

RECORD OF MEETING

Meeting #3, 18 September 2024

Online

CHAIR: Ian Knuckey

MEETING COMMENCED: 10:00 am

Present	
Ian Knuckey	Chair
Ewan Flanagan	Victorian Fisheries Authority / Executive Officer
Klaas Hartmann	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Scott Hadley	Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS)
Anthony Cicone	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). 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 two.

Ewan Flanagan ran through the actions for meeting two, advising that most are covered in the updated draft strategy to be presented at this meeting.

2. Data clarification

In response to the discussion at the previous meeting, clarification was provided regarding data applicable to the proposed reference period. It was confirmed that the data known to be compromised during this period was already excluded from the dataset applicable to this harvest strategy. Furthermore, in respect of the additional data suspected to be compromised, Klaas confirmed that the removal of this data would have no material effect on the peaks and troughs throughout the timeseries. As such, given its importance, this data will continue to be considered.

3. Key Discussion Points

3.1. Overview

Building on the discussion at the previous meeting, Klaas confirmed that greater detail had been added to the tier-table summary section and the section regarding input controls had been removed. The fishery is aiming to start this harvest strategy at Level 2.

3.2. Smoothed v. Annual CPUE

In light of the committee's decision to progress with a smoothed CPUE, which considers the CPUE as a rolling average over three years, Klaas asked for input on rewording the harvest control rule applicable to Level 2. In the current draft, an increase requires that the CPUE has remained above the target reference point for the previous three years. The committee unanimously supported changing the wording to reflect a smoothed three-year average instead. Utilising the average is likely to be less reactive to single-year changes that don't necessarily reflect the current biomass. The committee further agreed that a rolling average makes more sense than a set data period. At the request of a committee member, Klaas agreed to present some possible timelines based on differing CPUE levels.

Action: Klaas to present examples of possible harvest strategy applications at the next meeting.

3.3. Harvest Control Rules Details

Klaas provided an update on the harvest control rules in the current draft and asked for input from the committee. A summary of the key points raised is as follows:

i. Level 1

The committee discussed the possibility of including a research provision in the event that the CPUE falls below the limit reference point. This would essentially allocate a very small TACC for the purposes of ensuring continued data collection and monitoring. Ian cautioned against using any terms such as “exploratory” in allowing this provision as this could be considered as searching for new stocks. The committee agreed this was an appropriate inclusion but requested exploratory be further defined.

Action: Klaas to reword “exploratory fishing” under Harvest Control Rule: Tier 1.

ii. Level 2

The committee discussed the requirement for length-frequency data under this level and whether further guidance should be provided defining the quantity of data to be collected. Ultimately, it was agreed it wasn’t appropriate to be too prescriptive for this fishery. The length frequency distribution needs to be representative of the fishery at that time, without needing to specify numbers or a percentage of catch.

iii. Level 3

Klaas advised that the stock assessment model requirement under this level is deliberately vague to allow greater flexibility in implementing an appropriate model. If the wording is more prescriptive, it may inhibit the fishery’s ability to progress to this level. It was further clarified that if the fishery does not reach a position capable of implementing a stock assessment, it will be unable to progress to Level 3. There is no requirement, however, for the fishery to progress to this level at any stage. The committee agreed that the wording be made clearer without becoming too prescriptive. A possible cost-effective solution could be to consider a tri-state stock assessment.

Action: Clearer wording to be added regarding the stock assessment requirements in Level 3, including noting that there is no requirement for the fishery to reach this level.

A point was raised regarding the length of the new harvest strategy. Once approved, a new harvest strategy will remain in place until it is superseded by a new strategy. It is likely the next harvest strategy will be created as part of the next management plan review. The VFA advised that the strategy can include an estimated timeframe for review but cannot lock in a set period.

Action: Wording to be included stating that the next harvest strategy is expected to be review within six years or at the next management plan review.

3.4. Suitability of Reference Points

Klaas led a discussion regarding reference points, building on the developments in previous meetings. There is good rationale in setting the limit reference point at the lowest CPUE

level during the reference period given the CPUE recovered immediately after reaching the lows. The target reference point, however, is more subjective and dependent on industry aspirations. The current draft strategy is set at the peak during the reference period of 1.60kg per 24-hour pot lift. A concern was raised noting that this level was only achieved once during the reference period. Ian clarified that this was the catch rate not total catch and that this level is a reasonable goal for this fishery. It was further noted that while the limit reference point is driven by scientific analysis, the target reference point has a greater reliance on industry rationale. Klaas further advised that the peak achieved during the reference period should be an achievable target for this fishery.

Anthony requested further time to determine industry's preference.

Action: Industry member to consider preference for target reference point and committee to set target at the next meeting.

3.5. Scope and Content of Harvest Strategy Document

Klaas raised for discussion the desired content to be included in the draft document. Ian noted that generally a management plan will cover broader content while a harvest strategy will maintain science-based focus. The group agreed that the current document had captured the desired information but recommended greater monitoring and assessment details. Furthermore, the background information included in the strategy can be reduced to a factual description.

Action: Klaas to update monitoring, assessment and background details.

Action: VFA to format final draft in preparation for consultation.

3.6. Starting TACC

Ewan asked for comment on the proposed starting TACC in the draft harvest strategy. The TACC was reduced from 10.5 tonnes to 7.5 tonnes at the commencement of the 2021/22 quota period. This reduction was made due to a lack of confidence in the catch and effort data during the seasons leading up to 2021/22. It was noted that, given the CPUE fell below the threshold reference point, under the new draft strategy arrangements, a reduction in the TACC from would have occurred anyway. Furthermore, the TACC would not have increased based on these arrangements. While the fishery does not have enough data to provide scientific guidance on this decision, catch rates have recovered following the suspected erroneous period. It was clarified that the final point of the corrected CPUE is a known data point, providing confidence in the corrected period.

The group agreed to consider this discussion further and provide a recommendation at the next meeting.

Action: Group to consider starting point for TACC.

The next meeting is scheduled for 21 October at 10:00 am.

The Chair called the meeting closed at 11:30.

Schedule 1: Actions from meeting

Action	Responsibility	Timing
18 September 2024		
1. Circulate the draft minutes.	Ewan	October
2. Klaas to present examples of possible harvest strategy applications at the next meeting.	Klaas	October
3. Klaas to reword “exploratory fishing” under Harvest Control Rule: Tier 1.	Klaas	October
4. Clearer wording to be added regarding the stock assessment requirements in Level 3, including noting that there is no requirement for the fishery to reach this level.	Klaas	October
5. Wording to be included stating that the next harvest strategy is expected to be reviewed within six years or at the next management plan review.	Klaas / VFA	October
6. Industry member to consider preference for target reference point and committee to set target at the next meeting.	Anthony / All	October
7. Update monitoring, assessment and background details.	Klaas	October
8. Format final draft in preparation for RLRAG consultation.	Ewan	October
9. Group to consider starting point for TACC.	All	October