

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 1/2016
Wednesday March 2, 2016 – 10.30am
IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes (draft)

Present:

Members:

Ian Cartwright (Chair), Joey McKibben, Darwin Hansen, Avril Brown, Alan Gray, Ben Cobbing, Steve Crocker, Rob Scanlon, Byron Ransom Matt Bradshaw (DPIPWE), Craig Mundy (IMAS), Jillian Freeman (minutes),

Observers:

John Ramsden, Ruben Bock, Christine Bock, Ben Gray, Mel Porteus, Bev Amos, Clint Mitchell, Phil Pyke,

Apologies:

Dean Lisson, M Haddon, Greg Woodham, Alan Hansen, Jeremy Huddleston, P. Richardson,

1. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers, and outlined that the main purposes of the meeting were to review the 2015 season, gain an overall view of the status of resource, and from the IMAS data and industry input, consider appropriate recommendations to AbFAC.

3. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed with two additional General Business items:

- Bass Strait boundary change and
- Permits in closed areas

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on Thursday October 15, 2015, which were accepted as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Report from SMEG on target and limit reference points.

Lead: Joey McKibben supported by Malcolm Haddon, Craig Mundy, Darwin Hansen and Ben Cobbing.

Discussed further in the agenda

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.

Minister Rockliff arranged a meeting with The Chair at 1.45pm on November 19 2015. The Chair reported to the FAC that the main issues raised at the FAC/FRAG, namely i) ensuring adequate resources for IMAS to support the science necessary to inform management and ii) the issue of some industry stakeholders going around the formal

processes of the FRAG and FAC and lobbying politicians and industry for changes to current practices, or to oppose FAC recommendations on, for instance, size limits. The time allotted to the meeting was short, and covered all FACs. The FRAG suggested that further efforts to communicate with the Minister and his office should be made.

Action 1: Chair to arrange for Bronwen Perry from the Minister's Office to attend a FAC (or part thereof)

Action 3. Development of a rebuilding strategy for the Eastern and Western Zones:

Waiting on MDCA workshop data, and the report from Dr Knucky. Leave on action list.

Action 2. Development of a rebuilding strategy for the Eastern and Western Zones

Action 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:

Planning for the next SAFS is underway and the 2016 edition will be based on the 2015 data. While some changes to the way in which abalone fisheries are assessed, the comprehensive review of the SAFS methodology will not occur as formerly hoped. The 2018 edition may take into consideration the FRAG concerns of the SAFS process of determining sustainability.

Action 3: Craig Mundy to give an update on the SAFS process to FRAG#2

Action 5. Malcolm to write a fact sheet on size limits vs caps and decides what the size limit will achieve. Clarify the 'LML'

Malcolm has prepared a draft that will be discussed in FRAG #2 2016

Action 4: Size limit/caps paper to be finalised and discussed at FRAG #2 2016

Action 6. Place SAFS Assessment on the agenda for FRAG #1 2016

Completed

Action 7. SMEG paper on reference points and other harvest strategy elements to be put on the agenda FRAG #1 2016

Completed

Action 8. Consider changing the northern Zone boundary to Petal Point, thereby extending the Bass Strait Zone:

Discussed further in the agenda

Action 9. 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:

Completed

Action 10 FRAG #1 to review the use of catch caps in the abalone fishery:

Paper to be prepared by DPIPWE/TAC/IMAS

Completed

6. Review of the 2015 season:

MCDA TACC recommendations: full year vs partial year outcomes – IMAS have run and checked the data for the partial year up to October and found the trends accord well with full year trends. Accordingly data up to the time when the TAC setting process occurs can be used with some confidence as being representative.

Eastern Zone;

TACC has been stable with stable catch rates, stocks not showing signs of rebuilding

Actaeons – showing positive signs

Lower Channel –

Bruny Island – is holding well

Storm Bay – the catch is up, and showing positive signs

Fortescue – the catch falling, which is not a good sign

Freycinet – is falling away, the catch rate is declining, there has been a size limit change from 138mm to 145mm

St Helens – the catch is falling away

FRAG comments:

IMAS noted that the harvest strategy showed a slight trend downwards for 2015 and since the focus for management action was the West Coast, not reduction on the TAC was suggested. The FAC was reminded, however, that if there is no significant upward trend in indicators from the 2016 data then IMAS will be looking at recommending a TAC decrease for 2017.

Divers have a more optimistic view of the status on the East Coast with considerable stock being seen on the bottom especially in the south eastern area. Management action has been taken in terms of TAC reductions and improvements are being seen.

Freycinet – agreement that there should be discussions on whether this area remain closed until September due to elevated water temperature.

Action 5: Recommend to AbFAC that the Freycinet opening be delayed until June 1; Matt to consult with local divers

Central West;

Couta Rocks – there have been weather issues, but still catch rates look reasonable.

Western Zone;

High tonnage taken over the last 15 years

Granville – the catch is declining with the catch rate from 170/90kg/hr

Strahan – a sudden drop in catch rate

South West – there is a long term decline in catch 180/100kg/hr. YTD is good

South Coast inshore – the catch is stable

South Coast offshore – increasing catch trend, 120kg/hr

FRAG Comments:

There is a substantial tonnage left to catch in 2016 in the Western Zone. The zone will be left for a rest over winter and industry consider that it will fish well in the later part of the year.

Block 6A and 5D boundary to be changed, due to a small area of 200m where the block numbers can be misconstrued.

Northern Zone;

North West – there is a slight increase in catch rate,

King Island – is not fishing well, there has been a decline over the last 3 years, the catch rate is dependent on locals diving up to 25m depth.

North East – the catch is stable

FRAG comments:

DPIPWE/IMAS to arrange a research trip to resolve a number of issues, including on King Island.

Action 6: At King Island look at the data from resident divers vs visiting divers in deep water and weather conditions.

Bass Strait Zone;

Is reasonably stable with a constant catch rate.

Central North – a gradual rise in catch rate, size limit 110mm

Furneaux group – has a stable catch and catch rate,

Bass Strait Islands – the catch rates are still good with improvement being seen.

Greenlip fishery:

King Island – the catch rates are good at 50/60kg/hr. Fish caught at the beginning of the year are in poor condition. Suggest a desktop study to collect further data.

North West – is stable at 70kg/hr

Black Reef – change of size limit and a cap, still undecided if the cap limit is suitable for the area.

North Coast – bounces around, the catch rates are falling overall, with a positive outlook

North East – some data not is not reliable

Furneaux – the catch is increasing dramatically,

Bass Strait Islands – not a big catch to date.

FRAG comments;

Catch rates in block 1 have fallen away.

There are concerns that the current size limit is not protecting the fishery, as greenlip mature at a quicker rate than blacklip; 3 years vs 5 years.

Suggest a cap of 15t on King Island, or spatially manage the catch.

7. Review and use of catch caps:

There was a lengthy discussion concerning the use of annual caps in the fishery. There was some opposition to the use of hard caps, since in the past of caps have, at times tended to drive effort from areas that have been fishing reasonably well into areas that were fishing less well. There was, however agreement that some form of spatial management was needed to spread catch to prevent over fishing of some blocks and where necessary, build stock levels. Consequently, there was discussion of a form of compromise that would allow for spatial management based on the following:

1. Each spatial management unit (SMU), comprising sub blocks, blocks or a number of blocks, would be assessed with regard to an annual catch target.

2. When the catch reaches 80% of the catch target, the Department will facilitate a review to determine if:
 - the SMU should be closed at or before the catch target or
 - the SMU should be allowed to exceed the catch target.
3. No SMU should exceed the catch target by more than 115-125%¹, depending on the level of target catch
4. The review will consider a range of data provided by IMAS and industry including the following: catch, catch rate, collective diver views (using a structured process) and other relevant factors.
5. The review will be carried out by the TAC Executive and the Department with IMAS support; while advice will be provided by industry, the final decision concerning limits will lie with the Department.

Each year the target catch will be reviewed as part of the TAC setting process.

Action 7: Present the proposed review/catch cap process to AbFAC

The communication of the outcomes of the process to divers will need careful consideration noting that:

- The Department is required by Legislation to Gazette the closure and lodge the advertisement in the newspaper.
- Currently the Department notifies the TACL of closures via email, TACL forwards the email to divers and a txt message to divers.
- Suggest a map of Tasmania with coloured areas that are closed, on the Department website and the TACL website (members section) for easy access by divers.

Targets for blocks that are nearing the limit as at FRAG #1 2016:

- Eastern Zone – discuss at FRAG #2
- Western Zone - total 717t
 - Sub block 6D 20t
 - Sandy Cape & Granville 64t
 - Strahan 106t
 - 10 – 12A 282t
 - South coast 245.5t

Initial proposal is for review at 80% at SMU level and then may decide to open/close at a finer scale.

- Central West – leave as is
- Northern Zone total 189t
 - King Island 57t
 - North West 44t
 - North East 28t - likely to reach the limit soon.
 - Block 5 50t

¹ NB The FRAG suggested a maximum of 120% - this was modified by the FAC on 23 March 2016

Block 49D 10t

Initial proposal is for review at 80% at SMU level and then may decide to open/close at a finer scale.

- o Greenlip; 140t TACC 2016.

King Island	20t	changed to	16t
North West	21t		
Perkins Bay (48A)	25		
North East	25.5t		
Furneaux	47t		
Unallocated	1.5t	changed to	5.5t

Initial proposal is for review at 70% of the SMU level and then may decide to open/close at a finer scale.

Issue of increased mortalities.

In general there have been more mortalities this year from all areas with weaker fish which is believed to relate primarily to warmer waters. Runabouts are experiencing more mortalities than motherboats. Not all the spate of increased mortality is related to warmer water and other factors may be at play.

IMAS have received a new piece of equipment a Lipid Class Analyser (LCA) looking at the digestive glands in the foot and gonads. It is intended to have an ongoing process to take regular samples and look at periodic energy levels. The Infrared spectrometer is a non invasive process.

8. Knucky and Dichmont stock assessment reviews:

There are 30 recommendations contained in the Knuckey review. Responsibility for consideration of, and taking appropriate some on, varies, with IMAS being generally responsible for research issues and DPIPWE management. There are also implications for industry within some recommendations.

DPIPWE noted that:

- there has been a dislike of spatial management expressed in some quarters, with a belief that if the size limit is correct it will give protection to individual areas;
- experience has shown that this is not necessarily so, since a combination of catch and size limit measures are necessary to effectively manage abalone;
- the MCDA process is developing well and while still at an early stage is nearing a point where it can be used to derive default catch levels for each SMU; and
- modest size limit increases will help the industry transition to a higher TACC in the future.

IMAS noted that:

- setting the correct size limit correctly is a scientific process;
- it has been tasked with providing all the information to the FRAG on LML settings, their objectives and recommendations for change;
- there is a choice of size limit related to the desired level of protection of the biomass – e.g. at 127mm 7% of the biomass is protected, at 140mm 15% is projected and at 165mm 48% is protected.

The TACL is considering asking Ian Knuckey to attend a workshop in Hobart to discuss his report; there was discussion on the benefits of doing so, noting that Ian Knuckey is not an abalone biologist, and there may be very limited benefits to his attendance at a workshop. Conversely, his attendance may help to quell the dissention of some in industry to the outcomes of the FRAG and FAC processes.

It was suggested that it would be useful to divide the recommendations into actions to be undertaken by Industry, DPIPWE and IMAS, with a response and action to each recommendation. Such a table would be useful to assist discussion at the FRAG and FAC and also to provide the Minister with some comfort that the recommendations have been addressed.

9. 2017 TAC setting process – use of MCDA etc

It was agreed to recommend that the FAC/industry adopt the catch rate target setting, review and management process as above.

Action: Present the proposed TAC management process to the FAC for discussion and agreement and subsequent discussion at FRAG #2

10. SMEG (Spatial Management Evaluation Group) Report:

Refer to FRAG #2

The recruitment project juvenile settlement plates program being implemented by IMAS is showing a promising amounts of juveniles.

11. East/West Coast rebuilding strategy:

The strategy is yet to be formalised. Overall, the strategy to build wealth in the fishery, with size limits and catch targets set so as to achieve adequate recruitment and the building to/maintenance of stocks at target (sustainable) levels. It was, however, noted that no management measures can effectively control recruitment, which can change yearly

13. Other business:

1. Bass Strait boundary change, diagram of changes to be developed to show all proposed changes and the rationale for them

Action: IMAS to develop a simple diagram showing all proposed boundary changes and associated size limits to assist discussions and the formulation of recommendations at FRAG#2.

2. Permits in closed areas – agreed no permits to be issued after an area is closed. ‘On the closure of a spatial cap a permit will not be issued for commercial purpose’.

Meeting closed at 3:24pm

Action Items FRAG #1 2016

	Action	Responsibility
1.	Bronwen Perry from the Minister's Office to be invited to attend a FAC (or part thereof)	Chair
2.	Development of a rebuilding strategy for the Eastern and Western Zones	IMAS/ AbFAC Waiting on MDCA workshop data, and the report from Dr Knucky,
3.	Update on the SAFS process to FRAG#2	Craig Mundy/Dean Lisson
4.	Size limit/caps paper to be finalised and discussed at FRAG #2 2016	Malcolm Haddon
5.	Recommend to AbFAC that the Frecinet opening be delayed until September 1; Matt to consult with local divers	Dept./Matt Bradshaw
6.	At King Island look at the data from resident divers vs visiting divers in deep water and weather conditions.	DPIPWE
7.	Present the proposed review/catch cap process to AbFAC	DPIPWE

2016 TAC (DPIPWE)

Blocks - Area	TAC 2016	Kgs/unit
Bass Strait Blacklip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group		
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands		
Blocks 42-46 Central North		
Total Bass Strait TAC	77	22
Central Western Zone		
Blocks 6A-6C Couta Rocks	42	
Total Central Western Zone TAC	42	12
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		
Blocks 1-4 King Island		
North West not Perkins Bay		
Block 48A Perkins Bay		
Blocks 31, 39, 40 North East		
Total Greenlip TAC	140	40
Northern Zone		
Blocks 5A-5C		
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5		
Blocks 1-4 King Island		
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East		
Total Northern Zone TAC	189	54
Western Zone		
Blocks 6D, 7 and 8. Granville Harbour, Sandy Cape		
Block 9 South of Strachan		
Blocks 10, 11 and 12A. South West		
Blocks 12B-13B South Coast		
Total Western Zone TAC	717.5	205
2015 TAC TOTAL	1694t	484kg/unit

