

## Chair's Summary – Meeting #7

The Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee held its seventh meeting on Wednesday 16 June 2021 online via Microsoft Teams. Key matters for discussion at this meeting included the structure of the commercial fishing sector, management objectives, strategies and actions for the fishery, and concerns regarding Commonwealth trawlers (including Danish seiners) targeting King George whiting offshore. Key discussions and outcomes from that meeting were as follows:

### 1. Structure of the commercial fishing sector

- One recreational fishing representative initiated discussion on structure of the commercial sector - suggesting that if there is a small number commercial licence holders that don't want to stay in the fishery then perhaps a get-out option could be provided through a voluntary buyback for the benefit of all. They also suggested an association could possibly be established and funded to hold a licence and sell it.
- Commercial representatives noted that industry is trying to build the brand of Corner Inlet and build the value of the licence and that this is more powerful with higher numbers. It was noted that if the rules and expectations for fishing in the Inlet are clear and set out in the management plan, it would ensure any future entrants are clearer about what the expectations are.
- The VFA confirmed it is not planning a proposal for industry restructure and that it would stay out of this discussion between the two sectors (but noted they may choose to discuss further, including outside of the Committee).
- The Committee agreed that development of the draft management plan will continue to be based on a commercial fishery of 18 licences (i.e no change to the current number) that are all transferable and can continue to have one operator.

### 2. Management objectives, strategies and actions

- The VFA prepared a framework for the fishery management plan for the Committee's consideration. The five key management objectives proposed are to:
  - Ensure sustainability of the Corner Inlet fishery resource
  - Maintain the ecological integrity of the fishery ecosystem
  - Ensure fishing practices are ethical, responsible and respectful
  - Ensure optimal economic utilisation of the Corner Inlet resource
  - Cost effective and participatory managementThe proposed management actions that sit under these are mostly shaped by Committee discussions to date and include responses to key matters identified through the fishery risk assessment process.
- The VFA noted feedback from members that:
  - the performance measures need refinement
  - the target date for signing a potential memorandum of understanding between the rec and commercial sectors should be brought forward
  - it has more work to do where this relates to the indigenous sector (the VFA will meet with GLaWAC to progress this out of session).
- SIV also raised that there is not a strong focus on the recreational sector and that a form of resource sharing should be considered so there is a model for the future.
- The VFA noted that no major sustainability or social concerns are evident or have been raised that relate specifically to the rec sector and considers that most anglers are relatively satisfied with the current arrangements. The collection of cockles was one exception which has been focused on by the Committee already. The VFA has sought funding for a total annual rec catch survey in Corner Inlet - but this may not commence until at least October 2021 and will go into next year, and then it wouldn't be until early 2023 that it have that information in the form of a report. It also noted this survey would only provide one data point.
- The VFA will consider feedback from members and revise the table ahead of next meeting.

### 3. Presentation on science of King George whiting

- Dr Greg Jenkins provided a presentation to the Committee on the current science of King George whiting including some possible conclusions about the aggregations outside the Inlet. Professor Jenkins is a leading expert in King George whiting and has been doing research on the species for about 30 years now.
- He concluded that:
  - The timing of recent fishing in the Commonwealth fishery coincides with the peak spawning period for whiting settling in Corner Inlet
  - Some evidence suggests that spawning locations other than Western Victoria / SE SA may contribute to Corner Inlet

- Reverse modelling of larval dispersal indicates that spawning could occur offshore from Wilsons Promontory
- Trends in catch and CPUE in CI are not as strongly linked to westerly winds as in PPB and WP
- An alternative theory may be that the timing may coincide with maturing fish moving offshore from Corner Inlet – however would not expect the fish to be aggregated if this were the case.
- Further potential research was outlined:
  - Sampling for the reproductive status of Whiting from the Commonwealth fishing area
  - Tagging studies in Corner Inlet to investigate possible links with local offshore areas, Western Victoria / SE SA and the Flinders Island Whiting populations
- The VFA noted these could be included as research priorities in the management plan. One member also noted they could get fish or photos of ovaries sent over from Flinders Island.
- The Corner Inlet Fisheries Habitat Association advised it supports further research on whiting and either a 50kg catch limit or commercial trawling no-take zone outside the entrances of the Inlet.
- The VFA noted it has written to AFMA regarding the commercial take of KGW by commonwealth operators outside the entrance to the Inlet. It has requested AFMA take prompt action and restrict take of KGW by the trawl sector immediately. It noted that similar controls apply to Commonwealth fishers and King George whiting in South Australia and Tasmania.

#### **4. Other matters**

##### **June 2021 Fisheries Notice**

- Commercial fishing stakeholders noted that they believe many operators had reduced their mesh effort and were unsure why total mesh effort had increased in the last fishing season. The VFA has been requested to review logbooks to determine possible instances of misreporting by fishers.
- One member noted that while some in the sector want to see no more than 2 shots per day per person or per boat due to a public perception issue (i.e from the possible observation of one boat doing four shots), if this was actually enforced by the VFA it would actually lead to more overall effort (including mesh nets in the water) in the fishery and more boats on the water.
- The VFA had been actively considering feedback from submissions on the proposed Fisheries (Further Corner Inlet Fisheries) Notice 2021 and noted that a decision on the final Notice would be communicated to stakeholders later that week. Any final Notice was expected to commence from 21 June 2021.
- The VFA noted the good work by Steering Committee members in supporting the consultation process and attempting to bring licence holder views together wherever possible. It also noted that regardless of the outcome of the consultation process, there will be number of opportunities to adjust the management arrangements in near future, whether it be through revision of Fisheries Notices or regulatory amendment processes.

The next meeting of the Committee is likely be organized in early August 2021 and may be suitable for a face-to-face meeting followed by an open forum (pending any Covid restrictions) for interested licence holders to attend.

Dallas D'Silva  
 Chair  
 June 2021