

15 August 2020

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

Delays in approving minutes of Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council meetings

Dear Minister,

The NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers, formed in 1958, is the peak representative body for the State's freshwater anglers, focusing on fisheries management, conservation and regulatory matters, angler access, angling ethics, animal welfare and politics.

During the 1990s our organisation lobbied for the reintroduction of a freshwater fishing licence, and a number of our members were on the NSW Fisheries advisory committee which planned that reintroduction. Since then we have strongly advocated and promoted the licence system, the Recreational Fishing Trusts that managed the income from the licence, and several iterations of the advisory councils that approved the expenditure recommended by the Trust Expenditure Committees and ultimately advised the Ministers of the day. Our members have served on all of those bodies over the past 20 years.

Currently, the penultimate body assisting your decision making is the Recreational Fishing NSW Advisory Council (RFNSW). It is the final point of engagement between you and NSW recreational anglers selected to sit on the Trust/RFNSW committees and the NSW DPI Fisheries managers who depend on your approval of the Trusts' recommendations for funding of important fisheries work.

The work of the Trust committees and RFNSW is usually become known to the public via the minutes of meetings published on the Fisheries website, containing information about projects which have been approved for funding. In the past, the publications of these minutes have been expedited by the Minister of the day, so that work on projects can quickly get underway.

However, at the moment, the latest set of minutes of RFNSW meetings available online is that of the February 2019 meeting. That meeting was 18 months ago, and two other RFNSW meetings have been held since then—also without any minutes being published.

Similarly, the latest minutes available online for the Recreational Fishing Saltwater Trust Expenditure Committee, and for the Recreational Fishing Freshwater Trust Expenditure Committee, are from January 2019.

We have been told by members of the Trusts/RFNSW and by Fisheries staff that the reason for the delays is that you have not signed off to approve the minutes of meetings which contain the funding recommendations.

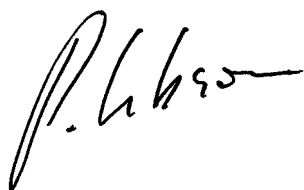
Your tardiness has a number of unwelcome effects:

- The public, including all licence-paying anglers, have no information about how their licence money is being spent;
- Important projects recommended to you by RFNSW and Fisheries are not proceeding; actions, execution and reporting relating to these projects is delayed because they have simply not left the starting line;
- We are hearing an increasing number of complaints from Trust Fund applicants and anglers that the proposed projects are not approved and are therefore not progressing;
- Anglers are questioning the performance and effectiveness of well-intentioned and hitherto-respected representatives nominated as members of the Trusts/RFNSW—but are being met with embarrassed shrugs from those representatives; and,
- The delays are destroying stakeholder confidence in not only the Trusts and RFNSW, but in the entire licence system.

The projects recommended to you by RFNSW and the Trusts are not incredibly expensive, and they are recommended within the known available Trust budgets. They are subject to reporting milestones and auditing. They are not controversial, nor do they have any political angle. They are not difficult to manage nor unlikely to fail—they are mostly just straightforward projects that are part of everyday recreational fisheries management. The decision to examine, query and review them should not be time consuming for yourself nor for your advisers within DPI Fisheries.

We ask that you expedite your approval of the minutes of these important Trust/RFNSW committees much more quickly, so that recreational fisheries in NSW can flourish and develop.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Gibson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Peter Gibson
President, NSW Council of Freshwater Anglers