Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 2/2015
Monday June 15, 2015 – 10.30am
IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Taroona

Minutes

Present:

Members:

Ian Cartwright (Chair), Joey McKibben, Greg Woodham, John Hoult, Darvin Hansen, Rob Scanlon, Avril Brown, Alan Gray, Alan Hansen, Matt Bradshaw (DPIPWE), Craig Mundy, D Tarbath (IMAS), Jillian Freeman (minutes), Dean Lisson

Observers:

J Ramsden, M Porteus, B Amos, P Kossman, L Kossman, T Lesser, B Ransom,

H Jones (IMAS)

Apologies:

P. Richardson, Ben Cobbing, Stuart Anning,

1. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers, and outlined the three stage process for FRAG meetings proposed by the Abalone Council, which has now been adopted by the FRAG. These are:

i) Part 1 – Informal, unminuted discussion for FRAG members only, to discuss agenda and key issues, usually 0900-1000.

ii) Part 2 – The full FRAG meeting with observers present, run using the FRAG agenda and minuted.

iii) Part 3 – FRAG members only concluding session, at which any additional recommendations for the FAC/TAC Board arising out of Part 2 of the meeting will be finalised/clarified.

The need for observers to advise the TAC office of their attendance in advance of the FRAG was emphasised. While observers are welcome, just 'turning up on the day' is not acceptable.

2. Matters brought forward from the FRAG pre-meeting:

FRDC funded Centrostephanus project update

Key points:

- The data shows a 50% overlap between the urchin and abalone fisheries.
- The urchin fishery is spatially consistent with the abalone fishery, with catches from waters slightly deeper than those favoured by the abalone fishers.
- The absence of a significant Centrostephanus fishery in 2015 means the amount of urchin harvested is insufficient to have an effect on urchin populations.
- Diver culling (smashing) of urchins during abalone fishing trips is not viable, and will affect the CPUE data.

- FRDC may co-fund (with the Abalone Council) an extension to the project to look further at selective culling.
- In the opinion of IMAS, the urchin fishery has no apparent disadvantages to industry and should be encouraged.

High water temperature event in 2010. This event and the associated high mortalities in the Actaeons, Freycinet and Bruny Island in 2010 has now been clearly associated with a sea surface temperature anomaly. .

SAFS (Status of Australian Fish Stocks workshop). 2015 will be the reference year for SAFS reports on the stock status of abalone. There continues to be concern that the current SAFS process is inadequate and inappropriate. Among other issues, the process does not adequately take into consideration of the management changes made and the 'lag' effect in abalone fisheries. Poorly considered negative assessments of sustainability, , have the potential to have a significant effect on the image of abalone in key markets. FRAG #3 will look at the framework for the 2016 SAFS, timeframes etc. it will be important to ensure that a project is supported to identify a defendable framework for abalone and develop a logical process for determining proxies for recruitment overfishing. DPIPWE will notify FRDC (Dr Patrick Hone) that the current model of assessment is not effective, with the expectations of a change in the methodology.

4. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed

5. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on Monday April 20, 2015 should be accepted as an accurate record.

6. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Joey McKibben set a date for a meeting to progress target and limit reference points and drive process;

Ongoing – information is now available and will be reviewed for a meeting on July 20, 2015.

Action 2. Raise concerns with the Minister concerning the tendency of a small number of industry members who do not attend FRAG or other meetings, subsequently seek to overturn advice made through established advisory processes.

Ongoing – meeting to be arranged.

Action 3. IMAS to support Dean at the FAC to create a process to re-build stocks on the West Coast.

On going - MCDA review workshop to be held on 20 July *to discuss using catch rate targets and development of a rebuilding strategy that represents quota reductions in a positive light (i.e. investing in the future).*

Action 4. Craig Mundy to work closely with FRDC and industry in the months ahead to inform an improved SAFS assessment process for abalone fisheries with much improved consultation and communication with industry during the assessment process for the next SAFS Report due in 2016

Ongoing – meeting to be held July 20, 2015

7. Issues from AbFAC 1/2015

SMEG – (spatial management evaluation group). It is proposed that the SMEG will consider a wide range of issues, including a staged approach to spatial caps in the form of a 'middle ground' position. This will involve the setting of review triggers for

possible management action when the catch of a given area exceeds a trigger level. When an area catch trigger is about to be activated/is activated, the FRAG, with the assistance of IMAS, will review and recommend what, if any, management action is necessary.

Size limits and boundaries – An industry proposal for i) incremental size limit increases on the East Coast and ii) an increase on the West Coast has now been supported by two FRAG meetings and an AbFAC meeting. DPIPWE were also supportive of the proposed changes as outlined in the public consultation documentation that was circulated and subsequently not actioned due to a number of written objections.

While it was noted that there are a range of issues before the Minister, the FRAG strongly endorsed sending the proposed outstanding boundary and size limit changes, to the Minister as a matter of urgency.

Action 1: IMAS, in collaboration with DPIPWE and the TAC, to formulate a proposal for a package of boundary and size limit changes.

Greenlip Fishery – A proposal was made for a four-month closure (January to April) in the greenlip fishery, while leaving some areas open to supply the live Melbourne market (North East, North West and Perkins Bay).

DPIPWE is watching closely due to large quantities being taken in the early part of the year (with generally lower recovery rates and poorer condition). 70t has been taken to date.

The majority of FRAG members supported this proposal. DPIPWE put forward a proposal of a 4 month closure – leave open Central Coast, King Island, top of Flinders Island. Other proposals were considered including for the establishment of a separate greenlip unit and slitting the quota into quarterly or half year 'blocks' which would spread catch out and improve marketing.

Allen Hansen suggested that greenlip TACs were somewhat conservative and that for instance, the KI greenlip catch target should be at 100t and see if can be caught.

Given the range of views, the FRAG agreed to task IMAS, in collaboration with DPIPWE and the TAC, with developing a harvest strategy for the greenlip fishery, which would aim to improve yield and sustainability, while also taking into account the issue of seasonaility in condition?.

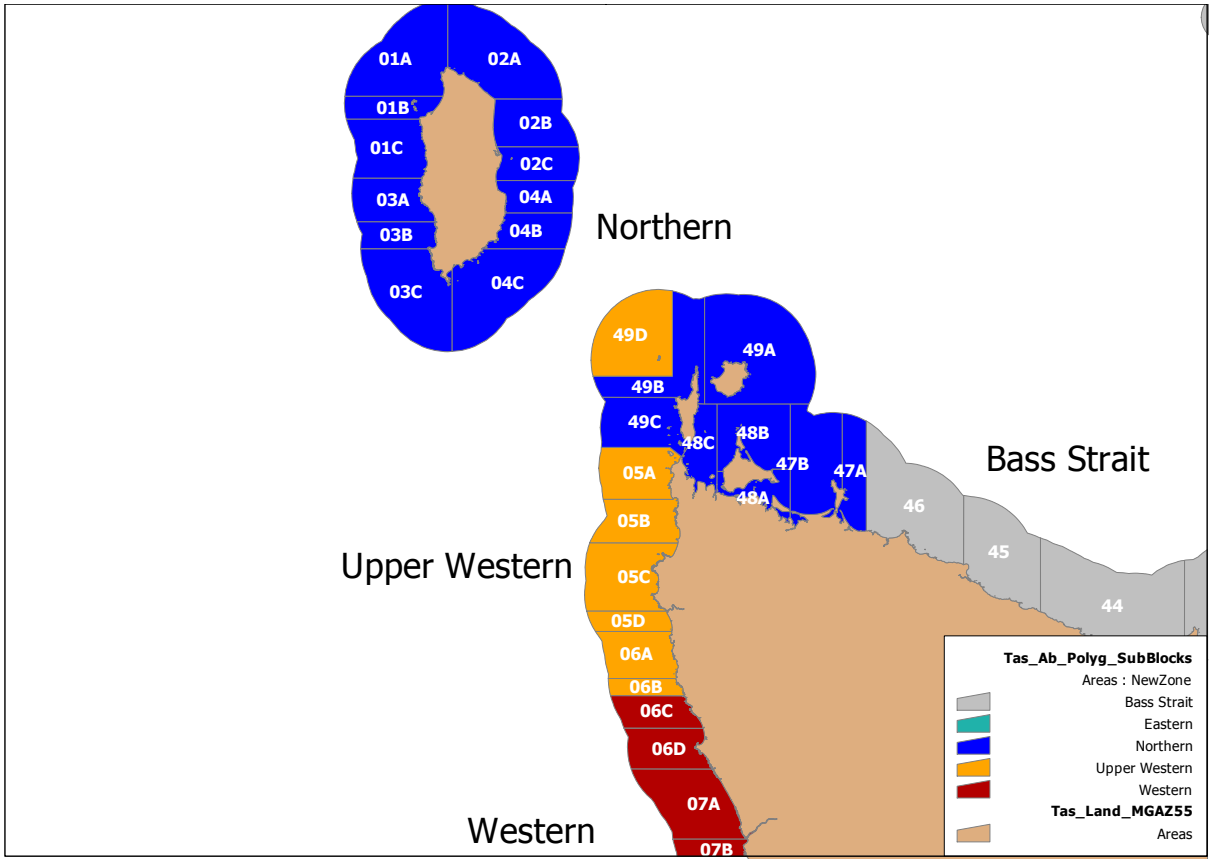
Action 2: IMAS, in collaboration with DPIPWE and the TAC, to formulate a proposal for harvesting greenlip.

8**. Fishery Performance update: I**

i) Central West

There was long discussion on the boundaries and size limits for the Central West and Western Zone, taking into account marketing, operational and stock considerations. A map showing the new Western, Upper Western, Northern boundaries is shown, and at the completion of the discussions the following action was agreed:

Action 3: That the FRAG to recommend to the FAC that the Central West Zone be removed and a new zone (the Upper West Zone) be created. This zone would extend between blocks 6B and 49B, including Albatross Island, and fished at 132mm minimum size . The Western Zone would extend between blocks 6C to 13B and be fished at 140mm.



ii) Western Zone:

IMAS Comments

Central West Block 6 – Lift in Q2 CPUE back to similar mean quarterly CPUE from 2014, but these levels are till down on previous years. No sub-block is showing signs of improvement and catch for the 1st two quarters is less than all previous years.

West Block 6 – Slightly better Q2 CPUE than Q1 but is lower than all previous years Q2 CPUE's. Catch to date for 1st two Q is similar to 2014 but CPUE is lower.

Block 7 – Steady CPUE in both Q's of 2015 at around 100kg/hr has provided a slight lift in CPUE data against 2014 data, first quarter catch is higher than the previous 2 years. 2015 is the highest two Q catch since 2012, mainly driven by effort in sub-blocks B and C. CPUE rise has been driven by sub-block B with both other sub-blocks declining on previous years. Weak evidence of improvement in B should be cautiously monitored through 2nd half the year.

Block 8 – Almost no catch in Q2. CPUE stable against 2014 data but very low compared to all previous years. In 2014, weather was blamed for low catch rates here?

Block 9 – Very little Q2 catch in this block. Decline in 2015 CPUE against previous years is a result of poor CPUE in 9C, this is in contrast to improvement in CPUE in 9B where Q1 catch was higher than 2014 and with a higher CPUE. Overall CPUE for this block is still declining.

Block 10 – Lower catch in 2015 with lower CPUE to 70kg/hr for the year to date. Poor Q1 CPUE when most catch as taken, low catch in Q2 has higher CPUE. Only sub-block C appears stable for CPUE, and the most productive sub-block (D) is continuing decline rapidly.

Block 11 – CPUE for two Q's of 2015 are stable at 78kg/hr which is lower than all other years. Catch is similar for the 1st two Q's to previous years back to 2011. No sign of recovery in any sub-block.

Block 12 – Q2 CPUE has improved on Q1, but there is still a large variation in effort as a result of differential CPUE at the sub-block level. Overall CPUE is slightly down on previous years. 12C continues to hold up the CPUE in this block with continued decline in sub-blocks A and B and stable low catch rate in D. 12C CPUE is down on the high CPUE in 2014. Catch in this sub-block continues to increase, and both the catch and CPUE here needs monitoring. Catch in other sub-blocks is similar year to date to other years, with 12B seeing a return to high Q1 catch compared to 2014.

Block 13 – Q2 catch is low, but CPUE is similar to Q1. Half year catch is lower than all previous years and at a lower CPUE

FRAG comments:

Action taken in 2014/15 doesn't appear to have arrested the decline and this area may need a further cut in 2016, depending on the speed of improvement.

Western Zone Blocks 9-11 – IMAS suggest incremental cuts if improvements are not seen in 2015, previous management decisions should be reviewed over a 2 year period.

Noted that increasing the size limit will lower the CPUE and the MCDA will be worse.

It was suggested that IMAS provide a report based on primary swell wave length patterns (wave power) to show the fishing events so far this year. IMAS responded that the quota was 57% caught with little sign of catch rate improvement and that swell height alone was unlikely to be the reason for the depressed catch rates.

iii) Bass Strait Zone:

IMAS Comments:

Block 33 – Good CPUE has brought the year to date CPUE above 80 kg/ph, year to date catch is lower than years 2010-14.

Block 38 – Good CPUE in 2015 >90kg/ph. Half year catch is similar to years 2010+

FRAG comments:

A mechanism to move effort to the Bass Straight fishery prior to fishing on the islands was suggested The FAC agreed to pursue the issue and received advice prior to the next FRAG

Action 4: IMAS, in collaboration with DPIPWE, to develop a proposal for improving the spread of catch and effort in the Bass Strait fishery.

iv) Northern Zone:

IMAS Comments:

Block 31 – 1st half of year CPUE for 2015 lower than all previous CPUE in this block. Catch for Q2 is similar to previous 4 years.

Block 49 – Q CPUE continues to decline in this block with all sub-blocks showing lower levels. Catch from this block is much lower than all previous years to date >15t.

Block 5 – CPUE increase on 2014 data for a similar catch year to date. Sub-block 5A is the cause of the increase with B and C stable.

Block 3 – Very little catch year to date <10t CPUE similar to 2014, which is lower than all previous years.

King Island

Block 1 – not a lot caught to date

Action 5 : IMAS, in collaboration with DPIPWE to consider the balance between minimum size, catch and catch rate for block 49

FRAG comments:

Interpretation of the data is tricky due to a reporting/interpreting the data between greenlip and blacklip effort. Block 31 data has shown 7 years of declining catch rates; part of this decline could be due to poor reporting (greenlip vs. blacklip) as divers are reporting good fishing for blacklip in that block.

Overall, there is likely to be a need for a reduction in TAC for the Northern Zone.

v) Eastern Zone

IMAS Comments

Block 13 - Better than expected CPUE data in all sub blocks, particularly in 13E gives the best Q data since 2012. Catch in 13C is low compared to previous years.

Block 14 – Q2 CPUE climbs above 60kg/hr for the 1st time since 2009. Catch of 10t is similar to other years from 2011.

Block 16 – Similar trend in CPUE to Blocks 13, 14 with increase in Q CPUE (55kg/hr). Three year trend of better CPUE, with catch at similar levels across years from 2011.

Block 17 – CPUE up, only 2 t caught.

Block 20 – CPUE stable against the 2013-14 data, still a long way down from high CPUE of mid 2000s.

Block 21 – Substantial variation in CPUE in Q2, but signs of an improving CPUE in both main sub-blocks A and C. Catch is similar to last few years 7t.

Block 22 – Mixed CPUE trends between sub-blocks give rise to an overall CPUE similar to 2014 which is lower than previous years. CPUE increase in A contrasts with a decrease in B and C.

Block 23 – Stable CPUE against 2014 and similar increased Q2 catch. 23B is performing better than A.

Block 24 – main sub-block 24B has a nice increase in CPUE and a higher Q2 catch than previous years back to 2006. Not much catch out of 24A and a low CPUE to match it.

Block 27 – Stable overall CPUE at 47kg/hr, driven by effort in 27D. 27C has a low CPUE for similar Q catch and may be of concern in future.

Block 28 – Overall catch is low compared to the past 15 years, with a very low catch rate.

Block 29– Q2 CPUE is lower than 2014, although sub-block 29A appears stable. 29B has low CPUE for similar Q catch. High catches during 2013/14 may have affected recovery in this block.

Block 30 – Early recovery in 2013 has not persisted. Experimental fishing in Block 30B has shown that 2t could not be taken from the same reef areas in two consecutive years.

Block 31 – CPUE is declining from high level in 2009, but Q2 shows an improvement over Q1. Catch to date is similar to 2013-14 data.

FRAG comments:

Overall the southern part of the Eastern Zone is showing good recovery, with recruitment starting to move through for a stock re-build. Some of the northern area that has been fished hard is showing signs of depletion.

Divers report the Eastern zone fishery is gradually improving, with processors paying an extra $1 per kg for 145mm fish, divers are targeting Tasman Island.

It is uncertain if the upturn in catch rates is a result of a short term recruitment pulse entering the fishery or stock rebuilding.

The three month E Coast closure at the start of the season and the original rationale for the closure was discussed. The possibility of closing block 31A as part of the closure was raised, as was the capping of each FLAD with a set catch. The Department pointed out that micro-managing effort via FLAD limits would be expensive and possibly impractical. It was noted that demand for abalone at this time is high due to the Chinese New Year

Action 6: the TAC (J. McKibben) to present a strategy to the next FRAG for dealing with the East Coast closure and associated issues.

iv) Greenlip:

IMAS Comments:

Note: Greenlip CPUE data has been treated as per South Australian practise, but interpretation is still challenging. Trends from mixed fishing events should be contrasted with trends from single species fishing events. **NB Analysis of mixed species CPUE trends requires more work.**

Block 2 – Overall slight increase in CPUE, which should be monitored, catch similar to previous years to date.

Block 48 – High ½ year catch, but CPUE is lower than previous 8 years. Decline is due to 48A.

Block 31 – CPUE stable against 2014 but these 2 years are lower than the previous 7. Catch is highest recorded.

Block 39 – CPUE has improved on 2014 after a good Q1 but still low compared to previous years. Catch is approximately 8t.

Block 35 – CPUE is stable here at 50-60 ton and represents the best example of a sustainable fishery. Catch has increased from 2010 onwards except this year catch is a lot lower.

FRAG comments:

Suggestion made to reduce the cap on King Island and add 5t to the north coast.

Action 7: IMAS and DPIPWE to look at a proposal to reduce the greenlip cap on King Island and move catch to other areas of the north coast.

IMAS suggested a reduction in caps in 2016 with a longer term strategy to re-build stocks.

NB See Section 7 (FAC issues) above for earlier discussion on greenlip.

8. Urchin Update:

Craig gave an update on the FRDC project researching the overlapping of urchin and abalone footprint. The urchin population is deeper than the abalone fishery and urchin harvesting is a solution to the effect on the abalone fishery. *See also Section 2 above.*

9. Voluntary size limits

There are a few divers taking fish at a larger size limit to maximise the value of the catch

10. SAFS:

The recent meeting was attended by a good representation of industry and scientists – Industry is critical of the SAFS assessment process as the process as there was no consultation with industry. The reporting template was quite negative and was released 2 days prior to the meeting. IMAS will put further recommendations over the table as there are 160 species across Australia – fin fish crustaceans etc with one method of reporting. IMAS provide a research report to ABARES and were unaware the document would be used as a public document. The next assessment is 2016. *See also Section 2 above*

Open Meeting Close 3:10pm

Closed FRAG meeting - additional outcomes

Confirmed importance of finalising MCDA process; agreement to hold meeting on July 21 to discuss the process and develop reference points, including trigger limits and long range rebuilding targets and a rebuilding strategy

Greenlip - Action xx above necessary for processers to develop their business/ marketing plans Processors need a direction from AbFAC #2 to facilitate their business plans.

Interim thoughts on TAC for 2016:

- Eastern Zone – looking better likely to recommend maintaining TAC
- Western and Central West – creation of new zone (Upper West); if catch rates do not pick up, may require another TAC reduction
- Northern Zone – Block 5 decline flattening out; Block 49 needs action

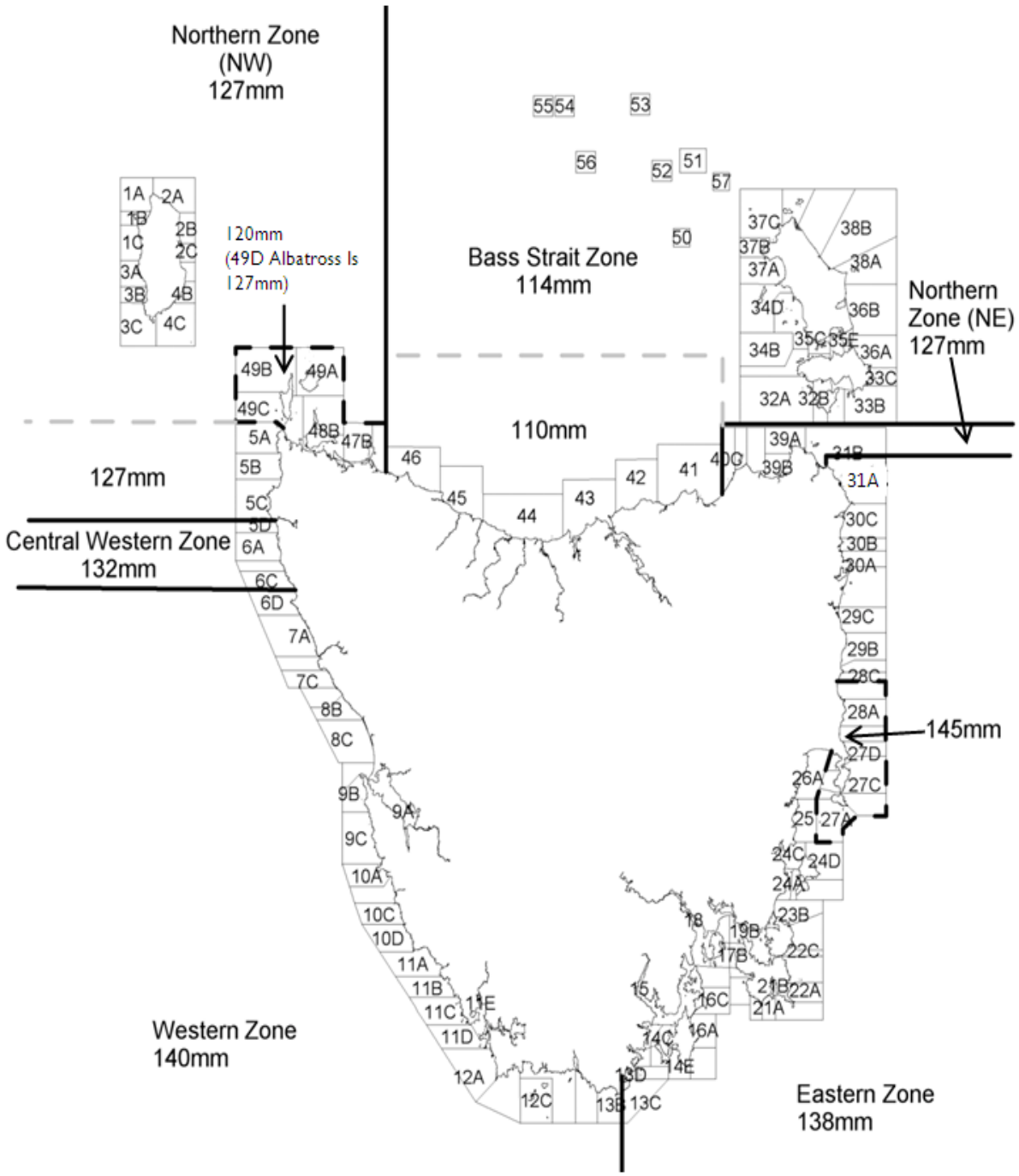
Next meeting must make firm recommendations on a number of issues; IMAS to check workload and ensure papers are presented in good time to support discussion and finalisation of FRAG/FAC positions.

Action Items FRAG #2 2015

	Action	Responsibility
From FRAG #1 2015	Set a date for a meeting to progress target and limit reference points and drive process	Lead: Joey McKibben. Supported by: Malcolm Haddon, Craig Mundy, Darvin Hansen, Ben Cobbing and Dave Tarbath Meeting set for July 20, 2015
From FRAG #1 2015	Raise concerns with the Minister concerning the tendency of a small number of industry members, who do not attend FRAG or other meetings, and subsequently seek to overturn advice made through established advisory processes	Ian Cartwright/DPIPWE Awaiting action by DPIPWE
From FRAG #1 2015	IMAS to support Dean at the FAC to create a process to rebuild the stocks on the West Coast	IMAS/ AbFAC MCDA review workshop set for July 20 2015
From FRAG #1 2015	Craig Mundy to work closely with FRDC and industry in the months ahead to inform an improved SAFS assessment process for abalone fisheries and much improved consultation and communication with industry during the assessment process for the next SAFS Report due in 2016.	Craig Mundy / Dean Lisson Progress report due at FRAG#3
1	Formulation of a proposal for a package of boundary and size limit changes.	IMAS in collaboration with DPIPWE and TAC
2	Greenlip harvesting proposal, including consideration of closed season	IMAS in collaboration with DPIPWE and TAC
3	Recommendation to abolish the Central Western Zone and establish an Upper West Zone	Chairman; Report to FAC
4	Proposal for improving the spread of catch and effort in the Bass Strait fishery.	IMAS in collaboration with DPIPWE
5	Block 49 proposal	IMAS in collaboration with DPIPWE
6	Proposal for 2016 East Coast closure	TAC (Joey McKibben)
7	Proposal to reduce the greenlip cap on King Island and move catch to other areas of the north coast	IMAS and DPIPWE

2015 TAC (DPIPWE)

Blocks - Area	TAC 2015	Kgs/unit
Bass Strait Blacklip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group		
Blocks50-56 Bass Strait Islands		
Blocks 42-46 Central North		
Total Bass Strait TAC	**70**	**20**
Central Western Zone		
Blocks 6A-6C Couta Rocks	52.5	
Total Central Western Zone TAC	**52.5**	**15**
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, inc Maria		
Blocks 25-29A Freycinet and Bicheno		
Blocks 29B, 29C, 29D and 30A North East		
Total Eastern Zone TAC	**528.5**	**151**
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	**140**	**40**
Northern Zone		
Blocks 5A-5C	50	
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5	75	
Blocks 1-4 King Island	70	
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East	30	
Total Northern Zone TAC	**224**	**64**
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**	**240**
2015 TAC TOTAL	**1855t**	**530kg**


Northern Zone (NW) 127mm
120mm (49D Albatross Is 127mm)
Bass Strait Zone 114mm
Northern Zone (NE) 127mm
110mm
127mm
Central Western Zone 132mm
145mm
Western Zone 140mm
Eastern Zone 138mm
1A 2A 1B 2B 1C 2C 3A 4B 3B 4C 3C
5554 53 56 52 51 57 50
37C 38B 37B 38A 37A 34D 36B 34B 35C 35E 36A 33C 32A 32B 33B
49B 49A 49C 48B 47B 5A 5B 5C 5D 6A 6C 6D 7A 7C 8B 8C 9B 9A 9C 10A 10C 10D 11A 11B 11C 11E 11D 12A 12C 13B 13C 13D 14C 14E 16A 15 16C 18 19B 17B 22C 21B 22A 21A 23B 24C 24D 24A 25 27A 26A 27C 27D 28A 28C 29C 29B 30C 30B 30A 31A 39A 39B 40C 41 42 43 44 45 46