

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 2/2019

Wednesday June 19, 2019

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes - DRAFT

1. Present:

Members:

Ian Cartwright (Chair), D Lisson, D Hansen, A Brown, B Cobbing, B Ransom, P Richardson, J Huddleston, R Bock, T Bush, S Cocker, C Mundy (IMAS), J McAllister, (IMAS), M Bradshaw (DPIPWE), J Freeman (minutes),

Observers:

B Rex, R Rex, T Lesser, Jack Xie, J Franklin, T Chadwick,

2. Apologies:

A Gray, J McKibben, A Hansen,

Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the second FRAG of the year, and outlined the main purposes of the meeting. 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 from 2019 data, and consider what management changes may be necessary. Members were urged to raise any management changes required for the 2020 season as early as possible before FRAG #3 so as to give time for their consideration well before the end of the season, when attention will be focused on TAC setting.

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 is appreciated.

3. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed with the addition of;

- Central West discussion
- Projects being considered from the AIRF
- Firmware for new data loggers
- GoPro footage on *Centrostephanus* – J Huddleston
- East Coast structured fishing

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

The minutes of the FRAG meeting held on April 10, 2019 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. – Closing of blocks - AbFAC

Consider variations to the four-day closure notice policy.

Done: AbFAC agreed closure process

Action 2. Structured fishing for Block 30B

IMAS and TACL to consider a structured fishing plan for Block 30B before FRAG #2

Testing for PST will be conducted closer to the opening time, if the testing is clear the block will be opened in 2020.

The members agreed to reduce the TAC for the two divers from of 1000Kg to 500kg.

Action 3. Closure of Blocks 13A and 13B

DPIPWE to close blocks 13A and 13B and reopen in December.

Done

Action 4. Perkins Bay greenlip

A new management plan for structured fishing under permit and bring to FRAG #2.

Perkins Bay and the Furneaux Group will struggle to reach the catch target, and what catch is taken will be at a very low catch rate. Particular concern was shown over the Perkins Bay black Reef greenlip stock levels. Divers noted that productive areas within the North-West 145mm size limit area must be protected, if exploratory fishing at smaller size limit (132mm) in specific locations is permitted..

Noted - Paul Richardson wished to record his opposition the lower size limit.

Options to share the load of the remaining greenlip TAC over all areas;

1. explore other pockets of fish, using an adaptive approach (e.g. experimental fishing at a lower size limit; and
2. Allowing the catch caps in the remaining key areas (King Island, North West, North East) to over-run the catch target.

Noted that if Perkins Bay and Furneaux areas are closed, it would be feasible to take the remaining TAC from other areas at 145 by using the 20% over target catch rule. It was agreed that FRAG 3 will use an adaptive approach and consider remaining TAC with IMAS. Agreed that areas outside currently productive areas should be opened at 132mm asap since any catch there will take pressure off depleted areas. Any catch from the North-West, North-East and King Island areas over 100% will be taken off the 2020 TAC.

<p>Action: IMAS will work with divers to ascertain which areas will open at 132mm. The Department will issue permits to divers who express an interest to fish at 132mm.</p>

Action 5. Reverse cap for greenlip

TACL to gather input from divers and present a proposal to FRAG #2 for a decision.

The TACL The Board recommended not to proceed with the reverse cap for greenlip in 2019. The FRAG endorsed this decision.

Action 5. East Coast structured opening

Rework the proposal to address FRAG comments and present to FRAG #2

Addressed under General Business.

6. Outcomes of 2019 FAC #1 meeting relevant to FRAG

The Chair advised receipt of a letter to AbFAC from Minister Guy Barnett advising of his approval of the Harvest Strategy and that there are a number of size limits that do not meet the three-year size limit rule. The letter requests that a plan be developed and considered by AbFAC on how to ensure all areas meet the size limit criteria, to ensure ongoing recruitment into the fishery.

The Department, in conjunction with IMAS will draft a plan with a proposal to align with the three year rule, ready for AbFAC #2. The document will be consulted more broadly by FRAG and other stakeholders. It was noted size limit changes will be staged and subject to statutory public consultation.

The members recommended the draft size limit change plan be placed on the DPIPWE website for comment/feedback. Any diver with thoughts on the the move to Harvest Strategy L50+3 provisions is invited to send a written submission to Dean and the Department.

The size limit for the North West Coast will increase from 129mm to 132mm. The Department can make changes incrementally, from Albatross to Wild Wave River from January 1, 2020. The divers in that area noted that they believe fish won't reach 132mm at The Bluff.

7. IMAS presentation of undated data, fisheries assessment including the MCDA outcomes and additional diver/stakeholder input.

Eastern Zone:

IMAS presented a new way to visualise catch and catch rate data, clearly demonstrating the degree to which catch and catch rates in most blocks are below historical and target levels. There has been limited fishing in the Eastern Zone this year, which opened on April 1. Preliminary observations from divers:

- The Actaeons are fishing well
- Port Arthur is fishing well
- Nubeena (the Duck Holes) are fishing well

FRAG Comments;

Divers suggested a future management plan to delay opening the Eastern Zone until the end of the winter season, Cape Pillar to 22A to 28B.

Western Zone:

Overall, divers considers the Zone is fishing well given the weather. With the exception of Block 12 and 13, the catch rate is well below the target catch rate.

Block 8 – no catch

Block 9 – trending lower than 2018

Block 10 – trending lower

Block 11 – trending down

Block 12 – trending down

Block 13 – the catch nominally allocated has been caught and is now closed.

Industry are firmly of the opinion that swell has had an impact on catch rate, with swell conditions forcing fishing into sheltered areas, depressing catch rates.

FRAG Comments

The catch rate is down due to weather related effects in the first quarter. The catch rate should be re-assessed after the winter catch and a good weather pattern. There is still a lot of fishing to go.

Northern Zone:

Block 39 - low catch

Block 31B – stable

Block 39 - no fishing to date

Block 49D – catch rates increasing, good fishing

Block 5 – catch rates increasing, good fishing

Block 6 - catch rates reached, 800kg to go

Block 1 – not a lot of catch

Bass Strait:

Reminder: There are additional blocks in this zone due to the Central West Zone being disbanded.

Block -33 – catch rates trending up and stable

Block 38 - catch rates up

Block 49 – cap reached, closes next week

Jeremy Huddleston provided GoPro footage showing the condition of the bottom around Bable Island. There has been a steady decline from 2008 of weed cover with an increase in urchin population. Initially the small population of urchin could be culled while diving, now there are too many urchin to cull and fish at the same time. The value lost to the industry is estimated at \$750,000 per year, if centro destroy the habitat in this area.

It was noted that it was important to deal with *Centrostephanus* barrens at an early stage in their formation i.e. an ounce of prevention is worth a tonne of cure.

Centrostephanus update: Dean Lisson provided an update on efforts to control/manage *Centrostephanus*. Since the harvest subsidy was introduced in 2016, almost 500 (check number, but Caleb said this morning it was 480) tonne have been harvested, mostly from the St Helens area. EOs have been called for under the AIRF, with over 30 projects submitted. These have been prioritised and the successful applicants will be notified with request a full project to be submitted.

The roe season is close to finishing within the next few weeks. IMAS is contracted by the AIRF to provide a review of the subsidy to date. The current subsidy has been modified to encourage fishing in other areas and in particular the southern end of the East Coast. There are a range of issues including licensing and diver safety code requirements to be addressed. David Westcott from CSIRO has been engaged to write a rehabilitation plan with a suite of options. Dr Westcott is a pest control expert, who has had experience with the control of crown of thorns starfish on the Great Barrier Reef. The report from David Westcott and Katie Creswell will be available at the *Centrostephanus* Forum which is scheduled for November 22 at Blundstone Arena.

Suggestion from the divers;

- A heavy concentration of commercial divers to effectively harvest/cull in target areas.
- Continue to seek involvement of recreational divers.
- Give divers a bounty to harvest urchin while they are diving for abalone.
- The limited finances from AIRF have to be used effectively.

Greenlip Zone:

Opens on July 1.

8. Management Report; updates from Fisheries Manager:

There is an amendment to the fishing rules underway, with the following proposed changes as part of the recommended changes ;

1. Recreational divers - the daily possession limit has been reduced to 10, the daily catch reduced to 5, with a boat limit of 20 abalone,
2. There is a 'no take of abalone between dusk and dawn'.

Typically over the last three years there has been an under catch in the top half and overcatch the southern half of the Western Zone. The Department will look at setting target catches for these areas based on a three year rolling average, which it considers will act as an incentive for divers to fisher there.

The TACL Board will make a decision on the re-introduction of the Central Western Zone, and take to AbFAC; currently there seems to be only limited support for it re-introduction

9. Industry report, including funding arrangements for research:

The Australasian Abalone Convention will be held at the Hotel Grand Chancellor 29, 30 & 31 July. The program is 90% finished and the theme is 'Productivity'. All engaged in the abalone fishery are encouraged to attend.

ACA have recently initiated the development of five new projects under the ACA IPA that are relevant to the Tasmanian fishery. These are:

- Incorporating diver observation into TAC setting and harvest strategies
- A review of stock enhancement approaches, including protocols to ensure effective biosecurity
- A review of fisheries independent surveys (FISs).
- Management strategy evaluation of harvest strategies
- Review of multiple indicators of stock status (FIS, CPUE and logger data)

The EO, TACL stated that the past, different states have submitted proposals to meet the same research objective. One aim of the IPA is to combine such projects where appropriate and make the outcomes beneficial to as many abalone jurisdictions as possible.

South Australia & Victoria have put forward a project to validate diver observation data included in the Harvest Strategy.

10. Research report, updates from IMAS:

Multi block length data for market measuring has been analysed for use in the assessment process and further data is planned to be collected, both from processors and using 4G-enabled measuring boards (funded by IMAS). These boards can be linked to the 4G modem on the divers -modem and the information will be pinged back to IMAS daily. The processors will be issued with new integrated weight/length measuring boards, which have been funded by the Abalone Overcatch Trust Fund.

Craig showed a graph of research data from Black Reef in the south-east, by way of an illustration of value of the value of the length frequency analysis – there are no fish over the 150mm, which could mean the area is either heavily fished and has been fished down, or it is a slow growth area.

The juvenile recruitment report based on the plate collectors is underway. It was noted that the collector plates that have been installed were an FRDC/IMAS project to determine if the plates fixed in various types of sea bed was successful as a potential indicator of recruitment. They were established to examine effectiveness in different habitat types rather than for the collection of data to be used for assessment.

Malcolm Haddon and Craig are working on SAFS.

General Business:

New logger firmware. Craig provided a presentation of the new firmware for the GPS loggers – the GPS logger will show the current time and sub block number. Time can be switched manually by the diver from winter time to daylight savings. The fishers will be able to enter blacklip and greenlip catch data for each sub block fished. The key data entry options are for either abalone or urchins. For urchins, the catch options are Centro and Helio.

Craig explained new GPS and the depth logger. The data will automatically ping daily to the secure UTAS server, without the need for the diver to mail back a dongle. The software will email the catch and sub block data (but not the spatial or depth data) to the Department daily and will be validated by the working dockets. The depth logger is rechargeable on a charging stone, if the battery level drops below a certain level (~25%), Craig will receive an email and will notify the diver by text to recharge the battery.

Divers asked questions relating to the firmware and its use.

East Coast structured fishing from Cape Pillar north.

Currently the target catch for this area is 10 tonne. There is an AIRF proposal which includes recommendations regarding gathering fishery data from Cape Pillar North for the 2020 fishing year, this will inform management for this region for 2020.

The Gardens has been closed and the IMAS dive team does not have the resources to check the block, and divers are not seeing what the area looks like in terms of recovery. It was pointed out that closures prevent monitoring of areas.

Suggestions;

1. Invest in the East Coast by closing all blocks and using structured surveys to monitor the rate of recovery.
2. Close this part of the fishery, and reduce the TAC by 10t,
3. Fully understand the cost of reseeding vs closing.

Meeting closed 4:00pm

Note: After the closure of the meeting East Coast Structured Fishing – Darwin provided a presentation on his thoughts of stock rebuilding

Action List FRAG #1 2019:

Action	Responsible Member	Task	Progress
1	FAC	Closing of blocks	Consider variations to the four-day closure notice policy
2	IMAS and TACL	Catch control for block 30B	IMAS and the TACL to consider a structured fishing plan for Block 30B PST testing will be undertaken closer to the re-opening with a TAC of 500kg
3	IMAS/TACL	Perkins Bay greenlip	The Dept. will close areas at the cap, IMAS will work with divers to ascertain the productive areas. The Dept. will issue permits to divers to fish at 132mm
4	TACL	Reverse cap for greenlip	Mixed results in 2018. The TACL Board decided not to go ahead for 2019
5	D Hansen	East Coast structured opening	Rework the proposal to address FRAG comments and present to FRAG#2 Darvin showed a presentation showing his thoughts on how to restructure the East Coast recovery.
6	Dept and IMAS	Three Year Rule	Draft a plan to align the three year rule across all zones.

Blocks - Area	TAC 2019	KG's/unit
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	252.0	72
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	717.5	205
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	98.0	28
Bass Strait Blacklip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group		
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands		
Blocks 42-46 Central North		
Total Bass Strait TAC	91.0	26
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		
Central North		
Total Greenlip TAC	108.5	31
2019 TAC TOTAL	1267.0	362

