

New South Wales
Department of Primary Industries

MP106/566
(stamped 5 JUN 2006)

Mr Phillip Ingram
President
Anglers Action Group
PO Box 630
NARRABEEN NSW 2101

Dear Mr Ingram

Thank you for your letter of 27 January 2006 to the Hon Ian Macdonald MLC, Minister for Primary Industries, concerning the commercial netting operations in Pittwater. The Minister has asked me to respond to you on his behalf.

Commercial fishing in Pittwater is managed as part of the Estuary General Fishery. The Estuary General Fishery is large and diverse, harvesting a range of species with a variety of gear types. In 2001, a zoning scheme was introduced to the Estuary General Fishery dividing the fishery into seven primary fishing regions and fishers were restricted to operating within one region in accordance with their historical participation. Pittwater is situated in Region 5 of the fishery, which ranges from 33°25'S (just south of the Entrance) to 33°20'S (just north of Wollongong).

In December 2005, there were 77 fishing businesses with Region 5 Estuary General endorsements. However, as you are aware, the NSW Government has recently implemented a closure on commercial fishing in Port Jackson due to elevated dioxin levels. The NSW Government is aware of the potential for effort to shift from the Port Jackson estuary to other waters in Region 5 and the impact is being assessed in light of the outcome of a \$5 million voluntary buyout of affected Jackson commercial fishers.

NSW Department of Primary Industries (NSW DPI) records show that over the last seven fishing seasons (1997/98-2004/05), Region 5 fishers (all commercial fishing methods combined) have landed an average annual catch of approximately 550kg of Kingfish from the combined waters of the Hawkesbury River, Pittwater and Brisbane Waters. The average recorded Kingfish catch in these waters over the past three fishing seasons averages only 148kg per fishing season. It is important to note that Kingfish are caught in many State and Commonwealth fisheries, all of which can be sold at the Sydney Fish markets at any one time.

An environmental Impact Statement (EIS) has been prepared for the Estuary General Fishery in accordance with the comprehensive requirements of the NSW *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. In this process the fishery was deemed to be

operating in a sustainable manner. The resultant Fisheries Management Strategy identifies the operational rules for the fishery and provides guidance for future management. The strategy contains a range of performance indicators and trigger points designed to alert NSW DPI to any undesirable changes in the fishery. If the level of Kingfish caught was to activate any of these trigger points, a review would be conducted and appropriate management arrangements implemented.

NSW DPI is not able to release the reported catch records of individual commercial fishers as this information is protected under the *Privacy and Personal Information Act 1998*. However, I can advise that the Department does take action to investigate instances of outstanding monthly catch records.

NSW DPI has also recently amended the *Caulerpa Taxifolia* closure for the Pittwater area to prevent the spreading of this invasive marine weed. There is now a complete netting ban for commercial and recreational fishers (except the landing net) in the waters of Pittwater bounded by a line drawn from the western most point of Barrenjoey Head south to the western most Port channel marker off Observation Point south to the northern most point of Stokes Point. A map of the amended closure has been enclosed for your information.

If you suspect illegal fishing in the Pittwater area, please contact the Hawkesbury Fisheries Office on (02) 9985 8357 or the Fisheries Watch Phonenumber on freecall 1800 043 536.

Yours sincerely

B D BUFFIER
DIRECTOR GENERAL