

Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee

Chair's Summary – Meeting #9

The Corner Inlet Fishery Management Plan Steering Committee held its 9th meeting on Friday 17 September 2021 online via Microsoft Teams. Key matters for discussion at this meeting included revisions to the draft Plan, a proposed management review process, commercial catch and effort reporting, and the timeline for finalising the management plan. Key discussions and outcomes from that meeting were as follows:

1. Feedback on the draft management plan

- Following feedback from Steering Committee members on a first draft of the management plan, the VFA provided a second version to members and outlined the various changes. Key additions included:
 - acknowledging the data gap in understanding total catch by the recreational sector fishing Corner Inlet and how these would be addressed through actions in the management plan
 - detailing the steps that would occur if the fishery were to require a review of management arrangements.
- The Chair asked each member of the Committee whether they had any remaining issues or key matters they would like to raise in relation to the Plan.
 - SIV noted that there needed to be further clarification around fishing gear. Commercial fishers need clarity around what gear they can use and how, and what the definitions are. It is also keen to ensure the data is accurate and reflective of what is occurring on the water.
 - VRFish noted that while there may still be some concern around latent effort and localized depletion going forward, it acknowledged that the Plan was overall shaping up to be a good plan and was comfortable with the process that has taken place to date. It noted there is some potential for lack of management action under the proposed review process but acknowledged this would be picked up and in the stock assessments and discussed then. It did not agree with some commentary from others that there will be a flood of recreational fishers coming into Corner Inlet in coming years.
 - One commercial fisher queried whether the catch and effort data reported by fishers under the M1 gear code was reliable (further details in section 2 below).
 - One commercial fisher noted they had concerns relating to the proposed harvest strategies, particularly the views of other licence holders, but agreed that a clear management change process would be beneficial.
- The VFA agreed to include some descriptions of the gear and fishing methods and noted it is developing a commercial fishing handbook which is designed specifically for licence holders to further support their understanding of management arrangements. It also noted it would also add a risk around catch and effort reporting and details on compliance arrangements.

2. Interpreting data from the mesh net gear code M1

- One fisher raised whether the current rock flathead data could be confused given use of the M1 gear code (which is a smaller mesh net mesh size range) can at times be used for targeting King George whiting instead. It was suggested that if this is an issue, addition of another column on the catch and effort logbooks could be used to indicate the target species.
- The VFA noted it has considered this matter and believes the current analysis methods including standardization of the data remains appropriate and it also enables the analysis to be applied to previous years reporting to monitor changes in abundance of a stock over time. It will however consider what can be adjusted in the next logbook update as it would be an improvement to collect this level of information.
- The electronic catch and effort reporting system could better enable capturing this type of information moving forward. The VFA had proposed to transition the commercial fishery to electronic reporting by 2023 but would consider bringing this in earlier if possible.
- One commercial fisher noted there may be some concern for some of the older generation fishers in the fishery around transitioning to electronic reporting technology, however most fishers are understood to be supportive of the concept.
- Another logbook amendment suggested was to revise the gear codes (whereby the M1 gear code could be split into two new codes).

3. Rock flathead research

- It was noted there could be an update on the genetics around the end of the year and an update on the movement early next year. The report is expected to be finalized around the end of 2023.

4. Proposed management change process

- The VFA presented on a review process that could be detailed in the management plan so all stakeholders are aware of what process would occur when a trigger point is exceeded in the management plan. In summary, the proposed process would involve the following:
 1. The VFA will conduct a deep analysis of the issue
 2. If the VFA considers that a management response may be required, the VFA will convene the Corner Inlet Fisheries Management Advisory Committee (CIFMAC), once established, to consult on the issue and adequacy of management arrangements.
 3. Following consideration of discussions at CIFMAC and any subsequent advice, if the VFA considers a management response is necessary, it will then develop a proposed solution and consult with key stakeholders including licence holders.
 4. The VFA will consider all stakeholder responses before seeking the Minister for Fishing and Boating's endorsement/approval of the proposed solution (where applicable).
 5. Should the approved solution require a regulatory response (e.g. preparation of a Fisheries Notice or a regulatory or legislative amendment), all relevant formal consultation processes associated with the relevant legal instrument will be followed.
 6. Advise relevant stakeholders of the outcome.

There was general support amongst Committee members for the review process. One fisher suggested the process should be generic so it applies to all management changes and also asked that fishers be shown data where possible to demonstrate why the change is supported.

5. Timeline

The VFA provided an updated timeline to the Committee noting it extended this out a few weeks following a request from SIV. This will also provide time for the VFA to follow up on the queries around commercial catch and effort data. It reiterated that if members have any issues with the draft Plan then please provide these on time according to the timeline. It noted that it was on track to potentially be released in November and could be declared as soon as March 2021.

Dallas D'Silva
Chair
September 2021