

ANNUAL REPORT 2022 - 2023



Tasmanian
ABALONE Council

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FROM THE ACTING PRESIDENT

From the President

As you would be aware, following the unexpected resignation of the previous Tasmanian Abalone Council (TACL) President in March of this year, I was subsequently endorsed by the Board as Acting President until the 2023 AGM. Those members that have been around for a while may remember my previous stint as TACL President from 1994 to 2007!

It has been a privilege to once again step into the breach and I have enjoyed the cut and thrust of the last few months working once again with Board and staff to provide outcomes for the benefit of our members and the industry.

The TACL continues its day-to-day industry engagement, communication and advocacy activities on behalf of abalone stakeholders. During the 2022/23-year TACL Staff and the Board have tackled numerous issues, challenges and opportunities. It would be reasonable to say that we have been busier than usual pursuing the following outcomes:

1. Comprehensive Review of TACL Constitution
2. Drafting of updated Dive Code of Practice
3. Provision of Review commentary of the draft “next generation” NRE Abalone Harvest Strategy (2024 to 2028).
4. Ongoing oversight and governance of the investment of AIRF and AIDF R&D funds
5. Drafting of new TACL Strategic Plan 2024 - 2028
6. Collaborating with NRE re digitisation of licencing and quota allocation processes
7. Liaison with NRE regarding the establishment of the “new generation” Abalone Fishery Advisory Committee
8. Drafting of an updated Abalone Biotoxin Management Plan
9. Liaison with the Tasmanian Commercial Divers Association and NRE regarding the Centro urchin harvest subsidy and other matters related to long-spine urchin management.
10. Updating the design and underlying architecture of the TACL website and TACL membership database.
11. Regular engagement with the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council (TSIC) via attendance at the TSIC Sector Group forum and via regular meetings between the TACL and TSIC CEO's.
12. Ongoing liaison with Abalone Council Australia Ltd (ACA) – Darwin Hansen and Rob Royle are the current Tasmanian directors on the ACA Board. For more detail regarding activities of ACA, please refer to the ACA report included later in this document.
13. Engagement with IMAS and NRE on fishery management matters via the recently established Abalone Core Advisory Group
14. Engagement with the Fisheries Minister Jo Palmer MLC and her advisors and staff

This is by no means an exhaustive list...all manner of other issues and tasks/responsibilities arise on a regular and sustained basis requiring attention by TACL staff and directors. Julian Amos has provided more detail regarding key TACL activities in his CEO report below.

Finances

I am pleased to report that the TACL remains in a strong financial position with ongoing operating surpluses and substantial funds in reserve.....a big thank you to our Office Manager Margie Westlake, our accountant Greg Smith and our Treasurer Graeme Geard for all of their combined efforts in managing our resources efficiently and effectively.

Better times ahead

Fishery performance data reveals improving productivity across most spatial assessment areas (sub blocks, blocks, zones) within our fishery. *Prima facie*, it would appear likely that after 12 successive annual quota reductions the fishery is recovering quite strongly, although with considerable variability between fishing blocks. It is now a case of "steady as she goes" with some prospect for modest harvest increases in the near term.

Advocacy

Effective engagement with external stakeholders such as NRE, IMAS, TSIC, Seafood Industry Australia, FRDC and the Ministers office (to name but a few!) is a key ongoing responsibility for TACL staff and directors alike. I am pleased to report that relations with key external parties remains stable, positive and constructive.

Thank you!

All in all, it has been a productive year to date and my thanks go to all Board members for their dedication to the tasks at hand. Similarly, many thanks also to our staff, Margie Westlake, Greg Smith and Julian Amos for the professional support they provide day in and day out to myself, the Board and to all of our members.

Warm regards to all,

Dean Lisson

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DIRECTORS 2022/2023

President	Adrian Cuthbertson (resigned)
Acting President	Dean Lisson
Vice President	Lynn Mason (resigned)
Vice President	Dean Lisson
Treasurer	Graeme Geard
Processor Sub-Council Chair	Darvin Hansen
Diver Sub-Council Chair	Joey McKibben
Quota-Holders Sub-Council Chair	Rob Royle
Company Secretary	Julene Jones
Director	Alan Gray
Director	Sean Larby
Director	Tony Wurf
Director and Treasurer	Rory Byrne (did not stand at 2022 AGM)
Dive Sub-Council Chair	Jesse Gasparinatos (Accepted Resignation 10 th August 2022)

STAFF 2022/2023

Chief Executive Officer	Julian Amos ceo@tasabalone.com.au
Office Manager	Margie Westlake admin@tasabalone.com.au
Accountant	Greg Smith gregsmith247365@gmail.com

TREASURER'S REPORT

FROM THE TREASURER

The Executive elected me as Treasurer on 22/11/2022 following the 2022 AGM. Thanks to previous Treasurer Rory Byrne for the 30 June 2022 Accounts and current accounting practices. TACL's finances are managed by the Finance and Risk Committee (FRC), one of 5 committees that manage TACL's affairs. The current membership is made up of Dean as Acting President, myself as Chair and Treasurer and Julene Jones. CEO Julian, Office Manager Margie and Accountant Greg attend the meetings with the Accountant providing current financials for review and submission to the Executive for approval.

For the year ended 30 June 2023 TACL had Total Revenue of \$922,716 and Total Expenses of \$819,543 giving a Profit for the year of \$103,173 (compared to budgeted \$81,612) and with adjustments of + \$16,981 and - \$12,576 for ASX Listed Investments resulted in Total Comprehensive Income of \$107,578. TACL's Accumulated Funds have therefore increased from \$793,213 at the start of the year to \$900,791 at 30 June 2023.

At 30 June 2023 TACL held \$255,094 in Unspent Abalone Industry Development Funds (AIDF) which had been received over time from the Tasmanian Government under the 2018 AIDF Grant Deed. These funds are required to be spent on approved projects by 30 June 2024. We expect that any unspent funds will be required to be returned to the Tasmanian Government. At 25 September 2023 TACL has \$242,243 on hand (NAB AIDF Account) with \$227,670 in Unspent Budgeted Amounts on 7 Active Projects leaving \$14,574 as Uncommitted AIDF Funds provided those 7 Projects proceed to completion as expected by 30 June 2024 – See attached AIDF Report.

On 30 March 2022 TACL invested \$300,022 in ASX Listed Securities seeking better returns on available TACL Funds when the Interest Rate on the Savings Account was 0.66%. At 30 June 2022 the Market Value of these Securities was \$283,041 resulting in a Net Unrealised Losses on Investments of \$16,981. This adjustment was reversed in the 30 June 2023 Accounts and a \$12,576 Net Realised Loss was recorded. Over the period that TACL held these Investments they declined in value by \$12,576 however TACL received \$17,013 in Income from these Investments.

The attached Budget for 2023-2024, which has been approved by the Executive Committee, shows Total Revenue of \$741,658 and Total Expenses (including \$25,000 for Contingency to allow for unexpected circumstances) of \$734,463 giving an Expected Profit of \$7,195 with Accumulated Funds expected to rise to about \$908,000.

Tasmanian Abalone Council Ltd is in a sound financial position. Our accounts have gone through a comprehensive audit and have been certified as compliant to the relevant accounting standards and further, that they give a true and fair view of our financial position as of 30 June 2023 and financial performance for the year.

Thanks to the Executive, Office Manager Margie, Accountant Greg and CEO Julian for their assistance to me in my position as TACL Treasurer.

Regards

Graeme Geard

Please email admin@tasabalone.com.au with any questions by 21/10/2023 so considered answers can be provided at the Annual General Meeting.

PROFIT & LOSS

Tasmanian Abalone Council Ltd				
Profit & Loss and Budget - 01 July 2022 to 30 June 2023				BUDGET
Income	Actual	Budgeted	\$ Difference	2023-24
Quota Holder Levies x 3,460	\$403,505.20	\$403,505.00	\$0.20	\$422,500
Dive Licence Owner Levies x 119	\$24,272.60	\$24,684.00	-\$411.40	\$25,846
Processor Levies x 17	\$15,866.10	\$15,866.00	\$0.10	\$16,613
Interest Received	\$4,743.50	\$8,372.00	-\$3,628.50	\$19,317
Franked Distributions	\$3,084.08	\$10,016.00	-\$6,931.92	\$0
Franking Credits	\$1,321.75	\$1,583.00	-\$261.25	\$0
Unfranked Distributions	\$4,683.45	\$0.00	\$4,683.45	\$0
Abalone Industry Development Fund Income	\$465,239.34	\$360,000.00	\$105,239.34	\$257,382
Total Income	\$922,716.02	\$824,026.00	\$98,690.02	\$741,658
Expenses				
Accounting Fees	\$800.00	\$1,000.00	-\$200.00	\$1,000
ASIC Review Fee W/Off at \$37.90 to 04 Jul 30	\$37.90	\$38.00	-\$0.10	\$38
Audit Fees	\$2,256.00	\$4,200.00	-\$1,944.00	\$6,000
Bank Fees	\$126.36	\$96.00	\$30.36	\$109
Biotoxin Testing	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$24,000
CEO - Contractor	\$124,999.98	\$124,500.00	\$499.98	\$130,000
Consultants	\$1,207.93	\$6,000.00	-\$4,792.07	\$11,250
Depreciation Expense	\$2,882.00	\$2,882.00	\$0.00	\$1,671
Donations to Political Parties	\$6,681.82	\$0.00	\$6,681.82	\$10,000
Donations - Other and Promotion	\$6,500.00	\$6,000.00	\$500.00	\$8,000
Electricity	\$1,967.95	\$2,000.00	-\$32.05	\$2,000
First Aid Courses Expenses	\$2,325.00	\$11,550.00	-\$9,225.00	\$20,430
Info Tech, Phones & Internet	\$11,700.62	\$34,500.00	-\$22,799.38	\$10,447
Insurance	\$6,695.29	\$6,000.00	\$695.29	\$7,883
Amortise Right of Use - Lease	\$25,252.33	\$25,224.00	\$28.33	\$26,605
Outgoings on Lease	\$2,953.60	\$3,040.00	-\$86.40	\$3,101
Interest on Lease	\$1,409.28	\$1,810.00	-\$400.72	\$1,116
Rent - Additional Car Parks	\$1,854.60	\$1,908.00	-\$53.40	\$1,909
Legal Fees	\$19,454.55	\$12,000.00	\$7,454.55	\$33,910
Meeting Expenses incl Catering	\$23,716.83	\$32,000.00	-\$8,283.17	\$28,141
Memberships & Subscriptions Incl ACA	\$6,000.00	\$5,250.00	\$750.00	\$3,000
Office Supplies and Postage	\$2,085.43	\$4,920.00	-\$2,834.57	\$2,108
President Chair Fee	\$0.00	\$12,000.00	-\$12,000.00	\$8,000
Repairs, Maintenance & Cleaning	\$1,113.65	\$1,200.00	-\$86.35	\$1,140
Sundry Expenses	\$721.04	\$2,400.00	-\$1,678.96	\$1,000
Training & Development - Exec Members	\$749.00	\$14,000.00	-\$13,251.00	\$2,000
Training & Development - Staff Members	\$567.05	\$1,200.00	-\$632.95	\$1,000
Travel/Accom Expenses Exec Members	\$7,847.15	\$12,000.00	-\$4,152.85	\$8,319
Travel/Accom Expenses Staff & Contractors	\$3,428.82	\$2,040.00	\$1,388.82	\$3,109
Wages & Salaries	\$80,463.34	\$80,000.00	\$463.34	\$84,500
Adjust Staff Entitlements	\$83.79	\$1,000.00	-\$916.21	\$1,000
Superannuation Expense	\$8,423.35	\$8,400.00	\$23.35	\$9,295
Abalone Industry Develop Fund Expenses	\$465,239.34	\$360,000.00	\$105,239.34	\$257,382
Contingency	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$25,000
Total Expenses	\$819,544.00	\$779,158.00	\$40,386.00	\$734,463
Operating Profit	\$103,172.02	\$44,868.00	\$58,304.02	\$7,195
Extraordinary Items				
Net Unrealised Losses 30 June 2022 Reversed	-\$16,981.35	\$0.00	-\$16,981.35	
Net Realised Losses on Investments	\$12,575.51	\$0.00	\$12,575.51	
Total Comprehensive Income	\$107,577.86	\$44,868.00	\$62,709.86	\$7,195

AIDF ACTIVE PROJECTS

AIDF Active Projects 1st July 2023 and onwards

Project Number	Provider	Project Title	Budgeted On these Projects	Spent to 31 August 2023 on these Projects	Unspent Budget at 31 August 2023
6	Offshore SMS	Safety Program to 31 Oct 2023	\$35,000.00	\$35,000.00	\$0.00
			Budgeted since 01 July 2022		
24	Biospherics	Provision of Advice - Managed by TACL	\$39,256.00	\$19,256.00	\$20,000.00
		Develop Qualitative Opinion - IMAS			
		and Size of Emergence Surveys - IMAS			
		and Develop Controlled Fishing - IMAS	\$199,576.25	\$199,576.25	\$0.00
25	IMAS	Biotoxin Sampling Work - Completed	\$13,712.47	\$13,712.47	\$0.00
		Biotoxin Sampling Work - Not yet commenced	\$34,136.53	\$0.00	\$34,136.53
26	IMAS	Biotoxin Uptake in Abalone	\$138,833.00	\$10,000.00	\$128,833.00
		Budgeted 01 July 2022 – 30 June 2023	\$425,514.25		
			Budgeted since 01 July 2023		
24	Biospherics	Expected Credit due to change in Project	-\$25,000.00	\$0.00	-\$25,000.00
27	IMAS	More Measuring boards	\$44,800.00	\$0.00	\$44,800.00
28	IMAS	Biological variability - Ex Over Catch Fund	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
29	Offshore SMS	Expanded safety program and Deckhand Safety	\$24,900.00	\$0.00	\$24,900.00
		Budgeted 01 July 2023 – 30 September 2023	\$44,700.00		
		Total	\$505,214.25	\$277,544.72	\$227,669.53
		Funds in AIDF Bank Account at 31 August 2023			\$242,243.49
		Uncommitted AIDF Funds before future interest - 31 Aug 2023 - To be spent by 30 June 2024			\$14,573.96

The Executive expects to spend all available AIDF Funds by the end date of 30 June 2024

All Amounts are Plus any relevant GST which will be recovered from the ATO

CEO REPORT FOR THE 2022-23 YEAR

It has been an eventful year, across the full spectrum of activity.

IN THE FISHERY

The total allowable catch (TAC) was set at 773.5 tonnes for the 2023 calendar year, being 21 tonnes less than the previous year, and a long way short of historic catch rates, which were over 2000 tonnes. This decision is made by the Minister, after receiving advice from the Abalone Fishery Advisory Committee (AbFAC) which in turn obtains advice from IMAS, which in turn is guided by data relating to CPUE (catch per unit effort).

The reduced TAC is designed to enhance the sustainability of the resource, which has been weakened by a variety of factors – including overfishing - and indications to date would suggest that the lower catch target is working. CPUE data for this year would suggest a greater level of stability in the fishery.

During the year it was also agreed that minimum size limits be increased, and this is to come into effect for the 2024 season.

The CPUE is the best available mechanism to determine the health of the fishery, but having said that it does have its limitations, and an amount of work is being done to refine the process, such as setting decision rules and meta-rules when determining block limits.

During the year, the term of AbFAC expired. AbFAC has outlived its usefulness and has come under criticism from TACL in the past. Now, AbFAC is to be disbanded and a new, more focused, body established. This body is to be known as the Abalone Fishery Core Group, and will comprise representatives of the Department, IMAS and TACL.

The information provided to AbFAC was also provided to a series of TACL-inspired Stock Assessment Forums, to which members were invited to hear presentations from NRE and IMAS. These will continue, and it is proposed that one be held around April (to review the data from the previous year), in August (to review data from the first two quarters, and one in October (to consider the data from the first three quarters). There may be more. The Core Group will also run port meetings in the third quarter. These meetings will also inform the Core Group in its final deliberations before providing its advice to the Minister for the ensuing year.

To assist fishing effort, the department advises when 70-% of catch is reached (by block) and on closures when 100% of the allocated catch is reached. This information exchange will continue.

The Green lip fishery has posed a challenge in that the catch limit is low, and thus any concentrated effort rapidly leads to over catch. This year processors suggested voluntary reductions in receivals, and this enabled the target to be reached without excess catch occurring.

IN THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Abalone is subject to external threats, including the invasive spiny urchin (*Centro Stephanus*), algal blooms which produce biotoxins and warming water, which may affect breeding.

All three have been apparent this year.

Centro has now established itself on the east coast, previous attempts to eradicate it having failed. In fact, an industry is being established based on sea urchin roe and has provided a commercial outlet for efforts to reduce Centro numbers. Significant research effort has gone into Centro and was the subject of a workshop held in February, at which the call went out for a more regional approach to the problem. This is being actively pursued at government-to-government level, supported by industry.

Algal blooms producing toxins occurred in Blocks 20A and 20B, with some build-up of biotoxins in shellfish, leading us to voluntarily close these blocks until such time as a full monitoring program had occurred. Fortunately, there was no detected build-up of biotoxin in abalone and after a short period the blocks were re-opened.

A warm water event has begun, with a mass of warm water slowly moving south down the coast from NSW, and in all likelihood will affect water temperatures off the coast of Tasmania. The Bureau of Meteorology is predicting a hot and dry summer on Australia's east coast, backed by a significant El Niño event. We maintain a watching brief.

WITH THE DEPARTMENT

The following matters deserve comment.

A new Harvest Strategy is being prepared, after a consultation period with TACL and other interest groups. It is anticipated that there will be a further round of public consultation, before a final draft is ready for approval and the strategy becomes operational, due for the 2024 year. Issues facing the Fishery Core Group are being referenced in the document.

Consultation has highlighted the fact that the utilisation of the resource is being seen by fishery managers within a broader framework of different interest groups, including recreational fishers, indigenous groups and conservation interests. Industry interests are being strongly promoted.

The department has been working towards digitising its catch data, which may remove the need for the continuing use of a docket system. It is planned that this will commence in 2024 although the department seems to face endless delays in getting this project underway.

Monitoring for the presence of biotoxins is occurring on a weekly basis, using shellfish as sentinels. A move is now afoot for a more integrated approach to the monitoring program, involving a number of different fisheries, and TACL is supportive of this move. This could also involve an expansion of the areas being monitored. TACL is also supporting moves to establish a cheaper testing regime.

The existing biotoxin management plan is out-of-date, and a new draft plan has been developed over the past year and is now in its final drafting stage. There remain some blocks on the east coast that have been closed to commercial fishing because of a past biotoxin build up, and federal authorities require an updated management plan as a prerequisite for re-opening these blocks to harvesting and export. The draft will be presented to DAFF for acceptance, as a prelude and a pre-requisite for reopening these blocks.

A number of issues specifically addressing the interests of quota unit holders and the department has been and continues to be prosecuted by the TACL quota unit holders' representative.

IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Research has been funded from three different sources with which TACL is involved and/or consulted. Dialogue with IMAS, the main research body supporting the department, has been open and interactive.

Major projects include the supply of equipment (freezer for storing samples, measuring boards), the timed swim program, biotoxin monitoring, data logging, a new diver guide, and diver safety on board and onshore. A major project dealing with shell morphology remains in play.

The Abalone Industry Development Fund (the AIDF) has been operating for the last 4 years and is due for closure in June 2024. Submissions to the government for its continuance have so far been unsuccessful.

The Abalone Industry Re-Investment Fund (the AIRF) was also due to expire, at end June 2023. However, lobbying for its continuance was more successful, with funding of \$1m per year for the next 2 years guaranteed. At this stage it is anticipated that half of these funds will be spent on Centro research and diver subsidy, and half on abalone research. Projects are presently being evaluated for support.

The department also manages the Over catch Trust Fund, and TACL is consulted when requests are made for support from the fund.

FOR DIVERS

The TACL Board has again supported divers by updating the Diver Code – now a Guide – and has also supported a digital on-board application for boat safety and funding first aid courses. It has also supported a project to define the socio-economic conditions presently being experienced by divers, and which may lead to more targeted support.

WITHIN THE TACL

At the AGM in October, one new member was elected to the Board, being Dean Lisson, while Joey McKibben was elected Chair of the Diver Sub-Council by divers and Darvin Hansen was elected Chair of the Processor Sub-Council by processors. Dean was subsequently elected as Vice President. Julene Jones was elected Secretary and Graeme Geard Treasurer.

In April, President Adrian Cuthbertson resigned, together with Lynn Mason, and Dean Lisson became Acting President until the following AGM. The two substantial positions remain vacant.

Amendments to the Constitution remain in play with suggested amendments to be put to the next AGM concerning gender neutrality, rebadging the Executive Committee as a Board, and some other necessary changes to bring the document up to date.

A process has been initiated to update the Council's Strategic Plan and is ongoing.

WITH ENGAGEMENT

Minister Jo Palmer has been the Minister since April 2022 and we have been able to communicate effectively with her and her office over the last year. The TACL has also established good relations with other members of State and Federal Parliament.

It is obvious that pressure will continue to be placed on the sector from different interest groups, including recreational fishers, indigenous interests, and various conservation claims, and it is imperative that the TACL voice be heard and understood at the political level.

The TACL and the Tasmanian industry generally were well represented at the international symposium held in New Zealand in February, with a clear understanding and respect from delegates that Tasmania was leading the way in its research and development activity.

We have maintained an open dialogue with the Tasmanian Seafood Industry Council (TSIC), with an increasing level of consultation apparent over the last year. An issue that requires resolution is the position of TSIC on ITQ's, as there would appear to be some confusion with respect to this matter, which also involves the FRDC. Members of the FRDC Board visited Tasmania and it was a good opportunity to present TACL views to them during their visit.

The TACL was also a sponsor of Dover SeaFest 2023, and TSIC's Tasmanian Seafood Awards.

IN THE OFFICE

Lease negotiations were successfully concluded, and an appropriate sub-lease is now in place with the head lessee, Fruit Growers of Tasmania.

Obtaining data from NRE remains difficult and has made the maintenance of our database more time-consuming than it needs to be. However, the database is now much more accessible and can now manage a more sophisticated voting system, allowing for mobile phone voting.

In lockstep, the communication system (telephone and email) was made independent of the lessee and the website has been re-designed and is presently being populated with up-to-date information. It is anticipated that all features will be truly functional by year's end.

AND FINALLY

My thanks go to Board members, who have provided guidance and support, to our accountant Greg Smith for keeping the books in order and to our Administration Manager, Margie Westlake, for her outstanding professionalism and diligence.

Dr Julian Amos

CEO

ADDENDUM TO THE CEO REPORT

Some membership data.

DIVE SECTOR STATISTICS

There are presently 120 FLADs, 15 of which are 'Inactive'.

Act	TOTAL	FLAD numbers		Personnel numbers	
		MEMBERS	NON_MEMBERS	MEMBERS	NON-MEMBERS
FLAD OWNERS only	77	60	17	37	17
OWNER SUPERVISORS	43	39	4	38	4
SUPERVISORS only	62	45	17	43	16
TOTAL	182	144	38	118	37

NB There is a small overlap in numbers, since a member can own a FLAD, and dive on another FLAD.

QUOTA UNIT HOLDER STATISTICS

There are 3500 units, of which 40 are owned by the Government.

	TOTAL		MEMBERS		Non-Members	
	Number	Quota	Number	Quota	Number	Quota
Persons	192	1517	151	1304	41	213
Entities	323	1943	260	1734	63	209
TOTAL	515	3460	411	3038	104	422

PROCESSOR STATISTICS

There are 14 active processors, all are members.

NB There is some overlap in numbers, since people can own both quota and a FLAD / diver licence.

COMMITTEES, MEMBERS AND MEETINGS 2022/2023

President is entitled to attend all Meetings as ex-officio member

	Meetings Eligible	Meeting Attendance
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HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE (HRC)

Supports TACL Strategic Objectives – Staff engagement – HR Compliance

Alan Gray (Chair to 22/11/2022 then Member)	1	1
Adrian Cuthbertson (President)		1
Sean Larby	1	1
Graeme Geard (Member then Chair since 22/11/2022)	0	0

FINANCE AND RISK COMMITTEE

Oversee TACL Financial Management – Report and make recommendations to EC, including appointment of Accountant and Auditor – Maintain Registers – Risk assessment and reporting.

Lynn Mason AM (Vice President to 22/11/2022 and Chair to 27/03/2023)	7	7
Graeme Geard (Member then Chair since 13/04/2023)	9	8
Rory Byrne (Treasurer)	4	4
Julene Jones (Secretary)	4	4
Dean Lisson (Acting President)		1

FISHERY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Is concerned with the sustainability of the resource and the regulatory framework to manage and monitor the fishery.

Sean Larby (Chair)		
Dean Lisson	1	1
Darvin Hansen	1	1
Joey McKibben	1	1
Rob Royle	1	0

PROJECT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Provides input into and approval for research projects aligned to the fishery, with monies allocated from various funds.

Darvin Hansen (Chair)	1	1
Dean Lisson	1	1
Sean Larby	1	1
Rob Royle	1	1
Tony Wurf	1	0

CONSTITUTION AND LEGAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

Has been reviewing the current (2015) constitution, considers legal issues and ensures good corporate governance. Committee name since changed to - Governance Review Committee

Lynn Mason (Chair to 27/03/2023)	1	1
Julene Jones (Chair since 13/04/2023)	1	1
Adrian Cuthbertson (President)		1
Darvin Hansen	1	1
Rob Royle	0	0

QUOTA HOLDERS SUB COUNCIL REPORT

The Abalone Quota Holders Sub-Council has a responsibility to identify and address issues relating to the Abalone Quota Units which have a collective capital value of \$700 M. Most of the issues in the past year involve preservation of the rights we have under the Deed. We are concerned that there have been actions which may reduce the rights and security of your Abalone Quota. Following are the identified issues and actions for year ending October 2023.

1. Authorisation of Quota

In 2019 NRE removed the exclusive right of Quota Holders to authorise quota to be caught by a diver. By way of a survey of Quota Holders 92% advised that they wanted the exclusive authorisation process restored. After non-productive meetings with NRE and letters to the Minister the TACL obtained an opinion from Mark Costello QC. Subsequently Dean and I met with David Fitzpatrick, Mark Costello and Eamon Kelly. They have concluded the following:

- (a) The Minister has the power to vary dive entitlement i.e., add quota
- (b) The statutory regime requires the Minister to obtain confirmation that licensee has authorised the diver to take licensee's quota, i.e., nominated diver, identified quota, and signed.
- (c) The Deed confers a proprietary right (Cl 2.4) and that a diver accessing this right without explicit "consent" would degrade the nature and quality of the Licensee's proprietary right ".

Subsequent to our meeting the Minister has advised, by letter, that she is giving further consideration to our request.

It was put to the Minister that the clear and obvious solution to this is to add a requirement for the quota holder's signature to the quota transfer form. Mark Costello also noted this simple solution in our discussions. It is difficult to understand why there is so much NRE resistance?

We await her response.

2. Living Marine Miscellaneous Amendments (Digital Processing) Act 2021

In late Jan 23 owners of quota and fishing licences, who are non-personal in name, received a letter from NRE signed by Malcolm Budd dated 17th Jan requesting they complete Forms nominating a Primary Licencing Agent in lieu of a NNP to comply with above Act.

Although the Primary Licencing Agent purports to be the same as the Nominated Natural Person Members have raised the issue of extent of powers given by both instruments. As previously advised the powers given in both are without limits. ie the PLA can sell the Quota.

We have written to NRE in respect of the limiting of powers of the PLA to effect permanent transfers. NRE responded stating that:

"NRE is currently working towards implementing a specific nomination of agency where an agent is not permitted to apply for permanent transfer, assignment of rights or surrender of licence."

We have now received a PLA Nomination form which allows the Licence Owner to remove PLA right to permanently transfer.

In practical terms there is no need to submit a PLA unless authorisation of quota is reintroduced which we have requested.

3. Abalone Industry Reinvestment Fund AIRF

The Government announced recently that they were committing to continuing to fund the Abalone Industry Research Fund, AIRF, for a further two years at \$1m/year. A large proportion of these funds have been used to subsidise the Centro Stephanus harvesting/eradication.

Quota Holders indirectly contribute to this fund.

Unfortunately, there is currently not clear terms specifying accountability of spending or powers of determination. We are trying to rectify this.

4. Old Deed Renewal

This year Quota Holders under old Deeds were reminded to take up the option to renew their Deed before the 30th of September 2023.

We obtained legal advice for members on this issue which was sent by email on 19th July 2023 from admin@tasabalone.com.au to all members.

5. Fishing (License Ownership and Interest) Registration Act 2001

This Act which was requested by the Abalone industry and your representatives participated in its drafting. The Act requires that there be a public register containing:

The name and address of the owner of a license or any person having an interest in a license and other information.

This register is kept by NRE and must be made available to any member of public on request.

We discovered that there were 40 Abalone Quota Units which were not in the register? This would appear to be a breach of the requirements of the Act by NRE and the Registrar.

We have written to the Minister requesting that these Quota Units be registered as per the requirements of the Act. It was discussed with the Minister at a meeting in September and we await her response.

6. AbFAC

AbFAC is the Abalone Fisheries Advisory Committee which is a statutory Committee that the Minister may establish in accordance with Sect 27 of the LMRMA. The purpose of the Committee is to provide the Minister with advice on the administration of the Act.

In recent years the Minister has not appointed sufficient elected TACL representatives to AbFAC to influence the advice given to the Minister on members behalf. We recently wrote to the Minister to ask that your elected TACL representatives are appointed to future AbFAC.

Subsequently NRE have advised that there will no longer be an AbFAC. We have had no advice from the Minister in respect of AbFAC?

At our September meeting with the Minister, we have requested that there be a statutory advisory body with ex-officio TACL representation.

7. FRDC ITQ Project - ITQ is Individual Transferable Quota

Late last year we became aware of an FRDC grant to a group of fishery academics to examine the ITQ system which is your Abalone Quota and other fishery quota. It soon became apparent that the agenda of this group was to diminish or remove the quota rights. The grant was funded by the Australian fishing industry. The Abalone Council of Australia and TACL have approached FRDC to have the project funding withdrawn. We have just received advice that the Project will be terminated.

FRDC is a Commonwealth body Fisheries Research and Development Corporation which distributes funds for fisheries research.

Summary

We believe all current issues have been identified and are being addressed. If you have any other concerns, please advise undersigned.

Thank you for your support.

Rob Royle - Chair Quota Holders Sub-Council - M 0407646180 E rob@ramroyle.com

PROCESSORS SUB-COUNCIL REPORT 20231005

Darvin Hansen, TACL Processors Sub-Council Chair

GREEN LIP MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

Processors met informally several times this year, to discuss a number of items, chief of which was to establish a voluntary cap on the Northeast Green lip Abalone region, through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU).

These meetings led to an informal agreement which was upheld at the opening of the season, which enabled the fishing to come in below the catch target for the first time in years. Processor cooperation also prompted the Department to shorten the notice period to 24 hours.

This was a great result for the industry and the fishery management, meaning more drastic measures like a separate zone that had been mooted, did not need to be introduced. It also reflected well on industry's stewardship given that critics of the industry would repeatedly point out this one issue.

MARKET SITUATION

More generally, it should be noted that the transport and export of fish has recovered somewhat from the COVID restrictions. The beach price has reduced to the low \$60 area from ~\$70/kg earlier in the year, due to market softness in China in relation to their economy (which is impacting all seafood, not just abalone).

It is also notable that the smaller Eastern Zone fish achieves a somewhat lower price overseas than the larger Western Zone fish. We will see if that situation remains the same once Western Zone weather patterns resume.

I have concerns that the impact of legal minimum lengths, in the absence of a legal maximum, may in future amplify this situation and take some effort to reverse, due to selection pressure (change in genetics through selective breeding). The difference in beach price between the 450g+ Black lip in the East and Western zone vs the \$30-37 in Bass Strait and Northern zones represents about double the value to industry and triple the value to the quota holder.

MARINE HEAT WAVE

The predicted Marine Heat Wave (MHW) may present a challenge as similar heat waves have shown in the past. The industry will have to be vigilant in terms of optimal fish handling procedures. If highest possible beach prices are to be achieved, all else equal, that rests on the receipt of quality fish, which requires assistance from the other sectors (mostly dive sector, but also quota holders in terms of timing of release of fish to be caught) in terms of fish handling, selection of appropriate days, time of year, areas, use of mother boats, etc. When higher mortalities result, ultimately this cost will be worn by the quota holder in the form of lower beach prices.

The TACL is attempting to commission science work to at least learn as much as possible from the event, for greater understanding and future reference.

ACA REPORT

ABALONE COUNCIL AUSTRALIA CEO REPORT

During the 2022/23 financial year, *Abalone Council Australia Ltd (ACA)* hosted three Board meetings and three *Industry Partnership Agreement R&D (IPA)* meetings. It was great to be able to host the first *face to face* meeting in November 2022 in Adelaide..... some three years since our last F2F meeting in Melbourne in October 2019. The most recent Board and IPA meetings were conducted in February in Auckland just prior to the commencement of the NZ based *International Abalone Symposium (IAS) 2023*.

ACA has recently welcomed two new directors: Darvin Hansen from Tasmania and Helen Burvill from Victoria. Jonas Woolford, SA director, is now in his third year as the ACA Chair. At the ACA AGM in November 2022, annual subscriptions were maintained at \$3,000 per state. Annual subscriptions cover the core costs of running the ACA – i.e., audit fees, D&O insurance, ASIC fees, bank and accounting fees and website hosting fees.

ACA R&D ADVISORY FUNCTION

In addition to providing industrial advocacy at a national level on a broad range of issues, the primary role of the ACA is to act as an *R&D Advisory Board* on behalf of the Australian wild harvest abalone sector.

This key function of the ACA is to co-ordinate the planning, implementation, and reporting of national abalone related R&D projects. The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) collects R&D levies at 0.25% of fishery GVP across all major fisheries and then matches the industry contribution dollar for dollar.

This process currently results in funding of around \$450,000 per annum available for R&D investment in national abalone related projects. Please note that this sum may be reduced somewhat in direct response to falling industry GVP. The FRDC R&D levy is a three-year rolling average of abalone GVP by state. Recent quota reductions across all states will result in a reduction in the levy collected going forward and directors will need to be cognisant of this fact when appropriating future R&D project funding commitments.

ACA has also partnered with the *Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre (FFW CRC)* to further leverage our investment in abalone related R&D. Two FFW CRC projects currently underway include (1) value adding to abalone waste and (2) improving the cost efficiency of the abalone canning process.

ACA has a R&D Strategic Plan which is updated every 5 years. The ACA commissions and/or approves R&D projects that address the R&D objectives listed within the 2018 – 2023 ACA Strategic Plan:

https://www.abalonecouncil.com.au/public/69/files/ACA%20STRATEGIC%20PLAN%202018-2023%20Final%2020180910_.pdf

ACA works closely with the FRDC and the project managers to ensure that each project delivers the specified outcomes to industry. Dr Chris Izzo, an FRDC Senior Research Portfolio Manager attended all ACA IPA meetings on behalf of FRDC during 2022 and 2023. In my capacity as ACA CEO, I work closely with

Dr Izzo and ACA IPA project “Principal Investigators” to ensure that IPA projects run on time and within budget. This has been a challenge since 2020 due to the pandemic with some projects being delayed....I am pleased to report that in most instances, IPA projects are “back on track” and progressing to completion with minimal and/or reasonable delays given challenging operational circumstances.

R&D ISSUES ADDRESSED BY CURRENT ACA PROJECTS

Currently there are 9 active ACA IPA national abalone projects with a combined R&D investment of \$3 million dealing with the following issues:

- **Aquatic Disease management** – The impact and implications of *Perkinsus olseni* on Australian abalone fisheries (SA & NSW)
- **Management Strategy Evaluation** testing of each jurisdictions Harvest Strategies (all states)
- **Best practice and policy in abalone stock enhancement** (all states)
- **New Opportunities for Abalone Processing Waste** (waste valorisation - all states and co-funded with FFWCRC)
- **Improving the cost efficiency of the abalone canning process** (all states and co-funded with FFWCRC)
- **Seafood Trade Advisory Group and SafeFish** – dealing with technical trade & market access issues (all states)
- **Incorporating indicators for density and biomass of exploitable abalone into Harvest Strategies** (GPS and FIS) (all states)
- **Accelerating Green lip abalone stock recovery in South Australia** using release of hatchery reared juveniles (SA with R&D implications across all states)

All of the above projects will be completed during 2023 with the exception of Safefish and the two *Fight Food Waste CRC* (FFWCRC) projects which will be completed in 2025.

The 2022 ACA IPA R&D Workshop held on 7 and 8 November 2022 at Glenelg in Adelaide provided the ACA Board, abalone managers and abalone scientists from each of the five abalone producing states an opportunity to come together and review R&D project progress. Progress updates for the above projects were provided by the Principal Investigators.....these updates (presented at the workshop) may be viewed at:

<https://www.abalonecouncil.com.au/research-development/r-d-workshop-november-2022-presentations/>

Please note that there is a comprehensive listing of all finalised abalone related R&D projects at the following weblink:
<https://www.abalonecouncil.com.au/research-development/abalone-related-research-projects/>

We are currently in the final year of the second ACA Industry Partnership Agreement (2018 to 2023 IPA). A comprehensive report on the first ACA IPA which ran from 2012 to 2017 is available from the ACA website at the following weblink:

<https://www.abalonecouncil.com.au/public/69/files/Closed%20Projects/Final%20Report%20Wild%20Harvest%20Abalone%20RDE%20Planning%20Management%20and%20Oversight%20DL%20August%2027%202018-compressed.pdf>

During the balance of 2023, the current ACA Strategic Plan (2018 to 2023) will be reviewed, and a new plan (commencing in 2024) will be drafted and adopted.

SETTING R&D PRIORITIES

Each year, ACA directors review abalone R&D priorities and for the **2022/23** year, the three key agreed priorities for ACA national R&D investment were identified as follows:

- **Digitisation of real-time fishery data and associated data storage and management innovations**
- **Less reliance on CPUE as a performance indicator and broader introduction of predictive Fishery Independent Pre-recruit survey methods**
- **National review of LML setting processes and associated fishery management implications.**

Whilst the above three R&D priorities remain intact, ACA directors tabled, discussed and updated their state-based challenges/opportunities and associated R&D priorities for 2023/24 at the most recent ACA Board meeting (February 2023).

These may be summarised as follows:

WESTERN AUSTRALIA: R&D around stock enhancement using hatchery reared green-lip juveniles is a medium to long term aspiration – particularly in WA Area 3 which is currently closed to harvesting. Continued rollout of Marine Parks is a major challenge in WA as they will encroach on productive abalone reef. The views of commercial fishers are being largely ignored by the WA bureaucrats conducting the current rounds of public consultation and industry stakeholders are still reeling from the impacts of previously established MPA's.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA: Stock enhancement using hatchery reared juveniles is an R&D priority in SA along with improved electronic fishery data collection technology. Western Zone SA is currently building an App for fishery data collection.

VICTORIA: Current R&D priorities include (1) production of swab kits for early detection of AVG, (2) Improved electronic fishery data collection technology and (3) Mitigation of the spread of *Centrostephanus* urchins. Abalone farm biosecurity continues to be an ongoing “sore” point.....particularly in relation to untreated abalone farm effluent being dumped in the ocean.

NSW: Improved electronic fishery data collection technology is a priority for NSW. The spread of *Centrostephanus* urchins is also of concern in terms of potential loss of reef productivity.

NSW Upper House Inquiry into cultural fishingresource theft under the guise of cultural fishing is having a deleterious impact on abalone stocks – particularly on the southern coast of NSW. Implications from Upper House Inquiry report still being absorbed.....this is a major source of long-term frustration for commercial abalone stakeholders....matter is yet to be fully resolved.

TASMANIA: Negotiations with Tasmanian Government for an extension of the *Abalone Industry Reinvestment Fund* (AIRF).... primarily to tackle *Centrostephanus* urchin spread as well as improving abalone fishery productivity.....this is a major priority for the Tasmanian abalone industry (footnote; AIRF has recently been extended). Digitisation of quota allocation process has some ongoing issues to be resolved.

2023 TRANS-TASMAN ABALONE CONVENTION

2023 INTERNATIONAL ABALONE SYMPOSIUM

The ACA and the Paua Industry Council came together in Auckland in February/March 2023 for the [2023 Trans-Tasman Abalone Convention \(TTAC23\)](#). The 4-day event sat within the *International Abalone Symposium IAS23*. It was highly successful and there is an extensive photo gallery of images taken during the symposium which may be viewed here.

<https://www.abalone2023.org/gallery>

Presentations from the IAS23 may be viewed at:

<https://www.abalone2023.org/sessions>

ACA and FRDC provided bursaries to four emerging leaders to assist with their expenses in attending IAS 2023 in Auckland. Bursary recipients were as follows:

Joel Brown NSW
Rene Strauss Victoria
Jay Haagmans South Australia
Jack Field Tasmania

It was great to have four very keen and excited stakeholders accompanying ACA directors at the symposium!

INDUSTRIAL ADVOCACY

From time to time, ACA is requested by the state directors and/or state peak bodies to assist with advocacy of various issues. During 2022/23, ACA assisted has with the following matters:

SIA requested advice for the development of their Export Market Strategic Plan and the potential transition of the Seafood Trade Advisory Group (STAG) to SIA.

The Eastern Zone Abalone Industry Association (EZAIA) requested advice regarding the establishment of a Trust Fund to tackle the *Centrostephanus* urchin issue in the Mallacoota abalone zone.

WA abalone licensees requested advice and assistance with regard to their ongoing battle with WA DPIRD for adequate compensation for reduced TACC's due to the construction of the Ocean Reef Marina and the creation of a new MPA (which excluded commercial access).

AANSW requested assistance with their long running South Coast resource theft issue. This relates to indigenous fishers taking in excess of their cultural fishing allocation, taking and possession of undersize abalone and the unauthorised "black market" sale of abalone (ostensibly harvested under cultural fishing rights) to Sydney based restaurants. There is a long and extensive legal case history of abuses of cultural fishing rights in Southern NSW waters and industry stakeholders are concerned about the impact on resource sustainability.

ABALONE ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALASIA (AAA)

ACA continues to work closely with the Abalone Association of Australasia (AAA), the peak national body representing abalone exporters. Upon invitation, two representatives from the AAA participate in ACA IPA R&D meetings providing an exporters/processing perspective which augments the input from those ACA directors who are also abalone exporters. The ACA CEO attends AAA meetings and provides an update on ACA activities.

UNWANTED FRDC ITQ PROJECT:

2020/029 IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF ITQ FISHERIES

In May of this year, ACA became aware of the existence of a partially completed FRDC project entitled “*Improving the performance of ITQ Fisheries*”. The unheralded existence of this project raised a red flag straight up.....the long-standing informal agreement between ACA and FRDC is that any project application that references abalone will be forwarded for review to the ACA. I was attending a meeting of the Tasmanian Rock Lobster Association (TRLFA) in Launceston in May when Dr Klaas Hartman made mention during a presentation that IMAS were working with FRDC on a project to improve the performance of fisheries managed under Individual Transferable Quota systems (ITQ’s).

All abalone fisheries in Australia (Tas/Vic/WA/SA/NSW) are managed under ITQ’s and I immediately wondered why ACA had not been informed (by FRDC) of this project.

Subsequent inquiry revealed the existence of *FRDC Project 2020/029 “Improving the performance of ITQ fisheries”*. The project was apparently initiated via internal processes within the *Human Dimensions Research Coordination (HDR) Program* of the FRDC.....<https://www.frdc.com.au/hdr-coordination-program>

Project documentation subsequently revealed a strong anti-ITQ bias.

Further investigation revealed the following:

1. Peak Bodies representing Australia’s ITQ managed fisheries were not consulted by the FRDC *Human Dimensions Research Coordination Program* (HDR program) to confirm the need for further research expenditure into ITQ structures.
2. There was insufficient justification for the HDR Program to initiate an EOI process for *2020/029*.
3. *2020/029* was not supported by any wild fishery peak body and thus should be wound up as soon as possible.
4. Process around the initiation, review, and approval of *FRDC project 2020/029* raises multiple questions around the purpose, internal governance processes and oversight of the *FRDC Human Dimensions Research Coordination Program*.

News about the “unwanted” project quickly spread to the representative national peak wild-catch fishing bodies and resulted in a coordinated initiative to oppose its continuation.

Tuna, western rock lobster, southern rock lobster and abalone peak bodies, among others, swung into actionletters of complaint about *FRDC 2020/029* were written to FRDC staff and FRDC Board members. FRDC responded by pausing the project and promising to host a forum for interested parties to determine the project future.

The resultant Melbourne based forum on 27 September 2023 was attended by FRDC, industry wild-catch peak bodies, State Fishery Heads of Department and IMAS researchers directly associated with project *2020/029*. I attended the forum representing *Abalone Council Australia* on behalf of the five state abalone fisheries.

During the forum, industry posed a series of questions to IMAS and FRDC regarding the genesis of the project (within the FRDC HDR program) and sought detail around the project intent, objectives, and planned outcomes.

Following five hours of robust discussion, forum attendees resolved to cancel the project. Furthermore, FRDC admitted that internal processes within the HDR sub program are in serious need of independent review and improved governance and oversight.

Regrettably, evidence points to the lead "protagonists" of this secret and unwanted project being the Tasmanian **Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)** and the HDR Coordination program within FRDC. The *2020/029* Project Principal Investigator is Dr Caleb Gardner and the project team includes Dr Emily Ogier and Dr Klaas Hartman also of IMAS. It is noteworthy that Dr Ogier also heads up the FRDC HDR program mentioned above.

Notably, forum attendees also agreed that there was merit in future research that informed **improved** rights-based fisheries approaches. This is the opposite of the IMAS position which seeks to potentially undermine and weaken rights-based fisheries.

The forum outcome is a victory of common sense and strong advocacy over poor internal FRDC process and the concerning ideological zealotry of some of our IMAS scientists.

To FRDC's credit, they have recently confirmed in writing the agreed pathway to wind up *2020/029 "Improving the performance of ITQ fisheries*.

There is little doubt that the IMAS "brand" has been seriously compromised as a result of this project.....not just amongst Tasmanian lobster and abalone stakeholders, but also across many other fishing industry stakeholder groups nationwide.

For the record, ACA has enjoyed a positive and highly constructive working relationship with FRDC over several decades. Recent conduct surrounding the HDR program and project *2020/029* is regrettable. ACA applauds FRDC in acknowledging the issues in a timely and transparent manner and looks forward to working constructively with FRDC to improve their project initiation, design, and approval processes.

Final Word

I would like to take this opportunity to thank ACA Directors for their ongoing support and insightful strategic input. I would also like to thank Melinda Caspersz for her management of our administration and finances. Finally, a big thank you to Dr Chris Izzo of FRDC for acting in a professional and timely manner as liaison between ACA and FRDC.

Dean Lisson ACA CEO

September 2023



ACRONYMS USED IN THIS REPORT

AbFAC	Abalone Fishery Advisory Committee Replaced with Abalone Fishery Core Group - AFCG
ACA	Abalone Council Australia
AIRF	Abalone Industry Reinvestment Fund
AIDF	Abalone Industry Development Fund
AMSA	Australian Maritime Safety Authority
CPUE	Catch Per Unit Effort
NRET	Department of Natural Resources & Environment Tasmania
FRAG	Fisheries Research Advisory Group
FRDC	Fisheries Research & Development Corporation
IMAS	Institute for Marine and Antarctic Science (part of the University of Tasmania)
MCDA	Multi Criteria Decision Analysis
TACC	Total Allowable Commercial Catch
STAG	Seafood Trade Advisory Group

AUDITED FINANCIAL REPORT

Attached and inserted from herein this report.