

TASMANIAN ABALONE COUNCIL LTD

262 Argyle Street
Hobart Tas 7000
Telephone: 03 6231 1955
Facsimile: 03 6231 1966
Email: admin@tasabalone.com.au
www.tasabalone.com.au
ABN: 80 009 590 578 ACN: 009 590 578

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 4/2014

Thursday October 9, 2014 – 11.00am

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes

Present:

Members:

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

Observers:

M Marriott, A Marriott, J Evans, J Ramsden, J Huddleston, G Jordan, G Hughes, S McRae, M Lovett, T Lesser, R Rex, S Anning. B Ransom, B Amos, E Thorpe, B Richardson, G Jordan,

Apologies:

D Tarbath,

1 Welcome and opening remarks:

DPIPWE noted that it will be meeting with IMAS and industry early in 2015 to develop a process going forward for the development of the MCDA as a reliable decision making tool. It is critical to have all comments from industry to input into this process. For this year (2015 quota year) the MCDA process will not be used as the key determinant for TAC setting and will be treated as an additional input into the more usual process based on catch and catch rate data, informed by CSIRO modelling for parts of the fishery.

It was noted that there had been a pre-meeting of the FRAG to consider data on the stock as presented by Craig Mundy.

The Chair outlined the Tasmanian Abalone Council Limited (TACL) expectations for the FRAG under the current terms of reference. It was noted that the FRAG had always been transparent, but of late input from some observers had meant that it was getting more difficult to reach an agreed position. Observers would continue to be welcome at meetings, but should advise the TACL when they will be attending. The Chair reminded/informed those present about the FRAG processes and how members and observers can have input into the meeting in an orderly manner. The FRAG TOR will be reviewed at the end of the year.

The purpose of the meeting was to look at the status of the fishery and consider views on target catches and a TAC recommendation, prior to the TACL AGM.

2. Adoption of agenda;

Agreed with the addition of two additional items 'Eastern Zone closure' and 'Reseeding'.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting:

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

4. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Development of target and limit reference points:

Ongoing, being developed by Craig and Malcolm – FRDC contract has been signed for new project; awaiting commencement.

Action 2. Central Western Zone Boundaries:

Ongoing, DPIPWE; to be discussed later in the meeting

Action 3. Zone Boundaries – draw up proposal:

Matt Bradshaw - to be discussed later in meeting

Action 4. Closure of Greenlip Fishery:

Ongoing - Matt Bradshaw

Action 5. Blacklip Zone changes:

Ongoing - Craig Mundy

Action 6. Provide a report on 'diver doubling up'

Completed - Malcolm Haddon provided a comprehensive presentation to the FRAG (see below)

Action 7. Contact local divers re Freycinet closure:

Matt Bradshaw – Discussed later in the meeting

Action 8. Block 31, boundary changes:

Discussed later in the meeting

Action 9. Block 40A & B, boundary changes:

Discussed later in meeting

Action 10. Block 14B & C, contact AQUIS for possible re-open:

Ongoing - Dean has been unable to contact AQUIS, Dean has contacted Nora Galway department of Agriculture, not a lot of progress to date. Efforts will continue and given the absence of a PST for more than 18 months, there seems to be few reasons for the area to remain closed.

Action 11. King Island, discuss status of stock and local divers accessing abalone in deeper waters

Complete - Matt/Craig

Action 12. King Island, investigate Greenlip data:

Craig Mundy – discussed later in meeting

Action 13. Write proposal to TACL Board to continue Shell Study meat quality project:

Ongoing - Dave Tarbath

Action 14. Copies of map with block numbers and zone map to next FRAG:

Completed - TACL

5. IMAS presentation of data and fisheries assessment, including preliminary IMAS/CSIRO scientific advice on catch settings, size limits etc (nb priority areas of the fishery will be dealt with first)

Doubling Up – Malcolm provided a comprehensive presentation on the effects of doubling up, based on data from 1999 to 2015.

Overall there is a negative effect as expected, i.e. two divers doubled up are not as efficient as two individual divers. Data showed that there has been a steady increase in the number of divers doubling up and these dives have, for the most part been identified.

For most areas, the trends in CPUE are not changed by standardising the CPUE i.e. the standardised catch rate follows the raw catch rate, but at a lower level. It was noted that some divers may get a false impression of stock status from doubling up that is, a negative perception due to the poorer performance in catch rate when doubled up.

For some blocks however, if the raw catch rate fell faster than the standardised catch rate, indicating that in some areas, the declines in CPUE may be explained, at least partially, by the practice of doubling up.

The FRAG agreed that standardised CPUE would be shown in future stock assessments.

Central Western Zone:

Block 6

- 2008 - LML 136 mm to 132 mm.
- 2009 - Block 6 transferred to new Central West Zone.
- Sharp increase in CPUE with size limit reduction in 2008. Block CPUE has declined continuously from approx. 140Kg/Hr in 2008 to below 70Kg/Hr in 2014 (figure 2a).
- Stocks in these Sub-Blocks have not responded well to increased fishing pressure (figures 2c-2e).
- CPUE in Quarters 3 & 4 have generally lower than the Quarters 1 & 2 since the change in LML in 2008 (figure 2f).
- Low CPUE of concern given current low catch level (figure 2a).
- MCDA suggests 25% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 2b).

Recommendation: *Catch reduction of 10-25 tonnes based on a Block catch allocation of 75 tonnes in 2014.*

Comments;

Central and Western Zone combined, there have been some moving of boundaries and several substantial reductions of 315t. The IMAS recommendations to reduce the TAC further don't take into consideration of the effect of the previous changes and suggest to leave for another 12 months. Once the reductions are in force it may not be increased easily in future.

The risk in the decline in CPUE; where the biomass is very thin on the ground a wait and see attitude to see if the previous reductions are effective, or an immediate risk of decline, which is a serious.

IMAS - There is a structure in place to increase TAC in a responsible manner.

IMAS – risk, the TAC setting is designed to stabilise the industry, and turn the CPUE around.

CSIRO – Management changes, TAC and catch rates respond with a time lag, 'now' doesn't look good so the response is to cut the TAC. But what is the risk, and the financial circumstances?

DPIPWE has drafted increased size changes to avoid TAC reductions; this proposal was open to public comment and has been held up due to submissions.

CSIRO have modelled the size limit vs the TAC, Malcolm showed the results.

IMAS 2015 TACC Recommendations = 65t

TACC 2015 = 52.5t

Western Zone:

Block 7

- *Block CPUE declining from 180Kg/Hr in 2008 to below 90 Kg/Hr in 2014 (figure 4a).*
- *Catch in 2103 and 2014 lower than historical annual catch for the past 14 years (figure 4a).*
- *With the exception of 2103-2014 catches of 50 tonnes have led to increased catch rates (figure 4a).*
- *Catch and catch rate trends across Sub-Blocks has been variable (figure 4c-4e).*
- *MCDA suggests 15% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 4b).*
- **Recommendation: Catch target of 30-40 tonnes based on CPUE response to catches over 60 tonnes and historic low CPUE in 2014.**
- **NOTE: Block catch allocation of 100 tonnes in 2014 for Blocks 6D, 7 & 8.**

Comment; what is the cycle of the abalone, what is the recruitment of the juveniles? Juveniles are cryptic, if there were multiple studies with many reports, it will not show any results for the following year. The current study is using 'plates' to study the growth rate of 20 to 40mm sub adults per year.

Greg Woodham gave a management history of productivity changes over the last few years.

Block 9

- *Block CPUE declined rapidly from approx. 170Kg/Hr in 2007 to 100 Kg/Hr in 2014 (figure 6a).*
- *Catch in 2014 lower than historical annual catch for the past 14 years (figure 6a).*
- *Sub-Blocks 9B and 9C have seen a shift in effort from 9B to 9C in the past 4 years with both showing declining*
- *CPUE (figure 6c-6e).*
- *Atypical trend of reduced CPUE in Quarters 3 and 4 since 2012 (figure 6f).*
- *MCDA suggests 15% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 6b).*
- **Recommendation: Catch target of 85-90 tonnes based on rapidly declining quarterly CPUE trends.**
- **NOTE: Block catch allocation of 100 tonnes in 2014 for Block 9.**

TACC 2015 = 125t

Block 10

- **NOTE: Block 10 has been closed since the 2nd Quarter in 2014.**
- *Block CPUE declined from approx. 170Kg/Hr in 2001 to below 90 Kg/Hr in 2014. Brief increase in CPUE in 2010 and 2011 (figure 7a).*
- *Catch is relatively stable over the past 14 years (figure 7a).*
- *All Sub-Blocks appear to respond to fishing pressure with a 1 year lag in CPUE (figures 7c-7e).*
- *Historic trend of higher 4th Quarter CPUE, but this trends stops from 2011 onwards (figure 7f).*
- *MCDA suggests 25% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 7b).*
- **Recommendation: Catch target of 75-90 tonnes based on historic low CPUE and declining 4th quarterly CPUE.**

- *NOTE: Block catch allocation of 350 tonnes in 2014 for Blocks 10, 11 & 12A.*

Block 11

- *NOTE: Block 11 has been closed since the 2nd Quarter in 2014.*
- *Block CPUE declined from approx. 160Kg/Hr in 2002 to below 90 Kg/Hr in 2014. Brief increase in CPUE in 2009 and 2010 appears linked to lower catch (figure 9a).*
- *Sub-Block 11A appears to have responded to lower catch but this trend is not repeated in the other Sub-Blocks (figures 8c-8e). Sub-Blocks D and E have a current CPUE of approx. 70Kg/Hr.*
- *Historic trend of Quarter 3 and 4 having higher CPUE, but this was not the case in 2013 (figure 8f).*
- *MCDA suggests 15% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 8b).*
- **Recommendation: Catch target of 180-195 tonnes based on historic low CPUE.**
- *NOTE: Block catch allocation of 350 tonnes in 2014 for Blocks 10, 11 & 12A*

TACC Western Zone 2015 = 840t

Eastern Zone:

Block 27

- *Block CPUE has declined from approx. 80Kg/Hr in 2006 to below 40Kg/Hr in 2012, while Block CPUE improved marginally during 2013 and 2014 (figure 12a).*
- *Substantial reduction in fishing in 2012 led to catch restrictions in 2013 and 2014 N.B. this achieved only minor improvements in Block CPUE (figure 12a).*
- *CPUE trends vary across Sub-Blocks, however all Sub-Blocks show falling CPUE in 2014 (figures 12c- 12e).*
- *MCDA suggests 5% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 12b).*
- **Recommendation: Status Quo based on catch reductions in 2011 and 2012, and stable Block CPUE.**
- *NOTE: monitor CPUE in Block 27.*

Block 28

- *Block CPUE declining in 2014 after rapid recovery in 2013. However marked increase in catch during 2013 unlikely to have helped recovery process (figure 13a).*
- *Catch in Block 28 too low during 2014 to interpret Quarterly CPUE trend (figure 13f).*
- *MCDA suggests 15% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 13b).*
- **Recommendation: Status Quo based on catch reductions in 2011 and 2012, and stable Block CPUE.**
- *NOTE: monitor CPUE in Block 28.*

Comment: if Block 14B and 15 were re-opened there could be additional tonnage, and fish the area rather than be open to scrutiny from the salmon industry for not using the area. Dean Lisson to contact DAFF, the cost of PST testing may be higher than the value of abalone taken.

Action;	Dean Lisson to contact DAFF re Block 14B, 15
---------	--

Block 30B to re-open at 145mm in 2015, the population is low in Block 30C and will remain closed.

Block 13C, D & E, - keep a watching brief.

DPIPWE – 2014 is a rebuilding strategy, suggest caps on blocks in 2015. The local divers believe the Freycinet blocks should be closed.

Action - Craig/Matt/Paul - Create a rebuilding management plan for the Eastern zone

Eastern Zone TACC 2015 = 530t

Northern Zone:

Block 49

- *Block CPUE has declined from approx. 110Kg/Hr in 2004 to approx. 60Kg/Hr in 2014 (figure 6a). Minor improvement in CPUE associated with LML reduction from 125mm to 120mm in 2012 (figure 6a).*
- *CPUE trends similar between Sub-Blocks 49B and 49C. SuBlock 49A (Robbins Island) showing more stable trend, but sharp drop in CPUE associated with intensive fishing in 2012(figures 6c- 6e).*
- *No trend in quarterly CPUE (figure 6f).*
- *MCDA suggests 25% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 6b).*
- **Recommendation: Catch target of 75 to 85 tonnes based on declining CPUE and a return to a catch level which appeared sustainable in the past.**
- *NOTE: The high fishing pressure for the past three years at a relatively low size limit will have substantially reduced accumulated biomass, and ongoing catch level will necessarily be much lower.*

Meat quality testing from the 'Shell Study' will be undertaken long term.

Block 49 requires a management plan to return to a sustainable level at a marketable size and maximise return.

Block 5

- *Sharp increase in CPUE in 2008 associated with LML reduction from 132mm to 127mm in 2008. Block CPUE has declined from approx. 110Kg/Hr in 2008 to below 60Kg/Hr in 2014 (figure 7a).*
- *CPUE trends similar across Sub-Blocks (figures 7c- 7e).*
- *trend in quarterly CPUE in 2014 suggests improvement associated with recent catch reductions (figure 7f). Note that Quarter 1 CPUE in 2014 has the lowest median CPUE in the past 14 years.*
- *MCDA suggests 15% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 7b).*
- **Recommendation: Catch target of 50 tonnes be maintained based on recent catch restrictions and improving CPUE through 2014.**

Block 3

- *Block CPUE has oscillated between 130Kg/Hr and 100 Kg/hr for the past 14 years, although Block CPUE declining sharply in 2014 (figure 10a).*

- *Periods of high catch appear to be linked to subsequent CPUE decline (e.g. 2004-2005 and 2011-2013) (figure 10a).*
- *Catch stable between 2020 and 2024 (figure 10a).*
- *CPUE trends similar across Sub-Blocks 3A and 3C (figures 10c- 10e).*
- *No clear trends in quarterly CPUE (figure 10f).*
- *MCDA suggests 40% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 10b).*
- ***Recommendation: Catch target of 40 to 50 tonnes based on declining CPUE and a return to a catch level which appeared sustainable in the past.***

Craig and Malcolm have divided the data from local and visiting divers to look at the trends of spatial data. The reports show the same information, except local divers have knowledge of special pockets and have a higher CPUE early in the year where visiting divers are fishing later in the year.

A local diver watches smaller boats continuously fishing the area whereas Motherboats can harvest more efficiently, and believes a higher TAC is sustainable.

Bass Strait

Block 54 & 55 - minimum management required.
Alan Hansen suggests an increase to 105t

Greenlip;

Block 4

- *Block CPUE has varied over the past 14 years, but has declined rapidly to below 40Kg/Hr in 2014 (figure 4a).*
- *CPUE and Catch trends are highly variable across Sub-Blocks, with Sub-Block 4A contributing the majority of the catch (figures 4c- 4e).*
- *No clear trends in quarterly CPUE, although trend of declining quarterly CPUE in 2013 and 2014 unusual (figure 4f).*
- *MCDA suggests 40% reduction in catch for 2015 (figure 4b).*
- ***Recommendation: Catch target of between 3 and 4 tonnes based on low CPUE.***

There is a mix of data due to combined fishing green and black, and some divers appear not to be using their GPS and data loggers.

Block 4 – local diver ‘travelling well’

Musselroe Bay – to stay closed.

Clark Island – DPIPWE have concerns and would like to see a cap in 2015

BOUNDARY CHANGES;

Matt Bradshaw and Ben Cobbing have put forward suggestions. There was considerable discussion on all options.

Overruns are caused by a 2 week delay in closing a zone, DPIPWE are hampered by the Statutory Rules that have to be followed - Matt to discuss options.

There may be compliance issues with Option A, Matt to discuss.

Beach price is affected by Central West/ Western Zone/Northern Zone boundaries.

Proposal – 2015

Option A – Ben Cobbing – agreed better option (to be discussed by the TACL Board)

1. Northern Zone shift south to include 5D, 6A, 6B, 6C
2. Central West to include 6D, 7 & 8
3. Western Zone to include 9 – 13B

Option B

1. Central West to include 5, 6, 7 & 8
2. Western Zone to include 9 – 13B

Option C

1. Northern Zone to include 5, 6A, 6B, 6C
2. Western Zone to include 6D – 13B

Proposal - relocate Bass Strait Boundary 39B 40A, 40B across to Lemons Beach to keep season open when Greenlip closed.

2015 proposal; - Northern Boundary 31A move from Cape Naturaliste to Cod Bay at 138mm for 12 months. – agreed - Matt to discuss compliance issues.

2015 proposal– extend the boundary of the Bass Strait Zone to the west to include blocks 47A, 47B, and 48A. This would take it from Cowrie Point (Port Latter) to include Stanley, North Point, Black Reef and the inside of Robins Island. It would align with the same boundaries as the 132mm Greenlip.

Byron Ransom agreed to withdraw motions 9 & 10 submitted to the AGM

6. Discussion of TACC settings for 2015

Western Zone	840t
Central West Zone	52.5t
Eastern Zone	530t
Northern Zone	235t
Bass Strait Zone	70t
Greenlip	138.5t
Total TACC	1,866t

7. Suggested boundary changes for 2015:

AGM motions – discussed previously

8. Other business

- Eastern Zone closure January to March;
The original idea of closing the Eastern Zone from January to March each year was due to warmer water, and poor quality fish spawning. This pushed the fishing to the west coast; the data is showing divers fishing in the northern zones which are also poorer quality fish.

There are suggestions for the East Coast to remain open to access fish for Chinese New Year.

Agreed to remain closed - ACTION item for 2015

Greenlip (excluding Perkins Bay) closure in line with the East Coast closure January to March - agreed

- Re-Seeding
Rob Rex advised that He is not involved with re-seeding, but due to the reduction of TAC He believes re-seeding is an option to improve the stock.
There is a motion at the AGM to look at the proposal.
- Grant Jordan – suggest removing the Bass Strait zone for a deep water fishery.
Craig and Dave will liaise with Grant to make up maps, discuss with DPIPWE and write a proposal to the Board for consideration.

Actions: DPIPWE - Matt;

- New sublock
- Northern boundary 31A
- Eastern Zone Jan – Mar – remain closed
- Greenlip – boundaries excluding Perkins Bay
- Freycinet – shut ??
- South West re-opening – 56t to catch – leave it closed to 15th December
- North East greenlip – leave shut
- Central West – pending discussion
- Clark Island – look at 2015
- 132mm Cod Bay? 138mm watch
- 30 day rule has been dropped.
- Motion at AGM for Catch data to be available all year

FRAG

Boundaries:

Central West - near majority, to be discussed by the TACL Board

Northern Boundary ??

2015 TACC

Central West	52.5
Western Zone	840
Northern Zone	235
Eastern Zone	530
Bass Strait Zone	70
Greenlip	138.5
TOTAL	1866t

Meeting Close 4.15pm

New Actions:

1. Dean to contact DAFF re opening Blocks 14B, 15
2. Craig/Matt/Paul – create a rebuilding management plan for the Eastern Zone
3. Craig & Dave to liaise with Grant Jordon on Bass Strait Zone.

Action Items FRAG #4 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 Ongoing
2	Central Western Zone boundaries	DPIPWE: ongoing
3	Zone Boundaries – draw up proposal	DPIPWE: Matt Bradshaw to draw up proposal ongoing
4	Closure of Greenlip fishery	Matt Bradshaw ongoing
5	Blacklip zone changes	Craig Mundy Ongoing
6	Provide a report on the 'diver doubling up' effect	Malcolm Haddon Completed
7	Contact local divers re Freycinet resource	Matt Bradshaw Completed
8	Block 31, discuss boundary changes	All
9	Block 40a & B, boundary changes	All
10	Block 14B & C, contact AQUIS for possible re-open	Dean Lisson Ongoing
11	King Island, discuss with local divers accessing large quantities in deeper water.	Matt/Craig Ongoing
12	King Island, to investigate Greenlip data	Craig Mundy Ongoing
13	write proposal to TACL Board to continue Shell Study meat quality project	Dave Tarbath Ongoing
14	copies of map with block numbers and zone map to next FRAG	TACL Completed
15	Contact DAFF to reopen Block 14B, 15	Dean
16	Create a rebuilding management plan for Eastern Zone	Craig/Matt/Paul
17	Bass Strait Zone	Craig/Dave/Grant Jordan

TAC for 2015

Blocks - Area	TAC 2014	TAC 2015
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	528.5
Northern Zone		
Blocks 5A-5C	50	50
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5	100	75
Blocks 1-4 King Island	100	70
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East	30	30
Total Northern Zone TAC	280	225
Central Western Zone		
Blocks 6A-6C Cousta Rocks	75	52.5
Total Central Western Zone TAC	75	52.5
Western Zone		
Blocks 6D, 7 and 8. Granville Harbour, Sandy Cape	100	100
Block 9 South of Strachan	125	125
Blocks 10, 11 and 12A. South West	350	350
Blocks 12B-13B South Coast	265	265
Total Western Zone TAC	840	840
Bass Strait		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group		
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands		
Blocks 42-46 Central North		
Total Bass Strait TAC	70	70
Greenlip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux	47	47
Blocks 1-4 King Island	20	20
North West not Perkins Bay	21	21
Block 48A Perkins Bay	25	25
Blocks 31,39,40 North East	25.5	25.5
Total Greenlip TAC	138.5 (140)	138.5
TAC TOTAL	1935t	1855t

Size Limits 2014

Commercial blacklip

The following size limits apply to the commercial blacklip abalone fishery: 110 mm, 114 mm; 120 mm; 127 mm; 132 mm; 138 mm, 140 mm and 145 mm (Figure 1).

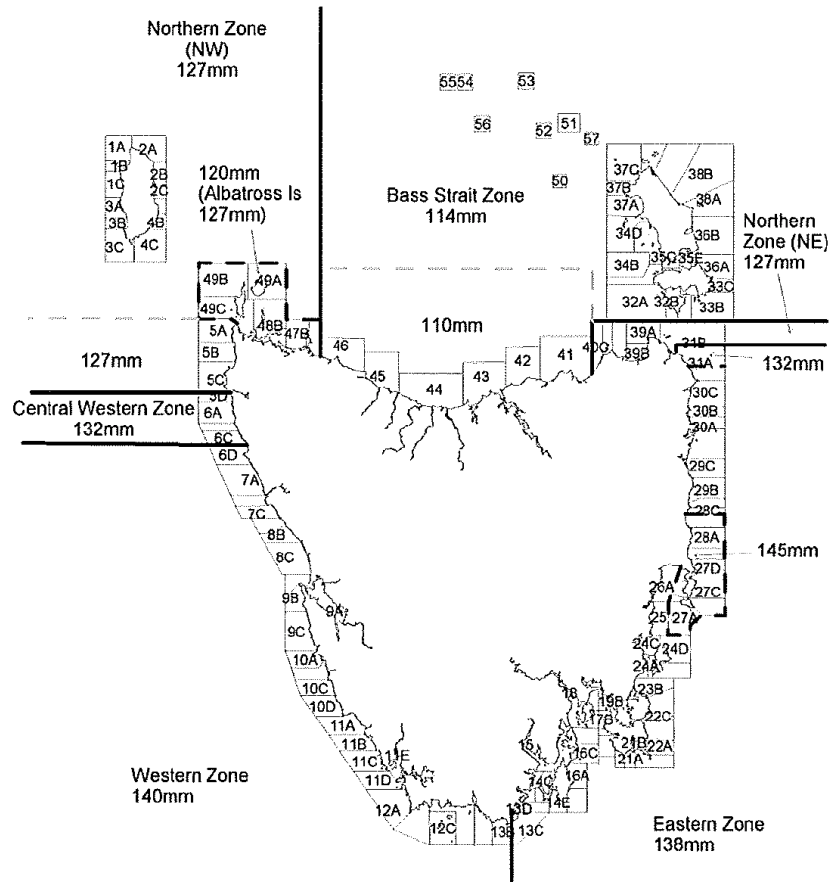


Figure 1 Commercial size limit areas for blacklip abalone