

NEWSLETTER JUNE 2023

Governance

Board Membership

Adrian Cuthbertson stood down from the Presidency in April, and both he and Lynn Mason resigned from the Board. Dean Lisson, our Vice President, has been acting in the role of President, and will continue in that role until the AGM in October, when a new president will be elected. Three Board positions will also be open to election, so anyone considering standing may wish to start thinking about doing so.

Constitution

A number of meetings have been held with members who have expressed an interest in this matter, and some reasonable progress has been made to amend and update it. I am hopeful that within the next fortnight I will be able to circulate to all members a draft for your consideration, input and advice. It will be a draft only, and will be written in such a way as to make the changes more comprehensible. I am sure there will be further input.

The Financial Year

The Board presently has before it a suggestion that our financial year be changed from the financial year July to June, to the calendar year January to December. The logic for doing so is that we receive the bulk of our income in the first three months of the calendar year, and it is more practical to operate with a known revenue stream than one you don't know until near the end of the budget year.

Strategic Plan

Last year the previous Board engaged a Tony Chapman to carry out a review of our current Strategic Plan, which had run its course. An effort went into updating the document, but it was not completed for a variety of reasons. The Board is keen to revitalise this project, and in doing so engage TACL members who might be interested in being involved in the process. A notice will be circulated to all members giving further details next week.

Dealings with Government

We have been dealing with government and the Natural Resources and Environment Department (NRE) on a regular and ongoing basis, with some matters successfully concluded and other matters still in the pipeline.

The AIRF fund

Funding for the AIRF was due to expire this year. Monies in the fund are spent on a range of projects dealing with stock enhancement and Centro research. The TACL lobbied hard for a continuation of the Fund, and the Government saw fit to extend it by a further 2 years, at \$1 million per year. The signals that we have received would suggest a further request would be considered favourably in 2 years' time. A recent decision within the AIRF has been to split the funds 50 50 between Centro control and abalone research, together with a new structure to provide advice on each of those areas.

The AIRF and Centro

Efforts to eradicate Centro from our waters has been unsuccessful, and a new policy of containment has been instituted. Centro exists in the waters of NSW and Victoria and has become an invasive species in our waters, where it has done enormous damage to our reefs. Efforts are now being made with the three state governments and the federal government to establish a national approach and funding for Centro control. These efforts are continuing.

In the meantime, work is being done to educate the public that the presence of Centro on our reefs is equivalent to the Crown-of-Thorns starfish on the Great Barrier Reef – which it is.

AbFAC and the TAC

The Abalone Fishery Advisory Committee has been a relevant source of advice to the Minister, and has been the major source of advice regarding the setting of the total allowable catch (TAC) for the following year. However it has been an unwieldy beast and we have lobbied hard for its reform.

With the expiry of the AbFAC's term, there has been consultation regarding a new approach. The Minister has a duty to consult with industry, and we have worked to ensure that consultation is meaningful. The Minister has now signed off on a new path for advice.

A new body is to come into existence, comprising TACL, NRE and IMAS and will be called the Fishery Core Group

The numbers on this body are not restricted. It will not be a “numbers game exercise”. It will have a trial period of 6 months and the TACL has indicated its support for it.

This body will meet 3-4 times a year, with one of those meetings to be held outside Hobart. We are keen to link these meetings with our own Stock Assessment Forums with members, and with IMAS and NRE involvement. A timetable is yet to be determined

Block Openings and Closures

NRE makes determinations when blocks are due for closure. It sends out advice and issues a public notice. The TACL advises diver and processor members when it receives this advice, as a backup service.

The Greenlip fishery

The nature of this fishery is such that once opened there is a rush to catch this limited allowable catch, with the areas having to be closed again within days and the industry experiencing an overcatch as a result. In consultation with the TACL processor group, it has been agreed that the NRE will provide a 24 hours' only notice of closure, in order to limit the overcatch.

Harvest Strategy

A new harvest strategy is being developed. The TACL has provided input into the process and has attended workshops to present its view as to the direction the strategy should take, The work is ongoing.

Digitisation of catch data

The NRE is working towards digitising its catch record to enable a simpler real-time collection of data. We have offered an input but have been told all is in hand - we will wait and see.

IMAS

The government has entered into a further agreement for IMAS to conduct NRE research. IMAS is regraded as a leader in fishery research, and specifically abalone research, and we have been working closely with IMAS personnel to further our knowledge of the species. This relationship has been helpful in being able to set a realistic and sustainable TAC, as well as setting research priorities.

Biotoxins

The presence of biotoxins, brought on by algal blooms, are a real risk to our fishery. If biotoxins reach a certain level, then the fishery (or individual blocks) can be closed for a considerable period of time. In shellfish (oysters and mussels) biotoxins accumulate rapidly, but also depuration occurs rapidly. In abalone, absorption is a much slower process, as is depuration. We need to understand this process better.

There has been an effort across a range of fisheries to more closely integrate our monitoring effort, which we have supported – in fact taken a lead. But it will come at a cost - until now we have had a free pass.

The shellfish industry monitors a range of sites on a regular basis (the shellfish monitoring program (ShellMAP)) and is willing to share this data. Other monitoring programs also exist e.g. SRL, which conduct a monitoring program in places where the ShellMAP program does not operate. We have had access to this data and we circulate that data to all divers and processors. We are presently negotiating further aspects of this integrated approach.

As we have been moving forward, we have had to produce an updated biotoxin management plan (BMP). The present document is seriously out-of-date and will no longer pass muster. A serious effort has gone in to developing a new BMP, and an updated document has now been drafted and is under consideration by the Board. A part of that plan will be a recognition of a regular program of testing. We will need this plan in place before the Commonwealth will re-open areas on the East Coast presently closed to abalone harvesting.

TSIC

The Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council has recently held elections for its Board. It has a new Chair and three new members. The TACL has no formal representation on the Board but has been in continuing communication with its CEO.

For Divers

Code of Conduct

Of particular importance is the Current Diver Code of Conduct. This is also a document that is out-of-date and the TACL has been active in developing a new “Guide”, which if accepted will be an acceptable replacement. The new Code is in draft form and is presently under consideration.

Diver Safety

The TACL is concerned that everything that can be done is being done to ensure dives are safe on the water. It has supported the annual first-aid check-up and is keen to work with Seafood Training to develop a new series of training modules relevant for our fishery.

For Quota Unit Owners

Rob Royle has sought further details on the following matters and will communicate directly on them.

Renewal of the Old Deed

To ensure there are no untoward aspects.

Digitisation

Change of name from Nominated Natural Person to Primary Licensing Agent

Quota Authorisations

The legal relationship between quota unit owner and diver

Furneaux units

The process followed in the registration and leasing of the 40 units for a 3-year term.

Finally, the office is always ready to assist any members with issues that might arise. Both Margie and I are here to assist and to work with you.

Julian Amos
CEO