

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 4/2015

Thursday October 15, 2015 – 10.30am

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes

Present:

Members:

Ian Cartwright (Chair), Dean Lisson Greg Woodham, Darwin Hansen, Avril Brown, Alan Gray, Ben Cobbing, Steve Crocker, Alan Hansen, John Hoults, Rob Scanlon, P. Richardson Matt Bradshaw (DPIPWE), Craig Mundy (IMAS), Jillian Freeman (minutes), Joey McKibben, Hugh Jones (IMAS)

Observers:

John Ramsden, Bev Amos, Mel Porteous, Ken Hoskin, Eileen Thorpe, Greg Hughes, Brett Wilson, Phil Pyke, Sarah Pyke, Brett Greene, Stuart Anning, Byron Ransom Tim Lesser, Beau Lesser, Max Marriott, Alice Marriott, Mal Steane, Stewart Anthony, Ben Rex, Anthony Hitchens, Mark Webster, Paul McShane, Ken Hoskin, Luisa Forbes, Ryan Baillie, Benn Richardson, Matt Debman.

Apologies:

D Tarbath, Scott McRae

1. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers, and outlined that the main purpose of the meeting was to get an overall view of the status of resource, from the IMAS data, the MCDA and industry input in support of making recommendations for the 2016 TAC.

The importance of respecting the opinions of all stakeholders, including that of divers, was emphasised. It was noted that presentations relevant to the assessment and TAC setting process would be provided by Dr Paul McShane, Alice Marriott, Allen Hansen and Peter Kossman.

Previous FRAG meetings had proposed the creation of a new Upper West Zone and a range of size limit changes. The Department advised that given the lead time for public consultation preparation of briefs, etc, that the new Zone was not a possibility for 2016. Some progress on size limits may be possible in 2016, but not by January. the formation this zone cannot be logically created for 2016.

2. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed with no additional items suggested.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on Monday August 24, 2015 should be accepted as an accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Joey McKibben set a date for a meeting to progress target and limit reference points and drive the process – report to be provided to FRAG #4

Meeting has been convened and report will be put forward at FRAG #1 2016.

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 - Minister Rockliff has arranged a meeting with The Chairman at 1.45pm on November 19 2015. Ian to report back after the meeting

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

Ongoing – waiting on MDCA workshop data, and the report from Dr Knuckey, a meeting date to be set. The Knuckey report has been completed and is with the Minister for approval

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

Stephen Mayfield and Craig Mundy have met and found some issues with the framework for abalone and other fisheries. The process has been referred back to the Advisory Committee and the FRDC will be running the process rather than ABARES. Malcolm Haddon is on the Advisory Committee. The framework is likely to add some modifications to the assessment process to cater for the abalone and other fisheries with particular characteristics. 2015 will be the reference year for the next SAFS assessment.

Action 1: Place SAFS Assessment on the agenda for FRAG #1 2015

Action 5. Proposal for improving the spread of catch and effort in the Bass Strait fishery

IMAS resolved in collaboration with DPIPWE. The changes proposed did not meet the cost/benefit test.

Action 6. Proposal to reduce the Greenlip cap on King Island and move catch to other areas of the north coast

See later agenda item

Action 7. Malcolm to write a fact sheet on size limits vs caps and decide what the size limit will achieve. Clarify the 'LML'

Pending – FRDC report which is being used to enable Malcolm to collaborate on the paper due in November

Action 8. Peter Kossman to write up a new submission on the greenlip closure for consultation to AbFAC and the Department.

Tabled and completed – to be discussed at a later agenda item

Action 8 Dean to contact FRDC to secure funding for the SAFS process

Action no longer required.

Action 9. Craig to put the full proposal for SAFS funding to the next FRAB meeting for approval

Completed

Action 10. Members are asked to submit a report o their queries and thought, to be distributed with the meeting papers prior to the meeting

Completed

6. Reports from SMEG (Spatial Management Evaluation Group) and other reports/presentations

Target Reference Points have been developed

Action 2: SMEG paper on reference points and other harvest strategy elements to be put on the agenda for FRAG1 #1 2016

Dr. Paul McShane – provided a presentation on sea surface temperature increases and the implications for the fishery. He also challenged to FAC not to consider size limits as a panacea to the management of the industry, as increasing size limits can push divers into marginal/high growth areas with negative effects for the resource.

Recommendations;

- East Coast size limits 136/138/140mm appear excessively high, a substantial proportion of the abalone could reach sexual maturity at a smaller size and will not grow any larger.
- Suggest an additional survey of pre-recruits and a report to forecast high settlement events.
- Conservative quotas may not be the way to go and high catch rates may not be sustainable. The catch rate data in this industry is comprehensive.
- Beware of assuming that large biomasses mean high recruitment and rebuilding the biomass is no guarantee of increased productivity from the resource, particularly when the fishery is under the influence of other major environmental impacts such as the water temperature increases highlighted earlier.

The FRAG noted that the current policy for setting the LML for abalone is ensure abalone breed twice (size at maturity plus 2 years). The issue is to better define and understand the '2 year rule', its adequacy and how to best to link it to policy decisions. It appears likely that the Knuckey review will make recommendations on size limits.

IMAS has a program in place with growth plates in 250 sites to grow abalone and assess long term recruitment.

IAS 2016 Korea – the theme that came out of the symposium was that egg production was not consistent and that this feature of abalone life history will dictate the style of management (dynamic) for the Tasmanian fishery.

Alice Marriott – tabled and spoke to a document 'Additional Comment Diver & Quota Holder Sub-Council Reports Oct 2015'. The points emphasised included

- Management decisions made are too reactive.
- Quota Holders should not be viewed as investors.
- TACL members should be more involved in the industry.
- communication lines should be more open.

Allen Hansen - tabled and spoke to a document on zones and size limits. The points emphasised included

- The LMLs of 138/140mm are too large and should be 135/132mm on the East Coast with the North East at 128/132mm.
- Catch rates are variable with the ability of the diver and weather conditions and should not be relied upon to inform stock assessments of the status of the stock.
- Western Zone quota should remain the same.

- Creating a new zone will not create a better price to the market.
- Quota for Northern Zone should remain the same.
- Bass Strait quota should be increased.
- Suggested quota for 2016 – 2,800t based on long term averages.

7. IMAS presentation of data and fisheries assessment, including additional diver/stakeholder

IMAS summary comments - Craig Mundy and Hugh Jones

2015 FRAG #4 Catch & CPUE Summary

Central Western and Western Zone

Zone Summary

- The TACC was reduced from 1001t to 840 t in 2014 and has been held constant for 2015.
- The objective of that TACC reduction was to reduce catch below the combined production through recruitment and somatic growth, and trigger stock rebuilding.
- CPUE continues to decline unabated across all blocks in this assessment, indicating catch remains greater than the combined biomass increase through recruitment and growth of abalone already above the LML.
- Several blocks show a short term (1 year lag) link between catch and CPUE, indicating that CPUE reflects short-term changes in stock levels.
- For many blocks, CPUE is at a 14 year low, and at a 14 year low in catch.

Central West;

- **MCDA and IMAS Recommendation is for a reduction in catch from 53 Tonnes to 42.4 Tonnes in the Central Zone for 2016.**

Western Zone

- **MCDA and IMAS Recommendation is for a reduction in catch from 840 Tonnes to 717 tonnes in the Western Zone for 2016.**

Central West

Recommendations;

Block 5D; no change

Blocks 6A – C; 20% reduction

Western Zone

Recommendations

Block 6D; 20% reduction}

Block 7; 15% reduction}

Block 8; 15% reduction}

Block 9; 15% reduction

Block 10; 20% reduction

Block 11; 20% reduction

Block 12; 10% reduction

Block 13A-B; no change

FRAG COMMENTS:

Central West – agree with IMAS view of 42.4t

AH feels the size limit should be reduced to 132mm and increase the TAC. St Helens reduce the size to 127mm.

2016 Total TACC for Central West – 42.4t

Western Zone

Block 6D, 7 & 8 - there are plenty of fish with a good catch rate, but the weather has been unsuitable for diving for most of this year. The Conicals and Sandy Cape are the only anchorage points where the swell is less than 1.5m, there are some areas that are not accessible due to the weather.

2016 TACC for Blocks 6D, 7 & 8; industry agreed to leave at 83.8t

Industry agrees with the IMAS recommendations.

There was an alternative view of reducing the TACC from 840t down to 700t.

(1) diver disagrees and feels it should remain at 840t, as it is unknown what recruitment is coming though.

2016 Total TACC for the Western Zone – 717t

Eastern Zone:

Summary Notes

- Within this assessment 12 tonnes of catch was unallocated to a block within the FRAG 2015 allocation process, therefore this 12 tonne is added to the final MCDA and IMAS TACC 2016 recommendations at the end of the assessment.
- CPUE is assumed to be a reasonable indication of abalone availability.
- Improving CPUE in the southern blocks of the Eastern Zone suggests stock rebuilding is underway.
- Current market pressures for larger abalone has the potential to undermine stock rebuilding in the southern blocks.
- Substantial changes in the seasonality of fishing is affecting catch rates in some blocks, for example most of the Block 27 catch was taken in the 2nd quarter of 2015.
- Blocks where fishing pressure was relatively high in 2012/2013 generally declined in 2014 and have continued to decline in 2015.
- Notwithstanding the above comment, there is a trend of increasing CPUE during Q2 and Q3 in several blocks, similar to the pattern observed when the fishery recovered in 2004.
- There is an expectation that a period of better recruitment to the fishery has or will commence shortly.
- It is recommended that catch should be reduced in those blocks where CPUE has declined in both 2014 and 2015.
- Catch allocated to Block 13 in 2016, must be taken from Block 13, and not re-allocated to blocks where run of fish is larger, and achieving a higher beach price.

- **IMAS Recommendation is for a reduction in catch from 530 Tonnes to 519.3 tonnes in the Eastern Zone for 2016.**

Recommendations

Block 13; no change

Block 14; no change

Block 16; no change

Block 17; no change

Block 19; no change

Block 20; 10% reduction

Block 21; no change

Block 22; no change

Block 23; 10% reduction

Block 24; no change

Block 27; no change

Block 28; no change

Block 29; 10% reduction

Block 30; no change

Block 31; no change

FRAG COMMENTS

Block 14 – good signs with plenty of fish

Block 16 – suggest increasing from 30t to 40t

Block 29 – the only block left open for 2015.

Block 31 – there has been a size increase to 140mm.

Suggested that if an area needs a cap due to being vulnerable the intention is to be flexible, review the area if required and communicate with members.

There needs to be a 'Force Majeure' protocol that can be put into place if required; if there are signs of an algal bloom that may affect the East Coast in 2016. . The TACC cannot be shifted to other blocks as these blocks would then be overfished. Sampling and testing is being undertaken on the *Gymnodinium catenatum* bloom for research purposes.

FRAG overall comment;

Fishing well, hold and monitor

Bruny, Freycinet and Storm Bay areas are showing good signs.

2 members support IMAS with a minor reduction of 2%

2016 TACC for Eastern Zone 530t

Northern Zone:

Summary Notes

- The depletion experiments in Blocks 5 and 49 have not improved the fishery in those locations, and would appear to have had long lasting (but not permanent) effects on production.

- Increases in CPUE are assumed to be an indication of increase in biomass, and vice versa.
- Rapidly declining CPUE and historic low CPUE in areas where LML reductions and elevated catches are of concern.
- In some areas, annual catch and CPUE are both below levels observed prior to LML reductions.
- Location, depth, and time of year appear to contribute to different opinions among local and visiting divers at King Island. However, the majority of fishing grounds are visited by both groups of divers, and there are limited areas where local divers fish in isolation. Where local and visiting divers overlap spatially, local divers typically fish early in the year and have higher CPUE as a consequence.
- **IMAS Recommendation is for a reduction in catch from 225 Tonnes to 188.7 Tonnes in the Northern Zone for 2016.**

IMAS Suggested Recommendations

Block 31B; 10% reduction

Block 39; 5% increase

Block 48; 5% reduction

Block 49; 20% reduction

Block 5A; 15% reduction

Block 1; 20% reduction

Block 2; no change

Block 3; 20% reduction

Block 4; no change

FRAG COMMENTS

Block 5 – fishing well with gutters of fish

Block 49 – not good

Block 3 – not good

IMAS data is an articulated independent set of data, when an area is closed there is no data collected from the block to be analysed.

AH suggests the TACC should be higher.

1 member suggests the TACC should be lower.

2016 TACC for Northern Zone 188.7t

Bass Strait Zone:

Summary Notes

- Within this assessment 5 tonnes of catch was unallocated to a block within the FRAG 2015 allocation process, therefore this 5 tonne is added to the final MCDA and IMAS TACC 2016 recommendations at the end of the assessment.
- Increases in CPUE are assumed to be an indication of increase in biomass, and vice versa.
- Rapidly declining CPUE and historic low CPUE in areas where LML reductions and elevated catches are of concern.

- In some areas, annual catch and CPUE are both below levels observed prior to LML reductions.
- MCDA result is absent from some blocks due to lack of fishing across assessment period and/or current year.
- **IMAS Recommendation is no change in catch (70 Tonnes) in the Bass Strait Zone for 2016.**

Recommendations:

Block 32; no change

Block 33; 5% increase

Block 34; no change

Block 36; no change

Block 37; no change

Block 38; 10% increase

Block 41; no change

Block 43; no change

Block 45; no change

Block 51; no change

Block 53; no change

Block 54; no change

FRAG COMMENTS

Suggest increasing the TAC by 10t.

The current boundaries are in place to protect the fishery of small size and needs to work from a policing perspective.

Action 3: Consider changing the Northern Zone boundary to Petal Point, thereby extending the Bass Strait Zone.

2016 TACC Bass Strait Zone 70.5t

Greenlip:

Summary

- Increases in CPUE are assumed to be an indication of increase in biomass, and vice versa.
- The method of capture and extent of mixed species fishing within the greenlip fishery in any year is likely to impact the reliability of CPUE estimates. In order to account for all mixed species fishing activity throughout the assessment process we utilise the catch-weighted estimate of CPUE in mixed species fishing. A published account of CPUE assessment in mixed species fishing between blacklip and greenlip species found that catch-weighted estimates of CPUE to be the most robust method. (Burch, P., Mayfield, S., Stobart, B., Chick, R., and McGarvey, R. 2011, Journal of Shellfish Research, Vol. 30, No. 2, 425436, 2011).
- **IMAS Recommendation is for a reduction in catch from 140 Tonnes to 130.1 Tonnes in the Greenlip fishery for 2016.**

Recommendations

Block 1; 10% reduction

Block 2; 15% reduction

Block 3; no change

Block 4; no change

Block 48; 5% reduction

Block 49; 15% reduction

Block 5; 10% reduction

Block 31; 10% reduction

Block 39; 10% reduction

Block 32; 5% reduction

Block 33; no change

Block 34; no change

Block 35; 5% increase

Block 36; no change

Block 37; no change

Block 38; no change

FRAG COMMENTS

Mixed suggestions of increasing the North East and North West or leaving as is.

2016 TACC for Greenlip 140t

Peter Kossman tabled a 'Proposal to implement changes to the greenlip abalone fishery'

Peter explained the logic of closing an area and the pulse fishing that would then occur.

Freighting fish off King Island by plane is not acceptable, transporting by sea is more logical.

North Coast small fish are not being caught, as they are not readily saleable.

Discussion on the 4-month closure January to April, and landing fish on the islands.

DPIPWE can use a closure instrument from January 1 to April 31, 2016.

Action 4: Modify the Bass Strait greenlip closure to allow for transport of greenlip abalone from the open areas in the first four months of the year back to the mainland

General Business:

The market dictates the preference for larger blacklip. The marketing of larger wild blacklip abalone are differentiated against the farmed abalone. This market preference has tended to lead to selected fishing this year, which eventuated in somewhat controversial East Coast Closures. After some discussion, the FRAG recommended that a new approach to spatial management be adopted, which

would involve setting caps with some flexibility (e.g. catch target +20%), with a review to occur when catches reach 80% of the catch target;

Action 5: FRAG 1 to review the use of catch caps in the abalone fishery

Meeting closed at 3:24

New actions:

1. Place SAFS Assessment on the agenda for FRAG #1 2015.
2. SMEG paper on reference points and other harvest strategy elements to be put on the agenda for FRAG 1 2016
3. Consider changing the Northern Zone boundary to Petal Point, thereby extending the Bass Strait Zone.
4. Modify the Bass Strait greenlip closure to allow for transport of greenlip abalone from the open areas in the first four months of the year back to the mainland
5. FRAG 1 to review the use of catch caps in the abalone fishery

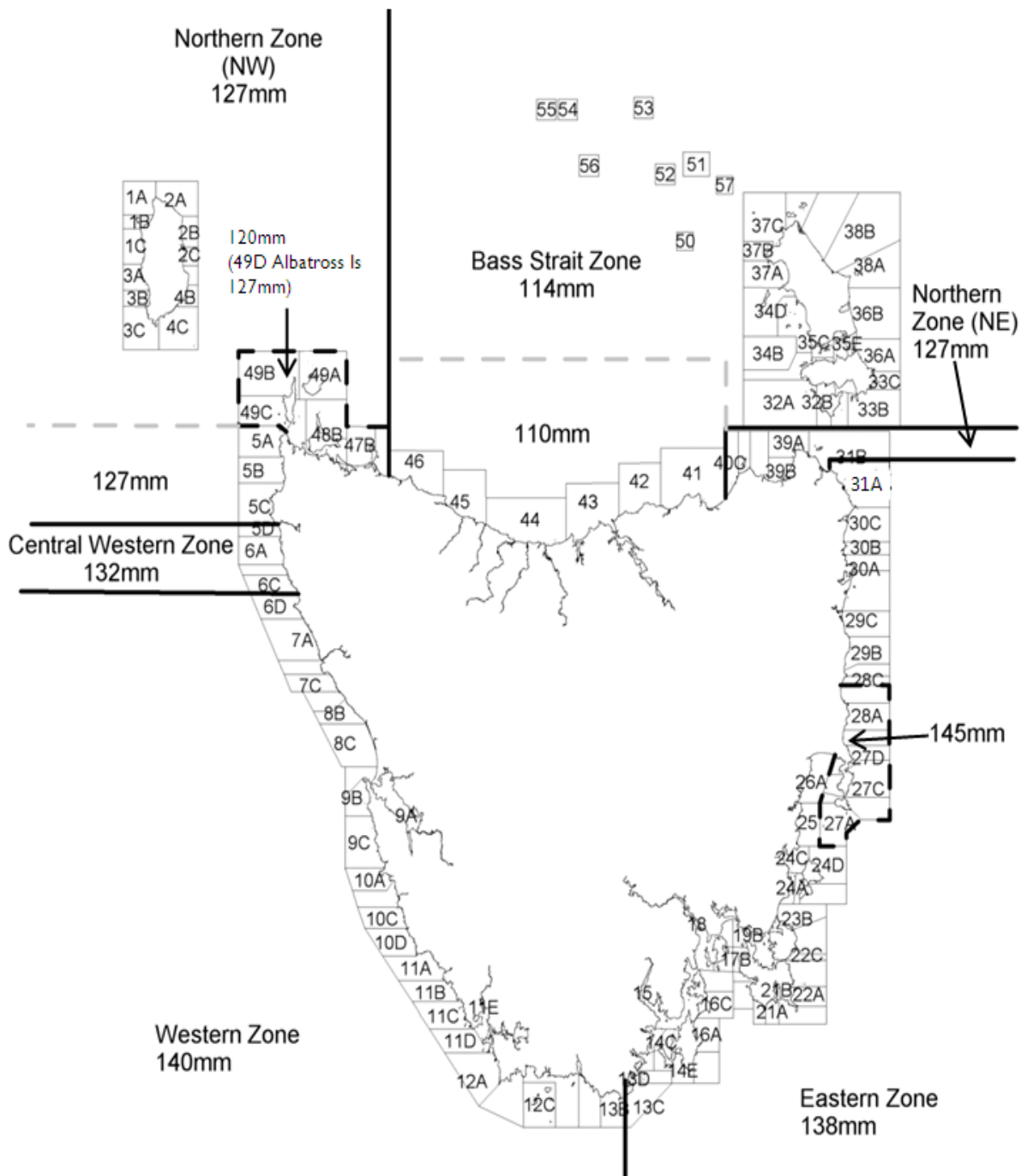
Action Items FRAG #4 2015

Previous FRAG Actions		
	Action	Responsibility
1.	Report from SMEG on target and limit reference points	Lead: Joey McKibben. Supported by: Malcolm Haddon, Craig Mundy, Darwin Hansen, Ben Cobbing and Dave Tarbath Report to FRAG #1, 2016
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.	Minister Rockliff has arranged a meeting with The Chairman at 1.45pm on November 19 2015. IC to report back after meeting
3	Development of a rebuilding strategy for the Eastern and Western Zones	IMAS/ AbFAC Waiting on MDCA workshop data, and the report from Dr Knucky,
4	Craig Mundy and Dean Lisson to monitor progress with the revision of the SAFS assessment, the next version of which is due in 2016	Craig Mundy / Dean Lisson Progress report due at FRAG#1 2016
5.	Malcolm to write a fact sheet on size limits vs caps and decides what the size limit will achieve. Clarify the 'LML'	Malcolm Haddon Progress report due at FRAG#1 2016
FRAG 4		
1	Place SAFS Assessment on the agenda for FRAG #1 2015	FRAG
2	SMEG paper on reference points and other harvest strategy elements to be put on the agenda for FRAG 1 2016	Joey/IMAS
3	Consider changing the Northern Zone boundary to Petal Point, thereby extending the Bass Strait Zone.	DPIPWE
4	Modify the Bass Strait greenlip closure to allow for transport of greenlip abalone from the open areas in the first four months of the year back to the mainland	DPIPWE
5	FRAG 1 to review the use of catch caps in the abalone fishery	Paper to be prepared by DPIPWE/TAC/IMAS

2015 TAC (DPIPWE)

Blocks - Area	TAC 2015	Kgs/unit	IMAS 2016	2016
Bass Strait Blacklip				
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group				
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands				
Blocks 42-46 Central North				
Total Bass Strait TAC	70	20	70.5	80
Central Western Zone				
Blocks 6A-6C Couta Rocks	52.5			
Total Central Western Zone TAC	52.5	15		42.4
Eastern Zone				
Blocks 13C, -14 E. Actaeons			211	
Blocks 14A and 14B. Lower Huon Channel, Huon to Southport Island, inc Dover, Southport				
Blocks 14C-16 Bruny Island			32	
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	519.3	530
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	131.5	140
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	138.2?	188.7

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	732.6	717
2015 TAC TOTAL	1855t	530kg/unit		1698.1



Thursday October 15, - Meeting 1 (pre-meeting)

The key job is to provide the best possible advice to the TACL and the Minister. The risk profile can be deliberated.

IAS 2015 Korea – around the world it has been found that egg production is not consistent. There is a link between weather events and larval production. When biomass is low there is low recruitment.

Overview;

East Coast – the 145mm closure agreed by FRAG, and was supported by TACL.

Management decisions should be thought out and discussed by members in a broader industry forum to manage the fishery successfully. This is a lesson learnt.

Facts – important to remember what the TACL is a consultative body. The Government makes the call on any recommendations made. The Department acknowledges the management is a real time fishery, is consultative and sometimes decisions have to be made quickly. It is an interactive process, a good one and real time fisheries management.

IMAS East Coast zone summary of 'no rebuilding across the zone of fish above the size limit with patchy recruitment' was challenged and discussed.

There has been a period of high biomass, which will result in a recruitment pulse.

CPUE is not an indication of abundance, - the finding the middle ground of caps and an orderly management practice.

IMAS – in 2016 suggests a minor reduction and spatial management.

Management decisions will be reviewed. And any closures due to PST will be dealt with if required.

IMAS recommends a reduction in TACC from 530t to 519.3t FRAG doesn't agree

At FRAG#1 a decision on caps is to be made.

Future decisions to be captured on how the decision was made.

MCDA Harvest Review has been released and is now at the printers– IMAS have adopted all the recommendations.

Central Western and Western Zone;

Zone Summary recommends a reduction in catch from 840t to 717t.

There are some extreme views amongst divers of the state of the Western Zone. There is a variance of demographics within the industry with very differing views. Therefore statistics and data from the whole of industry must be used to make management decisions.

FRAG recommends a reduction and agreed to 717t = 205kg per unit.

Central West;

IMAS recommends a reduction from 53t to 42t

There have been discussions previously to change the boundaries from Central West to Upper Western Zone.

FRAG recommendations - agreed

Thursday October 15 Post Meeting – wrap up

The board to discuss the West Coast / Central West / Upper Western Zone boundaries with a solid proposal to take to members.

Bass Strait & Northern Zone boundary – to be discussed further.

- **Bass Strait – 80t** increase by 10t, with 5t from the Kent Group and 5t from the Furneaux group. Craig to write up a proposal for AbFAC
- **Eastern zone – 530t** status quo (caps to be decided in FRAG 1)
- **Western Zone – 717t** a 123t reduction with review in 2 years to see the result and how the stocks respond.
- **Eastern Zone – 530t**
- **Central West – 42.4t**
- **Greenlip – 140t**