

# PFA Response to NSW Sustainable Seafood Strategy 2022-2025 Consultation Draft

## Overall Statement

The Professional Fishers Association of NSW (PFA) commends the NSW Government in its commitment to drive our productivity, remove out-of-date regulations, promote innovation and strengthen the industry as a whole. The PFA welcomes the commitments and looks forward to further detail to implement these strategies.

There are some clarifications and issues identified which we have outlined in this submission, but that does not change our overall support for the document. It is noted however the NSW Seafood Industry Council developed, through DPI funding, the NSW Seafood & Aquatic Resources Industry Strategic Intent and Roadmap. The process to develop the document was highly inclusive and comprehensive with DPI and major stakeholders discussing at length. The NSW Sustainable Seafood Strategy Draft is an important commitment from DPI that supports and assists our industry to reach our vision – however we do not believe that it is a complete Seafood Strategy...rather DPI's commitment to our shared vision for the NSW Seafood Industry. **We suggest that the title of the draft document is amended** to reflect this.

## Background:

The Professional Fishermen's Association (PFA) represents over 220 licensed commercial fishers from across New South Wales.

## Industry Advice

It has been noted by our membership that a number of the actions outlined in the draft plan have been committed to in the past with little to no activity to produce the outcomes. It is understood that in the past the lack of progress of these previous commitments was blamed on:

- limited dedicated resources and support,
- lack of political support or political interference,
- lack of industry understanding and cohesion/unity/leadership.

Previous justification for delayed delivery of programs or inability to achieve such programs has been that the Department has many tasks and not enough resources. Our membership has expressed concern that without additional resources provided to the Department, then it is unlikely that the draft strategic plan will achieve its actions within the specified broad timeframes.

The PFA strongly supports the commitments outlined in the draft but wish to emphasize that they can only be achieved if there is **dedicated resources**, political and department support, and strong industry ownership and involvement in both their development and implementation. We highlight the need for comprehensive implementation strategies to be developed to provide the necessary detail, particularly the appropriate resourcing and support.

## Strategic Priorities

### 1. Sustainable, confident and profitable industry

The PFA supports the actions identified and highlight the need to work closely with the PFA and its members on their development and implementation.

The centerpiece of the reform was the commitment to remove oppressive and unnecessary regulations and policy. For many fisheries, the reform has, to date, only added additional regulations to their existing control mechanisms. To be able to achieve an effective reform that creates efficiencies and a viable industry, it is essential that the process of reforming the legislation continues.

However, the PFA believes that an effective reform of the regulations and policies requires two (2) components that will identify areas of regulatory reform. The current consultation process with fishers may risk a more localized focus to identify issues with the regulations. Specifically, changes to regulations that will have a direct impact to the fishing activities. Although this provides immediate actions to reform it also risks losing a greater perspective on the reforms required.

The focus on individual perceived constraints loses the potential to provide overarching diagnosis of issues. Rather, adopting an approach that also includes a review of our future risks and challenges to ensure that the Act is flexible, adaptable and responsive would have a more constructive and effective outcome. For example, issues such as climate change, fisheries growth and global market changes should be factored into the regulatory reform.

It is **recommended** that the review process includes the use of experts in small business, as well as future planning to review the existing regulations to identify potential improvements.

Currently, the PFA is also concerned that the more operational focused regulatory changes identified require a more robust process of engagement to be able to identify the most effective amendment. Relying on consultation with written submissions limits a facilitated process that may arrive at a far

more effective and engaged outcome.

It is **recommended** that the regulatory review process that focuses on operational matters incorporates a robust and facilitated consultation processes that enable grass-roots fishers to engage in the process.

It is also evident that the fishing industry, as it continues to adapt to its new regulatory regime, will require a process in place to continuously identify and amend regulations as more issues and potential opportunities are recognized. This therefore needs a formalized structure to be in place that provides a process to identify, review and resolve additional regulations to amend or remove.

The draft outlines its actions to ensure a sustainable, confident and profitable industry. We support these commitments however note that to create a sustainable, confident and profitable industry can not be limited to regulatory and policy reform and development, harvest strategies, improved data, external impacts including biosecurity. Confidence comes from the stability within the industry, a feeling of worth and engagement, as well as strategies that focus on investment for the industry and stabilized market access.

NOTE: The draft outlines the need for a review of the fish receiver program and also reaffirms our members' need for this to progress. This is an obviously controversial review which will create some divide within the seafood industry, however the program does need a complete review and has been a long-standing commitment to the industry.

### **A Profitable Industry**

The viability of all businesses is reliant on profit margins. There are already significant costs experienced by commercial fisheries which is beyond the influence of NSW Government – such as rising fuel costs, insurance fees, slipway fees, crews etc. The NSW commercial fishing industry is one of the few primary producing sectors that can not pass these costs directly only the buyers. However, **programs that look at reducing costs, alternative fuel options, B2B selling avenues may assist.**

In addition, growing our Industry – both in tonnage and in variety should be considered a major focus. This also aligns with the DPI Strategic Plan 2022-2030 purpose “To maximise outcomes for NSW primary industries, the communities they support and the resources they rely on, both today and for the future.” As referred to in the FRDC Project *What could Australia's total sustainable wild fisheries production be?* (2016/056), the apparent belief that ‘little opportunity exists to increase the volume from wild-catch fisheries’ has actually never been formally tested and could, if they are believed, constrain future investment by government and industry. The report's modelling indicated that if Australian commercial fisheries operated to total potential maximum sustainable yield from (including TACs for the small pelagic species) a potential increase of 127,500 t or 77% of current catches could be seen. Obvious many caveats exist on the research, however it still indicated the potential for our commercial fisheries to grow.

## 2. Enhance collaboration and engagement

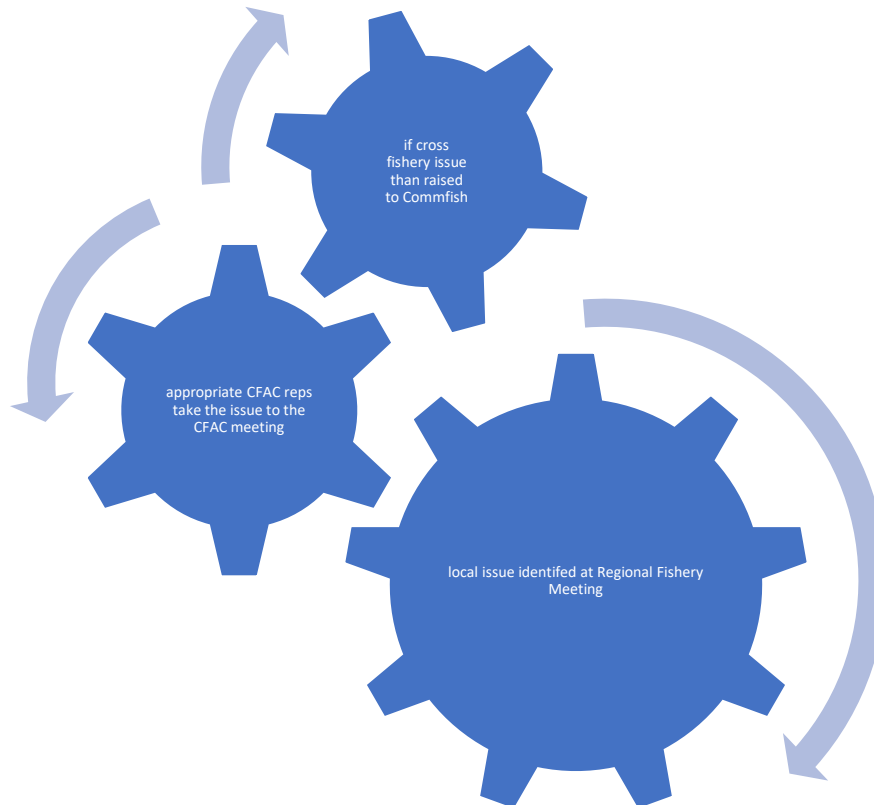
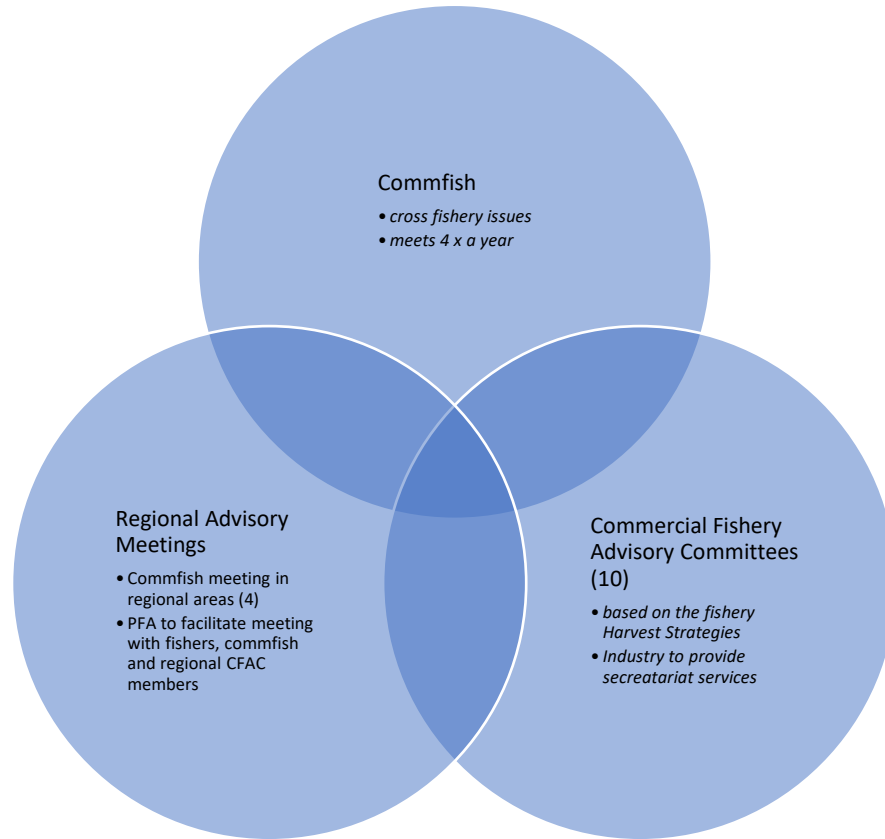
The PFA support the commitment towards co-management and assistance towards industry representation. **We acknowledge the support and contribution the DPI has already provided as we progress towards an Industry Representative Body.**

As part of the Stevens *et al.* (2013) Report, Recommendation 5.1 identified that the industry needed a peak industry body as ‘the current state of working relationships between industry and the Department, together with the present failure of most consultative bodies across the industry preclude the development of formal co-management arrangements at this time’. Subsequently, the NSW Government consulted with the industry through an industry workshop in November 2012 and discussion paper sent to all NSW commercial fishers to determine an appropriate peak industry body structure. Analysis of the industry discussions and responses showed strong support for a modified PFA as the peak industry body. The Government announced that they would advertise through a tender process for the delivery of a consultation contract, the main aim of which would be to establish a representative Industry body. The consultation contract would require the body to facilitate engagement of all industry interests. PFA prepared a comprehensive response to the tender to deliver the services – based on meetings and discussion throughout industry and advice from expert consultants. However, the Government closed the tender process without awarding the tender to any specific body.

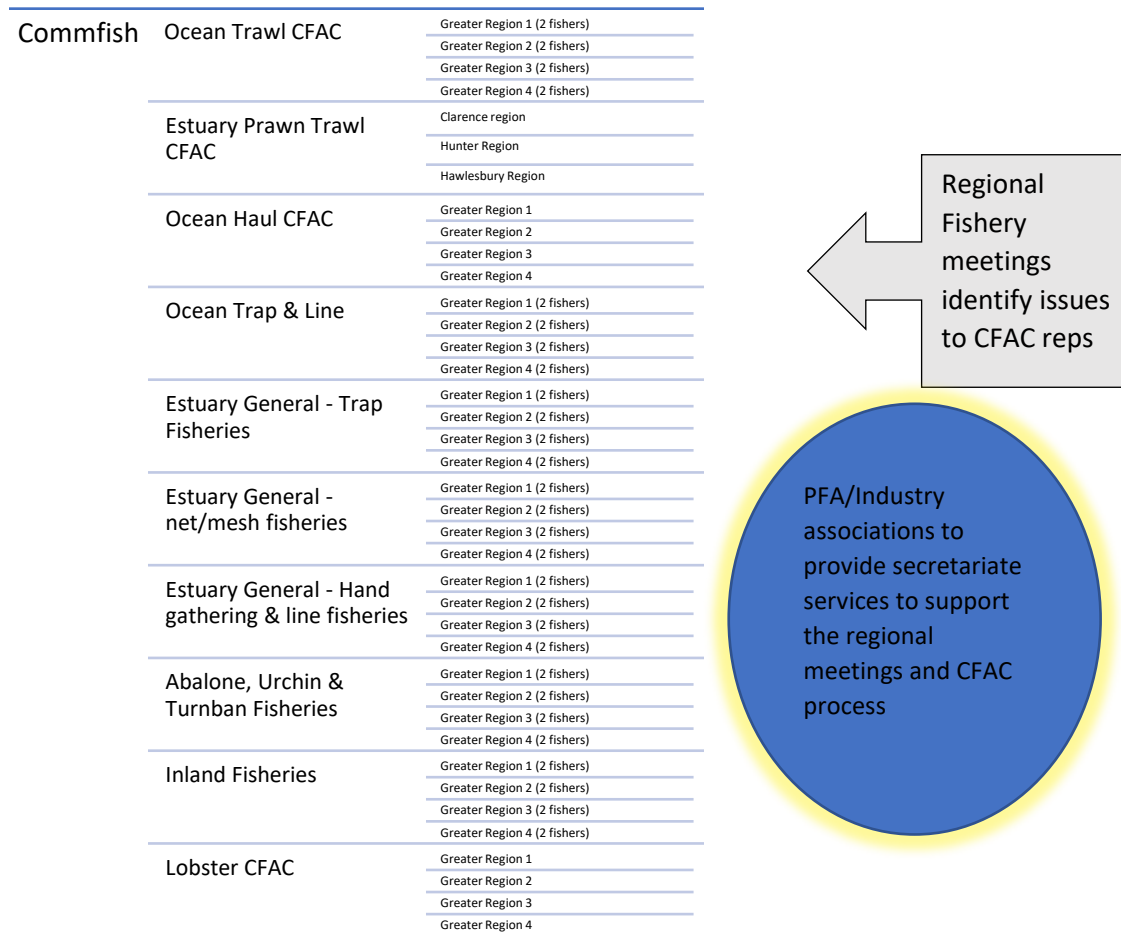
The most effective outcomes from fisheries management are obtained when industry and government can work collaboratively with a shared vision for the short- and long-term interests of a secure industry. The need to have a well-resourced and effective voice for the Industry is essential in any effective co-management framework to be adopted for NSW fisheries. The PFA continues to work constructively and professionally to represent our existing members and to work in the best interest of the industry.

As Neville (2013) identified “Mutual trust is the pre-condition to successful co-management<sup>1</sup>”. The opportunity exists today for the Industry and the Government to begin to build that trust and a framework for the future of a viable and effective NSW wild harvest seafood industry.

We emphasize the **need to engage with industry on the development of Co-management from an early outset**. The process of co-management should not be seen as a top-down approach. And as stated in many research papers (Carlsson and Berkes 2005; Jentoft, McCay, and Wilson 1998), co-management should be viewed as a process, rather than an outcome. Participation in the early development of the concept, the vision and pathways forward are important. The PFA has been in discussion with its members on an enhancement of the existing structure that also addresses the lessons learned from the past – greater grass-root fisher engagement, Independent chairman and industry as secretariat. We urge an **adoption of this approach and welcome further discussion**.



## Proposed Consultation Process for commercial fishers



### 3. Foster industry development and promotion

The PFA support the commitment to the listed initiatives that promote the NSW Commercial fishing industry and sustainable NSW Seafood. Already the funding provided through the Young Fisher Program and Eat More Seafood Program has provided significant assistance to the industry in business resilience, school programs, educational TV programs and the PFA's Taste of Seafood Festivals. These programs make a difference in not just improving social licence, awareness and education of the industry, but also improves the mental health of the industry.

It is becoming more and more a requirement of our markets to have 3<sup>rd</sup> party accreditation. This requirement has already closed access to markets for some of our more profitable species. Unfortunately, 3<sup>rd</sup> party accreditation is a costly exercise which evaluates the governance of the fishery on matters outside of the control of the industry. It is important that this is closing down markets. As of June 2022, the Western Australian Government, in partnership with the WA Fishing Industry Council and Recfishwest have financed and supported 12 WA fisheries to achieve MSC certification. They state that the MSC program has provided a range of benefits to WA, including enhanced community confidence in the sustainability of the State's fisheries and that their seafood purchases are sustainably sourced.

MSC certification also allows licence holders to use the blue MSC label 'eco-tick', which paves the way for new export markets and jobs growth in WA.

The PFA is disappointed that the "Foster Industry Development and Promotion" section of the draft strategy makes no commitment or reference to the OceanWatch Master Fishermen Program. The Master Fisherman Program was a successful program that should be further rolled out across NSW. An OceanWatch Master Fisherman is trained and assessed to participate in environmentally sustainable and responsible fishing practices. The Program incorporates many of these aspects including: quality assurance, bycatch reduction devices and techniques, animal welfare, threatened species management, catch documentation, marine pests management, protection of habitat, pollution, indigenous fishing, fisheries management and workplace health and safety, etc. The PFA strongly supports this program and **urges its continued funding under this initiative**

The PFA looks forward to working with and assisting in the delivery of these initiatives and believes that they will make a significant difference to fishers.

#### 4. Support industry innovation

The PFA supports the commitment for

- Digital transformation
- Digital trading
- VMS
- Seafood product innovation

We support the commitment to Industry Innovation but note the current issues that surround the Developmental Fishery process. We strongly believe there is both significant missed opportunities in potential markets that our industry has been unable to explore due to the highly restrictive nature of our governing regulations. Species such as hagfish, crystal crabs, octopus to name just a couple have such difficulties due to the restrictive nature of the regulations and yet have great potential for growth.

The PFA urges the Department to:

1. **Review its Developmental Fishery Policy** – to improve and streamline the process
2. **Trial a Dedicated Seafood Market Access and Trade Liaison Service** – to help grow our fisheries, fishers need assistance in negotiating the process and identifying opportunities.

### In Summary

The PFA welcomes the commitments outlined in the NSW Sustainable Seafood Strategy consultation draft and look forward to working with the DPI on the initiatives.