

Fisheries Officers update

The PSA and Fisheries Officers Vocational Branch (FOVB) Executive have been involved in several discussions with DPI Fisheries and the DFC regarding a number of different matters of late. Here are some of the notable highlights and some updates.

Batons and handcuff work bans lifted

After successfully bringing FCU to the table and getting written clarification around possession and use of baton and handcuffs, Fisheries Officers (FOs) have unanimously voted to lift the long-standing work bans. FOs are expected to read and understand the Work Instruction 2.21.1 as it relates to their roles.

The issue of compliance in the Jervis Bay Territory remains without a resolution and the Work Instruction states FOs should first speak to their SFO when attending locations where the jurisdiction doesn't allow for the administration of batons and handcuffs to be retained. The PSA maintains that the possession of batons and handcuffs is a vital piece of WHS material and that they should be with FOs when on patrol. If FOs have any questions, speak to a member of the FOVB Executive.

Rock fishing safety enforcement work bans continue

Whilst batons and handcuffs have been lifted, the work ban on Rock Fishing Safety Enforcement duties remains. If FOs have any questions, speak to a member of the FOVB Executive.

Introduction of bow fishing: FOVB response

Previously DPI Fisheries has sought public comment on the extension of bow fishing in NSW non-tidal waters. At recent consultative forums in April, the FOVB had a number of concerns and questions on the practicalities of the pilot and its further implementation. The DFC asked that the FOVB provide a response for consideration and consultation.

To see our response, click [HERE](#).

A big thanks to several FOs who have provided their detailed knowledge that formulated our response from an assortment of operational, legislative and Work/Health/Safety perspectives.

Resourcing of high-risk districts

During the April consultative forum there was significant time spent on the interactions between FOs and IUU fishers as these issues continue and in some parts have escalated significantly. This stems from previous discussions and correspondence with the DFC about the practicality of the current Safe Work Method Statements and Work Instructions. Part of our response to the DDG DPI Fisheries included the redirection of staffing resources to those high risk districts, including but not limited to the south coast and far south coast. It's a Catch-22 situation where there are obvious resourcing issues with current FO vacancies versus placing more staff in potentially volatile situations.



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The response also sought:

- an independent safety review with the focus on FO welfare and defensive capabilities in high risk fisheries
- improved defensive capabilities examining the practicalities of OC spray as well as stab proof vests
- implementation of an expedited prosecution process for all matters involving indictable species
- implementation of a zero-tolerance policy toward any matter involving threat, abuse, assault or obstruction of Fisheries Officers in the exercise of their lawful functions
- access to Departmental supplied legal representation for any matters involving application for restraining orders by Fisheries Officers against alleged offenders, where officers have a genuine and plausible fear for their own safety and for that of their family
- improved legislative powers of surveillance and examination for Fisheries Officers investigating offences involving indictable species (including Abalone) to enable evidence of such offending to be gathered using contemporary processes and mechanisms that do not require officers to always put themselves in harm's way.

However, the PSA is not naive enough to understand that DPI Fisheries isn't subject to budgetary impediments that are part of Government ideology. The FOVB is also mindful that there are some things that simply cannot be fixed by the Public Service and there is a requirement for the NSW Government to deliver on stalled legislative reforms in the Fisheries space.

In response to the PSA correspondence, the DFC has proposed the movement of existing (but not filled) FO roles to those identified districts. The concern that was related back to the DFC was the taking of resources from one area to plug gaps and stretch those resources further.

PSA recommendations not to entertain extra duties outside of role descriptions

Knee jerk reactions from NSW Government involve the announcements of new policy that requires Public Service administration. These include but are not unlimited to whale disentanglement, shark attack response and FAD deployment and retrievals.

These tasks were advertised on a volunteer basis, and some FOs interested in animal welfare or catching potentially man-eating sharks, took up invitations. These duties, whilst exciting, take FOs away from critical compliance work and involve heightened levels of risk associated to those activities that are not recognised or resourced. Nor are they properly remunerated or adequately compensated like many other government agencies do for duties outside a staff members role.

These extraneous duties were subject to correspondence and discussions between the FOVB and the DFC early in the year with the PSA seeking a better understanding of how/when they will be resourced.



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The upshot is there is no plan to provide further resource and there will be no extra staff to administer these duties.

The FOVB has explained to members the problems of duty creep and in 2018 drew a line in the sand. It is the recommendation of the PSA that members do not volunteer to conduct these activities until such time as they are recognised and properly resourced. It's about time that this NSW Government properly recognise the value that FOs provide.

First Year Fisheries Officer examinations

Last year's FYFO examinations provided considerable concern for those participating and local FOs involved in their mentoring. To date, there has been work on reviewing the substance of those examinations (on the basis that parts of the examination were outside the scope of a FYFO, no feedback opportunity from FYFO's or mentors and the mechanics of the exams were not appropriate) so that FYFOs are supported, and given every opportunity at being successful and progressing to be on-going employees.

DFO & FYFO recruitment

To finish on a good news story, DPI Fisheries has embarked on a FYFO recruitment drive to fill vacancies in a number of roles within the DFC structure. There is also a commitment that the current round of DFO recruitment will not create a talent pool for any other potential DFO recruitment into the future.

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