

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 4/2019

Thursday October 17, 2019

Astley Room, Derwent Entertainment Centre

Minutes

1. Attendance:

Members:

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

Observers:

A Gray, R Baillie, P Pollard, R Rex, M Reed, S Larby, T Lesser, G Hughes, B Lesser, M Leary, S Anning, M Fleming, M Webster, N Wallace, J Dale, S Dale, B Rex, S Sharp, G Woodham, L Rattray, G Smith, M Steane, J Polanowski, R Searle, B Denny, K Hoskin, B Allen

Apologies:

B Ransom

2. Welcome and opening remarks:

The Chair welcomed members and observers to FRAG #4 2019. The main purposes of the meeting 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. Importantly, this meeting provided an opportunity to review the MCDA outcomes and firm up catch targets and TAC recommendations at the final FRAG.

It was noted that the TAC recommendations will be firmed up at this meeting, based on IMAS data, the MCDA-based harvest strategy and diver observations. 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. This meeting provides advice to the TACL Board, AbFAC and the Minister. This meeting will confirm advice to the TACL Board prior to the AGM. The Minister receives advice from 5 sources.

The Chair welcomed Sue Forward as the newly elected Quota Holder Sub-Council chair.

3. Adoption of agenda;

The agenda as circulated was agreed with additions, a discussion on the Sustainability Motion (2) that will be voted on at the AGM.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

The minutes of the FRAG meeting held on August 16, 2019 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1. Catch control for Block 30B

Testing for PST will be undertaken closer to the re-opening with a potential TAC of 500kg per diver

Pending results of PST testing

Ongoing

Action 2. Perkins Bay greenlip

The Department will close areas at their cap. IMAS will work with divers to ascertain the productive areas and advise the Department to enable the issue of permits to divers to fish at 132mm to relieve pressure on the more depleted areas.

Completed

Action 3. Woolnorth line

Look at options for the boundary line at Woolnorth for greenlip and blacklip fishing. Divers are requesting an alignment and the opening of blocks together with a combined 15t cap, to be able to fish blacklip and greenlip together.

Ongoing

6. Outcomes of 2019 AbFAC #3 meeting relevant to FRAG

- There are a few serial offenders who are not sending logger data to IMAS, AbFAC agreed to review options available to the Department to address loss of data from these divers.
- Program for 3-year rule – noted that size limit changes will need to be implemented incrementally. The Harvest Strategy has been signed off by the Minister with an expectation for the size limit rule to move L50+3 years. Incremental size increases are drafted for 2021, 2023 & 2025. The Department will send the draft document out for public consultation in early 2020. All data and support information from Craig and Malcolm will be included in the proposal.
- The TACL Board does not agree with the draft proposal; and believes further consultation is required before a final decision on the implementation schedule should be made

7. Harvest strategy – recap of process

Craig explained the process of spacial catch allocation, elements of the empirical Harvest Strategy, particularly the target CPUE for each block.

There are three inputs used by the MCDA;

- Current CPUE relative to the target CPUE.
- CPUE gradient over the last 4 years as a proxy for medium term trend
- CPUE gradient over the last year as a proxy for short term trend

The weighting of these three Performance Measures is set at 65:25:10, and the Harvest Control Rule applied is HCR6.

The Harvest Strategy in its current form has been approved by the Minister for 2019, and will be reviewed in 2020.

There are various data sets that have been used over the last few years and there are additional measures that can be implemented into the Harvest Strategy e.g. spatial information from the loggers and juvenile numbers from the collector plates. The cost and resources associated with the collection of some fisheries independent data need to be considered, and a focus placed on important sections of the fishery i.e. high density/catch and high value areas.

Ruben Bock wished it to be noted in the record that he has requested the time frame for a blueprint of the further development of the Harvest Strategy.

8. IMAS presentation of updated data, fisheries assessment including additional diver/stakeholder input.

IMAS (Craig Mundy) took the FRAG through the latest data from the fishery, zone by zone. Preliminary catch targets were discussed.

Eastern Zone:

Previous levels of catch and effort do not seem to comply with precautionary principles laid out in the 'FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fishing'. Biomass in the Eastern Zone is at an all-time low. It was noted that while the industry is very supportive of re-building the fishery, un-structured fishing in blocks 22 – 28 during 2018 and 2019 has not given the information required to determine the state of this part of the fishery. An estimate by IMAS of \$20m invested in stock enhancement (reseedling using larvae) over 10 years will be required to rebuild 5 blocks (22, 23, 24, 27 and 28) on the East Coast. Divers have reported good abundance of abalone in very limited pockets. If the remaining fish have high fishing mortality and there are no recruits coming then there is a danger of overfishing and local extinctions even with structured fishing.

FRAG agreed to close the Eastern Zone January to March

HS Summary – including the Meta Rule

Block 13 IMAS 146.9t supported by the FRAG.

Comments; need to be more conservative as the population is decreasing due to environmental effects.

Block 14 IMAS 21.3t supported by the FRAG.

Comments; watch closely, use the 80/20 rule.

Block 16 IMAS 11.4t not supported. 0t agreed by FRAG

IMAS presented a proposal for a zero commercial catch for one year, with research survey undertaken by IMAS/industry divers to gain a snapshot of the area. This was agreed as IMAS now have the resources and equipment, along with a training course to bring industry divers up to University dive qualifications. The survey methodology will be drawn up by IMAS with the close consultation of divers.

Supported by the FRAG

Block 17 IMAS 6t and watch in 2020 agreed by the FRAG

Comments; small catch, low stock at Betsy Island,

Block 19 IMAS 1t agreed by the FRAG

Block 20 IMAS 17.5t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; there is a marginal improvement with a need to avoid taking catch from other blocks.

Block 21 IMAS 18t agreed by the FRAG

Block 22 to 28 IMAS presented a proposal for a zero commercial catch for one year, with a research survey to be undertaken by IMAS and industry divers to gain a snapshot of the area. This was agreed, IMAS now have the resources and equipment, along with a training course to bring industry divers up to University dive qualifications. The survey methodology will be drawn up by IMAS in close consultation with divers.

Supported by the FRAG

Block 29 IMAS 3.8t agreed by the FRAG - fishing ok

Block 30 IMAS 0.4t agreed by the FRAG – closed due to PST

Block 31 IMAS 5.0t agreed by the FRAG - fishing ok

FRAG Comments;

The Harvest Strategy is the default position, fishers can be precautionary and more conservative.

TOTAL TAC for Eastern Zone 220t
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Western Zone:

TACC reductions had been made in 2013 and 2016. If these reductions were effective in reducing fishing mortality below the combined contribution of somatic growth and recruitment, then CPUE should be increasing, rather than decreasing. Further, three processors have been reporting an absence of large fish over the past 5 years, suggesting the short-lived recovery in the Western Zone in 2017 and 2018 is more likely to be driven by a good year class (or two) rather than getting the TACC right in 2016. Some of the reductions envisaged in 2016 have not occurred due to catch shifting from blocks 6 – 8 to more southerly blocks.

Block 6D IMAS14t agreed by the FRAG

Block 7 IMAS 36.3t agreed by the FRAG

Block 8 IMAS 11, agreed by the FRAG

Catch allocations for blocks 6D, 7 and 8 was set at the average catch in each block from 2016, 2017, and 2018.

Block 9 IMAS 72.1t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; some divers claim to be leaving 20% on the bottom due to the size increase to 145mm, still with good catch rates. Other divers reported no or negligible effect of the size limit increase implemented on July 1. Not all the TAC is being caught. Fishing mortality could increase due to handling the fish with extra measuring.

Block 10 IMAS 66.4t, agreed by the FRAG

Comments; slight downturn in catch

Block 11 IMAS 138.6t, reduced by the FRAG to 134t

Comments; diminishing biomass = reduced recruitment in future years.

Block 12 IMAS 191.3t, agreed by the FRAG

Comments; this block is weather dependant and has been stable for number of years, there are smaller fish than in previous years.

Block 13 IMAS 38t, no change, agreed by the FRAG

Block 13A & B will re-open later in the year for divers to finish off prior to the end of year. Divers are asked not to hold on to the quota expecting to fish later in the year.

TOTAL TACC for West Coast 562.9t

Northern Zone:

The key blocks 5 and 6 show a pattern which responds quickly when the catch is pushed high, and recovers quickly when catch is reduced. Neither block is fishing well despite 80% to 90% catch reductions in the past 7 years. A clear message that reducing the size limit and increasing the catch has had devastating effects on this section of the fishery.

Block 31B IMAS 20.25t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; over ran the cap, the changes could be due to a fleet dynamics change. Divers report good size and quality.

Block 39 IMAS 4.2t agreed by the FRAG

Comments: uncertainty over the status of this block due to large error bars and apparently a stable CPUE.

Block 49 IMAS 10t agreed by the FRAG

Block 5 IMAS 10.0t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; many fish are under the measure. Note; there is a concern with the new size limit

Block 6A/C IMAS 8.0t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; subject to a later opening July 1.

Block 1 IMAS 6.0 agreed by the FRAG

Block 3 IMAS 9.0t agreed by the FRAG

Comments: all the inshore areas have been depleted. Note: the fish will need to be taken from this area, and not re-directed to other parts of the Northern Zone.

Block 4 IMAS 4.0t agreed by the FRAG

TOTAL TACC for Northern Zone 74.8t

Bass Strait:

Overall the Bass Strait Zone is fishing well. It has been nine years since the size limit reduction in Blocks 33 and 38. We are now entering a period where recruitment is driven by the reducing biomass associated with the first few years of changes, and is expected to decline as the stock builds up at the higher size limit. Block 49A, B, C (Hunter Island) is showing early signs of recovery after reducing the TACC here by around 95% since 2012.

Block 38 IMAS 15.8t agreed by FRAG

Comments; there is a *Centrostephanus* issue at Babel Island, motherboat owners and crews were reminded that they can submit an expression of interest for a project (EOI) to the AIRF.

Block 33 IMAS 19.9t

Block 53 IMAS 10t FRAG disagreed to the IMAS proposal to set catch at the average of the past 5 years.

Block 51, 54, 55, and 56 no fishing year to date

TOTAL TACC for Bass Strait 92t

Greenlip Zone:

During 2018, there were strong indications that Greenlip abundance in two key areas, Furneaux and Perkins Bay were declining. In 2019, CPUE at the Furneaux has increased sharply, whereas Perkins Bay has been avoided year to date again.

King Island IMAS 18t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; catch rates are increasing.

North West IMAS 10.72t rejected, 13.4 agreed by the FRAG

Comments; catch rates have been decreasing since 2012, the CPUE has oscillated sharply in consecutive years. Divers report seeing an increase in biomass, - agreed to a watching brief.

Perkins Bay IMAS 0t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; leave open and IMAS will provide a measuring board.

Central North IMAS 0t agreed by the FRAG

North East IMAS 17.3t agreed by the FRAG

Comments; there has been an overrun over the last 5 years (5 years TAC taken in 4 years)

Furneaux Group – IMAS 30.8t rejected, 37.6 t agreed by the FRAG with a watching brief

Comments; overrun of cap for 8 years, there was an anomaly in CPUE last year!

TAC Summary table

Zone	Target 2019	MCDA 2020	IMAS 2020	FRAG 2020	KGs/ Unit
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	

9. Changes to/confirmation of other management arrangements for 2020

Notice of block closures

Currently the notification to fishers of a change in block access (closures) is currently 4 days, based on what is a reasonable time for a mother boat to return to port if already at sea. There are costs involved in setting off on a motherboat trip including food, accommodation and fuel, this needs to be taken into account.

10. Other business:

1. Greenlip opening proposal – Sean Larby

Proposed to open the North East greenlip fishery on the 1st January.

The FRAG discussed various scenarios, including the creation of a secondary greenlip zone for the North East corner (18t) and the balance in the original zone.

This separate allocation for greenlip was considered impractical since it would be impossible to divide/allocate a small quota among 3.500 units in a way that would be operationally economical. DPIPWE also suggested that this would not be achievable administratively.

After a lengthy discussion the following was agreed:

- Leave the Western Zone open all year
- Open all other fisheries at the same time, on April 1

2. Increase the size limit of the North East greenlip fishery by 5-10mm
3. Darwin Hansen gave a presentation on his upcoming Motion to the AGM - 'Secure your future'

Meeting closed at 4.40pm

Action List FRAG #4 2019:

Action	Responsible Member	Task	Progress
1.	IMAS and TACL	Catch Control for Block 30B	IMAS & TACL to consider a structured fishing plan for Block 30B. PST testing will be undertaken closer to the re-opening with a potential TAC of 500kg per diver Ongoing
2.	IMAS/TACL	Woolnorth line	Look at options for the boundary line at Woolnorth for greenlip and blacklip fishing Ongoing
4.	AbFAC	Open West Coast year round	Proposal by Sean Larby
4	AbFAC	Open all other fisheries on April 1	
5	AbFAC	Increase the size limit of NE greenlip by 5-10 mm	Proposal by Sean Larby

Blocks - Area	Recommended target catches 2020	Kg's/unit
Eastern Zone		
Blocks 13C, -14 E. Actaeons	146.9	
Blocks 14A and 14B. Lower Huon Channel, Huon to Southport Island, inc Dover, Southport	21.3	
Blocks 14C-16 Bruny Island		
Blocks 17-21 Hobart to Tasman Island inc Nubeena	41.5	
Block 22		
Blocks 23 and 24 Deep Glen Bay to Triabunna, inc Maria		
Blocks 25-29A Freycinet and Bicheno	3.8	
Blocks 29B, 29C, 29D and 30A North East	5	
Total Eastern Zone TAC	220.5	63.0
Western Zone		
Blocks 6D, 7 and 8. Granville Harbour, Sandy Cape	61.2	
Block 9 South of Strahan	58.2	
Blocks 10, 11 and 12A. South West	391.65	
Blocks 12B-13B South Coast	38	
Total Western Zone TAC	549.5	157.0
Northern Zone		
Blocks 5A-5C	10	
Blocks 47-48 NW not Block 5	10	
Blocks 1-4 King Island	19	
Blocks 31B, 39 and 40 North East	35.8	
Total Northern Zone TAC	73.5	21.0
Bass Strait Blacklip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux Group	42.8	
Blocks 50-56 Bass Strait Islands	27.2	
Blocks 42-46 Central North	21.6	
Total Bass Strait TAC	91.0	26.0
Greenlip		
Blocks 32-38 Furneaux	37.6	
Blocks 1-4 King Island	18	
North West not Perkins Bay	12.06	
Block 48A Perkins Bay		
Blocks 31,39,40 North East	17.36	
Central North		
Total Greenlip TAC	84.0	24.0
2020 TAC TOTAL	1018.5t	291 kg/unit

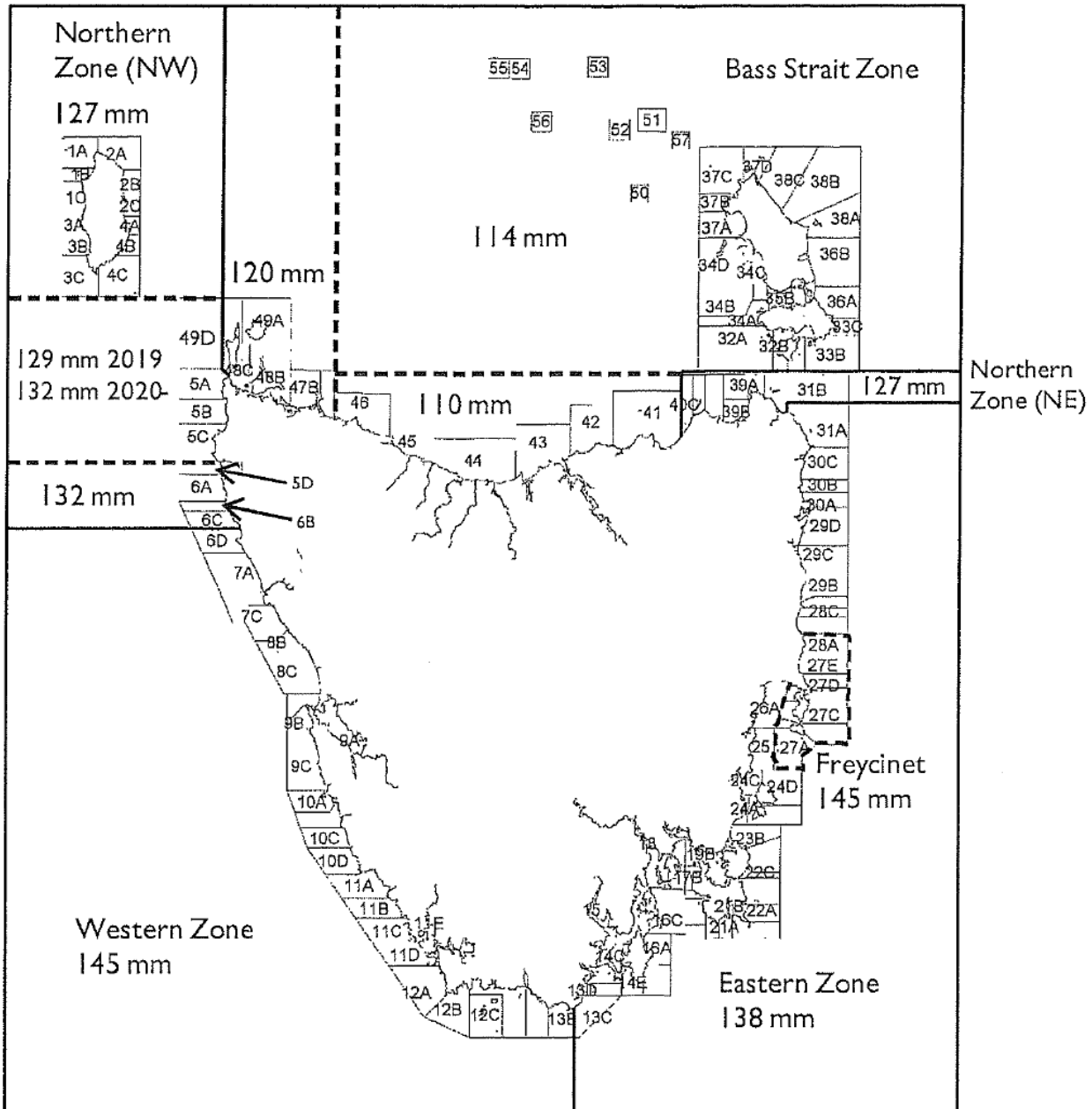


Figure 1 Commercial zones and size limit areas for blacklip abalone 2019 (solid line: zone and size limit boundary; dashed line: size limit boundary; please note, lines are illustrative only)

The Bass Strait zone has a recently introduced western boundary starting at the northernmost point of Woolnorth Point (Figure 2).