

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 4/2018

Thursday October 18, 2018

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes

1. Present:

Members:

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

Observers:

T Lesser, R Rex, R Searle, J Ramsden, S Anning, R Rex, G Hughes, A Chisholm, B Richardson, N Harris, D Hansen, M Porteus, G Woodham, N Wallace, M Florence, J Dale, G Hughes, G Smith, B Richardson, D Hogg,

Apologies:

T Chadwick, B Wilson

2. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the last 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 be firmed up at this meeting and will be based on IMAS data, the MCDA-based harvest strategy and diver and other industry process. The recommendations will be presented to the TACL Board and then the Annual General Meeting on Saturday October 20. The recommendation will also be considered by AbFAC on the October 24 prior to a recommendation going to the Minister.

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;

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on August 16, 2018, which were accepted as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Research proposal – augmenting stock recovery within Tasmania’s abalone fishery:

All options are being considered for augmenting/rebuilding abalone populations on the East Coast area, including translocation, larval seeding, and placement of juveniles,

Ongoing

Action 2. Finalise report on size limits and boundary paper:

IMAS noted that the report on size limits has been completed and circulated at AbFAC. This document is in the process of being 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. One review has been completed and a further peer review of the paper will be undertaken by an independent reviewer. To date comments from the peer review and others sources have been positive, with only minor changes to be made to the text being suggested.

Ongoing

Action 3. Workshop to increase the understanding of abalone stakeholders of the science of the proposed size limit policy and the TAC setting process;

Completed

Action 4. North East Boundary revisions:

Following internal discussions and with industry, DPIPWE have determined that the three boundary changes proposed by industry have unacceptable implications for other fisheries, including RecFish and Southern Rock Lobster, as well as for compliance. The Department stated that consequently, the costs of the changes would be significant, with the benefits uncertain.

To change the boundaries, the TACL will need to put a compelling case of the benefits to the State and the fisheries arising from the boundary changes. DPIPWE are concerned that the proposal results in costs against which there are uncertain benefits in terms of the increased quantity and value of abalone that will become available to the fishery

Industry expressed great frustration at the process, indicating that it has been requesting the changes for some time and that there were real benefits from the proposal to the sustainability the fishery, given there is no suggestion to increase the quota.

It was noted that the discussions between industry and DPIPWE had agreed that some actions may be possible in the short term to give determine what benefits the changes would yield.

Structured fishing under permit could be issued for Block 40, to survey the quantity of fish and estimate the value. To facilitate the block 30/31 boundary change to include Victoria Rocks, the research area in Block 30 C could be revoked and a survey also undertaken there. Time did not permit the details of these arrangements to be worked out and it was agreed that the TACL and DPIPWE/IMAS would liaise to decide on the best way to do the surveys.

Ongoing

Action 1.
IMAS to conduct a survey to assess the abundance of fish in Block 40, or A TACL diver with an IMAS observer under permit, survey Block 40, with the harvest to come off the quota

Action 2.
Open Block 30C in 2019

Action 5. Provide a draft copy of Harvest Strategy for TACL Website:

Completed

Action 6. Catch update available from DPIPWE monthly:

Completed

Action 7. AbFAC – NE Boundary Change:

Ongoing

Action 8. DPIPWE – East Coast Opening with Cap of 8T:

Completed

Action 9. West Coast Closure:

Blocks 10 & 11 – the area is fishing well, with an abundance of juveniles noticed, which is welcome for future harvest? The members discussed and decided to close on the cap.

Completed

Action 10. Review Block 38:

The members discussed and decided to close on the cap, and also close Block 33 which is currently over the cap.

Completed

Action 3

Review / Increase the size limit for Blocks 33 and 38, at FRAG #1, 2019.

Action 11. Reverse Cap:

Discussion on the results of the trial, prepare a paper outlining the experience of the reverse cap and how it can be improved to be for FRAG #1, 2019

Ongoing

Action 12. AbFAC – Greenlip Fishery:

Completed

Action 13. Effects of salmon farming on the Actaeons:

IMAS completed a reef survey in September – a further day is required to test the results. A further survey is scheduled for February.

Ongoing

6. Outcomes of AbFAC #2 July 23 2018, meeting relevant to FRAG:

1. The IMAS Workshop on understanding the Harvest Strategy was positive with good interactions. The presentation was designed to explain to members how the recommendations on size limits were arrived at. The harvest strategy is science based and peer reviewed and the science behind it was not up for discussion or negotiation. It was noted that some in industry did not get sufficient notice to attend the workshop and in some cases, received advice of the workshop after it had been run. It was agreed that having as much understanding of the rationale for size limit changes was essential for the effective implementation of the harvest strategy.

Action 4.

IMAS to organise a further education and awareness session for members on the harvest strategy

2. The public consultation period for the Harvest Strategy has been completed and a summary of submissions will be presented at AbFAC #4 and then to the Minister.
3. West Coast size limit - Block 5A, B, C and 49D will remain at 129mm for 2019 and increase to 132mm in 2020.

FRAG Comments – Some divers felt that the West Coast size limit increase was not appropriate at this time, given the status of the fishery and their view of negative impacts. A contrary view was also expressed, noting that in general, the West Coast fishery is improving, with a vast majority of fish above the size limit minimising the impact of the change on divers

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

‘2018 FRAG #4 Harvest Strategy summary and IMAS recommendations’

Eastern Zone:

IMAS Notes:

- Stock declines in the eastern zone due to multiple factors
 - Overfishing during the 1990's
 - Reduction in fishing grounds by *Centrostephanus*
 - Marine heat wave mortality
 - Marine heat wave sub-lethal effects (growth, reproduction)
 - Storm events (2007, 2016)
- Understanding contribution of these events critical for informing management decisions e.g. Block 16 catch and CPUE declining for many years, but no *Centrostephanus*, and before MHW events?
 - Cost of rebuilding stocks will be significant and require 8 - 10 years of restoration work.
 - Minimising fishing mortality in the short term will increase rate of recovery.
- Block 13 catch rates stable but no clear evidence of stock rebuilding.
 - CPUE in Block 13 likely to be lower by year end given history of lower CPUE in Q4.
- CPUE in blocks 17, 20, 21, 29 and 31 improving in 2018.
- Review catch targets for blocks north of Cape Pillar for 2019 (long-term gain vs short-term benefit).

IMAS argued for a conservative approach to the Eastern Zone TAC, especially between Cape Pillar and Eddystone Point, on the basis that more animals left on the reef now will aid recovery and require less financial investment in stock rebuilding. For example, the IMAS proposed goal of achieving 100 t harvest/annum from 2028 to 2038 in blocks 22 to 31 (i.e. increase of 1,000t over 20 years) could cost upwards of \$10 million.

Block 13 – the catch rate is stabilising, but based on previous years, the CPUE will decrease in the last quarter. FRAG decided to close when the cap is reached.

The MCDA suggests a reduction from 173t to 147t. = (26t)

FRAG comments;

There was majority support for the MCDA recommendation, with general discussion on previous management actions.

If there is an issue of PST closing an East Coast area before the end of the year, the Actaeons will be expected to supply fish to cover the current cap. The IMAS view is to apply the MetaRule; the science opposes an overrun.

The FRAG supported the MCDA recommended target catch for Block 13 (147t)

Block 14 – the CPUE is stable with no sign of rebuilding. The MCDA suggests a reduction from 26.6t to 21.3t = (5.3t)

FRAG Comments;

There were suggestions of a larger reduction than the MCDA recommendation, in this zone and some others. There is little or no protection of egg production in this area, there is also an environmental effect to be considered. There was a majority support for the MCDA recommendation. It was noted that more fish are being harvested to make up the tonnage. The point was made that previous management of the fishery had not been sufficiently precautionary, contributing to the decline in stock. In some areas, there should be a greater investment in stock growth by reducing catch, which would rebuild stocks faster and enable greater long term yields. There was limited support for this more conservative view.

The recreational catch is having an effect on the available commercial catch, which is now 10 fish per day with a possession limit of 10. With the commercial quota reduction it is felt that the recreational fishery should be reduced to 5 fish per day and a possession limit of 5.

The FRAG supported the MCDA recommended target catch for Block 14 (21.3t)

Block 16 – there was historically significant catch on the outside of Bruny Island. CPUE is stable with no evidence of recovery. The MCDA suggests a reduction from 18.4t to 13.8t = (4.6t)

FRAG comments;

The 2016 heat wave had a larger negative effect than previously realised, with little recovery. There was some support to be more conservative, with previous management decisions based on information and data that was available at the time.

The FRAG supported the MCDA recommended target catch for Block 14 (13.8t)

Block 19 – catch rates are trending down with a sporadic catch

Block 22, 23, 28, 29 – not a lot of catch – with a target of rebuilding

FRAG Comments:

It was agreed that catch data from the mid-East Coast was insufficient to support the use of the MCDA process and there was a need for a more integrated approach for the full area. There is a middle East Coast re-building strategy and a *Centrostephanus* removal project underway, but progress with this initiative has been slow and is frustrating parts of industry. Spreading the effort is optimal rather than several divers fishing in the same area. There is value in having a structured approach and asking divers to provide data and Go-Pro footage of the bottom to calculate the potential of this area.

Diver observation of the Freycinet area suggest that the area should be treated differently. Feedback from this area is that it is fishing well and previous management decisions on increasing the size limit to 145mm has now resulted in an abundance of fish.

Closure of the East Coast in 2019 from January 1 to April 1.

Suggest 9t with a carefully structured approach to fishing

The FRAG supported a target catch for Block 22, 23, 28 & 29 of 9t, with the details of structured fishing to be decided between the TACL and IMAS/DPIPWE.

Action 5.

TACL/IMAS/DPIPWE to work on a strategy for the best catch distribution of 9t among blocks 22-29, ensuring adequate information is provided to inform the rebuilding strategy.

TAC – THE FRAG AGREED TO RECOMMEND AN EASTERN ZONE TACC OF 249.05 T FOR 2019

Western Zone:

IMAS Notes;

- CPUE in blocks 6, 9, 10, and 13 increasing calm weather enabled access to difficult to fish locations in block 9?
- CPUE in blocks 7, 8, and 12 stable.
- CPUE in block 11 declining.

- Fishing at depth in Western Zone Block 13 is increasing, with \approx 30% of effort deeper than 11m in 2017.

Has there been significant recruitment of abalone deeper than normal?

Is there sign of multiple year-classes at depth?

FRAG Comments

Block 6 – improvement, agree with the MCDA

Block 7 – good catches agree with the MCDA

Block 8 – catches above the target agree with the MCDA

Block 9 – improving with a sharp increase, agree with the MCDA

Block 10 – higher catch rates due to good weather, agree with the MCDA

Block 11 – catch rate trending down, divers are seeing good catches

ACTION 6. Close Blocks 10 & 11 when the cap is reached

Block 12 – catch rates are improving and are close to the target.

Block 13 – the CPUE is increasing rapidly; the data shows 25% of effort is in deeper water, which could mean the fishing grounds are increasing.

IMAS suggest a conservative approach for Block 11, if the 2019 cap is exceeded suggest a greater reduction in 2020 to preserve the future biomass.

Follow the 80/20 rule, there is a long standing agreement to open Block 12 for the last 2 weeks for divers to finish off their quota if the weather suits.

The MCDA recommends a 25t reduction; there was discussion on a larger reduction.

The FRAG, noting the MCDA recommendation of 698t, and that this was a small change <3% at the Zone level, agreed to apply the MetaRule and maintain the current TAC.

TAC – THE FRAG AGREED TO RECOMMEND A WESTERN ZONE TACC OF 716.8 T FOR 2019

Northern Zone:

IMAS notes;

- Block 5 - CPUE stable with \approx 17 t caught. Expect very low levels of recruitment over the next 6 to 8 years given decreasing catch and decreasing CPUE over the past 8

Note: 10 t decrease in catch and 2 mm LML increase to 129 mm. Absence of recovery can't be assigned wholly to LML increase.

- Block 6 CPUE increasing slightly with \approx 9 t caught.
- King Island Block 3 CPUE down sharply from 2017.
 - \approx 35% of fishing effort in 2017 in Block 3 deeper than 15 m, although slightly less reliance on deeper reefs in 2018.

FRAG Comments

Overall data suggest a 9 years downward trend in CPUE, but an upward trend in 2018..

Block 39 – agree with the MCDA

Block 49B – agree with the MCDA

Block 5 – increase in size by 2mm to 129mm, agree with the MCDA

Block 6A – is fishing well

Block 1 – is fishing well

Block 2 – appears to be an amount of by-catch

Block 3 – catch rates are falling sharply, data shows there is a substantial amount of fishing at depth

Block 4 – trending down

TAC – THE FRAG AGREED TO RECOMMEND A NORTHERN ZONE TACC OF 99.7 FOR 2019

Bass Strait Zone:

IMAS Notes;

- Consider reviewing 1 t catch allocation to each of Blocks 32, 34 - 37, 44, 45, 51.
5 year average catch (t) is 0.7, 0.5, 0.4, 2.9, 2.6, 0.7, 0.6, 4.6 respectively.
- CPUE in block 33 trending down, and stable at CPUE target in block 38.
- Expect CPUE to fall in 33 and 38 after 8 years of catches at the new low LML of 114mm. reduced recruitment from lower biomass following LML change will begin to influence the fishery (based on 7 to 8 years from biological recruitment to entering the fishery).
- CPUE in Hunter and Three Hummock improving during 2018.

FRAG Comments

Block 48, 49, 47 – there is a slight increase

Block 33 – trending down slightly

Block 38 – trending up,

Block 43 – trending down

Block 49A, B, C – trending up, slow rebuild

FRAG Comments;

There is an increase in *Centrostephanus* around Babel Island, SRL fisherman have changed their fishing grounds and relocated to Babel Island; there has been a decrease in large lobsters, which are a predator of *Centrostephanus*.

TAC – THE FRAG AGREED TO RECOMMEND A BASS STRAIT ZONE TACC OF 92.6 FOR 2019
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Greenlip Zone:

IMAS Notes;

- Reverse cap in place for 2018 - North East catch allocation reached in 4 fishing days for the second consecutive year.
- CPUE on King Island and North West improving.
- Central North - 1.5 of 8 tonnes taken YTD. Catch allocation for this area to be set to zero for 2019.
- Perkins Bay open but negligible catch YTD, and CPUE still falling. Catch allocation to be reduced, and spread across central North.
Perkins Bay is subject to selective fishing, distorting CPUE trends and status. IMAS will adopt precautionary approach and following Harvest Strategy outcome.
- Sharp decline in Furneaux Group CPUE.
- Decline in CPUE in North East. Precautionary approach taken and reduction is recommended.

FRAG Comments;

King Island – has been closed

North West –

Perkins Bay – catch rates are down; selective fishing?

Central North – zero catch to date

North East – the cap was harvested in a short time

Furneaux Group – catch has dropped away sharply

Clark Island – trending down, close?

IMAS suggest combining Perkins Bay and Central North

Suggest reducing the cap at Musselroe (NE) and the Furneaux Group

Suggest a 7kg unit overall with whole of year to catch

There was a suggestion to create a new greenlip NW zone with a boundary change.

DPIPWE noted that in general, the creation of small zones that are not efficient commercially and financially is not a useful way forward. There is one 'spare' zone in the FILMS system and a better use of this would be give effect to re-establishment of a Central Western Zone (subject to discussion and agreement)

Pulse fishing events are an issue with a number of divers concentrating on a small area.

Summary – the FRAG agreed with the MCDA process.

FRAG Members support the MCDA recommendation of 107.6t

TAC – THE FRAG AGREED TO RECOMMEND A GREENLIP ZONE TACC OF 107.7 t FOR 2019
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Harvest Strategy and proposed size limits:

As noted above, the HS has been completed; the submissions have been reviewed by the Department. These will be presented to AbFAC for discussion. The comments will be submitted to the Minister.

Centrostephanus and other research issues:

The Department and TACL have been discussing the Governance framework and the terms and conditions on the Management Committee overseeing the East Coast stock rebuilding strategy.

'Expressions of Interest' will be called for the Management Committee and projects on Centrostephanus Management and Stock Enhancement.

Several fertiliser and pharmaceutical companies have expressed an interest in use of abalone viscera and urchin waste.

'Wineglass Bay Project' – recent follow up surveys have shown there has been a large re-growth of kelp in the controlled area where urchins were culled.

Other Business:

1. PST – Block 30A and Oakhampton Bay are still closed.

Meeting closed 3:31pm

New Actions:

1. IMAS to conduct a survey to assess abundance of fish in Block 40 or, a TACL diver with an IMAS observer under permit to survey Block 40 with the harvest to come off the quota. Final arrangements pending suitable allocation of funds.
2. Open Block 30C in 2019.
3. Revue / increase options for Blocks 33 & 38 at FRAG #1 2019 (conservative TACC vs LML change)
4. IMAS to organise another education/awareness session for members on the Harvest Strategy.
5. TACL/IMAS/DPIPWE to work on a strategy for the best catch distribution of 9t among blocks 22-29, ensuring adequate information is provided to inform the rebuilding strategy.
6. Close Blocks 10 & 11 when the cap is reached.

Action List arising from FRAG #4 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 Ongoing
3	DPIPWE/IMAS	North East Boundary revisions	TACL to present a case supported by analysis of likely costs benefit from the proposed NE Boundary change Ongoing
4	TACL	Reverse Cap	Prepare paper outlining the experience of the reverse cap and how it may be improved to be distributed before the next meeting to inform discussion Ongoing
5	IMAS	Effects of salmon farming on the Actaeons	Progress report on monitoring the impact of salmon farming on the Actaeons
6	IMAS/TACL	Block 40 survey	IMAS to conduct a survey to assess abundance of fish in Block 40, or a TACL diver with an IMAS observer under permit to survey Block 40 with the harvest to come off the quota
7	DPIPWE/FRAG	Block 30C	Open Block 30C in 2019
8	FRAG	Blocks 33 & 38	Revue / increase the size limit for Blocks 33 & 38 at FRAG #1 2019 or reduce quota
9	IMAS	Harvest Strategy Information session	IMAS to organise another education/awareness session for members on the Harvest Strategy
10	DPIPWE	Blocks 10 & 11	Close Blocks 10 & 11 at the cap

Catch Target Summary

Blocks - Area	TAC 2018	TAC 2019
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	252.0
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	716.8
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	99.7
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	92.6
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	107.6
2018 TAC TOTAL	1335.5t	1265.75

