

Wednesday, 13 February 2019, 10.00 am – 4.30 pm

Meeting Rooms 1 & 2, Level 14, 25 Grenfell Street, Adelaide

FISHERIES
& AQUACULTURE
PIRSA

Record of the Meeting to Discuss Strengthening Snapper Management Arrangements

Introduction

Representatives from the commercial Marine Scalefish Fishery, Charter Boat Fishery and Recreational Fishery were invited by the Fisheries and Aquaculture Division of Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) to participate in a second joint sector meeting on Wednesday 13 February 2019, to discuss further strengthening Snapper management arrangements.

PIRSA thanked all meeting participants for their time and commitment to working through a process to develop strengthened snapper management arrangements, with the common goal shared by all fishing sectors of having a sustainable snapper fishery into the future.

Updated Scientific Stock Status Report on Snapper and other species

PIRSA provided an overview of the process to date, including that in November 2018, the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI) published an updated scientific report entitled '*Assessment of the South Australian Marine Scalefish Fishery in 2017*', which has quantitatively assessed the current status of South Australia's three Snapper stocks in the following regions:

- Gulf St. Vincent as 'sustainable';
- South East as 'sustainable';
- Spencer Gulf/West Coast stock as 'depleted'.

Meeting attendees noted that a 'depleted' stock is defined as: a stock for which the spawning biomass (or proxy) has been reduced through catch and/or non-fishing effects, such as poor environmental conditions, such that recruitment is impaired. Current management is not adequate to recover the stock, or adequate management measures have been put in place but have not yet resulted in measurable improvements.

Meeting attendees noted that a 'sustainable' stock is defined as: a stock for which biomass (or proxy) is at a level sufficient to ensure that, on average, future levels of recruitment are adequate (recruitment is not impaired) and for which fishing mortality (or proxy) is adequately controlled to avoid the stock becoming recruitment impaired (ie. overfishing is not occurring).

Review Process

PIRSA highlighted that in response to the recent scientific information classifying the Spencer Gulf/West Coast Snapper stock as 'depleted' and the concerns for the increasing



fishing pressure being transferred to the stocks in Gulf St Vincent, a series of workshops were held in November 2018 with the commercial, recreational and charter fishing sectors to commence the process of responding to the new scientific information.

In December 2018, PIRSA convened a joint meeting with all key stakeholder groups to develop a consensus position on additional management arrangements as a first step in strengthening Snapper fishery management. Following these workshops and taking into account all available information, updated Snapper management arrangements were implemented on 15 December 2018. At this time, each of the sectors agreed that further measures would be required to strengthen the protection for Snapper stocks and that this process should commence early in 2019.

PIRSA outlined the process at the meeting to be conducted for the second stage of strengthening Snapper management arrangements in 2019. This will include this meeting held on 13 February 2019, which provided updated scientific information available on Snapper and initiated further discussion and consultation on additional management options to address the sustainability concerns of Snapper.

Following this meeting, each sector will have the opportunity to reflect on the updated scientific information and the additional management options prior to PIRSA convening another joint sector meeting to consider updated scientific information on Snapper biomass estimates, which are being derived from egg surveys conducted in both gulfs during December 2018. As SARDI are currently conducting lab processing of the Snapper egg samples collected during 2018 and the time required to analyse these data, the next joint meeting is planned for April/May 2019.

Informed by the most up-to-date Snapper biomass estimates, the next meeting will also include discussions to develop a proposed package of Snapper management measures for broader public consultation, which will be facilitated by PIRSA through a Snapper management consultation paper. Following this public consultation, PIRSA will convene a final joint sector Snapper meeting to review the information received through public consultation. The final step in the process will be for the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development to consider Snapper management changes before the next Snapper spawning season.

Outline of Current Scientific Information

SARDI scientists presented an updated overview of the biology (i.e. stock structure, spawning, recruitment, movement) of Snapper, stock status, catch and effort information of the recreational and commercial sector. Some data from the by-catch study undertaken by SARDI in 2007/08 that related to commercial longline fishing were also presented.

Meeting participants discussed the recruitment variability of Snapper stocks and noted that, similar to most marine finfish species, there is no clear scientific relationship between Snapper stock size (biomass) and future recruitment of juvenile Snapper to the stock. This is because the main driver of successful juvenile recruitment to the stock is having favourable environmental conditions to enable the survival of Snapper larvae, and subsequent recruitment.

Meeting participants noted that such environmental variables were clearly outside of the control of fishery managers. The key to ensuring successful replenishment of snapper stock is to manage fishing pressure to a level that maintains a sufficient breeding population size that enables the stock to replenish itself when all of the environmental variables are suitable to support successful spawning and subsequent survival of larvae. The available scientific information indicates that whilst Snapper spawn successfully every year between November to January, the subsequent survival of their larvae and juvenile Snapper may be episodic, which is specifically the case in Spencer Gulf which has had negligible recruitment since 1999. This poor recruitment to Northern Spencer Gulf meant that emigration to and the replenishment of populations of Southern Spencer Gulf and the West Coast have been relatively low throughout the 2000s.

Meeting participants shared a common concern that the biomass has been reduced in Spencer Gulf to a point that now requires strong stock management actions to be implemented to protect the remaining biomass and to support stock recovery.

Meeting participants were concerned that there is a four to five-year gap in the available data on recruitment into the Snapper fishery. Meeting participants agreed that it was a priority for pre-recruitment surveys/research to be undertaken across both gulfs to support informed and evidence based management of Snapper stocks. PIRSA agreed to work with SARDI to develop a research project proposal that would explore this important issue further.

It was also suggested that enhancing Snapper habitat or the stocking of Snapper could also be explored. Furthermore, it was noted that the by-catch research may need to be updated again, given that the previous study was undertaken over a decade ago, and that since then there has been considerable improvement to gear technology, particularly for longlines. It was also noted there had been considerable advancement in technology generally available to all fishing sectors, which has improved catching efficiency.

Recreational sector meeting participants raised concerns that they have been unable to obtain detailed spatial commercial catch and effort data to inform their deliberations on Snapper management arrangements. This was discussed and it was agreed by all meeting participants, that all sectors should have access to the same non-confidential data analysis and information to inform evidence based discussions on future snapper management. It was agreed that SARDI would collate information on Snapper catch by region, by month, by gear type and provide it in a way that does not breach the confidentiality provisions under Section 124 of the *Fisheries Management Act 2007*.

Management Options

Each of the sectors had an opportunity to provide their initial perspectives on additional Snapper management arrangements:

- The commercial sector representatives focussed their discussion on the annual Snapper State-wide seasonal closure and preferred the option of extending it to the end of January to protect Snapper during the full spawning season. The commercial sector representatives indicated that a total closure is the fairest option because it is proportional in that it affects everyone equally. Industry also sought specific

targets from PIRSA to enable all sectors to know what proportional reductions are required.

- The Charter sector representatives expressed that there should be an evaluation of the Snapper management arrangements, there needs to be greater confidence in the management arrangements to promote spawning and recruitment; and there needs to be a move towards a modernised Snapper harvest strategy. The annual Snapper seasonal closure was suggested to significantly impact the Charter boat sector and they would rather continue with spawning spatial closures than increase the duration of the annual seasonal closure.
- The recreational representatives highlighted that the Snapper fishery is an important and iconic fishery to recreational fishers. They are concerned about Snapper stocks in the gulfs and their recovery. They are also concerned about the current Snapper allocations and that the data to support informing Snapper management arrangements are not robust. The recreational representatives indicated that if reductions were required that the sector with the largest allocation should take the largest cut.

All sector representatives agreed that the recreational fishing data lacks precision and that there is a need to improve how recreational information is collected.

PIRSA presented eight Snapper management options that could be considered for implementation either as a package or individually. These options were presented to generate initial open and broad discussion among the sectors and meeting participants on all of the available options, noting that each of the options is associated with pros and cons. It was reaffirmed by PIRSA that the options being presented were for initial discussion only by meeting participants and no directions or decisions were being made at this meeting on the most suitable options or overall approach.

The options discussed included:

1. Extending the Statewide seasonal closure to include October to protect aggregating Snapper in the pre-spawning phase.
2. Increasing the current temporary spawning spatial closures to protect the key spawning grounds in broad large northern regions of each gulf from 15 December to end of February each year (including the spatial closures at Tapley Shoal and an area off Sellicks beach from 15 December to end of February each year).
3. Implementing a total allowable commercial catch (TACC) in the commercial fishery
4. Reducing daily catch limits for the commercial fishing sector.
5. Reducing the daily hook limits for commercial operators to align with reduced daily catch limits in the gulfs.
6. Reducing recreational bag and boat limits to align with the reduced daily charter fishery limits.
7. Implementation of a recreational possession limit, that may include combinations of fish/fillets/cutlets.

8. Improving data collection for the recreational sector.

There was discussion among meeting participants about the pros and cons of each option presented by PIRSA. It was noted that some options are directed at a single sector while other options cover all sectors. PIRSA highlighted that as Snapper is a shared access fishery, the solution to declining stocks will require a shared approach.

The recreational sector raised a concern about the issue of catch and release mortality in all sectors, including considering all mortality in the estimates of catch from each sector.

SARDI provided a presentation on how fishery-dependent and -independent information (including the daily egg production method, modelled estimates and catch history) can be used to inform more refined future management arrangements.

SARDI also provided information about the current collection of data for the recreational sector and possible cost-effective methods to improve the collection of such data to improve recreational estimates of catch and effort. There was mention of exploring the costs and benefits of implementing a Snapper enhancement program through stocking and habitat restoration.

Meeting participants were informed that detailed information was available on the history of Snapper management on the PIRSA website:

- http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/fishing/closures_and_aquatic_reserves/fishing_closures/snapper_closures
- http://www.pir.sa.gov.au/fishing/closures_and_aquatic_reserves/fishing_closures/snapper_closures/snapper_stock_assessments_and_management

Next Steps

PIRSA thanked all meeting participants for their attendance and contributions and offered the opportunity for PIRSA to meet with sector representatives individually between now and the next meeting, to help facilitate further discussion and thinking on management options. The date and timing for the next meeting will be communicated to meeting participants once SARDI has completed their work on snapper egg and biomass analysis. This is expected to be in April/May.