

## **Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)**

Meeting 1/2019

Wednesday April 10

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

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### **Minutes**

#### **1. Present:**

##### **Members:**

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

#### **2. Observers:**

R Searle, T Chadwick, T Lesser, B Lesser, G Hughes, B Richardson, P Pollard, M Florence, G Woodham, I Rattray, A Allwright (NAB)

##### **Apologies:**

T Bush, J McKibben, A Hansen,

#### **3. Welcome and opening remarks:**

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the first meeting of the year, and outlined the main purposes of the meeting. These were to review catches, catch rates and other information for the completed 2018 season, gain an overall view of the status of the resource from the 2018 and 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 so as to give time for their consideration well before the end of the season, when more attention will be on setting the TAC.

An employee of the NAB was welcomed as an observer to the meeting. His attendance was to observe the process of abalone management.

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.

#### **4. Adoption of agenda;**

The agenda as circulated was agreed with the addition of;

- Size limits in Blocks 33 & 38
- 9 ton cap on Blocks 22 & 29 and distribution of catch on the East Coast
- Report on Abalone Industry Reinvestment Fund (AIRF)
- Melbourne abalone workshop and establishment of the FRDC IPA
- Greenlip on King Island
- Resource security and the role of the Deed
- The fisheries assessment 'Toolbox', including industry input

#### **5. Minutes of the previous meeting:**

Members agreed the minutes of the FRAG meeting held on October 19, 2018, and they were accepted as a true and accurate record.

## **6. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:**

### **Action 1. Research proposal – augmenting stock recovery within Tasmania's abalone fishery**

AIDF project underway; regular reports will be provided to the FRAG

**Completed**

### **Action 2. Finalise report on size limits and boundaries:**

Draft policy completed.

**Completed**

### **Action 3. North East boundary revisions;**

TACL presented a case supported by analysis of likely costs benefit from the proposed NE boundary change. Department declined to take action and change boundary based on compliance concerns

**Ongoing**

### **Action 4. 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.

Divers to give feedback for a report on the success or otherwise, the Board to discuss the outcomes.

**Complete - on the agenda of this FRAG (FRAG 1 2019)**

### **Action 5. Effects of salmon farming on the Actaeons**

Progress report provided on monitoring the impact of salmon farming on the Actaeons. A one year EMP has commenced funded by the SMRCA, with additional sites established around the Actaeons. There is no ongoing commitment of funds to this project A report will be given to the TACL at the next Board meeting.

**Ongoing**

### **Action 6. 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.

**Completed**

### **Action 7. Block 30C**

Open Block 30C in 2019

**Complete - on the agenda of this FRAG (FRAG 1 2019)**

### **Action 8. Blocks 33 & 38;**

Review / increase the size limit for blocks 33 & 38 at FRAG #1 2019, or reduce quota.

Discussed further in the meeting

**Ongoing**

### **Action 9. Harvest Strategy information session;**

IMAS to organise another information session for Members on the Harvest Strategy. Agreed that on further considerations, including the poor support for other information sessions that the proposed session not be pursued, unless sufficient interest is shown, at the upcoming General Meeting.

**Completed.**

## **Action 10. Blocks 10 & 11;**

Close blocks 10 & 11 at the cap.

**Completed**

## **7. Outcomes of 2018 FAC #4 meeting relevant to FRAG**

**Notification of closed areas (on reaching/nearing caps).** A process of giving adequate notification to divers of an impending closure was agreed at the FAC. This involves the Department sending an email to FLAD owners with four days' notice of closure, with the closure coming into force at midnight on the fourth day. Four days is deemed by Compliance to be necessary to provide sufficient notice for Motherboats working in remote locations.

The FRAG suggested that areas with good reception could be closed with less notice, and as such would be less likely to experience cap 'overruns'.

**Action: That the FAC consider variations to the four day closure notice policy.**

**Draft Harvest Strategy** – This has been approved by the Minister, including the MCDA and the '3 year rule' i.e. Allowing abalone three years of spawning protection before entering the fishery.. This has far reaching implications for the fishery and it was noted that the changes under the HS need to be introduced incrementally. Additional points made were:

- Some strong views on the need to protect the biomass with size limits and understanding, and take account of the unique biology of abalone.
- Review area of the state and work through the data with respect to the need for LML changes
- Management action has started on areas of the West and East Coast.
- Matt & Craig to use information already created to plan a structured way of implementing the process and Craig to advise the priorities for a proposal to be discussed at FRAG #2.
- Changes will be implemented incrementally.
- The size limit in the Western Zone will increase to 145mm on July 1, 2019

**Action: Craig Mundy to work with Matt to develop**

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

**Central Western Zone** Blocks 6D, 7, 8.

Divers discussed the re-establishment of the Central West

**Eastern Zone:**

Overall the East Coast catches were relatively stable with a slightly declining catch rate at the end of 2018:

*Block 13 – Actaeons – stable*

*Block 14 – stable*

*Block 16 – stable, catch declining*

*Block 17 – variable*

*Block 19 – variable, trending down*

*Block 20 – positive*

*Block 21 – stable, increasing*

*Block 22 – not enough catch to register*

*Block 23 – not enough catch to register*

*Block 24 – not enough catch to register*

*Block 27 – increased catch (for data)*

*Block 28 – not enough catch to register*

*Block 29 – increased catch*

*Block 30 – decreasing rapidly – experimental fishing in this block*

*Block 31 – trend increasing*

**IMAS – overview;**

Experimental fishing in blocks 30A & B shows that despite ‘resting’ the area for 13 years, there is little evidence of increased recruitment outside of a small number of productive sites.

**FRAG Comments;**

Block 30A remains closed due to PST. The oyster farmers are using ‘ShellMap’ to monitor water quality with regular testing. These results are used by TACL and IMAS with only specific testing undertaken when an area is close to opening.

The remainder of the East Coast opened on April 1, and divers are reporting good catch rates in the Actaeons and a positive biomass of larger fish. An absence of smaller fish in some areas was highlighted as a concern.

Concern was raised that the fishing in blocks 22, 23, 24, 27, 28 was not structured and that there was a need for a different, more controlled approach to access these areas in 2020 that would ensure adequate data was collected to understand the status of the resource and inform management actions.

<b>Action: IMAS and the TACL to consider a structured fishing plan for Block 30A before FRAG #2.</b>
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**Western Zone:**

*Summary;*

The catch to date is less than that taken in 2018

Block 6 – catch rates have improved with positive sign

Block 7 – sharp downturn, nil weather patterns, flag a warning

Block 8 – nil catch to date

Block 9 – variation, flag a warning

Block 10 – trending down slowly, low catch

Block 11 – reasonable amount of catch, trending up

Block 12 – trending down, low catch flag a warning

Block 13A & B - sharp downturn, the catch nominally allocated has been caught.

*FRAG Comments;*

The size limit will increase to 145mm on July 1.

A small percentage of fishing is undertaken in deep water which doesn’t appear to affect the overall block CPUE.

There is concern that the overall catch rate is at best holding its own overall on the Western Zone, and is trending down in some blocks.

Fishing opportunities on the south and west coasts have been limited to fewer short weather windows so far in 2019.

The FRAG noted that the catch in Blocks 13A and 13B were close to the cap and agreed to recommend that these blocks be closed asap, noting that they would be open for a short period at the end of the quota year.

**Action – Blocks 13A & B close now and reopen in December.**

IMAS view – There is a downturn in some blocks, and the TAC has been decreased to trigger rebuilding in all blocks. There appears to be a 2-year lag from when a diver notes a decline in fishing, to a biomass increase. Individual divers are likely to experience different stock levels across the zone or block, except where there is widespread rapid recovery or widespread depletion. Individual divers will not be aware of the range of stock abundance experiences across the fleet. Only IMAS, and the FRAG through the presentation of summary information see the performance of the entire fleet.

Processors have noticed a difference in the quantity and size of fish packed in boxes for export.

Craig showed graphs produced from data obtained from NOAA and the Australian BOM which show number of days below threshold wave height and monthly wave energy, that is consistent with comments from divers at the FRAG.

**Northern Zone:**

Summary (from 2018 data)

Not a lot of catch to date

*Block 31 – catch rate trending up*

*Block 39 – not a lot of catch to date*

*Block 48 – not a lot of catch to date*

*Block 49 – all good*

*Block 5 – catch rates increasing*

*Block 1 – not a lot of catch to date*

*Block 2 – not a lot of catch to date*

*Block 3 – catch has stabilised, not consistent with the HS*

*Block 4 – not a lot of fish, stable*

*Blocks 5 A & C – declining*

*Blocks 6 A & C – declining*

**Bass Strait:**

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

*Summary;*

Overall the fishing is stable from Blocks 32 to 53.

*Block 32 – not a lot of catch*

*Block 33 – stable,*

*Block 37 & 38 – increasing catch, expect a decrease in recruitment*

*Block 43 – small amount of catch*

*Blocks 48 & 49 – increase in catch*

*Block 51 – small amount of catch, not a good sign of rebuilding*

*Block 53 – catch rates stable*

**Greenlip Zone:**

*Summary;*

*The TAC has been reduced*

*King Island – catch rates higher than 2018*

*North West – increase in catch rates*

*Perkins Bay – decreasing – only a 10t fishery*

*North East – catch rates are falling, - (is biomass declining or pulse fishing)*

*Furneaux Group – rapid drop off, growth of sponge has taken over*

*Central North – not a lot of fishing*

*FRAG Comments;*

Agreed that there is a need to ensure greenlip TAC catch is adequately spread.  
FRAG #2 – to discuss the distribution of the greenlip catch, with respect to relieving pressure on the Furneaux Group and the Perkins Bay fisheries, from July 1.

**Action – FRAG 2 to develop a new management plan for structured fishing under permit in areas adjacent to Perkins Bay that are currently fished at 145mm.**

## **9. Management Report; issues for 2019:**

### **Industry report, including funding arrangements for research and development (Industry Partnership Agreement (IPA):**

- The implementation of the West Coast size limit of 145mm is underway.
- Blocks 13A & B are close to cap, agreed to recommended close and re-open in December
- Flinders Island is not fishing well.
- Catch distribution should be better managed next year.

## **10. Research report, including progress with significant projects and outcomes of Melbourne R and D Workshop:**

ACA recently held a workshop on research and management. Managers, researchers and industry from all jurisdictions were present, including FRDC and ACA Directors. The workshop was called to discuss a range of research and management issues and a list of projects, which are currently under consideration. The workshop sought to improve communication between jurisdictions and to see where harmonisation and cooperation could improve utilisation of R&D funds in a constructive manner across all the states and increase the benefits accruing to fisheries there.

All jurisdictions are facing a decline, with the value of hindsight has enough been done to manage the respective fisheries. Other relevant comments made at the workshop included:

- Abalone fisheries are extremely vulnerable to fishing and environmental change
- There is probably a new regime shift in some fisheries whereby the habitat may no longer support past levels of catch.
- Co-management should not result in the government assigned full responsibility for the status of the stock, i.e. the current state of stocks is a shared responsibility.

One key issue discussed related to the use of CPUE in fisheries assessments and TAC setting. In relation to this issue, it was noted that:

- Fishers can maintain CPUE in the face of declining biomass (hyper-stability).
- When fishers are no longer able to adjust practices to maintain CPUE, and a declining fleet level mean CPUE is evident, this should be interpreted as a clear sign of depletion.

Research projects considered at the workshop for funding were:

- Diver observation

- Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) of harvest strategies
- Indicators and proxies for density and biomass of exploitable abalone
- Best practice and policy on stock enhancement (including governance)
- Best practice in stock recovery
- Fishery Independent Survey (FIS) methodology

It was noted that the ACA Trans-Tasman Convention will be held in Hobart from 29 -31 July, and FRAGZ members were requested to register for, and promote this event

## **General Business:**

### **1. The Abalone Industry Re-investment Fund (AIRF)**

The AIRF Committee has met twice and reviewed the effectiveness of the subsidy to divers for harvesting *Centrostephanus* from the East Coast. The subsidy has been changed to a zonal subsidy in an effort to push harvesting south.

The Government has committed \$5.1m over 5 years.

Expressions of Interest were advertised in the Mercury, the ACA, FRDC, and TACL Members. EOI's are invited for a project pre proposal from the AIRF

The next meeting of the steering committee for the AIRF is scheduled for May 9 to look at the pre proposals for investment.

### **2. Reverse cap**

Initial feedback was that the reverse cap did not work well to spread the effort or reduce the concentration of effort, with the North-East green lip TAC being caught in 4 days again in 2018.

There were some positives expressed over the use of the reverse cap and it was noted that while the process had not been perfect ;

- the majority of the greenlip TAC was caught at the right time of year; and
- the greenlip TAC was fully caught

Dean Lisson is waiting on feedback from industry on additional views on the efficacy of the reverse cap. After receipt of this information he will write up a proposal out of session to bring to FRAG #2 to make a decision.

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

### **3. Central West**

There was a majority support for consideration of the re-establishment of the Central West Zone, with adjusted boundaries, and an appropriate decrease in the TAC.

### **4. Resource security**

Western Rock Lobster (WA) fishery TAC was cut substantially 7 years ago due to low biomass. As the biomass increased substantially the WA Government decided to increase the quota with the industry allocated 25% and the Government having 75% of the additional quota to be sold to the local markets with some going to indigenous communities.

It was noted that the Tasmanian Deed is considered to be best practise. The WRL and SRL are looking to adopt a similar model to secure their access (property rights) to the resource.

### **5. A Conditional Eastern Zone Opening Framework**

Darvin Hanson spoke to a paper that proposed a process for opening the East Coast during the current closure at the start of the year (January 1 to March 30), to take advantage of the higher prices at that time. The opening would be subject to ensuing certain environmental parameters were met and there was no risk (additional mortality) to the resource.

The key reasons for the original closures on the East Coast were acknowledged:

1. The increase in water temperature
2. There was an increase in mortalities
3. The fish were stressed and spawning in the tanks

The proposal was to open the East Coast on a trial; if the diving weather is suitable and the ambient air temperature is also forgiving, then an opening could be considered, with additional conditions:

- *At least 2/3 of processors by previous year volume must agree that there is a need that cannot be met by West alone due to bad weather.*
- *The only block opened would be 13E (Actaeons) to prevent pulse fishing event in a small capacity block, and the opening should only be for 1-2 d ys at a time and close again.*
- *The sea surface temperature should be less than 18d at the Actaeons.*
- *The maximum ambient air temperature for Southport should not be more than 20d C, as judged by a means of googling 'Southport Tasmania Temperature'*
- *Diving weather must be suitable.*

### **Discussion**

The stock would be harvested in January/February instead of October/November.

Duty of Care for diver safety; processors want fish, quota owners want their fish caught and divers could be working on the West Coast in unsafe conditions.

The open/close notice would go out at the same time, which may create pulse fishing.

This proposal is market driven rather than by good fishery management.

IMAS noted that they could access and provide real time water temperature and in principle, DPIPWE could manage the open/close procedure.

Market price could trigger the proposal, which would then require all other conditions to be met.

While FRAG members had strong reservations about the proposal, there was general support for Darwin, at his own discretion, for considering another draft of the proposal that would address the concerns raised at the FRAG.

**Action: Darwin will rework the proposal to address the negative comments and bring to FRAG #2**

### **6. Abalone Spatial Indicators;**

Craig showed a presentation on special performance measures, showing the distribution of effort using the vessel GPS and the diver loggers. A number of options for indicators were shown, including Catch per Unit Area and Area per Unit Time, which were considered to hold the most promise at this stage. The issue of the impact of wave height and energy on CPUE standardisation was discussed.

Meeting closed 4:00pm

**Action List FRAG #1 2019:**

<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Member</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Progress</b>
1	FAC	Closing of blocks	Consider variations to the four-day closure notice policy
2	IMAS and TACL	Catch control for block 30A	IMAS and the TACL to consider a structured fishing plan for Block 30A before FRAG #2.
3	DPIPWE	Closure of Blocks 13A and 13B	DPIPWE to close blocks and reopen in December
4	IMAS/TACL	Perkins Bay greenlip	New management plan for structured fishing under permit and bring to FRAG 2
5	TACL	Reverse cap for greenlip	TACL to gather input from divers and present a proposal to FRAG #2 for decision
6	D Hansen	East Coast structured opening	Rework the proposal to address FRAG comments and present to FRAG#2

<b>Blocks - Area</b>	<b>TAC 2019</b>	<b>KG's/unit</b>
<b>Eastern Zone</b>		
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		
<b>Total Eastern Zone TAC</b>	<b>252.0</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Western Zone</b>		
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		
<b>Total Western Zone TAC</b>	<b>717.5</b>	<b>205</b>
<b>Northern Zone</b>		
Blocks 5A-5C		
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5		
Blocks 1-4 King Island		
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East		
<b>Total Northern Zone TAC</b>	<b>98.0</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Bass Strait Blacklip</b>		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group		
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands		
Blocks 42-46 Central North		
<b>Total Bass Strait TAC</b>	<b>91.0</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Greenlip</b>		
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		
<b>Total Greenlip TAC</b>	<b>108.5</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>2019 TAC TOTAL</b>	<b>1267.0</b>	<b>362</b>

