

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 1/2017

Monday April 10, 2017

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes**Present:****Members:**

Ian Cartwright (Chair), Joey McKibben, Dean Lisson, Darvin Hansen, Avril Brown, Ben Cobbing, Byron Ransom, Paul Richardson, Rob Scanlon, Alan Gray, Tony Bush, Alan Hansen, Matt Bradshaw (DPIPWE), Craig Mundy, Jillian Freeman (minutes),

Observers:

John Ramsden, Malcolm Petrie (AVCZ), Greg Woodham, Robin Searle, Matthew Gleeson, Matthew Florence, Benn Richardson, Tom Chadwick, Sarah Pyke, Glen Moroney, Greg Hughes, Greg Woodham, Beau Lesser, Stuart Anning, Bev Amos, Mel Porteus, Rob Langdale,

Apologies:

Jeremy Huddleston, Malcolm Haddon (CSIRO), Steve Crocker, Hugh Jones (IMAS),

1. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers, and outlined the main purposes of the meeting, which were to review the previous year, receive an update on the assessment, review catches, catch rates and other information for the season to date, and gain an overall view of the status of resource. Using the IMAS data, diver and other industry input the FRAG would consider recommendations to AbFAC.

The presence of observers, including divers, was noted; the Chair thanked them for their time and emphasised that they are always welcome and that diver input was appreciated.

Malcolm Petrie, Executive Officer from the Central Zone, Victoria, was welcomed as an observer.

3. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on October 6, 2016, were accepted as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:**Action 1. Size limit/caps paper to be finalised and discussed at FRAG #4 2016**

IMAS provided an update on the paper. The document is complex and provides a comprehensive analysis of all relevant size limit-related data including best practice from overseas. It will be released this week. A meeting will be set to discuss the conclusions and recommendations of the paper and to recommend acceptable size limits, given that the current 'L50+2' is only protecting around 8% of exploitable biomass. CSIRO are developing a scientific paper which will further support the conclusions of the study in relation to choosing appropriate size limits.

DPIPWE reported that the Minister has signed off on the MCDA - based harvest strategy, to be applied as a trial in 2017. While this is a step forward, there is a need to integrate appropriate size limits, and gain support for any changes. This will require adequate consultation and there are plans to hold two meetings:

1. a consultation meeting with industry on the all operational aspects of the industry in relation to the harvest strategy and size limits; and
2. a meeting between the TACL, IMAS and DPIPWE to develop a set of size limit to recommendations to take to the FAC and Minister. The TACL will set a meeting date with Ian as Chair.

Ongoing

Actions:

- DPIPWE to set a date for consultation meeting with industry on operational aspects of the industry in relation to the harvest strategy and size limits.
- TACL to set a date for a meeting between the TACL, IMAS and DPIPWE to develop a set of size limit to recommendations to take to the FAC and Minister

Action 2. Investigate changes to logbooks to check impact of selective fishing

Completed

Action 3. The view of the FRAG is the bag limit of 10 per person per day is too high and should be reduced, item to be placed on the AbFAC agenda.

Discussed at AbFAC – decided not reduce the bag limit but reduce the possession limit to 10 per person. Further discussion with RecFish and Tarfish.

Completed

Action 4. Update on the SAFS process

The latest SAFS – (stock report) has been completed;

The Greenlip, Western Zone, Northern Zone and Central West are ‘transitional-depleting’ = yellow.

Eastern Zone and Bass Strait Zone are ‘sustainable’ = green

The assessment process was extensive and the reviewers that the work of IMAS in respect of the assessment and reporting was exemplary.

All SAFS reports are available for viewing on www.fish.gov.au

Completed

Action 5. SAM + 2 – Policy on agreed values

Ongoing

6. IMAS Presentation of SST – extended marine heatwave

IMAS gave a presentation of the ocean warming event on the East Coast in 2015/16 and an overview of the associated mechanisms that contributed to that and other similar events. global warming. From 1991 to 2016 the water temperature recorded at Maria Island has increased by up to 4 degrees. The intensity and duration of the most recent heatwave event was a record at 251 days. The warming extended to a depth of 180 metres. Included the full Continental Shelf, and directly contributed to POMS outbreak in oysters and abalone mortality. It may also have been implicated in scallop mortality and poor productivity in salmon aquaculture. The sightings of sub-tropical species have also increased as a result of rising water temperatures.

The East Australian Current (EAC) Extension' is a series of 'eddies', which break off from the main EAC and move southwards down the east coast of Tasmania. These eddies are the dominant feature in summer, while the cooler, eastward flowing Zeehan Current is dominant in winter.

EAC eddies are unpredictable, and are particularly significant when they amalgamate into a large block of warm water. As stated in previous presentations, the ability to provide meaningful long term forecasts of heatwave events is not possible. However, in the case of extreme events, it may be possible to manage impacts block closures to limit the harvest of abalone weakened by the event. Prediction of heatwave events and how they can best be managed in the future are under review.

The increased likelihood of heatwaves provides a strong rationale for ensuring that the future abalone harvest strategy is sufficiently precautionary to allow for such events.

The following link provides access to the presentation provided by IMAS to the FRAG:

<http://data.imas.utas.edu.au/attachments/20188863-0af6-4032-98f8-def671cdaa58/EasternTasmaniaMHWAtlas.pdf>

7. IMAS presentation of data and fisheries assessment;

The 2016 Assessment is now available and the link is on the website. IMAS explained the various sources of data and how the information is collated and analysed. For the first time, logger data is included in the assessment and generally provides support for MCDA-based harvest strategy outcomes TAC setting and the heat wave event shows up in the data.

New data loggers are being trialled currently and will be available to divers in 2018.

Eastern Zone 2016

CPUE is showing the effect of doubling up which is slightly less efficient, although trends in 'doubled up' data are considered to be reflective of the status of the resource. The heat wave event shows a downturn of CPUE in most blocks, which, prior to this event and a subsequent storm, had been increasing.

For 2017, the TACC has been reduced and the status of the fishery should be carefully watched for the next couple of years. It was noted that the Actaeons should be protected from effort diverted there from other east coast areas that are not recovering.

FRAG comments;

The issue of pulse fishing created by the high level of excess divers was considered by the FRAG as an issue that needed addressing.

Northeast greenlip quota is almost finished; it was suggested that there should be a ban on motherboats – generally agreed this was not practicable.

Processors could voluntarily not accept abalone from an area, effectively 'closing' the area.

The effort could be spread if an additional 2-month closure is proposed when the weather is less conducive to fishing. The Eastern zone is currently closed until May 1.

Updated loggers will be distributed to divers in 2018 and will allow the entry and use of real time data. The FRAG was particularly pleased to note that the Department is working on the introduction of new legislation to will allow closures to be applied within 24 hours, thus greatly reducing the risk of target catch overruns.

A suggestion was made to introduce six monthly TAC's, which would reduce the impact of pulse fishing.

Due to concern for the greenlip and blacklip fishery the FRAG recommended that action be taken to address the pulse fishing issue via a temporary arrangement 2017. Three options were discussed:

- A 2-month opening delay
- Voluntary processor closure arrangement
- Or leave as is – minority view

These options will be discussed at the Executive meeting and put to the General meeting, noting that action will be required before the next FAC.

Western Zone:

The FRAG noted that the Western Zone is showing improvement with positive signs in CPUE. Processors reported that they have changed their pick-up patterns, with a concomitant effect on fleet dynamics.

The feeling of the FRAG was cautiously optimistic with respect to the status of the Western Zone abalone stock.

FRAG Comments;

A statement was made that 10% of divers are diving in shallow water, the rest of the divers who are not seeing abalone are diving in deeper waters. There was a following suggestion that deep diving is shoring up CPUE data in the Western Zone, thus providing a false impression of stock status. IMAS noted that the average CPUE of shallow and deeper water catch rates are virtually the same in the blocks they had cursorily examined. IMAS undertook to complete a more comprehensive consideration of deep vs. shallow water CPUE and any shifts in effort from one to the other.

Action: IMAS to consider the impact of effort shifts to deeper water on CPUE

IMAS only has data from the depth loggers from 2014. Spatial data from the loggers is a good indicator and should be watched and discussed in FRAG #2

Currently there is a voluntary policy document for Motherboat fish landed at Strahan. Processors are unwilling to transport fish from Strahan.

Biosecurity – an updated risk assessment could see fish caught from north of Strahan unloaded at Margate, which would be of benefit to industry. The CVO will be consulted if there remains an unacceptable risk of AVG arising from the practice and whether or not the can the risk be mitigated.

Action: DPIPWE to consult the CVO with respect to prospects for changing the current restriction on motherboats taking fish around the south coasts for unloading at Margate.

Central West:

Several years of lowering the TACC has seen no improvement to date.

Northern Zone:

Catch rates are stable.

Catch rates are standardised over blacklip and greenlip according to % caught. There is an overall downward trend, Block 5C is holding ok.

FRAG Comments;

Various divers expressed a range of varying experiences which is helpful, but will be enhanced once considered in the framework of a comprehensive harvest strategy.

Bass Strait Zone:

Warning signs that the size limit should be higher. There was a size limit drop resulting in a higher catch rate from bigger catches.

Block 38 fishing well, good habitat for juveniles.

Block 41 could be a lower size from 127mm to 110mm, the fish are slower growing and biologically mature.

FRAG Comments;

The FRAG asked if the western side of Flinders Island would be opened as discussed at the end of 2016. The Department expressed some reservations given that, in their view, the closure led to effort being spread up into the Bass Strait Islands. It was agreed to refer the issue to the AbFAC

Action: Refer the issue of the closure of the western side of Flinders Island to the AbFAC.

Greenlip Zone:

Downturn in Greenlip status overall, while noting that King Island, North East and Furneaux remain relatively stable.

FRAG Comments;

There is some selective fishing occurring which may be effecting catch rates.

Centrostephanus Study;

Funding has been sourced to re-survey for urchin barrens on the east coast. Surveys of 13 sites previously surveyed have been undertaken with mixed results; in some areas there has been a recovery of kelp and in others not. It was noted that the Wineglass Bay cull sites continue to be visible in respect of reduced urchin numbers. The survey will be documented and finalised by October 2017.

Feeding trials of centrostephanus, to increase roe content and harmonise maturity times will be conducted this year, aimed at producing urchins for the live market.

8. Block 5 Future Management - Pulse fishing

The effect of taking the full quota of abalone from an are in the first three months of the season rather than spreading catch out of 12 months was discussed. Concern was raised that the spawning potential of the stock would be impacted under this scenario, brought about by fishing power associated with the high numbers of divers. Where there are different price structures (up to \$5.00 per kilo) for fish in different blocks in a given zone it is clear that there will be a preference for taking higher value fish.

Methods of controlling pulse fishing including voluntary measures, changes to the fishing year, and closures were discussed, with clear conclusions or recommendations being reached.

The 2016 boundary proposal from TACL and DPIPWE will be out for public comment next month. The FRAG agreed that while some in industry wished to make changes to the discussion paper, it was recommended that no change me made and that comments on improvements/changes to the proposal could be put forward during the public comment period.

There was as suggestion that the Central West zone be retained (shelved) with a zero TACC. The Department indicated that this would most likely not be necessary and if it was agreed that an additional zone was required at some point in the future then this would not be an issue.

9. Update of trends from the IMAS juvenile monitoring project:

The juvenile collector plates were not affected by the heatwave. The natural habitat shows a movement of up to 30m with tagged abalone leaving the plates and subsequently returning. The size structure of abalone under the plates includes individuals up to 100mm in length.

10. Finalising Harvest Strategy parameters and settings for 2017:

The Harvest Strategy development is a joint project underway between CSIRO and IMAS that will need to be formalised to replace the current trial harvest strategy. The issue of when to take and increase in TACC was discussed and whether or not recovery over the whole zone (all blocks) was necessary before an increase should be agreed

11. General Business

Malcom Petrie (CZ, Victoria) was asked if he had any observations on the FRAG process. He noted that the relationship between IMAS, the Department and industry was rather closer and more productive than was the case in Victoria. He also noted that he felt the FRAG process was useful, open and transparent – and that the Central Zone industry would be seeking to introduce a similar system into Victoria.

Meeting closed 3.00pm

Actions

1	DPIPWE to set a date for consultation meeting with industry on operational aspects of the industry in relation to the harvest strategy and size limits. TACL to set a date for a meeting between the TACL, IMAS and DPIPWE to develop a set	DPIPWE/IMAS
2.	SAM + 2 – policy on agreed values. IMAS to submit a technical paper	IMAS
3.	IMAS to consider the impact of effort shifts to deeper water on CPUE	IMAS
4.	DPIPWE to consult the CVO with respect to prospects for changing the current restriction on motherboats taking fish around the south coasts for unloading at Margate.	DPIPWE
6.	Refer the issue of the closure of the western side of Flinders Island to the AbFAC.	Refer to AbFAC

Blocks - Area	TAC 2017	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		
Total Central Western Zone TAC	35	10
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	444.5	127
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	148.3	42
Western Zone		
Blocks 6D, 7 and 8. Granville Harbour, Sandy Cape		
Block 9 South of Strahan		
Blocks 10, 11 and 12A. South West		
Blocks 12B-13B South Coast		
Total Western Zone TAC	717	205
2017 TAC TOTAL	1561.8t	446kg/unit

