

RECORD OF MEETING

Meeting #4, 25 November 2024

Online

CHAIR: Ian Knuckey

MEETING COMMENCED: 11:00 am

Present	
Ian Knuckey	Chair
Ewan Flanagan	Victorian Fisheries Authority / Executive Officer
Klaas Hartmann	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Anthony Ciconte	Giant Crab Fishery industry member
David Reilly	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Melissa Schubert	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Apologies	
John Olver	Giant Crab Operator

1. Preliminaries

1.1. Welcome

Ian Knuckey, the Chair, opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country and welcomed all attendees. Ian advised that this meeting is run as a sub-committee of the Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG) and outcomes of the meeting will be reported at the next RLRAG meeting. The previous meeting minutes were accepted as a true and accurate record of meeting three.

Ewan Flanagan ran through the actions for meeting three, advising that most are covered in the updated draft strategy to be presented at this meeting. Klaas Hartmann noted that actions 3, 4 and 5 will be updated in the current draft following the outcomes of this meeting.

2. Recap of Current Draft

Klaas provided a recap of the current draft document including updates from the previous meeting. In summary:

1. Level 1 allows for a decrease in the total allowable commercial catch (TACC) but maintains a cap at 10.5 tonnes (t).
2. Level 2 incorporates mandatory length-frequency sampling and verified catch and effort data. In turn, increases in the TACC of up to 20% every three years are possible if the catch per unit effort (CPUE) is above the target reference point.
3. Level 3 relies on the data collection levels achieved in Level 2 for a minimum of three years as well as a model-based assessment. In Level 3, TACCs will be set based on that model.

It was clarified that there are currently no minimum length-frequency data requirements outlined to achieve Level 2. This requirement is deliberately non-prescriptive to account for mitigating circumstances within the fishery. The group agreed to amend the wording to reflect that data must be “representative” of the fishery at that time.

Further to the decisions at previous meetings, the catch rate applied is non-standardised and only adjusted for soak time. In addition, a three-year running mean is applied based on the preceding three years.

Action: Amend length-frequency data requirements to reflect “representative data”.

3. Key Discussion Points

3.1. Target Reference Point

Klaas led a discussion on determining the target reference point, outlining examples of possible scenarios at different levels. The limit reference point has been set at the lowest three-year mean CPUE of 0.435, of which the fishery has never fallen below. The threshold

reference point is set at 50% greater than the limit, of 0.65.

Under Level 1, if the CPUE is above the threshold reference point, the TACC remains unchanged; if it falls below the threshold reference point the TACC is reduced by up to 50%; and if it falls below the limit reference point, the TACC is reduced by 50-100% under a stock rebuilding plan.

Based on the previous five seasons, the CPUE was below the threshold reference point, which would have resulted in a TACC decrease of up to 50%. Noting that no TACC increase is possible under Level 1, the starting TACC point is important.

Under Level 2, the same rules apply to the limit and threshold reference points. If the fishery exceeds the target reference point, the TACC can be increased by up to 20% in a three-year period. It was clarified that the total of 20% can be taken in increments across multiple years within that three-year period. Length-frequency data is utilised as a secondary indicator depending on the data availability at that time.

Klaas presented possible future scenarios based on a target reference point set at the maximum CPUE achieved during the reference period, of 1.43 kg/pot-lift. Applying the current trend in CPUE, the first TACC increase would be available in the 2025/26 stock assessment, which would be used to set the 2027/28 TACC. Considering a CPUE at half of the current rate, the first increase in TACC would be available in the 2027/28 stock assessment and would set the 2029/30 TACC.

Possible options for setting a target reference point could be to double the limit (0.87 CPUE), double the threshold (1.30 CPUE) or apply the maximum CPUE in the reference period (1.43 CPUE). Klaas noted that while the limit and threshold reference points are determined based on biological assessments, the target reference point incorporates economic considerations and industry aspirations.

Anthony advised that industry proposes a 1.0 kg/pot-lift target reference point based on the consideration that it would be very difficult to achieve a higher CPUE than that experienced in recent seasons. The group agreed that this was an acceptable approach.

Decision: Set target reference point at 1 kg/pot-lift.

It was further noted that, in the event that fishing activity did not occur during a season, Level 1 would apply. Furthermore, it is difficult to screen out new operators in the fishery, due to the low number of total operators. The draft harvest strategy intends to account for this by applying conservative rules.

3.2. Starting total allowable commercial catch and the impacts of high grading

Under the proposed harvest strategy, the recent catch rates fell below the threshold reference point which would have triggered a reduction in the TACC of up to 50%. As such, delaying an increase in the TACC until the target reference point is met would be consistent with the draft harvest strategy rules.

Anthony advised that industry would like to see the TACC set back to 10.5 t and that there is considerable uncertainty during the period of lower CPUE. VFA members advised that

returning to 10.5 t immediately would not be appropriate.

The group further considered recent advice from the current key operator in the fishery suggesting high grading practices are not considered in recent results. Due to market conditions, a significant quantity of crabs over 5kg are returned to the water. While this is an important consideration, there is currently not enough data to accurately determine the effects of this practice.

A consensus was reached that the TACC commence at 8.5 t, recognising the recent recovery in CPUE.

The Chair called the meeting closed at 12:00.

Schedule 1: Actions from meeting

Action	Responsibility	Timing
18 September 2024		
1. Circulate the draft minutes.	Ewan	December
2. Amend Length-frequency data requirements, under Level 2, to reflect “representative data”.	Klaas	November
3. Update draft based on meeting outcomes.	Klaas	November
4. Present final draft to RLRAAG for review and endorsement.	Klaas / Ewan	December
5. Include wording stating harvest strategy is expected to be reviewed within six years or in the next management plan review.	VFA	December
6. Format final draft following RLRAAG consultation.	Ewan	December/ January