

ROCK LOBSTER & GIANT CRAB RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP (RLRAG)

2024/25 TACC RECOMMENDATION

The Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG) met on 6 March 2024 to review the 2022/23 Giant Crab Stock Assessment Report. Based on the results of this assessment and application to the Harvest Strategy, the RLRAG provides the Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) with the following recommendations on setting the 2024/25 Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC).

GIANT CRAB

Assessment summary

The TACC for the Giant Crab Fishery was set at 10.5 tonnes between 2014/15 to 2020/21. In early 2021 it became evident that a large correction to effort data for two fishers was required due to inconsistent effort reporting for both soak time and pot-lifts. The correction to effort data fundamentally changed the recent CPUE trend. The declining CPUE trend was confirmed during the 2021/22 season, with a known value of 0.55 kg per 24-hour pot-lift. This value is just above the limit reference point of 0.52kg per 24-hour pot-lift. The TACC was subsequently reduced to 7.5t for the 2021/22 quota period and has remained at this level for the follow two seasons.

Recently, the CPUE has recovered considerably reaching 1.10kg per adjusted pot-day in 2022/23. This amount was above the limit reference point of 0.52 kg per adjusted pot day and, consequently, also the trigger reference point. This represents a substantial CPUE increase. However, the low CPUE value over recent years, coupled with the uncertainty in this data, causes ongoing concern for the stock. The uncertainty in the last three years is due to the industry restructure that has taken place. As a longer timeseries of CPUE data becomes available from the new operators this will again provide insight into biomass trends.

It is also important to note that a revised harvest strategy is in the process of being developed. The RLRAG has committed to forming a sub-committee to progress the development of this Harvest Strategy during 2024.

Recommendation:

Whilst further work is undertaken to better understand current biomass levels, it is necessary to continue to apply the precautionary principle in setting the 2024/25 TACC. This strategy aims ensure the sustainability of the resource. The RLRAG further noted that under the current Harvest Strategy arrangements, it cannot recommend an increase to the TACC.

The RLRAG further recommends a sub-committee be formed to commence a formal review of the Harvest Strategy.

The RLRAG recommends maintaining the current TACC at 7.5 tonnes for the 2024/25 quota period given the uncertainty in the data.