in Lake Macquarie, which have indicated increased growth around the power station outlet. However, the weed is also growing in areas of cold water and other cold water lakes.

Publications and articles on the Internet indicate that *Caulerpa taxifolia* is very harmful to sea life and is severely damaging the Mediterranean. However, evidence in Australia indicates that this weed does not kill off seagrasses and does not have a huge effect on sea life. Although there hasn't been any detrimental effects documented in Australia so far, the weed is exotic and must be eradicated as a precautionary approach to prevent any problems that may arise in the future.

Currently in NSW there is a ban on the sale of *Caulerpa taxifolia* in the aquarium trade. However, the weed may be bought from other states, such as Queensland, where it is treated as a naturally occurring weed and is legally sold in aquarium shops.

Concerns were raised on the effect that *Caulerpa taxifolia* has on recreational fishing. Outbreaks of the weed usually cause fishing closures and there is the potential for change in bio-diversity and the food chain in the area. Additionally, areas of infestation include some RFA areas, which may cause *Caulerpa taxifolia* eradication to fall back on to recreational sector.

Restrictions have been introduced to restrict haul and other net activities in accordance with the attached information sheet. Options for control are being evaluated on an ongoing basis. Further restrictions will only be considered if necessary but could include restrictions to boat traffic or anchoring. Detailed consultation will occur if this is proposed.

Recommendation: ACoRF members noted progress on the *Caulerpa* issue.

Issue

Proposal to consider reducing the bag limit on cockles from 50 to 20 during the next saltwater review.

Background

Hunter, Illawarra and Central Coast offices have received numerous inquiries and complaints in relation to cockle gathering in Lake Macquarie, Tuggerah Lake, Lake Illawarra and Brisbane Water. Community members are concerned about the depletion of the cockle resource if current harvest levels are maintained. Traditionally, cockles have been primarily harvested for fishing bait. In line with bag limits on other bivalve molluscs, cockles have a daily bag limit of 50 per person.

In recent years the harvest pressure on cockles in estuaries such as Lake Macquarie, Lake Illawarra, Tuggerah Lake and Brisbane Water has increased markedly. Family groups of 10 to 25 visit these locations from Sydney, specifically to gather cockles for human consumption. The cockles are predominantly found in zoetra beds. It is possible that seagrass beds may be subject to damage whilst cockles are being gathered.

Local closures to protect zoetra beds and prevent the over-harvesting of cockles could be implemented if there is evidence of seagrass damage and local overfishing. Any proposal to restrict recreational access to cockles through area closures would be referred to ACoRF on a case by case basis.

NSW Fisheries sought ACoRF's advice on the proposed reduction of the bag limit for cockles as an option in the next saltwater review that will be undertaken as part of the development of the recreational fishery strategy and environmental assessment.

Discussion

In recent years the harvest pressure on cockles in estuaries such as Lake Macquarie, Lake Illawarra, Tuggerah Lake and Brisbane Water has increased markedly, primarily due to increases in human consumption. It is illegal to harvest in seagrass beds for nippers/worms/cockles in NSW.

Reprinting all advisory material is expensive. Therefore, proposals should be noted and considered during the review of saltwater fishing rules, which occurs ever 5 years.

Recommendation: ACoRF recommends deferring consideration of a reduction in the bag limit for cockles until the next saltwater review.

Issue

Freshwater Review update.

Background

The Freshwater Fishing Review Committee (FFRC) has been established to assist in reviewing the State's recreational trout and freshwater native fish fishing regulations. The process will focus upon big picture issues and in particular will consider sustainability issues. It is envisaged that local issues will be dealt with on a local scale.

The FFRC will act as an expert advisory committee to ACoRF to advise the Minister for Fisheries on regulatory amendment. The Committee is having its first meeting on 12 September 2001 to establish terms of reference, develop a consultation strategy and time line, and consider issues for discussion with stakeholders.

A number of issues have been highlighted for discussion including set lines, time limits on set gear, hook numbers, yabby trap by-catch, size limits & spawning period closures for trout, further restrictions on Murray crayfish capture (seasonal closures and or gear limits), Murray cod (slot sizes and catch reductions), minimum size limits for Australian bass, and the protection of Macquarie perch from incidental capture gear.

Discussion

NSW Fisheries has statutory obligations to ensure the resource is sustainably managed and the quality of recreational fishing is maintained. Freshwater regulations were last reviewed in 1995 (trout) and 1997 (native fish). In order to streamline the process the Minister recently agreed to combine these reviews into a single process. The Freshwater Fishing Review Committee (FFRC) was established to assist NSW Fisheries with the review.

Review aims

Assess the current set of freshwater regulations against the following legislative obligations:

- To conserve threatened species including, for example, platypus and turtles.
- To promote Ecologically Sustainable Development.
- To promote quality recreational angling.

Role of the committee

The Committee has been established as an expert advisory committee, to advise ACoRF and the Minister on proposed freshwater regulation amendments. The Committee will consider bag, possession and size limits, fishing gear restrictions, closed seasons, and area closures.

The process

1. Identification of issues and the development of management options - the committee met recently to discuss pertinent issues.
2. Development and release of an options paper as the primary consultation mechanism. It is envisaged that the paper will be mailed to stakeholders and placed on the NSW Fisheries website.
3. Call for written submissions during the consultation phase.
4. Recommendation(s) to the Minister.

Time frame

August 2001 - 1st meeting of the FFRC.
September 2001 - draft discussion paper.
October 2001 - finalise discussion paper.
November 2001 - release paper to public.
January 2002 - compile comments.

Recommendation: ACoRF notes the advice on the freshwater review process.

Issue

Recreational Fishing Areas proposals - RFSTEC
Region 1 (Tweed and Richmond Rivers) and Region 7

Background

Community consultation reports have been prepared for the Minister for Fisheries as a result of the recreational fishing area proposals and community consultation for regions 1 and 7 (reports have been sent separately).

Issues papers for regions 1 and 7 were released on 28 May 2001, and meetings were held with commercial fishers, recreational fishers and the broader community. Submissions closed on 26 June 2001. Each issues paper outlines a number of proposals for recreational fishing areas in the region concerned.

The preparation of community consultation reports was overseen by independent facilitators. The reports outline all aspects of community consultation including meetings and written submissions. The Minister has sought the views of the Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust Expenditure Committee in relation to the community consultation reports for Regions 1 and 7 and any recommended expenditure from the Trust. RFSTEC recommendations will be presented verbally at the meeting.

Discussion

Region 7 proposal

St Georges Basin, Turross Lake, Conjola Lake, Burrill Lake, Dalmeny Lake, Tabourie Lake, Meroo Lake, Minnamurra Lake, Lake Brunderee, Narrawallee Inlet, Tomago River. It is proposed to remove at least 25 fish businesses at an estimated cost of \$2.5million.

There has been a lot of debate on whether to fully or partially close the above waterways. Region 7 proposal is for full closures.

Region 1 proposal

Tweed River – close to all commercial fishing, including hauling, in canal estates and the mouth of the river to Boyds Bay Bridge and to Barney's Point Bridge.

Richmond River – close to all commercial fishing from the mouth to Wardell Bridge (including Mobb's Bay, Shaws Bay, North Creek and Emigrant Creek).

It is proposed to remove at least 46 fishing businesses at an estimated cost of \$5.4 million, however, a fallback position has also been developed due to the significant cost of this proposal.

Concerns were raised regarding the possible increase in effort in other areas, as was the chance of the remaining commercial fishers catching the same quantity or even more than currently. This was the case in Victoria where commercial fishing was bought out (i.e. removal of latent effort) but no RFA's were created. However, in NSW real effort will be reduced and RFA's will be created.

NSW Fisheries advised ACoRF that both the initial recommendation and fallback position significantly exceed the projected budget for the RFA process, given the majority of Regions are still to be considered.

Recommendation:

Region 7

ACoRF endorses the Recreational Fishing Areas proposal for Region 7, as presented by NSW Fisheries (ie the removal of at least 25 fishing businesses, at an estimated cost of \$2.5 million). This would close the following water bodies to all commercial fishing: St Georges Basin, Tuross Lake, Lake Conjola, Burrill Lake, Dalmeny Lake, Lake Tabourie, Meroo Lake, Minnamurra Lake, Lake Brunderee, Narrawallee Inlet, Tomago River.

Region 1

ACoRF endorses the Recreational Fishing Areas proposal for Region 1, as recommended by RFSTEC (ie the removal of 46 fishing businesses at an estimated cost of \$5.4 million). The proposal for the Tweed River is to close all commercial fishing in canal estates and from the mouth of the river to Boyds Bay Bridge and to Barney's Point Bridge, including Kerosene Inlet, Wommin Lake and Lagoon and Sponsors Lagoon. The proposal for the Richmond River is to close all commercial fishing, from the river mouth to the Wardell Bridge, including Mobb's Bay, Shaws Bay and North Creek. This proposal includes the buyout of all estuary hauling operations in this area, ie the Richmond and Tweed Rivers (as outlined in proposal 1 and 3 of the issues paper).

ACoRF also endorsed an alternative option, as recommended by RFFTEC. This would result in the removal of 28 fishing businesses at an estimated cost of \$3.2 million. This option is the same as the initial recommendation outlined above, except that the buy out of hauling operations in the Tweed and Richmond would not be included.

Issue

Proposed closures of Estuarine waters - RFSTEC

Background

The draft Estuary General Fishery Management Strategy includes an appendix (approximately 120 pages) listing estuaries in NSW open to commercial netting, and the gear types approved to be used within these estuaries. Mr Malcolm Poole (RFSTEC member) noted that Division 4 of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, which lists methods available to commercial fishers, is very open.

Mr Poole advised that he has prepared a modified list of estuaries for consideration that excludes some of the smaller waterways, which are currently subject to very minimal commercial effort. Mr Poole seeks the closure of these 34 smaller estuaries to avoid any future transfer of effort. He also identified in his list of proposed commercial estuaries, those waterways that may be captured in the RFA process.

The Department advised that this issue may be outside the terms of reference of the Expenditure Committee and would be more appropriately dealt with under the Estuary General Fisheries Management Strategy. The committee was advised that following the completion of the Estuary General Environmental Impact Assessment, all estuary waters not listed in the final table would be closed to estuary general commercial fishing under Section 8 of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*. The Department also advised that the RFA process is designed to buy out enough effort to avoid the transfer of commercial fishing effort.

Mr Poole said that he believed that the Estuary General Fisheries Management Strategy has other priorities and is not the appropriate avenue to pursue this issue. The committee agreed that the matter should be referred to ACoRF for consideration, as it is not an expenditure committee issue.

There is also concern that a number of small waters that are tributaries to other major water bodies can be effectively overfished by netting occurring on just one or two occasions each year. It has been proposed that these creeks, lagoons and inlets should be identified and closed to all net fishing.

Discussion

Fishery Management Strategies will outline where commercial fishing activities can occur. There is real concern that commercial fishers will move their activities to more sensitive estuarine habitats, for example, it was mentioned that in region 8 some commercial fishers have claimed they will wipe out small areas if they are removed from larger areas.

It was asked whether the issue could be considered during the RFA process. NSW Fisheries advised that the estuary general FMS is the best process to consider this.

ACoRF supports the proposal from RFSTEC regarding the introduction of commercial netting closures in small estuarine water bodies, to avoid any lateral transfer of effort following the RFA process.

Recommendation: That NSW Fisheries forward the RFSTEC list of small water bodies to the management planning team, for consideration of closures under the Estuary General Fisheries Management Strategy.

Issue

Consideration of RFSTEC and RFFTEC recommendations.

Background

The 2nd RFSTEC meeting was held on 17 September 2001 at Cronulla Fisheries Centre. The 9th RFFTEC meeting as held on 30 August 2001. Recommendations from these meetings will be presented to ACoRF for its consideration.

Discussion

The Chair's summary from meeting 1 and 2 of RFSTEC was provided for discussion. The proposals for expenditure from the saltwater trust are:

1. \$20,000 to enable continuation of the recreational licence data entry process; and
2. An external (Small Grants Program) funding request of \$5,000 for "erection of fish measuring stations" as proposed by Healthy Cities Illawarra Inc. It was mentioned that these stations should include common languages to assist communication and education.

The Council also considered the following expenditure proposals from RFFTEC:

3. \$50,000 (\$25,000 for 2001 and 2002) to supplement the cost of renting 8 billboard sites throughout NSW for information and advisory purposes;
4. \$35,000 to modify the brood stock holding dams at the Dutton Hatchery. It was noted that no further action is proposed until an evaluation of the success of the dam modifications and the brood stock management strategy are finalised.

Recommendation:

1. ACoRF approves the RFSTEC budget recommendation for expenditure of \$20,000 from the Saltwater Trust to continue the entry of licence data into the database.
2. ACoRF approves the RFSTEC budget recommendation for expenditure of \$5,000 from the Saltwater Trust (Small Grants Program) for the erection of fish measuring stations by Healthy Cities Illawarra Inc.
3. ACoRF approves the RFFTEC budget recommendation for expenditure of \$50,000 (\$25,000 for 2001 and 2002) for billboard rental.
4. ACoRF approves the RFFTEC budget recommendation for expenditure of \$35,000 for improvements to the Dutton Hatchery.

Issue

Baitfish Working Group update.

Background

The baitfish working group last met on 10 July 2001 at NSW Fisheries Cronulla.

The Baitfish Working Group has been established to review the available information concerning the status of the baitfish resource, particularly species such as slimy mackerel and yellowtail. In achieving this objective it is intended that the group:

- Identify and describe the various sectors, including commercial fisheries such as the ocean trap and line and ocean hauling fisheries, which access the resource, and the purpose for which the resource is taken.
- Review NSW Fisheries "bait for own use" policy as applied to Commonwealth Tuna endorsement holders.
- Make recommendations about future access rules for the various sectors.
- Make recommendations to improve the reporting of catches in the various sectors.
- Make recommendations on options to mitigate conflict between commercial and recreational sectors over access to the baitfish resource.
- Ensure consultation with relevant MACs and advisory councils at both the State and Federal level.

At its last meeting the group discussed:

Catch Data Recording

In order to manage the baitfish resource successfully it is necessary to have adequate records of the catch taken by the various sectors. It is also a requirement under State legislation that commercial fishers submit a NSW fishing return while fishing under the authority of a state licence.

The environmental impact assessment of the fishery will be conducted in conjunction with the development of the fishery strategy for the NSW Ocean Hauling fishery. It is expected that this process will identify key areas for research needed to ensure the sustainability of the resource. Stakeholders will need to assist in the collection of this information and contribute towards provision of the necessary resources. These objectives can be partially achieved by a co-operative approach to monitoring and more detailed reporting of catch by State and Commonwealth fishers, on a species-by-species basis.

A draft monthly log sheet was presented for use by all fishers gathering own use bait in state waters using either purse seine gear or lift nets. The working group suggested several modifications and suggested that a generic logbook be developed for use across the sectors accessing the resource.

Access to Key Recreational Areas

Submissions were called for from major recreational groups identifying key areas and times for recreational access to the bait fish resource.

To reduce incidences of conflict between resource users it may be desirable to regulate access to some of the areas where these conflicts take place and develop a code of conduct for commercial fishers engaged in bait gathering.

The working group's views were sought on the potential management tools applicable in particular areas, and for suggestions on items to be included in a code of conduct covering the bait gathering sector. NSW Fisheries is to progress the issue of local working agreements with ACoRF, with involvement from the working group. These agreements can be included in a code of conduct for bait gathering and purse seine fishing, which will be developed under the ocean hauling fishery management strategy.

Bait Gathering Access Policy

The NSW Fisheries Licensing policy was first developed in consultation with industry in 1994 to avoid speculation during the development of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, and to ensure no expansion occurred in the industry while new management arrangements were being introduced. This policy was revised in 1996. The policy specifically provides for access to bait for tuna vessels and states that it is NSW's intention to bring Commonwealth licensed tuna operators who wish to fish in State waters within the management arrangements being developed for all NSW fishers. The lift net and the purse seine net are the two methods used by Commonwealth commercial fishers to take bait in NSW waters.

A review of this policy has been triggered by concerns relating to consistency in its application, compatibility with other policies, and increasing demand for baitfish resources by different stakeholder groups. These concerns are particularly relevant given the absence of information relating to the stock structure and size, combined with the legislative requirement to demonstrate a fishing activity is being conducted in an ecologically sustainable manner.

It was proposed to review the grounds on which current permits have been issued, and develop a long-term strategy that is compatible with other management arrangements.

Discussion

Commercial fishers fill out monthly logsheets in order to record baitfish catches, but recreational baitfish catches are unknown. The National angling survey should provide detailed information on recreational harvest of baitfish.

The ocean haul management strategy for commercial fishers incorporates the issue of baitfish harvesting. The development of an enforceable code of conduct may also assist. Meetings have been held with commercial fishers and recreational fishers/gamefishers to develop suitable rules.

Members asked about the status of negotiations with the commercial sector regarding the request to stop baitfish collection in areas where gamefish tournaments will take place, for a predetermined period of time prior to the tournament. Concern was also expressed regarding the use of lift nets by commercial fishers. The baitfish working group are considering this and other issues. Discussions are ongoing and a reasonable period of time is required to negotiate suitable outcomes.

Recommendation: ACoRF notes developments with the baitfish working group.

Issue

Status of the Richmond and Macleay Rivers following this year's fish kills.

Background*Richmond River*

Following major flooding in the upper reaches of the Richmond River system at the beginning of February, a major fish kill occurred in the lower reaches of the river approximately one week later, peaking on or about 9 February. Records of the dead fish involved and measurements of water quality parameters in this system were collected by NSW Fisheries staff between 7-9 February, and water quality monitoring has continued since. Preliminary analyses of these initial data indicated extremely low dissolved oxygen levels (up to one or two orders of magnitude lower than normally expected in such waters), although pH levels (a measure of acidity) were generally close to normal in most of the areas studied. At that time, and up until around the end of February, dissolved oxygen levels generally improved, turbidity reduced and salinity slightly increased, especially towards the mouth of the river. Acidity, however, increased in some mid-river areas following the subsidence of the flooding (especially in the case of waters flowing out of the Tuckean Swamp sub-catchment - recorded at approximately pH 4 on 19 February).

The main fish species of importance to commercial and/or recreational fisheries recorded as having died in the fish kill between Mobbs Bay and Dungarubba from 7-9 February were yellowfin bream, Australian bass, sea mullet, sand whiting and eels, together with smaller numbers of luderick, sole and forktail catfish. Very large numbers of school prawns and numerous mud crabs were also killed. Amongst the non-commercial species killed in significant numbers were estuarine eeltail catfish and bullrouths.

The river and adjacent inshore ocean waters were closed to all fishing following this fish kill for an initial period of three weeks from 9 February. An initial post-fish kill survey was conducted towards the end of February 2001, approximately 2-3 weeks after the kill. Following the late February survey, the fishing closure was extended for a further three months pending the results of subsequent 4 weekly surveys, of which this present (July) survey is the fifth (sixth in total). The objective of these surveys is to provide the necessary biological (ie. the distribution and relative abundance of fish and crustaceans) and water quality information to make fisheries management decisions as to if, when and how the fishing closure in the Richmond River should be lifted.

The fishing closure in the Richmond River was lifted to some types of fishing on 1 July. Limited recreational fishing downstream of the Burns Point ferry and crab trapping is now allowed. A three-month recreational fishing survey was commenced at the beginning of July. The principal objectives of this recreational fishing survey are:

1. To estimate the level of daytime recreational fishing effort in the Richmond River during the three month period from July 2001 to September 2000 inclusive,
2. To estimate daytime recreational harvest rates in the river,
3. To estimate the daytime recreational harvest in the river, and
4. To assess the recovery of the shore and boat-based recreational fisheries in the river.

Macleay River

Following a significant flooding event and minor fish kills upstream in the Macleay River system just before the middle of March, a major fish kill in the lower part of the system occurred around 15 - 19 March. This kill was most severe downstream of Jerseyville towards the river mouth, with large quantities of dead fish being washed up on the shore in this area. Species involved in the kill included yellowfin bream, sand whiting, dusky flathead, mullet, luderick, silver biddies, eels, estuary cod, Australian bass, mud crabs, school prawns, and a number of smaller non-commercial species such as gudgeons, gobies, mosquitofish and toadfish.

On 19 March dissolved oxygen levels measured near the river mouth at the entrance to the North Arm were below 0.4 mg/L (normal healthy estuarine conditions are above 5.0 mg/L). Dissolved oxygen levels at this time in some of the inflowing tributaries and flood drains further upstream were as low as ~ 0.2 mg/L, although pH measurements (a measure of acidity) were all around or above 6 (7 being neutral).

The river and adjacent oceanic waters were closed to all fishing activities following this fish kill for a period of three months pending the results of subsequent 4-weekly scientific surveys, of which this present late-July / early-August survey is the fifth. The previous post-fish kill surveys in this system were done in late-March, early-May, early-June and early-July. The objective of these surveys is to provide the necessary biological (primarily the distribution and relative abundance of fish and crustaceans) and water quality information to make fisheries management decisions as to if, when and how the fishing closure in the Macleay River should be lifted.

The fishing closure in the Macleay River was lifted to some types of fishing on 1 July. Crab trapping and eel trapping are now allowed. Commercial mesh netting and limited recreational fishing are also now allowed downstream of Kinchela. A three-month recreational fishing survey was also begun on 1 July. The principal objectives of this recreational fishing survey are consistent with the survey for the Richmond River.

The rivers have recovered well and have been assessed as capable of sustaining increased fishing pressure. The Minister has announced that the river will reopen on the Friday before the October long weekend (29/9 at 6 pm), rather than waiting until October 1 so the local tourism industry can benefit.

Discussion

The survey/status reports were provided at the meeting for the fish kills in the Richmond and Macleay Rivers. The most significant fish kill occurred in the Richmond River in February 2001. An additional fish kill occurred in the Macleay River in March 2001.

The fish kills were caused by low dissolved oxygen levels in the water. This was a result of the decaying process of plant materials from the surrounding areas, which used up the oxygen in the water.

The rivers were immediately closed to all commercial and recreational fishing. NSW Fisheries does not have the capacity to restock marine species, therefore the rivers had to be given the chance to recover naturally.

Fish surveys were conducted every two weeks, which showed the gradual return of most species. This allowed for the partial relaxation of closures in June 2001, which was followed by the full re-opening of rivers to commercial and recreational fishing on 28 September 2001.

Commercial fishers have been completing logsheet information to report all catches since the partial re-opening of the rivers.

Working groups, comprising representatives from all stakeholder groups, have been formed for both rivers. NSW Fisheries is fairly confident that the rivers should be sustainable over summer. However, the rivers will be monitored very closely and another closure may be enforced if there are any problems.

The big question is how do we stop it from happening again? This issue has led to the formation of a group by the NSW Premier, to consider these types of events i.e. large flood events, and develop methods to stop it from happening in the future. NSW Fisheries will be involved in future floodplain management committee meetings.

Council asked if there were any studies on the recovery of aquatic animals after these types of events. Prior to the latest fish kill, a student was funded to study the recovery process in the same river system. There has been a noticeable increase in prawns and many bass were caught in a recent bass tournament in the Macleay River, showing good signs of recovery in these rivers.

Council members asked if there was any way of mitigating floods by persuading farmers to open up their floodgates. Farmers are reluctant to do this as they risk increased salinity on agricultural lands.

Recovery efforts:

- Formation of a river recovery group, which considers opinions from local stakeholder groups and provides feedback to the Minister.
- Whole of government approach (SES, main roads etc) - Premier's report on the event, including recommendations/impact reductions etc.
- NSW Fisheries to be included in floodplain management initiatives and committee forums.
- Review of floodgate management practices.

Action Item: Richmond and Macleay River reports to be copied and distributed to ACoRF members.

Members stated that while NSW Fisheries does some very good work, for example the fish kill research, this information does not often flow to the general community. It was suggested that NSW Fisheries should expand the distribution of minutes from these meetings.

Action Item: NSW Fisheries should distribute a copy of ACoRF minutes to all major fishing magazines, to assist with advising.

Recommendation: ACoRF note the status reports and support the Minister's request for additional resources to continue the monitoring program for another 6 months.

Issue

Macquarie Perch research.

Background

Office of Conservation research staff recently completed two surveys for the eastern Macquarie perch in sites around Sydney. The first survey was carried out in the Woronora River upstream and downstream of the Woronora Dam and was funded by Sydney Catchment Authority. This study failed to locate an extant population in the Woronora River system, and it appeared that a lack of suitable spawning habitat might have limited the establishment of a viable population in this river. The second survey was funded by BHP and was conducted in the Cordeaux Reservoir and its tributaries. This study found a small population of Macquarie perch within the reservoir and identified suitable spawning habitats in several tributaries.

NSW Fisheries has recently completed a FishNote summarising all available information for the species. We are currently developing a recovery plan for Macquarie perch, which will provide information to promote the recovery of the species with the aim of returning it to a position of viability in nature. Because of the proximity of this threatened species to a large population centre it is likely further surveys will be conducted, especially in areas where future development is planned.

In the future, NSW Fisheries would like to establish if the eastern populations of Macquarie perch constitute a different species to the populations west of the Great Dividing Range. If they are found to be different, we will need to evaluate the benefits of improving fish passage between populations isolated above or below dams and weirs, as well as doing a more comprehensive assessment of the extent and distribution of current populations within the Hawkesbury-Nepean River and Shoalhaven systems. It is hoped that additional ecological work will also be done in the Goodardigbee and neighbouring river systems in the ACT in conjunction with researchers at Canberra University.

Discussion

A lot of activity is about to happen with Macquarie Perch research very soon. The office of conservation is currently preparing a fish note to overview this study.

Issues:

- Previously distributed in cooler reaches of the Murray Darling system.
- Status in NSW is vulnerable.
- Recent work has been done in the Woronora and Cordeaux Rivers.
- Conservation actions:
 - allocate environmental flows
 - prevent sedimentation
 - control introduced species
 - protect genetically distinct populations

Increased sedimentation in the Cordeaux and Woronora Rivers as a result of the BHP coalmine proposal has raised concerns regarding Macquarie Perch and other species in these rivers. Therefore, the BHP coalmine assessment has been an impetus for further research.

Initiatives

1. Draft conditions for BHP's Dendrobium mine:

- population surveys
- genetic status
- fishways

2. Ph.D. study funded by TransGrid to research ecology and genetic populations. Possible funding for further research should become available.

Recommendation: ACoRF recommend that Macquarie Perch be listed as a high research priority.

The Chair informed ACoRF that the Recfish review is due out very soon. Bruce Schumacher and Peter Goadby will be attending the Recfish AGM in November.

Considerable concern was expressed regarding the proposed removal of angel rings in the Bouderee National Park (south side of Jervis Bay) as outlined in "The Fishin Times Are Changin" article that appeared in the spring 2001 edition of Saltwater Fishing magazine.

Motion: A letter be sent from ACoRF to the NPWS to request retention of angel rings at all existing rock platform sites, irrespective of whether the area is deemed to be dangerous (as outlined in the Bouderee National Park documentation).

Council was informed that there were a number of proposals regarding stocking of marine species and associated research on the effects of stocking, however, no work can be done until the fisheries management strategy and environmental impact statement for saltwater fish stocking are completed. At this stage RFSTEC has not prioritised funding for a saltwater stocking management strategy and impact statement ahead of other expenditure opportunities.

Action Item: Graham Moore requested a list of indigenous representatives on NSW Fisheries committees/councils for information.

A letter was received from the Scone Fishing Club, who strongly opposes the restrictions on trout stocking. Council was informed that there was a lot of misinformation amongst the public regarding trout stocking. NSW Fisheries is preparing a Fishery Management Strategy for freshwater fish stocking. It is believed there should be more communication between NSW Fisheries and stakeholders to get the key messages out to the general community.

Action Item: NSW Fisheries to respond to the Scone Fishing Club regarding their opposition to trout stocking.

It was asked if recreational fishing licence details are recorded, and if so could the information be traced when a fisher is caught without their licence on them. Council was informed that licence details are recorded and can be traced. Generally a fisher has 48 hours to demonstrate that they have a licence.

Some Council members stated that the report on the lower Murray River includes a recommendation that recreational fishing may have an adverse effect on the ecology of the river. Local tourism businesses and councils are worried that a ban on recreational fishing in the Murray River will be enforced. This issue is causing real concern to recreational anglers and local businesses in the region

Motion: ACoRF recommends that a letter be sent to the Scientific Committee to request clarification of implications if recreational fishing is restricted in the lower Murray River, due to ecological reasons (ie the area may be deemed to be a threatened habitat/community). It was also agreed that this letter should include the concerns of the local community.

Peter Goadby thanked Council for electing him to attend the 3rd International Billfish Symposium. A summary of the symposium was prepared and distributed to ACoRF members.

Mr Goadby asked if a licence was required when tracing or gaffing a fish and was informed that any activity that involved fishing in any way requires a licence. Mr Goadby informed that recently a large number of salmon and tailor were caught with prawns and small whiting in their stomachs. He asked if this is having an effect and if so, can it be studied. He was informed that this would be very hard to study and it is very hard to determine if the stomach contents are part of just a one off recent meal or a regular meal.

Action Item Copy of 3rd International Billfish Symposium to be copied and distributed amongst members.

Next meeting

The resource sharing team requested that the next ACoRF meeting be held on 22 November 2001, to coincide with the RFA process for regions 2, 3, 4 and 8.

Meeting closed 3pm