

# The Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW

## Promoting Sustainable Fishing



30 April 2020

The Hon. Adam Marshall MP  
Minister for Agriculture and Western New South Wales  
GPO Box 5341  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

### Transitioning the NSW Southern Fish Trawl Restricted Fishery to Commonwealth management

Dear Minister,

Almost two years ago the Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW (RFA), in its capacity as the peak body for recreational fishing in NSW, was approached by representatives of 22 of the 23 commercial fishing operators in the Southern Fish Trawl to establish a pathway to allow the recreational sector to acquire these access rights with a dignified exit strategy for the operators.

The Southern Fish Trawl operators have offered the permanent removal of fish and seine trawl from all NSW State waters between Barrenjoey Point and the NSW/VIC border, out to 3 nautical miles. They offered this to the RFA as individually-signed letters of intent with a total price of \$24 million. An area from Sydney to Victoria, out to 3 nm, would become trawl free; this would have inestimable long-term value to the fish, to NSW recreational fishers and to NSW non-trawl commercial fishers.

Now, in 2020, the operators still want to surrender any Southern Fish Trawl holdings from their fishing businesses. Every NSW recreational angler would support this, however no-one from DPI Fisheries is saying anything about it, even though the start date to Transition is set at May 2020. (It had an original transition date of May 2019 but this was extended by 12 months when the RFA started questioning the process).

Recreational anglers support the supply of fresh locally caught fish to consumers of NSW and we have been assured by Southern Fish Trawl operators that this will not change—many have current Commonwealth Trawl endorsements that will allow them to fish in Commonwealth waters and maintain supply locally. No one is seeking the removal of the current NSW Ocean Trap and Line Commercial Fishers that operate in NSW state waters.

Under the DPI Fisheries proposed transition there are changes recommended to size limits to fish that the operators would be able to take under the Transition—these changes ignore the body of science that underpins the size limits that have contributed to the sound management of most species in NSW in the past. The lack of size limits in Commonwealth managed fisheries could be one of the reasons for their collapse in NSW. Two of the state's most important recreational and commercial fish species are Snapper and Silver Trevally; both of these species are listed in NSW DPI scientific publications as being "growth overfished". However, the Transition proposes that the

trawlers in NSW have no size limits for those species—exactly the opposite of what DPI Fisheries’ own scientific literature recommends.

NSW Recreational size limits are meant to protect inshore spawning stocks, inshore fish nursery grounds and allow fish to reach maturity and complete their breeding cycle. Trawl caught fish generally have low survival rates upon release, which is why there are few size limits in the Commonwealth. A fish in a net is essentially a dead fish and should be utilised, but why do we need to kill all fish as part of the process? The high rates of survival of fish released by recreational anglers means we play our part by releasing undersized or unwanted fish, but we need to be really watchful of what happens in other aspects of NSW fisheries.

Transitioning the NSW Southern Fish Trawl Restricted Fishery to Commonwealth management

Table 3 – NSW Minimum Legal Length (MLL) for each species reportedly landed in the SFTF and corresponding MLL in the SESSF

Species reportedly landed in the SFTF	NSW MLL	Commonwealth MLL
Bluespotted flathead	33 cm	28 cm
Dusky flathead	36 cm	No size limit
Flounder ( <i>Bothidae spp &amp; Pleuronectidae spp</i> )	25 cm	No size limit
Grey morwong	30 cm	No size limit
Gummy shark	N/A	45 cm <sup>1</sup>
Jackass morwong	30 cm	No size limit
Mulloway	70 cm	No size limit
Red morwong	30 cm	No size limit
Sand whiting	27 cm	No size limit
School shark	91 cm	45 cm <sup>1</sup>
Sea mullet	30 cm	No size limit
Silver trevally	30 cm	No size limit
Snapper	30 cm	No size limit
Spotted mackerel	60 cm	No size limit
Tailor	30 cm	No size limit
Tarwhine	20 cm	No size limit
Teraglin	38 cm	No size limit
Tiger flathead	33 cm	28 cm
Yellowfin bream	25 cm	No size limit
Yellowtail kingfish	65 cm	No size limit

<sup>1</sup> when measured from the rearmost gill slit to the ventral insertion of the caudal fin

\$27 million dollars was offered to the commercial fishers in Port Phillip Bay in Victoria to remove trawl fishing. Whilst anything from \$350,000 up to \$1.6 million was offered to licence holders, it was divisive, forceful and, like most forced or compulsory buyouts, very destructive to the Victorian commercial fishing community and their families. By comparison, the area being offered by the operators of the Southern Fish Trawl is worth \$33 million, if we compare the size of the Southern Fish Trawl to Port Phillip Bay.

Unlike just about any other buyout of commercial effort around Australia, the commercial industry has approached recreational anglers through the RFA to work together to achieve a common goal. This is where New South Wales differs to Victoria—a joint NSW recreational and commercial fishers’ position has been agreed to.

If the Transition proceeds the external stakeholders that will be directly adversely impacted include close to one million NSW recreational fisherman, NSW commercial fisherman and thousands of businesses including those reliant on tourism and tackle sales in small NSW south coast towns.

Your NSW Recreational Fishing Advisory Council voted to recommend exploration of an exit grant strategy for commercial fishers in the Southern Fish Trawl and all parties are waiting patiently for more engagement. Recreational anglers must have a seat at the table, not as an afterthought.

We continue to hear that the Transition is the only solution. We don't agree. There should not be any halt to the communication or the proposed work that was meant to occur to try and resolve the problem.

I have attached the RFA Business Case and a link to the 2019 RFA Election Scorecard to show that we have worked diligently to elevate the Transition as a major issue in NSW with your predecessor.

<http://www.rfansw.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/2019-NSW-ELECTION-COMMITMENTS-RFA-of-NSW-Scorecard-.pdf>

We request a meeting with you to discuss a way forward to a suitable outcome for Southern Fish Trawl commercial operators and NSW recreational fishers.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Konstantaras".

Stan Konstantaras  
President  
Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW