

RECORD OF MEETING

Meeting #23, 4 March 2019
Queenscliff

CHAIR: Ian Knuckey **MEETING COMMENCED:** 9:30am

1. PRELIMINARIES

Present	
Ian Knuckey	Chair
Johnathon Davey	Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV) representative
Ross Bromley	Industry Representative
Mark Pechers	Industry member
Klaas Hartmann	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Rohan Henry	Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Land Corporation
David Reilly	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Toby Jeavons	Victorian Fisheries Authority (Executive Officer)
Lawrence Moore	Recreational fishing representative
Dallas D'Silva	Victorian Fisheries Authority
Markus Nolle	Industry member
Michael Burgess	VRFish
Gary Ryan	Industry Member
Wayne Dredge	Industry Member
Guests	
Matt Harry	Industry member
Apologies	
Caleb Gardner	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Anthony Olver	Industry member
Russel Frost	Industry member

1.1. Welcome

Ian Knuckey, as Chair, stated an Acknowledged Country and welcomed members to the 23rd meeting of the Victorian Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG).

Toby noted that Athol was unable to attend for agenda item 6 due to fires in the Gippsland area.

1.2. Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with two additional items added into other business: Ecatch and deck logger roll-out update.

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.

The following actions remained outstanding:

- Actions relating to updating Harvest Strategy components, Eastern Zone CPUE analysis and clarification of weighting by zones will be addressed through Agenda item 4
- Consultation on updated Harvest Strategy components will be undertaken during consultation on 2019/20 TACC's

All other outstanding actions arising from Meeting 23 are outlined in the attached 'Actions List' circulated with the meeting minutes.

Action:

- **Toby to send minutes of Giant Crab Tri-state workshop**
- **Toby to circulate final report from Danial Ierodiaconou**

2. EASTERN ZONE TACC WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

Ian provided an overview of key outcomes from the Eastern Zone TACC workshop held earlier in the day as follows:

- The commercial and recreational catching sector share concerns over the impact of ongoing poor recruitment on the status of the stock;
- Based on the 2017/18 Stock Assessment report and application of the Harvest strategy, there are concerns over the economic impact of the TACC (26t) on the commercial sector;
- All management options need to be considered with a TACC reduction;
- Concern from the commercial sector over lack of proportional decrease in the recreational sector if trying to achieve a stock rebuild;
- The 'rebuild' objective and appropriateness of rate of rebuild is a key consideration;
- Consultation to be undertaken on changing TACC lookup tables (based on most recent information) for this year and whether these will be adopted going forward; and,
- A direct trade-off exists between achieving a rebuild and short-term profitability and viability of the commercial sector.

2.1. Overview of outcomes and recommendations

Mark Peychers expressed concern that when the Eastern Zone exploitation rate of 15% was shown to the Management Plan Steering Committee two years ago, there was a different stock trajectory for this exploitation rate. Toby presented the projections that were available to the Committee under 15%, 17.5% and 20% scenarios. Mark recalled that the initial decision not to go with a 20% exploitation rate was that there was an initial decline in catch and CPUE projections.

Gary commented that we may be jumping down too early given the initial cut to 47t and that catch rates have recently improved in the West and South Australia and we will see this improvement in the East.

The RAG noted concern that the PRI principle of the Harvest Strategy may lead to locking in a low TACC because of poor data. Wayne expressed his concern over the PRI graph and uncertainty in calculating the PRI as fishers are not seeing the results of the PRI spike that occurred in 2013/14/15 and 16. Wayne does not want future TACC increases to be reliant on the PRI value. Both industry and researchers shared concerns over the robustness of the PRI and uncertainty of the indicator. Recommendation was made to take all efforts to improve the PRI.

Ian questioned RLRAG members where the clear argument lies not to go with a 26t TACC as the figure derived from application of the Harvest Strategy to the results of the stock assessment. Markus directed the groups attention to the objectives of the Management Plan, the correct rate of rebuild and finding a balance to achieve social and economic outcomes.

The RLRAG reviewed the key objectives of the management plan:

- Ensure the sustainability of the rock lobster resource;
- Ensure fair and equitable allocation of the rock lobster resource;
- Ensure optimal economic utilisation of the rock lobster resource;
- Cost-effective and participatory management;
- Maintain the ecological integrity of the fishery ecosystem.

The RLRAG extensively discussed meeting the objectives of the Management Plan under the current context of the Eastern Zone:

Sustainability

It was agreed in principle that exploitation rates between 15 and 20% satisfy sustainability objectives and will not drive the stock towards the limit reference point, and that beyond 20% there is a higher degree of uncertainty and risk of breaching the 1951 egg production limit reference point.

Fair and equitable allocation

Johnathon Davey highlighted that if the TACC is dropped the recreational take will increase to 20%. Klaas commented that this is currently a big issue in Tasmania whereas catch rates improve, so too does participation in the recreational fishery. Dallas noted that the VFA is listening to both sides of the story and the current focus is on the three-year trial putting us in a better position to inform the 'fair and equitable' allocation discussion. Dallas also noted that the rock lobster fishery is the only fishery in Victoria with a notional recreational allocation and this was agreed to by both the recreational and commercial sector at the time. He emphasised that there will be no change to the recreational catch limit during the three-year trial.

Markus noted that we cannot manage the fishery if we don't consider the recreational catch. Toby noted that the VFA is restraining catch in the recreational fishery and the tagging program is putting us in a better position than we ever have been to estimate recreational catch. Markus noted that the science and facts must be considered otherwise the modelling becomes flawed. The RLRAG agreed that future recreational catch estimates, as determined by the tagging program, are to be used in modelling projections rather than the proxy of a proportion of the commercial TACC.

Johnathon questioned whether promotion of the recreational tagging program is correlated to tagging numbers reducing in Season 2 of the program. Toby suggested the drop in recreational catch could be attributed to reduced opportunity over this summer due to increased swell and less 'fishable days'. Ian noted the VFA show caution in social media posts promoting recreational rock lobster diving, with no mention of the tagging program, given the current Eastern Zone situation.

Optimal economic utilisation

Ian noted the RLRAG has heard the message of the 'crippling impact' that a 26t TACC would have on industry. Profitability and viability is a key consideration of the Management Plan and requires a trade-off in achieving a certain rebuild rate for the fishery.

Cost-effective management

A reduction in licence fees and levies can be considered in discussion to ease the financial impact on fishers.

Ecological integrity

The impact of urchins, climate change and system wide regime shifts to be considered in addition to managing catch when addressing ecological risks.

Action:

- **RLRAG to incorporate recreational catch information from tagging program in future projections**
- **Enhance robustness of EZ PRI through initially increasing voluntary data collection program**

3. EASTERN ZONE ANALYSIS

3.1. Eastern Zone CPUE sensitivity

Klaas presented an analysis of inputs that have been considered to potentially impact the Eastern Zone standardised CPUE value. Klaas noted that the small number of operators in the Eastern Zone make it difficult to standardise for all factors.

Catch for various depth categories was shown to be relatively consistent through time. Catch by longitude was also shown to be relatively consistent other than in increase in the far East. A comparison of CPUE values including all Eastern Zone data and removing data East of Longitude 149 degrees was displayed showing similar trends, however to a lesser degree.

Catch for 2017/18 and 'year started fishing', largest operators and smallest operators was analysed following concerns that newer entrants are taking higher catch and influencing the standardised CPUE value.

Klaas concluded that the overall standardised catch rate trend is robust to the inclusion/removal of various fisher parameters.

3.2. Potential for future differing PRI levels associated with TACC table

Whilst Klaas has not yet undertaken work to review the potential for PRI to be scaled relative to stock levels, general discussion was held around the PRI value and its application in the TACC setting process. Ian summarised the key outcomes of this discussion as:

- 1) Improving Eastern Zone PRI data is a priority;
- 2) Uncertainty around the PRI is leading to industry concern of becoming locked into a low TACC level under the current Harvest Strategy rules; and,
- 3) Klaas to undertake review of PRI and the application of a proportional PRI.

Action:

- **Klaas to undertake review of PRI and the application of a proportional PRI**

4. ROCK LOBSTER TACC RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Overview of Eastern Zone Stock Assessment Report

Klaas presented an overview of data for the Eastern Zone noting that catch has been steady over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of active vessels and increased effort required to take catch.

Klaas highlighted that catch rates have declined across the Eastern Zone. Large reduction in catch rates in the Queenscliff region, increase in catch in the Lakes Entrance region with declining standardised catch rate and San Remo region showing similar catch rates to previous year. The PRI has declined further from 0.16 to 0.10.

4.2. Eastern Zone TACC recommendation

The RLRAG noted that application of the Harvest Strategy to the stock assessment determines a 26t TACC for 2019/20. The RLRAG recognised the significant impact this level of TACC reduction (45%) would have on industry, particularly their economic viability, and the implications this might have under the social and economic objectives of the Rock Lobster Management Plan. It was understood that these issues would be discussed at subsequent port meetings.

The RLRAG has recommended three areas where the new harvest strategy could be improved with respect to Eastern Zone management:

- CPUE-Biomass time series relationship – Update TACC lookup table to reflect most recent and representative 1978 – 2016 CPUE-Biomass relationship;
- EZ exploitation rate – The current 15% exploitation rate sets an ambitious rebuilding target that may compromise meeting multiple objectives of the Rock Lobster Fishery Management plan. It was noted that an increased exploitation rate for the Eastern Zone up to 20% would not jeopardise the sustainability of the fishery with regard to the limit reference point, but would reduce the expected rebuild rate. An exploitation rate exceeding 20% in the Eastern Zone has an associated higher level of uncertainty with future rebuilds and the ability to meet egg production limit reference points; and,
- Virgin egg production – Adopt reference points that relate to virgin egg production (rather than 1951 levels) to align with the Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS) national standard.

The RAG has highlighted that such changes can occur under the 'continuous improvement' principle of the Rock Lobster Management Plan and support consultation between VFA and industry for due consideration of the impacts of these changes.

4.3. Overview of Western Zone Stock Assessment Report

Klaas presented an overview of data for the Western Zone noting that there has been a slight decrease in active vessels, the average catch per vessel and number of days fished per vessel has increased slightly, overall Western Zone catch rates have improved for 2017/18 and it is likely that we are seeing a large recruitment spike growing from 2011/12 through the fishery as low PRI continues. The PRI from fixed site and observer programs is still well below the 1.81, however there is signs of a slight upward trend for 2017/18.

4.4. Western Zone TACC recommendation

Whilst CPUE has increased, the PRI remains below the long-term average and limit reference point of 1.81 undersize/potlift, which prevents an increase in the CPUE band and hence TACC. **The RLRAG recommends the 2019/20 TACC remains at 245t.**

The RLRAG has recommended three areas where the new harvest strategy could be improved with respect to Western Zone management:

- CPUE-Biomass time series relationship – Update the Harvest Strategy TACC lookup table to reflect the most recent and representative 2000 – 2016 CPUE-Biomass relationship;
- Reduced EZ exploitation rate – The current 32.5% exploitation rate barely achieves any rebuild of the the stock and has an associated high level of uncertainty in achieving the rebuilding objective of the Management Plan. A reduced exploitation rate is recommended for the Western Zone.; and,
- Virgin egg production – Adopt reference points that relate to virgin egg production (rather than 1951 levels) to align with the Status of Australian Fish Stocks (SAFS) national standard.

The RAG has highlighted that such changes can occur under the ‘continuous improvement’ principle of the Rock Lobster Management Plan and support consultation between VFA and industry for due consideration of the impacts of these changes.

5. MODERNISING THE STOCK ASSESSMENT TOOLS IN THE ROCK LOBSTER FISHERY- FINAL HANDOVER

Athol was unable to attend due to Gippsland fires preventing his return to Melbourne. Decision was made for Athol to provide final handover either out of session or at the next RLRAG meet.

Athol provided a written update of progress on finalising the project and Toby will distribute with RLRAG minutes.

Justin Rizarri gave a brief update of progress towards undertaking a reef reseeding feasibility study. Justin has engaged a Deakin University student to undertake the project as part of his studies. Once Athol has finalised the model, projections will inform the scenarios to be investigated through the feasibility study. An update will be provided at the next RLRAG.

Toby discussed concern around confidentiality of fisher data through AVIS. For this reason, AVIS has not yet gone live. AVIS provides the ability to ‘drill down’ into data for regions where less than 5 fishers information is shown (such as Lakes Entrance region). Wayne stated he has no issues with showing his data. Mark Peychers noted caution in compromising another program such as the voluntary pot sampling with data confidentiality. Recommendation by RLRAG to receive written permission from fishers to display data at upcoming port visits.

Action:

- **Athol to provide final Handover at next RLRAG**
- **Justin to provide reef reseeding update at the next RLRAG**
- **Toby to circulate MEZO update with RLRAG minutes**
- **Toby to receive permission to show data ‘below 5 fisher rule’ at upcoming port visits**

6. OTHER BUSINESS

Dallas provided a brief update on the e-catch project. 18 months ago, the VFA received a \$500,000 grant to roll out -catch. The tender process is currently underway with bids in and the VFA close to recognising and awarding a preferred supplier.

David Reilly updated the RLRAG on roll out of Deck logger. Integration of technology and software is still happening with a final timeframe of delivery not known. Dave will provide an update at the next RLRAG. Wayne noted that he is happy to invest in camera technology to ensure the integrity of data that he is collecting and the use of the data for stock assessment purposes.

Action:

Jeanette Botha (Project Officer) to circulate update when contract is awarded

6.1. SRL RD&E update

Upcoming SRL meeting on 13 March. Update to be provided following this meeting.

6.2. RLRAG workplan for 2019

Updated workplan to be circulated via email for comment.

Action:

Toby to send updated 2019 workplan to RLRAG members for comment

6.3. Tri-State Giant Crab workshop FRDC project

Data collection across all jurisdictions is lacking. Development of a research proposal to facilitate collection of data by fishers in Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia testing the feasibility of new technologies under development. Summary of the project to be provided at upcoming VicRAC meetings whilst proposal is finalised in May 2019.

Meeting concluded: 5:00pm