

ROCK LOBSTER MANAGEMENT PLAN REVIEW STEERING COMMITTEE

RECORD OF MEETING

Meeting No 5, 10 March 2022

Queenscliff

CHAIR: Jill Briggs

MEETING COMMENCED: 9:30 AM

1. PRELIMINARIES

Present	
Jill Briggs	Chair (Affectus Pty Ltd)
Toby Jeavons	Victorian Fisheries Authority (Executive Officer)
Stephen Beever	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Klaas Hartmann	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Lawrence Moore	Recreational fishing representative/ VRFish
Wayne Dredge	Industry Member (Eastern Zone)
Ross Bromley	Industry Member (EastRock)
Alex Haberfield	Industry Member (Western Zone)
Matthew Harry	Industry Member (Eastern Zone/SIV rock lobster Director)
Gary Ryan	Industry Member (Western Zone)
Zeb Johnston	Industry Member (Western Zone)
Steven Rust	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Guests	
Rob Timmers	Representing SDFV
Craig Starrit	Representing SDFV/VRFish
Apologies	
Ian Knuckey	Fishwell Consulting
Joanne Butterworth-Gray	SIV
Rohan Henry	Independent coastal Indigenous representative
Ben Scullin	VRFish
David Reilly	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Adrian Meder	Australian Marine Conservation Society
Steven Wojtkiw	SIV
Peter Galvin	Scuba Divers Federation Victoria (SDVF)
Leslie Feast	Industry Member (Western Zone)

1.1 Welcome and apologies

Jill Briggs, as Chair, stated an Acknowledgement of Country and paid her respect to elder's past, present and emerging. Jill welcomed members and observers to the meeting of the Victorian Rock Lobster Management Plan Review Steering Committee (RLMPSC) and noted

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We're hooked on
SAFETY

the apologies. Craig Starrit stated a conflict of interest - his wife is involved with Black Rock Underwater Dive Group (BRUDG) and her dad is a rock lobster license holder in Tasmania.

1.2 Overview of meeting Adoption of agenda

Toby provided an overview of the meeting and agenda. The agenda was adopted with no changes made.

1.3 Review timelines and outstanding actions

Toby provided an outline of timelines highlighting what the group has already achieved. He discussed the focus of future meetings and the future direction for the review process.

Outstanding actions

- Toby to rework the consolidated risk assessment table and add to Trello for members. COMPLETE.
- Toby is to make the necessary changes to the objectives and strategies table and add to Trello for members. COMPLETE.
- Toby is to send a doodle poll to schedule next meeting date, current suggestion is the 2nd of May 2022. COMPLETE.
- IMAS is to commence harvest strategy review to inform discussion at the next meeting. UNDER WAY.

Toby noted that he would like to send Klaas away today with a list of key tasks to undertake to inform the harvest strategy review discussion at the next meeting.

Timelines

The first 4 meetings have been undertaken and completed as planned.

Meeting 1 involved setting the context, establishing the vision and recognising risks.

Meeting 2 involved developing a direction towards the vision through commencing the ESD risk assessment and undertaking an economic analysis of the fishery.

Meeting 3 involved consolidating the vision and completing the risk assessment process to then inform development of objectives, strategies and actions

Meeting 4 involved reviewing existing objectives and strategies to ensure they are covering the risks and working towards achieving the vision.

Meeting 5 (Current meeting) aims to work through each objective and associated strategy to identify actions to manage risks and achieve vision.

Meeting 6 (Next meeting) will be held over the coming months, which aims to refine the tools to achieve the vision and manage risks. This will involve:

- Development of a target reference point and review existing reference points. Completed at RLRAG on 1 March 2022.
- Reviewing management controls to achieve the Target within rebuild timeframe
- Review harvest strategy decision rules and discuss key improvements identified through the RLRAG
- Discuss Eastern Zone rebuilding strategy

1.4 Project discussion platform – Trello

Toby thanked those who have contributed to Trello and highlighted the benefits of Trello and its ability to progress discussion between meetings. Toby reiterated that Trello is extremely useful for members to express their concerns or comments which Toby can raise at future meetings.

2. Reviewing vision statement and risk assessment

2.1 Reviewing the vision

Toby presented the new vision. The group had a brief discussion and recommended minor grammatical changes with the removal of the word 'resource'. Toby accepted the change, and the group agreed on the finalised vision which is as follows;

A fishery underpinned by best practice management that sustains a healthy resource to support the values and objectives of all users and the wider community, now and in the future.

2.2 Reviewing consolidated risk assessment

The consolidated risk assessment was reviewed and discussed by the group. Previous changes and recommendations have been made and accepted. Toby noted that the risk assessment has now been consolidated into one list that is split into the key areas of social and economic risks, ecological risks and wellbeing risks. The scores behind each risk have also been removed. A member had made comments through Trello, which suggested a risk that had not been identified - **Potential impact of quota/fleet consolidation**

This led to discussion surrounding quota or fleet consolidation which were raised to management. A member questioned if the intent is for management arrangements to maintain a larger number for smaller operators increasing the flow on benefit across small communities and supporting regional employment opportunities post COVID? Or is it to seek economic efficiency within the fishery by implementing arrangements that promote further consolidation to a smaller more efficient fleet?

The group then requested the VFA's official stance on consolidation. Toby noted the wider Victorian government supports job creation, but that he cannot speak on behalf of the CEO, who may have a different position.

A member noted the potential for people to undercut each other and end up working for very little money. Members noted that many license holders have had their license for years and owe no money on them, so are largely unimpacted. However, if licence holders start to sell, and new fishers can't afford them with the lower quotas, then the fishery is at risk. Members further discussed that a higher number of small operators has the potential to cut the profits too thin and increases risk for fishers to not be profitable. The group suggested different arguments between fleet size and many different investors. They note quota consolidation can't be controlled because operators can shift the quota around their families. However, there is a potential to control fleet size. Members also note the need for clear direction so that they can plan their business moving forward.

The Chair discusses the need to add or reword the risk to **Impact of quota or fleet consolidation.**

Members expressed their desire for decisions to be made that are best for the fishery and best for the state rather than best for the individual. This led to a discussion around the 'owner on board' rule. Klaas noted this rule can lead to strange circumstances.

Members discussed the 'boots on the boat' policy and feared it will lead to a drop in capital value of the fishery. Steve Rust discussed socio economic impacts and potential risks associated. The group noted that since China stopped taking crays, the industry looked to make smaller sales locally, rather than making bulk sales to international buyers such as China. Members noted that whilst wholesalers may be more convenient, more money is made dealing locally due to reduced interest internationally.

The Chair noted that the group must be aware of the difficulties and complexities of the space, with the analogy "like trying to unscramble an egg" being widely accepted. She noted that the plan may not be as rigorous as it could be, due these difficulties.

A member noted fishers desire to know the direction of the VFA and Government. This direction is required now, as it will be harder to do in the future. The industry requests clear direction, and economic modelling.

Toby noted that the outcome of this discussion can be captured as an action under the plan. This may read along the line of '**Develop a clear VFA ITQ policy and ensure that management arrangements in the VRLF reflects this direction. The VFA ITQ policy should provide direction on number of vessels, profitability, operating size, shifting demographic and efficiency**'. **DRAFT**

Action – Incorporate an action into the plan for the VRLF to reflect wider VFA ITQ policy which is to be developed.

The Chair thanked the group for lengthy discussion and that this discussion reinforced that the right people are in the room to undertake the management plan review.

Morning tea – 10:40

A member suggested renaming the Social and Economic wellbeing risk to "captured risks to the industry". Klaas noted the intersectoral allocation impact is across both sections.

A member noted that recreational fishing is only a small part of the industry but still needed to be addressed in the risk assessment.

The group is happy to keep current risk assessment, with some suggested word changes.

VRfish representatives suggested some changes including reordering the risks under each heading and putting the ecological risks at the top of the assessment.

Action – Toby to put ecological risks at the top of the list. However, emphasis must be placed on the fact that the ordering is not a reflection of importance.

Action - Toby to combine the first two risks.

Action - Toby to reword 'pandemic impact' to 'restricted market access'.

2.3 Reviewing consolidated objectives/strategies table

Toby provided an overview of the existing objectives, strategies and actions table and noted that this informs the work plan of which the manager is accountable to check progress.

3. Reviewing Objectives and Strategies

3.1 Identifying actions to meet the objectives/strategies

Toby introduced the next focus of the meeting which was to review existing actions and develop new actions to achieve the objectives and strategies. The actions must ensure that we are managing the identified risks and working towards achieving the vision for the fishery.

3.2 Small group workshop session – Identifying Actions for objective 1 and strategies

Toby introduced each objective, strategy and existing actions. Small groups then split off to discuss each objective and develop actions against the strategies, before coming back together as a group to make final recommendation.

Objective 1: Ensure the sustainability of the rock lobster resource

Strategy 1 – The group suggested minor adjustments to the proposed actions, changes of wording were made to make clear. The addition of a new action aimed at reviewing the harvest strategy every 5 years to ensure its achieving the rebuild target as recommended by the RLRAG was added.

Strategy 2 - Members held discussion on ‘rigidity’ of the harvest strategy. Members agreed the number 1 objective of the plan is a sustainable fishery and to stick to the harvest strategy. Slight changes to wording are made as reflected in updated table.

Strategy 3 - The group discussed the existing actions and made slight word changes to include more specific details. Largely these actions remained unchanged.

Strategy 4 – The group discussed what is lacking from this strategy and put forward 4 new actions. New actions for strategy put forward by the group include;

- (i) Monitor for long term changes in productivity such as growth and recruitment
- (ii) Ensure harvest strategy assessment methods and recreational management are robust to changes in climate.
- (iii) Apply the precautionary principle to management decisions in the context of climate change.
- (iv) Monitor and consider to climate change research impacting the broader ecosystem of south-eastern Australia

Action – Toby to add updated table to Trello for the group to review actions

3.3 Small group workshop session – Identifying Actions for objective 2 and strategies

Objective 2: Maximising community benefit of the rock lobster resource

Strategy 5 – The group suggested 3 new actions:

- 5 (i) Continually monitor and use quantitative modelling to inform implementing management measures to ensure biomass trajectory is in line with Harvest Strategy target
- 5 (ii) Monitor and implement necessary management changes to account for possible regime shifts and recruitment patterns in fishery
- 5 (iii) Formalise RLRAG advice to set rebuild targets within set timeframe

Strategy 6 - The group held a large discussion on the actions associated with this strategy and made many changes to their wording and placement as reflected in the updated table. There were questions raised on allocations for traditional owners.

Action - Toby to discuss action relating to traditional ownership with Rohan Henry.

The group recommended minor word changes to 6 (iii) with some members of the group questioning what the action is achieving. The action was eventually re-worded as it is determined that part of the action is covered by 6(ii) and so, split into a new action specific to both traditional owners and recreational fishers. The group included the new action focused on addressing the risk of consolidation/quota investment. This was worded as 'develop a clear VFA ITQ policy and ensure that management arrangements in the VRLF reflects this direction. The VFA ITQ policy should provide direction on number of vessels, profitability, operating size, shifting demographic and efficiency'.

Strategy 7 - The group agreed to remove reference to an MEY target.

A member had a query about tracking the rebuild and suggested that this occur in 5-year increments. This was added to the table as 1(iii). Discussion was held around ensuring that management changes consider arrangements in other jurisdictions (ie. Changes to season timing) to ensure profitability of the VRLF. Action 7 (v) was added to reflect this discussion.

Strategy 8 - The group recommended a slight change of some of the wording in 8 (iii). The group recommended adding an action to ensure that any proposed management change considers mental health and workplace safety factors. Action 8(iv) was added to reflect this discussion.

3.4 Small group workshop session – Identifying Actions for objective 3 and strategies

Objective 3: Ensure best practice cost-effective and participatory management

Strategy 9 - The group suggested minor changes to some of the wording in (ii). The group recommended including an action to develop a Management Advisory Committee (MAC). This was added as action 11(ii). Members recommended adding an action to make meeting minutes publicly available on the VFA webpage.

Strategy 10 - The group requested a minor change to include 'cross-jurisdictional' wording in the strategy. No further changes to the actions under strategy 10.

Strategy 11 - The group added a new action to implement the revised industry code of conduct. The group requests the formation of a MAC to recommend the best practice for the strategy. The group requested valuating the fishery against international standards. The table was updated with the recommended actions accordingly.

Strategy 12 - No further changes to actions.

Strategy 13 - The group suggested providing a breakdown of licence fees including total expenditure against each service as part of annual licence renewal process. Members discussed that the original cost recovery committee has since been dissolved and ongoing discussions are looking at most appropriate course of action. A member didn't feel like the current system is transparent and no one is sure where the money is going. Members wanted to know more about the breakdown of fees i.e. how much is spent where. The group requested a new action for the breakdown of fees and levies. The group suggested the MAC should review cost recovery schedule annually.

3.5 Small group workshop session – Identifying Actions for objective 4 and strategies

Objective 4: Sustain the ecological integrity of the fishery ecosystem

Strategy 14 – The group suggested including an action to undertake an ecological risk assessment every 5 years. The group suggested implementing a bycatch and discard workplan.

Strategy 15 – No changes made.

Strategy 16 - The group suggested the inclusion of adding a program to regularly review changes in risk to habitat.

Strategy 17 - The groups suggested to include better understanding the role of lobsters in assisting the management of urchin barrens as a new action.

Strategy 18 - The group requested a new action that considers centrostephanus changes in abundance. Toby noted that a review of the sea urchin management is underway and this will be a good opportunity to work together to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

3.6 Small group workshop session – Identifying Actions for objective 5 and strategies

Objective 5: Enhance community trust, respect and value of the fishery

Strategy 19 - The group discussed the benefit of attracting divers and fishers to the state to dive wrecks from interstate and internationally. A member noted the flow on benefits for local business and operators. The group recommended a new action that requires SIV, VRFish and the VFA promote the fishery through social media, festivals, and public education. The group requested a new action to implement targets under the harvest strategy in line with internationally recognised standards amongst consumer markets. The group suggested consideration of legislative barriers that prevent tourism services in VIC (ie. RL commercial fishing tourism). The group would like to see an action to align with the SRL strategic direction to diversify consumer markets.

A member suggested developing an amnesty day on fishing license fees on a weekend across the whole industry, in a bid to get more people on the water. Toby noted that this is a committee for rock lobster not an industry wide committee and that this can be progressed more widely with the VFA.

Discussion was held about facilitating an open day for members of the public to board commercial boats. Toby noted that insurance issues would restrict this possibility. Matt noted that licenses do not allow for passengers, only deckhands and the skipper. A charter company would need to be setup to facilitate this.

3.7 Workshop session – Reviewing updated Objectives/Strategies and Actions table

Toby reviewed the priority risk table to ensure that the objectives, strategies and actions successfully address the key risks.

Risks

Social & Economic risks

The group discussed the clean-green program and accreditation. They conclude that interest has shifted more toward pursuing MSC and therefore unlikely to progress clean-green

accreditation. The group concludes that actions effectively address key social and economic risks.

Ecological Risks

The group discussed actions addressing urchin barrens to prevent further loss of habitat. The group agrees ecological risks have been addressed and covered.

Wellbeing Risks

The group has an open discussion around mental health. Members raised an issue related to fishers working too many pots due to increased financial pressure that has impacted on workers mental health. Working long hours can cause issues for fishers not spending time with family and friends. Members note that 140 pots take 11hrs to work, that's too long and so pot reductions may help with fatigue and mental health. The risk of mental health of workers wellbeing has been increased due to lower prices for RL. The group recommends the review of license fees to help business who are struggling after the COVID pandemic and market instability. Klaas makes note of the stay afloat program, for mental health assistance.

The group discussed pot soak time and how it might put pressure on fishers when laws force retrieval of gear when conditions are unfavourable. Toby noted this is easily avoided if the option to include a caveat which allows fishers to call the VFA duty officer and inform them of their inability to retrieve pots in time i.e. Poor weather, emergency etc. The group discussed bureaucratic requirements that add further stresses on operator's. The group discusses the importance of pre-empting and eliminating mental health problems, rather than dealing with them once they happen. The group concludes the key wellbeing risks have been addressed through the actions developed.

Action – Ensure the risk relating to loss of kelp forests applies for the Eastern and Western Zones providing.

4. Other business

4.1 Committee homework

Toby thanked members for joining and requested that all review the updated objectives, strategies and actions table prior to next meeting.

Toby noted that the focus of the next meeting will be to review the harvest strategy and management arrangements to achieve the rebuilding target within the rebuild timeframe. Members compiled a list of tasks for Klaas to complete prior to the next meeting to inform discussion.

Klaas Action:

- **Size limit variations** (look at range of sizes, 110mm, 115mm opposed to 120mm);
- **Closed season variations** (timing and duration). Investigate variations of closed seasons to assist achieving the B₄₀ target easier. Sex specific closures, tie in with spawning. Look at open seasons for genders. Female closure to 1st of May
- **Pot numbers** – Review variations of pot numbers to assist addressing mental health, workload and sustainability concerns. Klaas to provide an overview of pot numbers ie. How many are currently being used, average per operator, how has this changed through time. However Klaas noted this information does not influence the rebuild.
- **Soak time** – Klaas to investigate soak time. Soak time rule may assist to reduce predation of octopus.

4.2 Closing Comments and next steps

Jill wrapped up the meeting and thanked members for joining and assisting in the committee and concluded the 5th Rock Lobster management plan review steering committee.

Next meeting date - May 2nd 2022.

Actions:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Committee to incorporate an action into the plan for the VRLF to reflect wider VFA ITQ policy which is to be developed.
<p><u>Risk Assessment</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Toby to put ecological risks at the top of the list. However, emphasis must be placed on the fact that the ordering is not a reflection of importance.• Toby to combine the first two risks.• Toby to reword 'pandemic impact' to 'restricted market access'.• Ensure the risk relating to loss of kelp forests applies for the Eastern and Western Zones providing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Toby to add updated objectives, strategies and actions table to Trello for the group to review actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Toby to discuss action relating to traditional ownership with Rohan Henry.
<p><u>Klaas actions to inform discussion at next meeting:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Size limit variations (look at range of sizes, 110mm, 115mm opposed to 120mm);• Closed season variations (timing and duration). Investigate variations of closed seasons to assist achieving the B40 target easier. Sex specific closures, tie in with spawning. Look at open seasons for genders. Female closure to 1st of May• Pot numbers – Review variations of pot numbers to assist addressing mental health, workload and sustainability concerns. Klaas to provide an overview of pot numbers ie. How many are currently being used, average per operator, how has this changed through time.• Soak time – Klaas to investigate soak time. Soak time rule may assist to reduce predation of octopus.