

ARTICLE for TSIC – May 2023

There have been a few changes to the TACL Board. Adrian Cuthbertson stood down as President and Lynn Mason stood down as a member – both resigning from the Board. So at present, and until the Annual General meeting in October, Vice President Dean Lisson will act as President, and the position vacated by Lynn will remain vacant.

Of major concern to the industry is to resolve the Biotoxin Management Plan (BMP), as the existing document is out-of-date. A number of East Coast blocks are closed because of historic biotoxin levels and will not be re-opened until we have updated our BMP and shown that the biotoxin levels in abalone have fallen. As such we are also progressing a sampling program to establish a baseline against which future sampling can be measured. Preliminary results are promising.

We have also agreed to support a proposal to integrate our efforts with other fisheries and share data with them. That proposal is still being finalised.

The total allowable catch (TAC) remains low, being below 780 tonnes for this calendar year, although the stock assessments we have seen would suggest that recovery is underway. We are under no illusions that this will be a quick fix – rebuilding stocks will be a slow process!

We are also updating the Diver Code of Practice – another document that is now out-of-date, and the final draft is presently before Workplace Health and Safety. From this document we believe the onus will be on divers to ensure their training and skills are up-to-date, and we will be looking to support them in this endeavour.

We were thrilled to hear the government announce the continuation of AIRF funding, and this will allow monies to be spent on further research and Centro mitigation programs. The establishment and operation of the AIRF fund is the envy of other jurisdictions, both national and internationally, and has led to world-recognised research outcomes.

We anticipate that NRE will be moving to a digital management for dockets, and we have endeavoured to link into this work with projects to make this more user-friendly on board and at the processing plants.

Research is vital if we are going to ensure that we are able to operate within sustainable parameters, and particularly so as there is more interest being shown in the fishery from other interests, including recreational and indigenous bodies.

Quota unit holders have expressed some concern regarding the treatment of the relationship between themselves and divers, and we are seeking clarification as to how that relationship can be managed. This becomes more important as we enter the digital age!

We are also working with others with interest in the fishery to amend and update the harvest strategy, a document which will guide the approach to the fishery for the next 5 years, including setting targets and triggers for action to be taken to ensure stock sustainability.

All in all, it has been a busy few months with much activity in many different matters that have needed to be addressed.