

DRAFT RECORD OF MEETING

Meeting #27, 12 March 2020

Queenscliff

CHAIR: Ian Knuckey

MEETING COMMENCED: 9:30am

1. PRELIMINARIES

Present	
Ian Knuckey	Chair
Toby Jeavons	Victorian Fisheries Authority (Executive Officer)
Klaas Hartmann	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Lawrence Moore	Recreational fishing representative
Gary Ryan	Industry Member
Wayne Dredge	Industry Member
Mark Peychers	Industry member
Ross Bromley	Industry member
Michael Burgess	VRFish
Johnathon Davey	Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV) representative
Markus Nolle	Industry member
Guests	
Pauline Nolle	Industry member
Craig Starrit	Recreational observer – Black Rock Underwater Dive Group
Matt Harry	Industry member
Hayden McFayden	Recreational observer – Geelong Freedivers, Vic Spearfishing commission
Steven Rust	University of Tasmania
Nicola Sondermayer	Atlantis Fisheries Consulting Group
Les Feast	Industry Member – Western Zone
John Mercer	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Apologies	
Dallas D’Silva	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Anthony Olver	Industry member
Russel Frost	Industry member
Rohan Henry	Bunorong Land Council Aboriginal Land Corporation
Rafael Leon	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
David Reilly	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Caleb Gardner	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)

1.1. Welcome

Ian Knuckey, as Chair, stated an Acknowledgement of Country and welcomed members to the 27th meeting of the Victorian Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG). Ian acknowledged the apologies to the meeting and extended his thoughts to the industry during the current adversity resulting from coronavirus.

1.2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with an Ecatch update added to the agenda under ‘other business’.

1.3. Minutes and actions from last meeting

Ian noted that a final copy of the minutes of the last meeting had been circulated via email. As a matter of process, the RLRAG endorsed the minutes to record that they are a true and accurate reflection of the meeting.

Progress against the outstanding actions were summarised as follows:

- Recreational rock lobster tagging – An analysis of the data was undertaken to determine why tags had been reported during the closed season. Tags that were reported during the closed season were not an error, however, were legitimately reported by fishers as ‘used’ during the closed season. Members suggested that a follow up phone call be made to those fishers for educational purpose. The VFA have committed to transitioning the trial to an ongoing program and outstanding actions relating to App enhancement will be addressed through this process;
- Stock Assessment – Klaas has continued discussions with Markus to gain an understanding of the numbers and names of those using 3D sounders for analysis. Markus will again contact fishers through VRLA to inform further analysis. Gary Ryan suggested there are significant efficiency gains and Matt Harry suggested there are three new larger fishers in the Eastern Zone using WASP technology who have improved their catch rates considerably. Noting the concerns of eastern zone fishermen that an increase in size of the lobsters caught could be influencing the CPUE analysis Klaas undertook to do a CPUE analysis using lobster numbers caught in lieu of the weight of lobsters. This analysis would be presented at the next RAG meeting for RAG discussion;
- Egg production calculation – Klaas has investigated the method for calculating egg production and confirmed the approach is consistent with the other SRL jurisdictions;
- Stock Assessment updates – Stock Assessment report updated and included biomass level and length frequency plots for comparison. PFN and vessel numbers were similar, therefore only vessel numbers were included in report. Technology creep and divergence between catch rates and biomass estimate to be covered in Agenda item 6.
- Harvest Strategy – Consultation undertaken on reducing the Western Zone exploitation rate, however consultation not undertaken on capping the Western Zone TACC at 246t
- Eastern Zone PRI – Klaas has undertaken an analysis of logbook data. The concept of ‘industry champions’ for data analysis was raised at the VRLA AGM and requires further details from industry of a list of ‘champions’. VRLA port representatives were suggested as suitable candidates. Eastrock has not yet provided candidates for Eastern Zone. Wayne Dredge, Simon Hocking, Matt Harry were nominated as Eastern Zone ‘champions’;
- Biotoxin monitoring plan – To be discussed in Agenda item 8;
- Model development – To be addressed at the next RLRAG meeting;
- Whale entanglement – Toby circulated whale citizen science App link to all licence holders/operators;
- Administration – Toby circulated 2020 workplan, Western Zone exploitation rate industry paper and DRAFT stock assessment report and scheduled next meeting date

The following actions remained outstanding:

- Undertake a review of industry code of practice – Markus Nolle;
- Reef reseedling – Follow up stakeholder meeting and future direction to be determined - Toby
- Model different levels of PRI and likelihood of breaching reference point – Klaas Hartmann;
- Strategic plan for future tag recapture program – Klaas Hartmann

- Indigenous participation – Toby has met with Rohan Henry and discussed project scope for 2020 to engage indigenous sector in telling the story of Southern Rock Lobster;
- Increase to LML in the Eastern Zone to be considered with respect to spatial and price components with MEY development
- Recreational tagging App enhancement including recreational ‘relative undersize abundance’ measure – Toby
- SRL – Markus to raise the MEZO project, biotoxin monitoring, whale entanglement and Aquil-S at the upcoming SRL meeting;

All other actions arising from Meeting 27 are outlined in the attached ‘Actions List’ circulated with the meeting minutes.

2. TAGGING OF RECREATIONALLY CAUGHT ROCK LOBSTERS

Toby presented a summary of Season 1 and 2 of the recreational rock lobster tagging program.

A total of 6,834 southern rock lobster were caught by recreational rock lobster fishers during the 2018/19 Season, slightly less than the 7,925 that were caught during Season 1. 3,101 rock lobster were caught in the Eastern Zone and 3,733 in the Western Zone. The majority of participants in the program reported using 1-2 tags for the Season with over 93% of these reported between the summer months of November to April. Approximately 65% of rock lobster taken were males with an average weight of 2.8kg in the Eastern Zone and 2.1kg in the Western Zone.

Over 600 fishers (11% of participants) opted in to provide additional valuable data through the citizen science program. This information has indicated that the majority of rock lobster catch in the Western Zone was from the Warrnambool region, and Queenscliff region in the Eastern Zone. The citizen science program has also identified that free diving is the most popular method for targeting lobster in the Western Zone and the use of captive air (Hookah/Scuba) is utilised to a greater degree in the Eastern Zone. In both seasons the Eastern Zone accounted for a greater number of larger male lobster, with the Western Zone accounting for a larger number of smaller females.

Preliminary results for the summer of Season 3 of the tagging program indicate there has been a further reduction in recreational catch with lower than average catches for November, December and February (preliminary results only).

Recreational representatives noted that numbers of lobster in the Eastern Zone has not improved with very few undersize lobster observed in the Queenscliff region towards Cape Schanck, however numbers of lobster in the Western Zone appear to be better. Mike Burgess noted that the summer period has been particularly limited in terms of fishing opportunity resulting from bushfires and unseasonal conditions.

Future direction of the recreational tagging program

The Minister has committed to transitioning the recreational rock lobster tagging trial to an ongoing program. The VFA will now work with stakeholders to refine the requirements of the program, explore the concept of adopting a ‘digital tag’ and enhance the App. There are a number of potential enhancements to the App that can be used to improve reporting accuracy including photo capability, measuring device and time and date stamps. The addition of an angler diary component where users can look back through photos, record details of their fishing trips and share via social media will improve the usability of the App. There is also opportunity to explore integration with the GoFish Vic App.

Members discussed a number of options that could be pursued through the review process including limiting tag availability to daily catch limit, fees for tag use and implementing pre reporting requirements. Toby stated that a working group will be put together in the coming months to review

the requirements under the program and guide the future direction. Toby suggested that at this stage the manual tagging process will be in place for the next season, with the plan to transition to digital tags for 2021/22 season. Ian congratulated the VFA on their innovative approach to recreational data collection and making this information available for stock assessments.

Toby advised the RAG that although the source of funding for this project had yet to be decided the commercial sector would not be funding the recreational tagging program.

Action:

- **Toby to establish a recreational rock lobster tagging steering group to guide future direction of the program**

3. MONITORING PROGRAMS – Puerulus collection future direction

David Reilly was absent due to illness and unable to present this agenda item. Toby provided an overview of the context behind the need to discuss the future direction of the puerulus collection program. The collection sites in Port Campbell are becoming logistically difficult to service which has triggered a review of the ongoing value of the program and assess future options. Options may include reallocation of funds to enhance other areas of the monitoring program, seeking alternative puerulus collection methods and considering relocation to more accessible sites. David Reilly will compile an options paper which will be circulated to members prior to the next RLRAG meeting.

Action:

- **David to put together an options paper that presents the necessary data and options considering alternative collection methods/locations/reallocation of funds and future value of the puerulus collection program**
- **David to analyse PRI trends with other jurisdictions to identify similarities**
- **David to consider renaming the PRI to 'undersize lobster index'**
- **David to discuss future direction of puerulus collection with other jurisdictions**

4. Coronavirus – VFA response and future management implications

Toby presented on the key steps taken by the VFA to support industry since the trade disruption resulting from coronavirus took place in January. This includes:

- January 30 -Minister announced uncaught quota to be rolled over to 2020/21 fishing season;
- February 5 – Meeting held between all jurisdictional RL managers to discuss coronavirus response;
- February 6 – Letter to sent all licence holders/operators outlining additional measures to support and minimise losses from trade disruption such as:
 1. Facilitate the ability to return lobster stored in coffs/wetwells to fishing grounds under set conditions
 2. Confirmation of quota rollover
 3. Link to RFCS for support and guidance in making business decisions

The VFA continues to explore other opportunities to support fishers during the trade disruption including leading and supporting local events to promote Victorian seafood to the Victorian

community and planning a promotional video in Chinese and other languages to attract overseas visitors back to Australia following coronavirus.

Johnathon Davey updated the RLRAG on current lobbying undertaken by SIV to the Federal Government to make available two-year interest free loans to the fishing industry, and the VFA to waive licence renewal fees or consider a six-month deferral period. A National stimulus package was announced by the Federal Minister on the day of the RLRAG meeting that would be delivered by the States. The details of the stimulus package were still unclear however the package was not to be used to offset licence fees.

Members and observers expressed concern that the implications from Covid-19 were only just beginning. The World Health Organisation had announced the outbreak as a pandemic earlier in the morning and the fall out at a domestic level was yet to be seen.

The RLRAG agreed that the sentiment amongst members is that the industry appreciated the flexibility shown by the VFA in announcing the roll-over of quota, however the impact on business' short-term cash flow needs to be addressed. The current market closure, that may remain closed for the foreseeable future, will result in a loss of cash flow to business' for some time. The VFA need to consider delaying/offsetting licence renewal fee payments because of this lack of cash flow.

Future management implications

Toby also presented a number of future implications for consideration by the RLRAG including:

- Uncaught TACC's resulting from market failure

Industry members suggested opportunity that may exist with relation to uncaught TACC's. This included consideration of using reef reseeded money to buy back quota for greater stock benefit, and consideration of using funding set aside for observer work to fund industry members to tag and release lobster to fill the existing mature size growth rate knowledge gap. Funding could be redirected from the monitoring program or through the FRDC

- Biological considerations – Stock improvement

Klaas noted that leaving lobster in the water for an additional period of time is likely to provide a benefit to the resource.

- CPUE standardisation and application of the Harvest strategy

Klaas acknowledged that applying the harvest strategy and adjusting for likely changes in the CPUE will be a challenge in the next assessment process. Ian noted that the RLRAG has determined that data up until 19 January can be used to inform the stock assessment during the current fishing period.

- Quota rollover/quota setting – Multiple years

Industry members expressed concern that they may not have the capacity to catch the quota following a single year quota rollover. This results from the fleet and associated infrastructure adjusting to smaller TACC's.

- Market implications

Members noted that as fishers are squeezed to fish to the market demand, they are more likely to leave gear in the water resulting in an increased level of unreported mortality.

- Changes in fishing behaviour

Members noted the significant impact on fishing behaviour due to the market demand narrowing to lobster within a particular size class, this will have implications on future CPUE.

Action:

- **Toby to investigate engaging industry to undertake tagging work within budget allocated to the observer program**
- **Toby to put forward the RLRAGs recommendation to implement measures to allow for analysis of CPUE under the expected changes from electronic reporting and coronavirus**

5. ROCK LOBSTER AND GIANT CRAB TACC CONSULTATION

5.1 - Summary of TACC setting port meetings

Toby presented a summary of the discussion from each of the port meetings relating to the recommended TACC for 2020/21. Key comments from each of the port meetings are as follows:

Eastern Zone comments on recommended 40t TACC fro 2020/21

San Remo

- Consensus that catch rates match what is shown in stock assessment report
- Starting to see better spread of size classes
- CPUE spike in previous season influenced by larger fish
- Consensus that 40t is the correct level (consider no roll over/multiple seasons)
- Next jump to 51t would be too significant and need to HS review steps

Queenscliff

- 40t potentially too high for the Queenscliff area of the Eastern Zone
- Concern that stock has not improved from decision to leave at 40t
- Support to maintain 40t
- Poor catch rates and lack of undersize continues for this region

Apollo Bay

- Sentiment that TACC is set too high and need to look at secondary measures to assist rebuild in the zone.
- Slight increase in undersize abundance closer to Apollo Bay, not seeing this further to the East in the Lorne area

Western Zone comments on recommendation for a 246t TACC for 2020/21

Apollo Bay

- Sentiment that TACC is set at the correct level and agreement with decision rules
- Anecdotal increase in undersize and expecting PRI to increase in next assessment

Port Fairy

- No comment on proposed 246t TACC

Port MacDonnell

- Sentiment that TACC is set at appropriate level and going from strength to strength

Western Zone Giant Crab comments on recommendation for a 10.5t TACC for 2020/21

Apollo Bay

- Sentiment that TACC is set at the correct level
- Drop in catch rate largely due to the return of larger/damaged animals to the water (market for larger animals has been in decline)
- Unseasonal conditions in current fishing period is impacting current season
- Poor early start and market issues will result in uncaught 2019/20 TACC
- Fishing more impacted by market rather than the health of the stock and catch rates

5.2 – Management considerations arising from port meetings

Giant Crab

The key management consideration put forward by the primary Giant Crab fisher for consideration at the RLRAG was a review of the input control relating to pot number restrictions. The Giant Crab fisher has observed a shift in the level of risk taken by his buyer who is no longer willing to stockpile crabs. Previously the buyer would purchase and hold 9-10t of crabs and will no longer take on this risk.

The Giant Crab fisher is seeking removal on restriction of pot numbers entirely as this will provide for the ability to catch more crabs in a shorter time in response to market demand. Markus clarified that the fisher only has a small window to fish and is seeking to maximise efficiency within this window.

Members of the RLRAG expressed initial comments including the need to consider other fishers/fisheries, caution with implementing too many management changes in a short time period given the reduction to the male size limit over the past year, considering a restriction on pot numbers (not unlimited) and the option to buy pots from the rock lobster fishery.

The RLRAG agreed that they would benefit from the attendance of the primary Giant Crab fisher to better understand his fishing operations to be in an informed position to consider the proposal.

Action:

- **Anthony Olver to attend the RLRAG to discuss the proposal of increasing his pot entitlement and further inform the RLRAG of his fishing operations**
- **Klaas to compile a paper outlining key considerations to inform discussion of increasing pot entitlement**

Rock Lobster

Toby presented a number of proposals that arose at the recent port meetings for consideration at the RLRAG. A summary of the proposals and comment by the RLRAG are as follows:

- Removal of RL closed season

Klaas noted a number of considerations relating to removing the closed season for rock lobster. This included pots being left on the ground for longer periods, increased whale entanglement/ bycatch/ mortality risk and increased handling of newly moulted animals. Klaas explained that in Tasmania industry has previously agreed to not land soft shell lobster, however they did anyway and subsequently brought down the beach price in the State. Klaas noted that the energy reserves of lobster post moult are low, and lobster are most vulnerable during this time.

Mark Peychers commented that there are no restrictions in New Zealand, however post moult fish are a disaster for export and New Zealand processors regularly shut down fishing. Markus noted that a recent evaluation undertaken in South Australia has considered this a viable option. Other members expressed concern with having some fishers working all year and resulting further fleet consolidation.

The RLRAG agreed that the proposal causes too much division even among industry members present at the RLRAG and that industry will need to come back with a united position for further consideration.

- Investigate South Easterly weather patterns and impact on productivity

Klaas noted that there is an FRDC project underway and he will ask Katy Creswell for information relating to South Easterly weather patterns and their impact on Victoria to present at the RLRAG.

Action:

- **Klaas to contact Katie Creswell to inform discussion of South Easterly weather patterns and their impact on productivity in Victoria**

- Spatial shift in effort and relationship to CPUE as an indicator

Spatial shift in effort to be discussed under Agenda item 6.

- Recruitment index – Larger lobster keeping smaller lobster out of pots

Research project underway and Klaas will continue to update the RLRAG.

- PRI – Ratio of oversize to undersize as index

Action:

- **Klaas undertake analysis of oversize to undersize ratio for consideration alongside current PRI**

- WZ – Review of PRI as not considered representative

Expansion of the voluntary data collection program and electronic reporting will assist to provide a better understanding of representativeness of the PRI

- Re-calculation of egg production

Egg production calculation method aligns with other SRL jurisdictions. Klaas to complete a recalculation for Victoria.

- Re-evaluate TACC steps in EZ Harvest Strategy

The RLRAG noted this for further review, however given the PRI is unlikely to trigger an increase in the next two years this analysis is not considered a priority in the short term.

- Westernport Bay – Potential to add as site for improving PRI across zone

No historical data and not to be progressed

- Eastern Zone – Review recreational arrangements and resource allocation

To be discussed during Management Plan review.

- EZ size limit change to females and consider female/male closed season duration

This proposal has arisen from a recruitment problem that is not well understood and searching for management change that could improve the situation. Klaas to review the benefit of LML with consideration to MEY discussion.

5.3 – Summer CPUE review

Klaas presented the November, December and January (January data include dup until January 31) standardised catch rate value. Klaas noted that there has been a change in the dataset used and there may be potential underlying assumptions that are incorrect and current work is underway to rectify. Toby clarified that the summer catch rate value alone, is not feeding into the TACC setting decision making process and is for information only.

The Western Zone summer catch value shows a slight trend in the standardised value and a steep drop in the nominal value. Klaas reiterated that this is a ‘quick and dirty’ analysis and full standardisation has not been undertaken. Industry members noted various observations across the Western Zone ranging from a large reduction in catch rates in late January in the Warrnambool zone, and solid improved catch rates in the Portland region.

The Eastern Zone summer catch rate value shows a downward turn. Industry members have observed a very slow start to the season through November and December, however noted that catch rates had improved significantly in January. There continues to reportedly be poor catch rates in the Cape Schanck to Apollo Bay region.

5.4 – Western Zone exploitation rate

Toby presented the outcomes of consultation on reducing the Western Zone exploitation rate from the recent port meetings. Ian noted that the RLRAG is not changing its position in regard to this matter.

The majority of WZ industry members present at port meetings were supportive to adopt a more precautionary exploitation rate of 26.3%, However, some strong concerns that were raised included:

- Responding too quick to a sudden change
- PRI prohibiting TACC increase in future – This plays a key role in adopting more precautionary approach
- TACC steps in table are too wide
- Consider a two year response rule

- Uncomfortable with formalising a rule that forces quicker response, however precautionary sentiment is the same. Fishers want to be involved in the discussion and not forced to take reduction. However, this creates ambiguity

Industry members noted hesitation in adopting the reduced exploitation rate due to the PRI holding back future TACC increase.

The RLRAG agreed that the one aim of achieving a rebuild is at risk and action needs to be taken. If the PRI is not met, then it is not a good time to increase the TACC. The opportunity is present now and action needs to be taken. Ross added that the industry is at risk of losing export approval and measures need to be implemented.

Action:

- **Toby to bring back South Australia egg production improvement measures to the next RLRAG**
- **Toby to progress recommendation of reducing Western Zone exploitation rate for VFA approval**

6. EXAMINING CPUE STANDARDISATION

Klaas presented an analysis of CPUE standardisation to address concerns that were raised at the recent TACC setting port meetings.

Klaas summarised that the catch rate is first standardised for:

- 1) Month
- 2) Fisher
- 3) Depth range

The regional indices are then:

- 1) Adjusted to match the mean nominal CPUE for the reference period (1978-2013)
- 2) Combined, weighting by annual catches in each region.

Klaas addressed some of the key concerns that have been raised with relation to the standardisation process as follows:

Why is the Western Zone nominal and standardised catch rate diverging?

Klaas presented a graph displaying the individual components of standardisation. The 'fisher' component was noted as having the largest influence on divergence from the nominal value. This may be expected due to fishers changing through time and improvements in efficiency. In recent times due to the efficiency gains, the standardised CPUE suggests a lower biomass. Currently, this suggests that fishers have become approximately 30% more efficient over the past 40 years. Ian noted that prawn fisheries have seen gains of approximately 3-4 percent per year over the same time period and Klaas' analysis is showing gains of approximately 1 percent per year for the rock lobster fishery.

Markus note a series of clear 'step downs' through the time series displaying the WZ fisher effect on CPUE correction and suggested that it may be useful to draw out the efficiency gains through time. Mark queried the efficiency losses shown at times through the time series and Klaas suggested this may be a result of less efficient new operators entering the fishery and times of non-binding TACC's.

Is CPUE being over-standardised?

Not a concern, the divergence is as expected through changes in fisher efficiency

Are shifting spatial patterns biasing CPUE?

There is some evidence that this may be occurring. Klaas to complete analysis of standardisation including spatial shifts at a finer scale.

Action:

- **Klaas to complete analysis of standardisation including spatial shifts at a finer scale.**

Is higher-grading impacting CPUE?

Opportunity to explore further through electronic reporting and the requirement to record 'legal discards'.

Are CPUE changes leading to fine-scale changes in fishing patterns that are not recorded in logbooks?

Klaas suggested this is difficult to assess. There is some attempt being made, e.g. with analysis of hydroacoustic mapping equipment. Markus questioned, if in a contracting fleet are our assumptions relating to CPUE missing the information from 'not fished' areas? Klaas to readdress this concern.

Action:

- **Klaas to address concerns around missing information from 'not fished' areas**

Will Ecatch create a discontinuity in the CPUE time series?

The RLRAG highlighted the need to proceed with caution and maintain a consistent index of abundance through the transition period. Mark noted that there will be some changes to reporting with the requirement to complete 'legal discards'. Similar changes in New Zealand have led to the requirement for up to 5 years of new data before the CPUE index under electronic reporting can be used and has implications for TACC setting of up to 20 percent differences in areas such as CRA7.

The RLRAG agreed that as we have nothing else as a proxy for biomass, a consistent approach needs to be maintained and consideration given to dual reporting, and a transition period with part of the fleet transitioning (random sample). Klaas will assist to inform the transition process going forward.

Action:

- **Klaas to provide recommendation in maintaining a consistent abundance index through transition to electronic reporting**

7. Consideration of pursuing an MEY target for the rock lobster fishery

Steven Rust from the University of Tasmania attended the RLRAG to commence discussion on pursuing a Maximum Economic Yield (MEY) target for the stock as outlined in the objectives and actions of the current Rock Lobster Management Plan.

Steven introduced the concept of MEY to RLRAG members and observers as setting the TACC and input controls to maximise the return of profits to all quota holders over many years. Steven highlighted that in pursuit of MEY, the distribution of profits that are earned in the fishery are often not considered and the higher cost (less efficient) fishers are the greatest impacted.

Steven presented case studies and learnings from pursuing MEY from the Western Rock Lobster fishery, CRA8 in New Zealand, Tasmania and globally. Consistent across the case studies were increases in CPUE, contraction in overall fleet size and consolidation of quota. Members of the RLRAG

noted that there has been a number of contributing factors outside of MEY targets that have led to the observed improvements in CPUE in the case studies such as transferability of quota, TACC reductions, binding TACC's and pursuit of Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY).

Steven noted that with the pursuit of MEY and fleet consolidation this reduces the economic flow to the local economy as a result of factors including less deck hands, mooring fees and vessel maintenance work. Steven also highlighted that objectives listed in the Victorian Rock Lobster Management Plan appear to be contradictory in nature with regard to 'pursuing an MEY target' and 'Maximising the flow of economic benefit to the Victorian community'.

Members of the RLRAG expressed their concern with pursuing an MEY target and hesitation in shifting to new approaches to change the economic flow of benefit from the fishery. Ian noted the fishery is a long way from achieving MEY or MSY, and an MEY discussion must include multiple sectors and consider resource allocation policies. Ian summarised the RLRAG's sentiment that there are currently no clear objectives in the Management plan and focus needs to be directed towards achieving clear social, economic and sustainability targets as a priority in review of the Management Plan.

The RLRAG recommending the following key actions:

- 1) Establish a working group outside of, but in close partnership, with the RLRAG to develop targets that inform pursuing objectives related to social, economic and sustainability aspects of the fishery
- 2) Bring forward a review of the Management Plan to commence as soon as possible
- 3) Alter the contract with IMAs to broaden the deliverable related to pursuing MEY to include multiple objectives.

Action:

- **Toby to consider establishing a working group outside of the RLRAG to develop targets that inform pursuing objectives related to social, economic and sustainability aspects of the fisher**
- **Toby to recommend bringing forward review of the Management Plan**
- **Toby to discuss with IMAS altering the contract deliverable relating to development of MEY to include multiple objectives**

8. Draft biotoxin management plan

John Mercer (VFA- Aquaculture Manager) attended the RLRAG to present a DRAFT Biotoxin Management Plan. John highlighted the need to implement a Biotoxin Management Plan to address risks associated with market access closure and human health. Biotoxins can accumulate in Southern Rock Lobster and exceed the Food Safety Code (FSC). Algal blooms causing increased biotoxin risks are rare in Victoria, however they have historically occurred in the State with many commercial fisheries impacted. Whilst the risk in Victoria is low, it is necessary for Victoria to have transparency and be able to demonstrate that they are managing the risk, if biotoxin levels are exceeded in any of the SRL jurisdictions to retain market access to China.

John clarified that there is no legal requirement for the SRL industry to establish a Shellfish Quality Assurance Program, however the FSC does require that seafood business identify risks and implement measures to manage those risks, and outlines that if a seafood business must not harvest seafood from an area if it is aware that seafood harvested from an area may not be suitable for human consumption. The Export Control also requires that fish products for export must not be sought from areas where natural toxicants are present and may be at risk of being in excess of safe levels. Fish and Fish Product Orders (Export) require that: fish products must be fit for human

consumption and any risks to food safety are identified in HACCP plans. In addition, the product must comply with any importing country requirements i.e. regulatory limits for biotoxin.

John presented the proposed sampling protocols, sampling areas and monitoring protocol as outlined in the circulated DRAFT biotoxin Management Plan. The VFA has developed the DRAFT plan as a first step to support industry in establishing controls to address the risk of biotoxins in Victoria. RLRAG members commended John and the VFA for establishing a blueprint that can be carried forward to SRL discussions.

The establishment of an SRL Biotoxin Monitoring Program, should it be established, is a voluntary undertaking by the SRL industry primarily to assist in retaining continued market access in the event of a local or interstate biotoxin event.

Action:

- **Markus to take DRAFT biotoxin management plan to SRL to establish coordination across jurisdictions**

9. Other business

9.1 SRL RD&E update

No update to provide since the December RLRAG as SRL have not held a meeting during this time.

9.2 Scheduling RLRAG meetings for 2020

Toby will circulate a schedule of proposed meeting dates out of session for consideration. Wayne Dredge noted that the RLRAG consider peak fishing times in scheduling the meetings to avoid the beginning of July and weeks leading up to Christmas.

Members expressed interest in holding regional RLRAG meetings and twice yearly roadshows

Action:

- **Toby to send proposed RLRAG schedule to members and finalise 2020 meeting dates**
- **Toby to consider holding regional RLRAG meetings**

9.3 FRDC giant crab project

Toby provided a summary of the progress towards submitting an FRDC funding application for a tri-state project. The project will look to enhance data collection in the giant crab fishery through utilising new technologies such as photo recognition and machine learning. The application received a request for further information and was re-submitted in December. The application is awaiting further decision from FRDC.

Meeting concluded: 4:15pm