



OWA Fisher Day Hexham Bowling Club Newcastle

21st November 2008

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OceanWatch Australia (OWA), in partnership with the Hunter Central Rivers and Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authorities (CMA's) and OWA's National Landcare Program funded "Tide to Table" program, facilitated an initial four hour workshop to develop a unified approach from the local fishers to some of the key issues facing their industry.

CC Consulting was asked to facilitate the workshop with a number of key stakeholders invited. Stakeholders included the DPI Fisheries manager, two DPI Compliance Officers, a representative from the CMA, local fishers from a number of different fishery sectors and staff from OWA.

With the limited duration of the workshop, the agenda developed targeted the development of synergy between the group. Developing stronger relationships with a partnership focus was considered a critical component of the longer term strategy to develop better environmental outcomes in both regions. The agenda for the session is documented below:

Agenda for the 21st November 2008

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| 9:30 | Arrive: welcome, tea/coffee and time for 'yarning'. This provided an opportunity for OWA staff to provide name tags and re-establish relationships with the participants. |
| 9:45 | Introduction: OWA about the program, need and funding etc and Facilitator about the day: rules of the session. |
| 10:00 | Concerns and issues from the participants about anything: small group work with voting completed once all sheets were on the wall for the top priorities as consensus. |
| 11:00 | Break |
| 11:15 | Fears and Needs: this session asked the participants to identify the things they were fearful of and also what was needed within the fishery to overcome the issues identified earlier. |
| 12:00 | Actions for issues: participants were asked to identify specific actions that would help to overcome the identified issues. |
| 1:00 | Close formal part of the day: summary of the days events, thanks to the participants for the constructive input into the day and good luck for the future. |
| 1:15 | Lunch and celebration: session closed formally by OWA staff |

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Session Outcomes

The following details the outcomes from the workshop held with the Hunter River fishers on the 21st November 2008.

Session 1: Concerns and Issues

The participants were asked to record all the issues and concerns they currently have for the fishery and their businesses. Below lists the issues identified by the workshop participants. Once all the sheets were placed on the walls, participants were provided with four (4) red dots and asked to vote on the most significant issues facing them in their opinion. By a process of consensus the top priority issues were identified. The top five issues were:

1. Effort

- Commercial effort: closures implemented without a reduction in the number of fishers actively fishing (effort redistribution and increased competition in remaining areas)

2. Share trading

- Changes to share trading and latent effort a concern to industry

3. Gear Design

- Concerns about the implementation of square mesh codends in variable fisheries
- Manning River against the implementation of the square mesh codend because it clogs with mud, damages prawns and the square is inflexible

4. Floodgates

- Active management of them to ensure productive fisheries areas

These remaining issues all recorded a similar number of votes from the participants. These issues are causing considerable concern to the fishers, but not to the same degree as for the first four. These issues may form part of a long term strategy of action for the fishers and the partner organisations.

- Environmental degradation of critical fisheries habitat: wetlands, mangroves, water quality
 - Acid sulphate soil management
 - Water quality – monitoring and research of fish kills
 - Development - Council continues to develop wetlands, areas that are critical to the ecosystem, reclamation of wetland areas
 - Degradation of mangrove areas
 - Dredging activities
 - Mine water discharges, research into the impact of the discharge on the environment
 - Rocks
 - Break wall at Tuggerah Lakes to help keep lakes open
 - River bank development and impact on fishing grounds
 - Increase in bird numbers – particularly shags. Need to be culled, Department used to smash eggs in the past, the pine trees are harbouring shags at the entrance
 - Water use and the Tillegra Dam
- Wharves and moorings
 - New ones were put in without any consultation from the Department
 - Development works on riverbanks and the impact on fishing grounds

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- Better facilities at boat ramps
 - Safe walk ways
 - No drop off to water (floating v fixed wharves)
 - Bollards to secure boats to the shore while parking, etc
- Research into the benefit (or not) of recreational fishing havens
- Cooperation from DPI staff
 - Closures
 - Listening to the ideas of the fishers
 - Negotiating outcomes that will achieve win-win outcomes
 - Research into the benefit of closures
- Improved communications with the Minister and Opposition Minister, to hear industries complaints and issues
- DPI Management arrangements
 - Recreational fish havens and other closures
 - Season start dates – need to be negotiated and related to the fish stocks
 - Prawn counts with modified gears – 130 should remain even with the implementation of the square mesh codends
 - Communication from the Department
 - Consultation from the Department
 - Cost of licences
 - Environmental levy
 - Number and frequency of MAC meetings
 - Carp – currently illegal to take this noxious pest species but they are highly destructive to the native habitats and species
 - Discrimination of fishers by the marine park authorities
 - Increase in population and a greater number of interactions between recreational and commercial fishers
 - More education from the Department for the recreational sector to minimise conflict
 - Compliance
 - Of BRDs and other management measures
- Marketing
 - Imported versus local product
 - Media releases about water quality reducing the price of fish
 - Co-ops need to implement a minimum standard for quality and size of prawns accepted to ensure that the price remains high (the highest possible)
- Value of fishing businesses
- Monitoring and research into critical fish and prawn breeding areas, nursery areas etc. To help protect these areas from destruction, utilise aerial photography to monitor and identify areas

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Session two: Fears and Needs

Workshop participants were asked to identify their fears and needs for the future of the industry and for their business. At the conclusion of the session, the group came to the wall and pinned up their 'fears and needs' write up and to discuss some of the issues more closely. It was critical to note that most people shared the same fears and needs. This exercise was used to bring the group closer together by identifying similar issues between an otherwise diverse group of people.

Dot points two list, fears and needs.

Fears

- National Marine parks shutting fishers out of too much area therefore forcing the same number of fishers to work in smaller and smaller areas
- Estuaries gaining more fishers from other estuaries that have closed down. More estuaries being closed thus increasing the effort
- Lack of unified or whole of government approached to fisheries closures and marine parks
- No one will listen
- Negative reactions from DPI staff about suggestions for changes from long term fishers
- DPI misinterpretation of issues raised by fishers
- Losing truck boat when entering closed waters
- Wallis Lakes fishers won't be able to survive as they are being starved out of the industry
- Zoning and licensing issues
- Share threshold will make fishers unviable
- After lifetime of working in the fishing industry no shares or payout from the co-ops
- Pollution: rubbish dumps; sewage; feel like they can't speak about these issues for fear of being closed down
- Upping the shares from 125 to 250
- Scientific research and recommendations being used adequately together with the recommendations from the fishers
- Ensuring sustainability and viability of the industry into the long term
- Having the resources to be able to deliver on what industry needs and wants
- Power of the coal industry groups that may be controlling the environmental outcomes in the Lower Hunter – big industries having too much power
- Imported produce undercutting the local prawns and fish species
- Government not supportive of fishing industry

Needs

- Reduce effort by fishers through a voluntary buy out of commercial licence holders
- Research into what has been gained from recreational only zoning and fishing havens
- Closures need to be unified so that there is effective management of the marine and estuarine environments for the future
- Respect between all stakeholders
- Voluntary buy out of commercial licences with money raised from the recreational levy
- Understanding from the public: better representation, we are not enemy
- Industry money to stop effort
- Representative – ethical representation that will help us reduce shares and tackle issues
- Communication with DPI should be a more constructive level
- NSW Food authority: justification for the regulations
- There needs to be more patrols by the compliance officers
- More support by DPI Fisheries to ensure fishing areas are protected
- More real on the ground research before any zoning or re-zoning of fishing areas

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- Honest information on the future shares is required and there should be no transfer of shares from region to region
- Make sure that standard for imported products meets the same strict requirements as is needed for Australian product
- Politics must be removed from fisheries management to ensure the best sustainability outcomes are achieved
- Develop a relationship with these other stakeholders to help ensure that environmental practices are balancing the needs of all industries uniformly rather than one over another
- Stronger marketing and promotion strategy for the local product with the Co-ops
- Raise the profile of the industry within the Government and policy makers

Session Three: Actions

Focusing on the top issues raised in the first session (issues 1-4), the participants were asked to work up some potential actions to address these issues. It was imperative that the group work up their own actions for their own issues to ensure they had ownership of the programs and outcomes achieved. The participants were asked to generate as many actions as they could think of, irrespective of how crazy they considered them to be. These are the actions against the top five issues raised:

General Actions Addressing All Four Issues

- Fishers standing together with a single united voice to represent the industry on fisheries management issues, including closures
- OceanWatch to get a list of commercial licence holders to help ensure effective communication

Fishing Effort and Share Trading

- Owner operator policy: where the owner is the only person that can operate the endorsements, this would help reduce the effort in the fishery.
- Along with the owner operator policy, there should be a policy of no splitting of the endorsements or leasing to remove the latent effort.
- All zoning should be removed: endorsements could be valued on effort, usage and value
- Voluntary buy out of licences using funds collected through the recreational levy. Lobby the Minister and Department to get action on this.
- Issues surrounding recreational effort could be improved with improved public relations: good signage at key locations, explanation of commercial fisheries and the operations, etc
- Season opening and closing dates should be the same for commercial and recreational licence holders
- Recreational effort needs to be further restricted with tighter bag and temporal limits.
- Partly re-open recreational fishing havens to commercial licence holders

Floodgates

- Remove the floodgates and effective management of the floodgates to ensure win-win is achieved for all stakeholders and the environment
- Fund a research program (PhD or equivalent) to understand the effects of the floodgates on the ecology of the environment, on fisheries productivity and the farming industry (some farmers have said that the floodgates are bad)

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- Act on the recommendations of the research to ensure effective management of the ecosystem

Gear Design

- Better methods of communication and negotiations with decision makers, including the MAC process, through the DPI and other government departments
- Greater education for the decision and policy makers – get these people onboard the boats to ensure good policies and recommendations
- Implement strategies where fishers are listened to by the management agencies
- Remove the square mesh codend as the only option for by-catch reduction and replace with a larger mesh option

Suggested Follow-up Actions

As previously outlined, this initial session was only four hours duration, ideally a workshop to try and unify a group and develop a strategy for action would take closer to two days. However, the session did yield some excellent outcomes and opportunities for actions, partnerships and capacity development and realisation within the group.

The participating fishers recognised the need for a single representative voice. This major milestone has not been seen in New South Wales for some time. In order to capitalise on this, Industry identified the need of OWA to help facilitate more lasting actions through targeted follow up steps, in 2009. However, it is imperative that the development of the “single industry voice” is industry owned and therefore that OWA assists or facilitates rather than directing. It must also be recognised that the process of developing a new organisation may take many months, possibly years.

A key recommendation from participants suggests OWA’s industry forum could be used as a template to further engage with industry both on a geographic and fishery specific basis. This was seen as a positive step and outcome for industry in improving communication with the department and within industry.