

Abalone Fisheries Resource Assessment Group

Annual Report 2019

Chair: Ian Cartwright

Background

The FRAG is a committee established by the TACL to:

- consider outcomes of the abalone assessment, including the interim data report;
- review performance of the fishery;
- discuss and identify key drivers influencing catch and effort distribution, and catch rates;
- consider TAC setting motions from industry and provide comments prior to the AGM;
- provide recommendations to AbFAC on the annual TAC, distribution of catch and related issues; and
- provide other advice as required, including advice relating to size limits, zone boundaries and research.

Operation

- FRAG Membership: independent Chair, full membership of the TAC, CEO of the Council, 2 IMAS reps and 1 DPIPWE fisheries manager.
- Observers welcome and continue to valuable input; venues have changed to accommodate increased interest.
- Four meetings per year, with robust discussion
- Timing linked to FAC dates, to ensure timely advice
- FAC appointments made by the Minister.
- The Abalone Council considers advice from the FRAG and makes its own submissions to the FAC/Minister

Size Limits

- Were discussed at all FRAG meetings
- The issue continues to be contentious with widely differing views within industry on their role in the management of the fishery
- Following the peer-reviewed report on size limits and the endorsed harvest strategy, the Minister has proposed schedule of size limit changes.
- The new minimum sizes will allow for three year's spawning for 50% of the population (L50+3) rather than two years (L50+2).
- The proposed 'package' of size limit changes will be subject to a statutory consultation process
- 145mm for the West Coast was introduced July 1

Meeting 1: 10 April 2019

Considered the status of the resource based on IMAS updates and diver observations and ii) discussed, and as appropriate, made recommendations on:

- Notification of closed areas on reaching/nearing caps - four days' notice suggested
- The approved harvest strategy for the fishery including the '3 year rule' and application of the MCDA
- NE boundary changes
- The outcomes of the Melbourne R and D workshop
- The abalone Industry re-investment fund
- Resource security in light of the WA development

Meeting 2: June 19 2019

Considered the status of the resource based on IMAS updates and diver observations and ii) discussed, and as appropriate, made recommendations on:

- Concern over Perkins Bay and Black Reef Greenlip and accessing areas at 132mm
- Decision to recommend not to proceed with the reverse cap for greenlip
- *Centrostephanus* update, noting successful harvesting season (c.500 tonnes)
- Proposal to reduce the recreational bag limit to five, state-wide
- Proposed East coast structured fishing

Meeting 3: 16 August 2019

Considered the status of the resource based on IMAS updates and diver observations and ii) discussed, and as appropriate, made recommendations on:

- A request from the Minister to develop a schedule to implement the three-year size limit rule
- Need for a Workshop to review of all aspects of abalone fishery management
- A preliminary view of likely MCDA-derived catch targets for 2020
- Setting the catch target for blocks 6D, 7 and 8 at the average of the previous three years' catches to create an incentive to fish there and avoid displaced catches to southern blocks.
- The impact of weather on catches and catch rates in the Western Zone
- The suggested pace of change of size limits

Meeting 4: 17 October 2019

Considered the status of the resource based on IMAS updates and diver observations and ii) discussed, and as appropriate, made recommendations on:

- The schedule of size limit changes which will be circulated for public comment early in the New Year, with no additional changes until 2001
- Target catch settings for 2020 (on next slides)
- Arrangements for the east coast blocks, which are heavily depleted relative to their historical status (Block 16 and Blocks 22-18)
- A motion from Darvin Hanson on rebuilding the abalone resource
- Ways to prevent the 'rush to fish' on NE Greenlip

Key Issues (1)

NE Boundary Change

- Industry case of the benefits to the State and the fisheries arising from the boundary changes presented but not accepted as compelling
- Change now off the table for the foreseeable future

Central West Zone

- Some suggestion of re-instatement of Central West Zone to ensure a better distribution of catch and to avoid exceeding target catches in more 'desirable' blocks
- FRAG agreed to a rolling three-year average for blocks 6D, 7, 8 as an alternative

Greenlip Opening

- The excess level of fishing power (FLAD numbers) continues to cause a 'race to fish' for greenlip
- Issue considered by the FRAG and some suggestions for change made, but no definitive position reached

Key issues (2)

Harvest strategy

- While the MCDA-based harvest strategy, combined with meta-rules provides an objective way to set TAC recommendations, it appears to be insufficiently effective at rebuilding severely depleted stocks
- The current harvest strategy and metarules will be comprehensively reviewed in 2020

Reverse cap

- While the reverse cap for greenlip effective in delaying opening and encouraging some catch from less desirable reefs, agreed to abandon this approach for 2020

TAC settings

- Very constructive discussions resulting in strong FRAG support for the science and the suggested catch reductions.

FISHERY SUMMARY

Zone	Target	MCDA	IMAS	FRAG	KGs/ Unit
	2019	2020	2020	2020	
E	252	220	238	220	62.8
W	717	576	568	563	160.8
N	100	77	86	75	21.4
BS	92	77	90	92	26.3
GL	108	87	75	86	24.6
TOTAL	1269			1036	

2020 TACC = 1036t rounded or approx. 296 kgs/unit

A reduction of 233t or approx. 18%

EASTERN ZONE SUMMARY

Block	IMAS 2020	FRAG 2020	Comments
13	146.9	146.9	
14	21.3	21.3	
16	11.04	0	Critical action Taken – Zero TAC with monitoring
17	6	6	
18	0	0	
19	1.12	1	
20	24	17.5	Improving more than 2 years - no reduction
21	18	18	Not above CPUE Target for > 2 years - no increase
22	0	0	Critical action Taken – Zero TAC with monitoring
23	0	0	Critical action Taken – Zero TAC with monitoring
24	0	0	Critical action Taken – Zero TAC with monitoring
27	0	0	Critical action Taken – Zero TAC with monitoring
28	0	0	Critical action Taken – Zero TAC with monitoring
29	3.8	3.8	Not above CPUE Target for > 2 years - no increase
30	0.4	0.4	
31	5	5	
	238	220	

2020 TACC = 220t a reduction of 8t (8%)

WESTERN ZONE SUMMARY

Block	IMAS 2020	FRAG 2020	Comments
6	14.0	14.0	Catch reduced to ~ mean catch of past 3 years
7	36.3	36.3	Catch reduced to ~ mean catch of past 3 years
8	10.9	10.9	Catch reduced to ~ mean catch of past 3 years
9	72.1	72.1	
10	66.4	66.4	
11	138.6	134.0	
12	191.3	191.3	
13	38.0	38.0	No Change
	567.5	562.9	

2020 TACC = 562.9t a reduction/increase of 153.9t (21%)

NORTHERN ZONE SUMMARY

Block	IMAS 2020	FRAG 2020	Comments
1	6	6	
2	0	0	
3	9	9	
4	3.4	4	
5	25.52	10	More conservative TAC agreed than MCDA: Critical action Required in 2020 if no recovery
6	8	8	Accept MCDA with later opening; reassess next year for a closure and to implement structured fishing
31	20.25	22.5	Accept MCDA with later opening; reassess next year for a closure and to implement structured fishing
39	4.24	5.3	Against MCDA; mixed species fishing may have impacted CPUE
40	0	0	
49	10	10	
	86.41	74.8	

2020 TACC = 74.8t a reduction of 24.9t (25%)

BASS STRAIT SUMMARY

Block	IMAS 2020	FRAG 2020	Comments
32	1	1	
33	19.9	19.9	CPUE not above Target > 2 years - no change
34, 35	2	2	
36, 37	4	4	
38	15.8	15.8	CPUE not above Target > 2 years - no change
41, 42	0	0	
43	5	5	
44	1	1	
46, 47	0	0	
48	3.8	4.5	
49	11.1	11.1	Improving < 2 years - no change
51	5.5	5.5	
52			
53	19.7	19.7	
54	2	2	
55, 56	0	0	
	90.92	91.6	

2020 TACC = 91.6t No change

GREENLIP SUMMARY

Block	IMAS 2020	FRAG 2020	Comments
King Island	16.2	18	No Change
North West	10.72	13.4	No Change. Against MCDA; uncertainty around CPUE oscillation needs to be assessed
Perkins Bay	0	0	Remain open with zero TAC but fishers to contact IMAS prior to fishing for a measuring board
Central North	0	0	
North East	18.445	17.36	More conservative TAC agreed than MCDA
Furneaux Group	30.08	37.6	No Change. Agreed to assess where spatial effort has changed; suggestion that a-grade fish areas are no longer being targeted.
Bass Strait	0	0	
	75.45	86.36	

2020 TACC = 86.36 a reduction of 21.34t (23%)