

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 2/2018

Tuesday June 19, 2018

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes**1. Present:****Members:**

Ian Cartwright (Chair), J McKibben, D Lisson, D Hansen, A Brown, B Cobbing, B Ransom, T Bush, A Gray, R Scanlon, C Mundy, (IMAS), M Bradshaw (DPIPWE), J Freeman (minutes),

Observers:

R Searle, A Hansen, B Amos, M Porteus, B Rowe, T Lesser, T Dermoudy, S Leonard, T Chadwick, A Isles, N Forsyth, M Florence, B Allen, B Wilson, B Lesser, I Rattray, G Moroney, B Rex, J Larby, S Larby, G Woodham,

Apologies:

S Crocker, J Huddleston, P Richardson,

2. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the second FRAG meeting of 2018. The main purposes of the meeting were outlined; these were to review catches, catch rates and other information for the season to date, gain an overall view of the status of the resource and discuss other matters related to the assessment and, where appropriate, the management of the fishery. It was noted that the TAC recommendation will start to be firmed up at FRAG 3 and will be based on IMAS data, diver, and other industry input and the MCDA process.

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

3. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed with the addition of;

- North East Boundary Change
- Timely delivery of catch updates
- Preliminary results of the reverse cap experiment

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on April 9, 2018, which were accepted as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:**Action 1. Research proposal – spawn and hand raise abalone larvae on bio-secure vessel and spray onto reefs.**

The TAC has commenced a research (AIDF) Project, 'Augmenting stock recovery within Tasmania's abalone fishery'. This paper will be completed by March 2019 and will be sent to all members for their consideration prior to any decision on the way forward.

Ongoing

Action 2. Finalise report on size limits and boundaries:

IMAS noted that the report on size limits has been completed and circulated at AbFAC. This document has been peer reviewed with the scientific evidence suggesting that the LML should be set at $L_{50} + 3$ years. This is an increase over the current $L_{50} + 2$ years and will provide additional protection from overfishing and local depletion. A further peer review of the paper will be undertaken by two independent reviewers.

Ongoing

Action 3. Workshop to underpin the science of size limits and TAC:

There was a brief discussion of the size limit review and it was considered that it would be helpful if industry were provided with a more detailed description of the report and the proposals contained therein.

ACTION - Craig will run a workshop to increase an understanding of the science of the proposed size limit and the TAC setting process

Ongoing

Action 4. Relocate Northern Zone Boundary to south of Cod Bay:

Discussed further in the meeting

Action 5. Letter of appreciation to Hugh Jones:

Ongoing; Craig to provide Dr Jones' address

6. Outcomes of FAC #1 meeting relevant to FRAG:

- Metarules are being reviewed and developed; these will include rules to ensure management action taken to address stock concerns will be taken into account when considering a subsequent year's management action.
- The Harvest Strategy for the fishery is under review prior to being signed off by the Minister. It will include a new rule covering size limits based on the recently-completed review and a more objective way of setting 'default' TACs.
- Diver rationalisation was discussed and efforts will be made to progress the issue. It was noted that other jurisdictions have had to deal with similar issues
- There was substantial discussion of the *Centrostephanus* issue and a review with recommendations put forward by the TAC utilising monies from the 'Abalone Industry Re-Investment Fund' (AIRF). The review paper is titled - 'Maintaining healthy abalone reef systems on Tasmania's East Coast and has two major strategies;
 1. Accelerating the culling of *Centrostephanus rodgersi* and
 2. Assisting the establishment of a commercially viable industry based on the sustainable harvest of *Centrostephanus rodgersi*

The TACL will be sending out a memo to members and Version 4 of this report will be uploaded to the TACL website. FRAG members were invited to review the document. IMAS, DPIPWE and the commercial divers have reviewed the report, and it was generally considered to be a thorough overview of the issues and potential options. The timing of project commencement will be dependent on when funds are released from Treasury. An advisory committee is to be set up to seek and review proposals, and for disbursement of funds, which will commence with about \$600,000 as the initial tranche. Annual funding levels will ramp up over time.

- There was a brief report on the use of lime to remove urchins from urchin barrens in the northern hemisphere; the method has proven successful in some areas of Norway in waters over 20+metres.

7. IMAS presentation of data, fisheries assessment including the MCDA outcomes and additional diver/stakeholder input (NB priority areas of the fishery will be dealt with first)

Eastern Zone:

Summary;

Freycinet, and Cape Pillar to Denison Canal have been cleared of PST, the blocks around Maria Island and Bicheno will be tested in the next week or two. Catch to date has been limited but there are some positive signs with standardised catch rates increasing. The allocated TAC is 17.5t for blocks 22A to 28B and needs careful management.

Actaeons – fishing well, the catch allocation is not fixed, and will be reviewed when 80% caught

Block 14 – low catch rates

Block 16 – not a lot of catch, picking up

Block 17 – not a lot of catch, improvement on last year

Block 19 – no data, not a lot of catch

Block 20 – catch rates have improved

Block 21 – catch rates have improved,

Blocks 22A to 28B – closed

Block 29 – cap reached, catch rates improved, local diver knowledge indicates still fishing well

Block 31 – Fishing ok, there is an abundance of small fish, but is fishing below target the *Centrostephanus* incursion is moving down the coast.

FRAG Comments;

Discussion on closing or keeping open Block 29 to relieve pressure on the Actaeons: it was noted that with the current weather conditions further Algal Blooms are a possibility in this area.

There was discussion of the currently closed blocks and whether or not they should be opened if given the 'all clear' for PST.

A range of opinions were expressed, the key issues raised being:

- Support for opening the blocks provided the catch is spread, which will occur as divers seek out the highest catch-rate areas,
- Concern that taking a further 25,000 fish (17t) fish from this area will take the broodstock necessary for future sustainability – this is of particular concern given the projects to rebuild stocks on the east coast has not yet commenced.
- Allow catch in Block 29 to run to 150%. The rationale here was to limit the extent of over run in Block 13. An alternative option discussed was to close Block 29 now and force the additional catch into the Storm Bay blocks.
- Concern that closed blocks will be closed to fishing for all time; this concern was refuted as being unrealistic.
- That the government (DPIPWE), as custodians of a public resource, have a duty of care and should consider carefully allowing the removal of stocks from an area that is heavily depleted, given knowledge of abalone stock collapses in the past.
- CPUE for blocks 22 to 28 was particularly low (in the region of only 30 to 40kg/hr) before they were closed because of toxic algal blooms

Options;

1. Open the blocks and allow fishing to 100% of the block cap, with management of block caps enforced.

2. Open the blocks and allow fishing to 100% of the remaining catch allocated to Blocks between Cape Pillar and Douglas River (22A – 28B). Given there is a cap of only 17.5t cap overall, it was proposed to allow the fishing to occur over all the blocks rather than micromanaging individual blocks.
3. Allow 5t fishing by permit from block 22A to block 28B i.e. structured fishing.

The majority of FRAG members agreed to option (3) 'fish under permit' DPIPWE, with permits allocated using a ballot process conducted by DPIPWE.

Action: DPIPWE to conduct a ballot by EOI for (5) divers to catch 1t each.

Western Zone:

Summary;

Improving overall, catch rates are up.

Block 6D – catch rates up, plenty of small fish, optimistic with positive signs

Block 7 – ½ way through the cap

Block 8 – ½ way through the cap, showing variability

Block 9 – substantial improvement, 22t to date, fishing well, good stock, the weather hasn't had an effect on the standardisation process.

Block 10 – cap nearly reached, catch rates improved. Close at 120%

Block 11 – cap nearly reached, catch rates good. Close under the cap.

Block 12 – steadily improving

Block 13 – closed, good improvements over 3 years, positive signs, recruitment driven.

Northern Zone:

Summary;

Northern zone has expanded to include block 6.

Block 31 – nil caught to date

Block 49D – reasonable catch rates with 8t caught to date, the fish are large and the size limit is good.

Block 5 – catch rate ok, 5t caught to date, the second increase in the size limit from 129mm to 132mm will be discussed at the next FRAG.

Block 6A/C – positive start with 10t caught to date,

Block 1 – there is a large variation in the catch rates, and is not viable to take a motherboat to this block.

Block 2 – not a lot of fish caught to date

Block 3 – not positive, 6t has been caught, the catch rates are variable

Block 4 – not a lot of catch to date

North East is not open

Bass Strait:

Summary;

The size limits have changed, and Blocks 48 and 49 have been added

Block 33 – Clarke Island, there were concerns raised at FRAG #4, 2017 re reducing the size limit down to 110mm. The size limit was reduced from 127mm to 114mm in 2010. Until 2017, most recruits entering the fishery were derived from higher biomass periods prior to the size limit reduction. It is expected that recruits to the fishery will decrease over the next 6 to 8 years as a consequence. Diver comments suggested this expectation was consistent with observations in this area.

Block 38 – Centrostephanus is making an impact. Catch rates are similar to 2017.
Block 41 – not a lot of catch to date
Block 43 – no data to date
Block 48 – no data to date
Block 49 A,B & C – 3t caught to date, catch rate ok
Block 51 – not a lot of catch to date
Block 53 – not a lot of catch to date,
Block 56 – Curtis Island and Moncuers are fishing well

Greenlip Zone:

Summary;

King Island – the catch rates are slowly coming down – there is mixed species fishing in the zone which complicates accurate calculation of catch rates. South Australia is trialling different methods of managing their mixed species and will be watched closely.

King Island - there has been a big change in the fishing dynamic; the trends are not easy to put into data, catch rates are responding to previous management decisions but caution is required.

North West- not a lot of catch to date

Perkins Bay – a small amount of catch

Furieux Group – a small amount of catch, with catch rates declining, watch carefully,

Central North – a small amount of catch, watch carefully

North East Boundary:

The proposal to DPIWE requires a change in the Rules and the regulations. There was unanimous support from the TACL Board and FRAG members for the change with acknowledgement that the changes will not be easy to implement. DPIPWE to consult with all stakeholders prior to taking to the Government to make changes.

FRAG #1 proposal

Action. Move the Northern Zone boundary to south of Cod Bay and fish at 132mm without an increase in catch.

Boundary revisions;

DISCUSSION

Greenlip – Blocks 40A, B and C size limit at 132mm

ACTION:

The FRAG agreed to the following:

- 1. Blacklip - Relocate eastern Bass Strait Zone blacklip boundary from block 40/41 to block 39/40 with size limit of 110mm**
- 2. Relocate the Northern Zone boundary in block 31A southwards to Cod Bay, north of Georges Rock, size limit 132mm with no increase in TACC.**

DPIPWE will commence discussions with internal process and Marine Police etc.

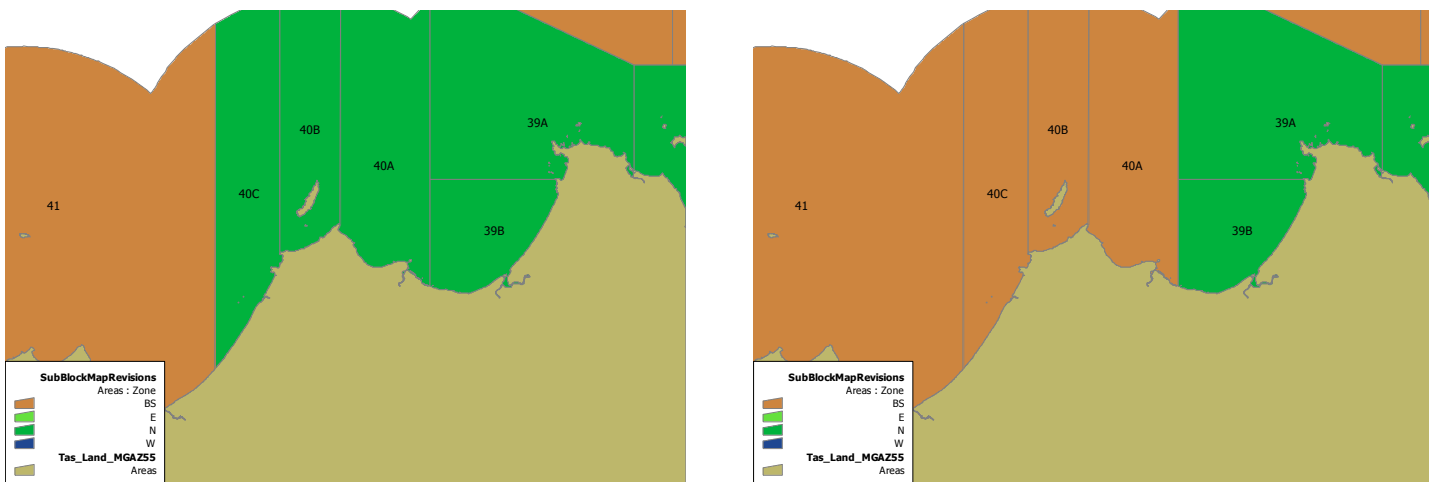
3. Relocate boundary 31A/30C to Red Rocks south of Eddystone, such that the contiguous reef between Eddystone Point and Victoria Rocks falls into 31A.
4. IMAS to draft a revised set of maps outlining the proposed changes.

(The following is an extract from the Boundary Revisions proposal presented to FRAG #2 2016)

“Blacklip boundaries to be adjusted as follows (Box 1);

- Northern Zone / Eastern Zone Boundary to be moved to Cod Bay, north of Georges Rocks
- Size limit of 132mmmm in the new Northern Zone 31A.
- No change in TACC.

Box 1. Left panel= current arrangements; Right = Bass Strait Zone boundary revised eastwards southwards to Block 40.



8. Harvest Strategy and proposed size limits:

Craig Mundy (IMAS) provided a brief presentation of size limits arising from the LML review and re-analysis. The level of protection given by potential LML was discussed, with the need to provide sufficient precaution/risk avoidance highlighted. As an example, the current LML of 140mm on the west coast exposed 92% of the biomass to fishing, with leaving an estimated 8% as broodstock protected from fishing.

The main purposes of size limits are to provide some protection of spawning biomass and prevent localised depletion. Size limits should be set a level that assures sustainability and are based on clear policy objective for the fishery, as laid out in the Harvest Strategy Document.

The FRAG noted the significance of the Harvest Strategy and that there would be recommendations for changes to size limits arising from its implementation.

Some account can be taken of market preferences in the setting of catches and LMLs, but these should not compromise sustainability.

Action: IMAS will provide a Draft copy of the Harvest Strategy, to be loaded to the TACL website. FRAG members and other stakeholders are welcome to comment

Action: IMAS will conduct a workshop for divers to understand the biology behind the Harvest Strategy

Other Business:

1. Reverse cap – Tas Seafoods have agreed to collect and process small quantities of fish. Which should assist with the reverse cap. There was some discussion of abandoning the reverse cap principle, but this was not agreed.
2. It was noted that The TAC Board endorsed opening Clarke Island, which was agreed by FRAG
3. Catch Updates – zone updates are being distributed monthly or for meetings, the block reports in the past have led to a rush on the caps. It was agreed that a balance was needed between transparency and the risk of ‘divers rushing’ to fill block caps as they near cut-off. A compromise was agreed.

Action: DPIPWE to make available a Catch Update with sub-blocks monthly and for each FRAG and AbFAC meeting

Meeting closed 1.50pm

Action List arising from FRAG #2 2018:

Action	Responsible Member	Task	Progress
1.	Dean Lisson/IMAS	Research proposal – Augmenting stock recovery within Tasmania’s abalone fishery	AIDF project underway Ongoing
2.	IMAS	Finalise report on Size limit and boundary paper	Draft policy completed Further peer review
3	IMAS	Workshop to increase the understanding of the science of the proposed size limit policy and the TAC setting process	ongoing
5	Ian Cartwright	Letter of appreciation to Hugh Jones	ongoing
6	DPIPWE	Blocks 22 - 30 – ballot EOI to fish 5t under permit	TAC
7.	DPIPWE/IMAS	North East Boundary revisions	
8.	IMAS	Provide a draft copy of Harvest Strategy for TACL Website	
9.	IMAS	Workshop for divers on Harvest Strategy	
10.	DPIPWE	Catch updates available monthly	

Blocks - Area	TAC 2018	KGs/Unit
Bass Strait Blacklip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group	42.8	
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands	27.2	
Blocks 42-46 Central North	7.0	
Total Bass Strait TAC	77.0	
Central Western Zone		
Blocks 6A-6C Couta Rocks		
Total Central Western Zone TAC	00	
Eastern Zone		
Blocks 13C, -14 E. Actaeons	172.8	
Blocks 14A and 14B. Lower Huon Channel, Huon to Southport Island, inc Dover, Southport	26.6	
Blocks 14C-16 Bruny Island	18.4	
Blocks 17-21 Hobart to Tasman Island inc Nubeena	51.2	
Block 22	3.8	
Blocks 23 and 24 Deep Glen Bay to Triabunna, inc Maria	10.1	
Blocks 25-29A Freycinet and Bicheno	3.5	
Blocks 29B, 29C, 29D and 30A North East	7.2	
Total Eastern Zone TAC	293.4	84
Greenlip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux	47.0	
Blocks 1-4 King Island	18.0	
North West not Perkins Bay	13.4	
Block 48A Perkins Bay	21.2	
Blocks 31,39,40 North East	25.5	
Central North	8.0	
Total Greenlip TAC	133.1	38
Northern Zone		
Blocks 5A-5C	31.9	
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5	4.5	
Blocks 1-4 King Island	30.0	
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East	48.9	
Total Northern Zone TAC	115.3	33
Western Zone		
Blocks 6D, 7 and 8. Granville Harbour, Sandy Cape	93.0	
Block 9 South of Strahan	84.8	
Blocks 10, 11 and 12A. South West	501.0	
Blocks 12B-13B South Coast	38.0	
Total Western Zone TAC	716.8	33
2018 TAC TOTAL	1335.5t	381kg/unit

Eastern Zone

Block No	Catch 2016	Catch Targ	IMAS 2018	FRAG 2018
13	253	192	121	172.8
14	63.8	33.3	26.6	26.6
15	0.1	0	0	0.0
16	23.6	23	18.4	18.4
17	22.7	10	7.5	7.5
18	0	0	0	0.0
19	3.8	2	1.7	1.7
20	30.8	30	24	24.0
21	17.9	20	18	18.0
22	14.2	20	15	3.8
23	16.8	19.6	14.7	3.7
24	20.2	34.2	25.7	6.4
27	14.8	15.2	11.4	2.9
28	3.4	3	2.2	0.6
29	17.2	20	15	3.8
30	2.8	6	1.5	0.4
31	15	16.2	12.1	3.0
Total	520	444.5	314.9	293.4

Central West Zone

Block No	Catch 2016	Catch Targ	IMAS 2018	FRAG 2018
6	42	35	0	0
Total	42	35	0	0

Western Zone

Block No	Catch 2016	Catch Targ	IMAS 2018	FRAG 2018rev
6	19.3	20	20	23
7	30.9	51	51	54
8	11.5	13	13	16
9	61.5	106	84.8	84.8
10	77.3	80	80	83
11	168	160	160	163
12	297.2	252	252	255
13	34.2	35	35	38
Total	700.1	717	695.8	716.8

Northern Zone

Block No	Catch 2016	Catch Targ	IMAS 2018	FRAG 2018Dev	FRAG 2018
1	8.3	9.6	9.6	9.6	6
2	2.6	0	0	0	0
3	43.9	32	25.6	25.6	20
4	7.7	4	4	4	4
5	56.2	42.5	31.9	31.9	31.9
31	26.1	22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5
39	4.2	5.3	5.3	5.3	5.3
47	0.1	0	0	0	0
48	7.3	6	4.5	4.5	4.5
49	31.8	26.4	21.1	21.1	21.1
Total	188.1	148.3	124.5		115.3

Bass Strait Zone

Block No	Catch 2016	Catch Targ	IMAS 2018	FRAG 2018
32	0.4	1	1.1	1.1
33	20.2	19.9	19.9	19.9
34	0.1	1		1
35	0.1	1		1
36	4.1	2		2
37	1.7	2	2	2
38	18.4	17.6	15.8	15.8
41	0.8	0	0	0
42	1.8	0		0
43	5.2	5	5	5
44	0.4	1		1
45	0.1	1		1
51	11.8	5.5	5.5	5.5
53	9.8	18	20.7	19.7
54		2		2
56		0		0
Total	74.8	77	70	77

Greenlip Zone

Block No	Catch	Catch	IMAS	FRAG
	2016	Targ	2018	2018
Bass Strait	0.2	0.5	0	0
Central	0.1	8	8	8
North				
Furneaux	42.5	47	47	47
King Island	23.8	20	16	18
North East	34.5	25.5	25.5	25.5
North West	21.4	13.6	13.4	13.4
Perkins Bay	16.4	21.2	21.2	21.2
Total	188.1	140	131.1	133.1

