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Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 2/2014

Monday June 16, 2014 – 10.00am

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

DRAFT Minutes

1. Present:

Members:

I Cartwright (Chair), G Woodham, J McKibben, P. Richardson, B Cobbing, J. Hoult, D Hansen, A Gray, J McKibben, A Brown, M Daft, D Lisson, A Hansen, D Tarbath, C Mundy (IMAS) M Bradshaw (DPIPWE), M Haddon (CSIRO), J Freeman (minutes),

Observers:

B Lesser, T Lesser, B Richardson, M Lovett, M Florence, S Anning, D Browning, B Ransom, M Bresnehan, J Huddleston, G Moroney, R Menadue, B Wilson, M Steane, G Hughes, H Jones (IMAS) John Ramsden

2. Apologies:

M Webster, J Evans, B Rex

3. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair opened the meeting. Observers were welcomed and reminded/informed about the FRAG processes and how members and observers can have input into the meeting. In setting the TAC the Minister receives advice from three sources: the AbFAC; the Tasmanian Abalone Council AGM; and DPIPWE in the form of a Departmental brief. The Minister takes gives due consideration to this advice makes a decision on the TAC and associated issues. The FRAG is an industry body, funded and administered by the Abalone Council and was formed to allow in-depth discussion on the status of the resource, TAC settings, size limits and related issues. The FRAG provides advice to the TAC Board and AbFAC.

This purpose of this meeting is to look at the status of the fishery and to look at where the fishery is prior to the next FRAG meeting and, given it is the last meeting before the AGM, consider preliminary views on target catches to inform TAC setting at the last FRAG meeting.

In answer to a question from industry, the FRAG noted that:

- draft minutes will be posted on the TAC website; and

- notices of meetings will be provided to all divers and quota holders via email and a notice on the website.

4. Adoption of agenda:

The agenda was adopted with two additions: i) a statement from an industry observer concerning ways to improve the fishery and ii) the proposed TASSAL expansion in the Channel area.

5. Minutes of the previous meeting:

The FRAG agreed that the draft minutes were an accurate record and were accepted.

6. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Development of target and limit reference points

Ongoing.

Action 2. Workshop to develop criteria for MCDA process –

Ongoing.

Action 3. Application to AOTF – ‘Occupational Divers Course’

Completed.

Action 4. Block 14B

Completed. The FRAG noted that Blocks 14B, 14C and 15 are still closed. Spring (September/October/November is the most likely time for a PST ‘bloom’ to occur. Testing based on risk and likelihood will be undertaken as and when required, noting the high cost of these tests.

Action 5. Central West Boundaries

Discussed further in the agenda.

Action 6. Freycinet catch Caps

Complete. DPIPWE reported that most divers contacted considered that the strategy adopted was the correct one and that while there is signs of recovery, the area has some way to go to rebuild.

Action 7. Block 31 – Zone changes north of Georges Rock

Ongoing

For a number of years this block has been an insurance reserve, a small amount (2t) of fish have been taken. Decided on a watching brief to be reviewed at a later date. Discussion by divers whether this block should be in the Northern Zone.

Block 31B

Action 8. Caps & Zone Boundaries – draw up proposal

To be discussed in agenda item 6. Matt has discussed options with divers; leave size at 145mm, as fish seem to be plentiful and growing at a good pace.

7. Central West Zone Proposal (DPIPWE)

Noted that existing boundary for CW Zone originally changed to increase the value of the catch, based on processor preference/price. However, while noting the overrun of the target catch, the current boundary has also contributed to more catch coming off the SW area, which was an area that the CW Zone was originally developed to protect.

The FRAG agreed to the following proposal:

“To re-instate the southern boundary of the central western part of the fishery to its original position, namely Strahan”.

Under this proposed arrangement the following will apply

Central Western Zone = sub-block 5D, blocks 6, 7 and 8.

Western zone = Blocks 9, 10, 11, 12, 13A & 13B.

IMAS and CSIRO will consider the implications of moving the boundary.

Size limit for the revised CW Zone to remain the same, with caps to be applied due to market/price considerations and the need to spread catch effectively. The voluntary biosecurity code of conduct for mother boats requiring unloading at Strahan during high risk periods rather than steaming back to Margate will continue to apply.

Following agreement of the change to the southern boundary of the CW zone, the FRAG noted that there were a range of strongly held and different views on zone boundaries, including the northern boundary of the CW Zone, and size limits, particularly among divers. This was making agreement difficult. The FRAG agreed that there would be some value in gaining a wider understanding of the views of divers on size limits and boundaries.

ACTION: Paul Richardson to convene port meetings statewide to discuss and get input into the discussion of, and subsequent agreement of, revised size limits and zone boundaries.

Size limit changes

The discussion moved to a broader discussion of size limit changes and the desire by some members of the FRAG and a number of divers to increase size limits, particularly on the West Coast.

DPIPWE explained that due to the large number of submissions to the Minister opposing the proposed size limit changes, and only one is supporting submission, making changes to size limits in 2014 is unlikely given that there are a number of studies in hand through IMAS/CSIRO. Getting agreement for change in 2015 is conceivable, but would depend on that research bring complete, or at least at a stage where scientific advice on the possible impacts of any changes could be provided. While this lengthy process is challenging it is required due to the subordinate legislation that must be developed and agreed as part of the regulatory process, which, in turn, requires a robust scientific foundation and consideration of economic impacts.

The FRAG noted that work on the broader policy and rationale for size limits needs to be completed alongside this work and IMAS confirmed that his work is in hand under the current research projects. This should assist with a more objective process for setting size limits and improve the understanding of strategies to achieve an optimum balance between size and catch limits.

A number of divers with long history in the fishery noted that they have seen the benefits of having a larger size limit for ensure long term sustainability and that they have repeatedly seen fish grown through to these larger sizes, increasing productivity by taking fewer fish and increasing egg production. Freycinet is an example of such a change. The majority of divers diving the West Coast, suggested that a higher size limit was required.

7. Summary of Catch and effort data and preliminary TAC discussion

IMAS presented data of the status of the fishery using a new format, based on a relatively simple Multiple Criteria Decision Analysis (MCDA). The analysis was based on two key indicators:

- Current CPUE relative to Target CPUE
- Rate of change in catch rate over 12 months

For each Region or block, a score is calculated for each indicator, weighted based on importance, and then combined to give an overall score. The Control Rule is then applied to the overall score, with values less than five indicating decline in fishery performance and above five an increase in fishery performance. The Control Rule provides a pre-determined mechanism for proposing a % change (none, up or down) in the future catch. The approach is preliminary but provides a more objective consideration of fishery performance in each spatial unit, together with a suggestion for action to be taken in response to observed changes in the fishery.

A Decision Tree was also discussed, to address how the calculations work when the fishery is well below, at, or above the CPUE target.

Members of the FRAG commended IMAS on the process.

It was acknowledged that the reference points for catch and catch rate were somewhat arbitrary and required further discussion between industry, researchers and managers.

Eastern Zone;

Target CPUE set at 80 Kg/Hr

Actaeons – Catch rates continuing to decline and is of concern. It was noted that the area had not been open for long and more time was required before conclusions could be drawn. However, it should have performed better given it has been closed for three months .

Block 13E - CPUE ~50 kg per hr

Bruny Island – CPUE increasing but below target, although caution advised as catch in recent years is at historical lows.

Storm Bay – CPUE below target, but stable - Minimal catch to date

East Coast – CPUE below target, and down on 2013. Minimal catch to date

Block 22 – Minimal catch to date

Action: CSIRO/IMAS (MH/CM) to use an upcoming workshop with divers to find an interim CPUE target for TAC setting on the east coast. A decision required on which year (or years) to be used as a benchmark.

Block 29 – slight downturn, minimal catch to date

Western Zone;

Using CPUE of 130kg/h as a target for all blocks.

The west coast catch (Western Zone plus Central Western Zone) was stable until 2008 and minor reductions have occurred since then.

Granville Blocks 6D, 7 & 8

CPUE below target and declining rapidly. Catch low, it is a spring/summer fishery and now is the end of the west coast season. A rough of rule of thumb is that if CPUE is falling, then catch taken (output) is more than the combined input (recruitment to the fishery plus growth of remaining animals).t. Suggestion from diver observers that the data be recorded as a season (financial year rather than calendar year), based on fishing activity occurs primarily during summer.

Strahan

Block 9 – CPUE below target. Catch rates falling away quickly, after being stable for quite a few years until 2011. Concern expressed by fishers, poorer catch rates may be reflected by catches in shallower waters.

South West

Block 10, 11 & 12A, - CPUE below target and long decline in CPUE from high to now very low, and a rapid decline over the last 12 months. No evidence of fishery responding to TAC reductions as yet.

South Coast

CPUE below target, but no time-series of decline.

Sub-block 12C (offshore Islands) is good, and maintained by catches in deeper water. May be masking CPUE declines in other sub-blocks. Keep a watching brief for next year.

Central West;

Couta Rocks Blocks 5D – 6C - Sharp decline in CPUE over past few years. Initial reduction in CPUE expected in association with catch spreading and creation of the Central West Zone. TAC reduction now required.

Northern Zone;

Target CPUE set at 85Kg/Hr

North West (not including Block 5) – Below CPUE Target, Starting to fall away,

Block 49 – Below CPUE Target, CPUE Falling away quickly after reduction in size limit and high catches over the past 2 years

Block 5 - Catch rate collapsing at 50kg/hr, further reduction in TAC required to allow rebuilding, given reductions to date have not stabilised CPUE.

King Island – CPUE below target. Minimal catch taken to date and is not reflective of the state of the fishery. Opposing views over ability to sustain level of catch.

Action: CSIRO (MH) to standardise King island data, by diver

North East Blocks 31B, 39 & 40 - Fishing ok,

Bass Strait;

Central North - Fishing ok

Furneaux Group - Fishing ok, the fish are looking good, are of better quality and growing through. Suggest increasing the size limit. There is good bottom, large rock lobster and very few *Centrostephanus* seen. Healthy looking area.

Bass Strait Islands - Fishing ok.

Greenlip;

King Island - Some concerns, with local divers concerned about stock levels.

North West - Up and down, sitting at 15t

Black Reef - Fishing well, and investigate the closure of the greenlip fishery during the summer months. DPIPWE could do a 3 part closure

Divers report that greenlip LML should be increased to 150mm generally, not including Black Reef.

Concern was raised about the poor quality of greenlip during the early part of the year. It was noted that a closure, of, say three months might allow the abalone to gain weight/condition and thereby be more marketable and result in less fish being taken for the same weight. SA was considering or had implemented management arrangements on the same basis.

Action: DPIPWE (MB) to investigate the closure of the greenlip fishery by DPIPWE in the early part of the year using a 'short term instrument'

Action: IMAS (CB) To investigate the available data to inform the proposal to adjust the western boundary of the central north coast Bass Strait zone

North East - Fishing well

Furneaux - Fishing well, the larger fish are localised.

Bass Strait Islands - Small amount of greenlip caught while catching blacklip.

8. Other business

Tassal –all divers were encouraged to attend the Tassal meeting on Tuesday 17th June at the IMAS Waterfront Building. Industry is concerned of the effects to the fishery of the Tassal expansion.

Additional FRAG. Suggestion made for an additional FRAG meeting to discuss issues further, given concern at the possible reduction in TAC.

TAC reduction. A concern was expressed at the potential level of reduction in TAC suggested by the analysis presented. As an alternative approach, it was suggested that the following process be considered:

- suggest an overall reduction in TAC that would be acceptable to industry(c. 120 tonnes or 500-525kg per unit was proposed), given the severe economic conditions being faced;
- keep a watching brief until October, and decide on an acceptable level of risk for each spatial unit; and
- spread the reduction across the areas of highest risk

Meeting closed at 3pm

Next meeting 21st July – Exec meeting 9am to 2pm with a FRAG workshop 2pm to 5pm

FRAG #3 - 9th October 2014

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New actions:

1. Paul Richardson to convene port meetings statewide to discuss and get input into the discussion of, and subsequent agreement of, revised size limits and zone boundaries
2. IMAS/CSIRO (MH/CM) to use an upcoming workshop with divers to find an interim CPUE target for TAC setting on the east coast. A decision required on which year (or years) to be used as a benchmark.
3. CSIRO (MH) to standardise King island data, by diver
4. DPIPWE (MB) to investigate the closure of the greenlip fishery by DPIPWE in the early part of the year using a 'short term instrument' Investigate the available data to inform the proposal to adjust the western boundary of the central north coast Bass Strait zone
5. IMAS (CB) To investigate the available data to inform the proposal to adjust the western boundary of the central north coast Bass Strait zone

Action Items FRAG #2 2014

	Action	Responsibility
1	Development of target and limit reference points	IMAS: Malcolm Haddon, Craig Mundy and Dave Tarbath FRDC contact has been signed for new project; awaiting commencement.
2	Workshop to develop criteria for MCDA process	IMAS: Craig Mundy Craig & Joey to convene a meeting to discuss criteria, prenotation of analysis etc
3	Central Western Zone boundaries	DPIPWE: FRAG #1 2014 ongoing
4	Block 31 – Zone changes north of Georges Rock	Joey McKibben: Joey to consult with divers and other interested parties and develop and put forward a proposal on Block 31 for the next FRAG Watching brief
5	Zone Boundaries – draw up proposal	DPIPWE: Matt Bradshaw to draw up proposal Paul Richardson to consult with divers
6	CPUE target for east coast TAC setting	Malcolm Haddon/Craig Mundy
7.	Standardise King Island data	Malcolm Haddon
8.	Closure of Greenlip fishery	Matt Bradshaw
9.	Blacklip zone changes	Craig Mundy

TAC for 2014

Blocks - Area	TAC 2014
Eastern Zone	
Blocks 13C, -14 E. Actaeons	
Blocks 14A and 14B. Lower Huon Channel, Huon to Southport Island, inc Dover, Southport	
Blocks 14C-16 Bruny Island	
Blocks 17-21 Hobart to Tasman Island inc Nubeena	
Block 22	
Blocks 23 and 24 Deep Glen Bay to Triabunna, including Maria	
Blocks 25-29A Freycinet and Bicheno	
Blocks 29B, 29C, 29D and 30A North East	
Total Eastern Zone TAC	530
Northern Zone	
Blocks 5A-5C	50
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5	100
Blocks 1-4 King Island	100
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East	30
Total Northern Zone TAC	280
Central Western Zone	
Blocks 6A-6C Couta Rocks	75
Total Central Western Zone TAC	75
Western Zone	
Blocks 6D, 7 and 8. Granville Harbour, Sandy Cape	100
Block 9 South of Strachan	125
Blocks 10, 11 and 12A. South West	350
Blocks 12B-13B South Coast	265
Total Western Zone TAC	840
Bass Strait	
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group	
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands	
Blocks 42-46 Central North	
Total Bass Strait TAC	70
Greenlip	
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux	47
Blocks 1-4 King Island	20
North West not Perkins Bay	21
Block 48A Perkins Bay	25
Blocks 31,39,40 North East	25.5
Total Greenlip TAC	138.5 (140)
TAC TOTAL	1935t