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Chair's Summary

Pre-TACC Setting Workshop - Eastern Zone Abalone

Mallacoota

Wednesday February 3rd 2026

1. Present:

Ian Cartwright	Chair
Helen Burvill	Executive Officer EZAIA
Joe Peel	EZAIA
Chris Daniel	EZAIA
Brendan Wadsworth	EZAIA
Grant Shoreland Jnr	EZAIA
Cam Armstrong	EZAIA
Rob O'Neil	EZAIA
John O'Neil	EZAIA
Chris Wright	EZAIA
Darren Joiner	EZAIA
Brett Cowan,	EZAIA
John O. Niell	EZAIA
Tony Banks	EZAIA
Don Hayes	EZAIA
Joel Theodore	EZAIA
Waikora Strauss	EZAIA
Hannah Searle	EZAIA
Reinhard Strauss	EZAIA
Reece Warren	EZAIA
Doug Boyle	EZAIA
Jason York	EZAIA
Brock York	EZAIA
Craig Fox	Abalone Council Victoria/Western Abalone Divers Association
Cameron Dixon	MRAG Asia Pacific, Science Advisor
Charles Nelson	Mallacoota Abalone Ltd, CEO
Luke O' Sullivan	VFA, Director, Fisheries Management and Boating
Melissa Schubert	VFA, Senior Manager, Commercial Fisheries and Science
Mattias Baenziger	VFA, Senior Fisheries Officer
Brooke Hall	VFA, Manager, Major Fisheries Crime Unit
Paul Shea	VFA, A/Director, Community Engagement and Major Crime

2. Agenda

The agenda is provided at **Attachment 1** for reference.

3. Apologies

Apologies were received from: Gavin Hayes, John Armstrong, Grant Shoreland Senior, Chris and Deahn Arendsen, Elke Hupfauf, Roz Davis, Reuben Cooper Battel, John Armstrong.

4. Introduction and workshop purpose

The workshop was a sequel to the Pre-TACC Workshop, held 3rd December 2025. Craig Fox (ACV/WADA), Brooke Hall (VFA), and Paul Shea (VFA) were afforded a particular welcome. The Chair noted the excellent turnout and thanked attendees for their participation.

The workshop focused on a number of issues:

- i. The stock assessment and key changes to it.
- ii. Settings for next year's TACC
- iii. Management of the Airport Spatial Management Unit (SMU)
- iv. SMU/reef code limits
- v. The fisheries independent survey (FIS)
- vi. Compliance

A range of other issues were raised and discussed.

5. Previous meeting - Chair's Summary

An overview of the December 2025 Pre-TACC Workshop was provided for those who were unable to attend the meeting. Key discussion points were:

- i) Improvements to the stock assessment: See section 12 below
- ii) Airport SMU

Airport quota continues to be a challenging issue, with some divers not catching their allocation and at season's end and many reef codes triggered while the Airport still has quota left, leaving some divers with little option but to catch Airport fish. Many areas of the Airport feature small and/or dark abalone, which have lower value due to marketing pressures.

As agreed at the December meeting, a broader conversation is needed on how to manage the Airport quota and its interactions with other reef codes. There was a short discussion about possible options to address the Airport, including removing the Airport allocation from each licence and treating it like the 110mm LML reef code/SMU, with others cautioning that such a move might force divers not to fish the Airport and could still leave quota "stuck" and underutilised.

It was agreed that some action to address the Airport was necessary and the following staged approach was agreed.

- 1. Compile a history of the Airport area to better understand the history and context of where we are today**
- 2. Through the MRAG Science Adviser and the Abalone Scientific Working Group, taking into account the upcoming management plan review (12–18 months), develop a set of management options (including "no action") and a market review. This would include 'testing' with Government to ensure feasibility of options with respect to legislative constraints.**
- 3. Armed with options, industry and government would then collaborate to select a preferred course of action to improve future management of the Airport**

- iii) Fisheries Independent Survey (see Section 6 below)
- iv) Shifting quota to reduce risk of serial depletion via changes to Optimal Targets (OTs): due to poor performance at Mueller (closing Mallacoota West), reducing the SMU by 1.7t; re-opening Gabo Island for an additional one tonne and adding 750kg to Gunshot and the Iron Prince; and increasing the SMU upper limit of Mallacoota Central and Mallacoota East from 10% to 15%

Previous meeting - Actions

Action	Responsibility
Build an access portal in eCatch to enable EZAIA EO and MAL access to catch data; in meantime provide updates monthly or as required	VFA – Outstanding – ASAP
Review provision loggers and of assistance to support the collection and use of more comprehensive logger data (including length/frequency data).	VFA – Substantial progress with purchase of loggers (ACV/VFA/MRAG) - progress report next meeting
Raise issues on data collection and use discussed at the workshop with the Scientific Committee.	Cam Dixon, EZAIA – Progress made – ongoing issue – report next meeting
Brief Ian Parks on compliance issues and ensure attendance at February TACC meeting	VFA – Done , IP on holiday, Booke Hall and Paul Shea attending
Consider rebuilding targets to inform future TACC decisions	VFA/EZAIA - Outstanding – tied to development of new management plan/harvest strategy, which will commence in 2026 and will be a requirement under the new EPBC Act Export Approval conditions
Consider strategy to better manage Airport quota	VFA/ EZAIA – Strategy agreed (see above)
Conduct audit of current new FIS sites and provided advice to Cam/VFA on any issues/improvements identified	EZAIA – Done – Audit plan developed and Craig Fox/ industry to commence post this meeting
Invite Craig Fox to February TACC meeting	VFA - Done
Undertake consultation to shift catch/amend SMU OTs as per recommendation above	VFA- Done
Discuss extending SMU upper threshold from 10% of OT to 15% in all SMUS for the next quota year at the February 2026 TACC Forum	EZAIA to develop a proposal - Done – see this agenda item 13

6. Fisheries Independent Survey (FIS)

MRAG provided a review of the methodology used for the fixed transect method for developing FISs under the Fishery Independent Survey Working Group. The new FIS approach is common to all three zones and is based on that used in the Western Zone (WZ). Sites were chosen in close collaboration with divers and are in randomly selected areas of abalone habitat, some of which are more productive and heavily fished than others. It was agreed to review the process. The day after the TACC Forum, Craig Fox and Cameran Dixon will visit some sites as an audit and discuss how the process can be refined to increase industry involvement in selecting FIS sites by identifying the right habitats and providing other advice. The aim is to build confidence in, and buy-on to, the survey's outcomes and outputs across the industry through that involvement.

Collection of habitat condition, including an estimate of urchin abundance, will be discussed for the surveys.

An issue was raised about the influence of recent fishing on survey sites, which would reduce counts, change the size frequency of the survey, and incorrectly indicate that stocks were declining. To overcome this in the WZ, 'heat maps' of diver effort from loggers is overlaid on FIS sites and accounted for in the analysis of surveys.

7. East Cape translocation trial

Following the December meeting, the proposal to translate abundant, small, slow-growing ('stunted') abalone from one end of the East Cape to the other, which is far more productive and heavily depleted, was discussed. Comments from Cam Dixon on his experience with greenlip abalone in South Australia were noted: abalone removed from the heavily populated, slow-growing area to the more productive area resulted in two things. Firstly, the abalone, in the area from which translocation had occurred, became more productive (but still small). Secondly, the abalone moved to the productive end of the reef and grew quickly, after an initial period of recovery from the effects of translocation.

The TACC Forum supported the trial to move abalone at East Cape and noted that a permit from VFA would be required. The EZAIA and VFA will work on the conditions of that permit.

An additional translocation proposal to address the abundance of small, dark abalone in some areas of the Airport was raised. While there was general support for this proposal, there was some discussion about the appropriate quantity of abalone to be translocated. An initial proposal of around 200 was considered too small, and a second proposal of five tonnes was considered by some to be too high.

The TACC Forum supported the development of a trial to move abalone from selected areas of the Airport to an isolated (island) area, and that the amount translocated should be significant enough to enable an estimate of success. VFA noted that it would be important to have some way of determining the 'success' of the two proposed translocation trials, and MRAG offered to provide some advice on this. A permit from VFA would be required. The EZAIA and VFA will work on the conditions of that permit

8. Abalone Council of Victoria

Craig Fox, ACV Chair, addressed the meeting. The ACV is a standalone peak body to represent Abalone in Victoria. It evolved from, and is now separate to, Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV). The EZ is represented, as are the other two zones, each with two representatives. ACV has an executive officer and a processing representative. ACV meets at a state level, once a month, working closely with VFA. The ACV looks at commissioning industry-wide R&D projects, such as the one on the health of the Marlo area, and new online data platforms that could be rolled out across the state, similar to the one in the WZ. In discussion with the VFA, ACV has purchased enough Succorfish, depth, time, and temperature loggers to fit out every boat in the state. These will be adapted to suit the EZ and rolled out in association with the EZAIA EO. The information from those loggers will help significantly improve the current stock assessment.

The importance of gathering additional length frequency data to augment logger data was highlighted. VFA noted that funds had been found to get the shell measurer at MAL operational.

VFA to provide funding to enable the shell measurer at MAL to be operational at or around the end of the first quarter, 2026

MAL requested that temperature data from diver loggers be provided, as this information is important for live trading and live holding, it is important to keep the temperatures quite similar to those at harvest.

EZAIA to review options for MAL to access temperature data from loggers

A Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) grant provided to culture seaweed was noted. This group was Fire to Flourish who received \$96,000 from DEECA for a feasibility study, noting that funds of this size would be best suited to support urchin removal. It was agreed that a project to support the removal of urchins, based on climate change, habitat restoration, etc., should be more attractive to grant-funding agencies and could make a substantial difference (through some form of subsidy) to the economics of the urchin fishery. The VFA indicated a willingness to assist industry in identifying opportunities to seek grant funding for projects applicable to the urchin and abalone fisheries.

The Victorian Sea Urchin Divers Association, with the assistance of VFA, can explore the possibility of grant funding to support urchin removal

9. Management Update

Melissa Schubert, Senior Manager, Commercial Fisheries and Science, continues to provide services to the Abalone Fishery, with assistance from her team, following Anthony McGrath's departure to VRFish. VFA will commence the recruitment process for a new abalone manager in mid-February. The Victorian Government will create a new entity, Outdoor Recreation Victoria (ORV), which will amalgamate the VFA and the Game Management Authority and also cover four-wheel driving and camping. From the commercial abalone space, there'll be no change from what occurs now under the current VFA arrangements. Legislation hasn't been drafted up yet, but the new organisation will start on the 1 July 2026. As for location, the Fisheries Officers will, by and large, remain where they are now.

Nick Gall, consultant to the VFA, has completed a report on the governance arrangements for the abalone industry across Victoria, with a view to making them more efficient and effective. Essentially, every zone works differently, and the Central Zone has two representative bodies. VFA is seeking consistency across the state in how governance is applied across the zones. This should lead to increased transparency and clarification of the responsibilities and accountabilities for each industry group and the VFA. Funding and use of funds is also part of the review. There is no intention to introduce major reform, and any change will be made in close consultation with the industry.

10. Compliance report

Like most years, the commercial sector has high levels of compliance. Conversely, the VFA Community Engagement and Major Crimes division, has been targeting some quite significant abalone crime across the EZ, which absorbs both time and resources. There has been some minor VMS non-compliance, but no infringement notices have been issued. No undersized fish have been recorded in commercial landings, and divers were reminded that it is a requirement to 'open a trip' (i.e. start the trip) in the e-Catch reporting app prior to departing in the vessel. The allowance for two operators working on a single vessel continues, as divers make efforts to save costs by fishing together as well as targeting both abalone and urchins on the same trip. A fair amount of undersized fishing has occurred at Cape Conran, with several recreational fishers exceeding their catch limits. In addition, there are several ongoing prosecutions of illegal take from the EZ.

On the issue of staffing at Mallacoota, the station will be operated with three staff, with a new position to be advertised in Mallacoota in the near future. Andy Benton is on secondment for 12 months and a replacement will be sought. Industry was concerned about the absence of Fisheries Officers at times; VFA explained that this is often due to officers moving across the state as they engage in various operations.

The issue of exceeding catch limits was raised, particularly, where there is a relatively small amount of remaining quota and two operators set out on the same day and unknowingly exceed the limit. The industry requested consideration of increasing flexibility. It was agreed that while it was

important to maintain limits for sustainability reasons, the current process of managing limits could be reviewed.

EZAIA and VFA to review the flexibility in relation to catch limits and VFA to action the previous request for the EO to receive catch data

It was noted that boarding at sea is a high-risk activity and all compliance boarding will be done when the diver is on board the boat. No boarding will be done unless an emergency, a major crime, or a significant abalone offence is detected, in which case compliance officers will board with the dive in the water. It is the diver's responsibility, as the master of the vessel, to make sure that they have a dive flag displayed all the time when the diving operation is on.

11. Aboriginal fishing

The EZ expressed serious concern over compliance issues in New South Wales, where Fisheries Officers have been prevented from arresting and reporting Aboriginal people for fishing illegally. Fisheries Officers in Victoria look for illegal activity and, when it is detected, collect evidence regardless of who is suspected of the offence. The process is then worked through, and if that person is found to be illegal for whatever reason, that will be determined. For example, the native title claim may be found to be legitimate. What happens in the courts does not affect how VFA compliance officers obtain observations and evidence. Industry reaffirmed the deep concern at the alarming numbers of illegal activities in New South Wales. It also expressed concern that the current long-running major case underway in the Supreme Court appears to be running out of steam. The VFA noted that there are five prosecutions currently before the courts and during a meeting with the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), the VFA reaffirmed the importance of the long-running case and gained support from the DPP for it to continue. Substantial progress with the prosecution has already been made.

Industry was advised of the importance of intelligence in support of detecting fisheries crime, and was strongly encouraged to make full use of 13FISH phone reports to VFA of suspected illegal fishing.

12. Stock assessment update

MRAG noted that there are "green shoots" – the beginnings of some recovery - in some areas (e.g. Gabo, parts of Mallacoota and Tullaberga) following large quota cuts over the last 2–3 years. However, while some reefs are clearly improving, others are flat or still weak and as abalone is a long-lived species, full recovery will take many years, not one season. Acknowledging some recovery, data limitations and past quota shifts mean the safest path is to hold catches steady, improve monitoring, and allow recovery to consolidate before any increases are considered.

There have been several improvements to the stock assessment, including:

- Near real-time data with the stock assessment now using data up to 3 months old (previously ~9 months behind).
- Catch updates are available up to the date of the TACC Forum.
- CPUE trends are now analysed by quarter, helping reduce confusion caused by late-season fishing and market effects.
- Airport SMU fishing lengths are now treated separately (110 vs 120mm), reducing noise in the data and improving CPUE reliability.
- CPUE and catch trends are now examined at the individual reef level.

In the future, logger (GPS/effort) will be considered as "absolute gold" for their projected improvement of effort and stock dynamics.

In reviewing the stock assessment, there remain key problems and uncertainties. CPUE remains a poor indicator of biomass on its own, with market behaviour, slot fishing, weather, and end of season quota shifts strongly affecting trends. Consequently, there remains a heavy reliance on diver observations due to limited independent data.

About 70 tonnes were shifted away from Marlo into other areas over approximately 5 years, which likely contributed to stress in the Mallacoota areas. Going forward, small end-of-year shifts are acceptable, but large shifts are risky, and any shifts made must be remembered and considered when setting next year's targets.

The current harvest strategy is no longer fit for purpose. Current reference points (targets & thresholds) are too high and CPUE indicators have never triggered reductions, even as stocks declined. Through the TACC Forum process, the industry has voluntarily cut quotas, showing the harvest strategy is not working as intended. There is a need to redetermine reference points (including long-term catch targets and to incorporate new data streams (loggers, size data, surveys)).

MRAG's clear position was that the EZ is a recovering fishery and that without strong evidence of sustained improvement, the TACC should stay roughly the same as last year, avoiding increases driven by optimism alone. It was suggested that there is something to learn from the Central Zone model; i.e. a good strategy would be to hold TACC stable for several years and consider increases only after consistent, multi-year improvement using slow, evidence-based rebuilding rather than early increases. To do otherwise risks undermining the considerable work done to date to rebuild the resource.

13. SMU/reef code flexibility rules

There is an ongoing tension between protecting SMUs and productive reef while avoiding being "locked out" of good reefs when SMUs close, forcing fishing onto less productive and more depleted reefs.

It was agreed to keep the current 10% SMU / 15% reef limits and conduct earlier in-season reviews (from October) to overcome the issue of being shut out of reefs rather than relaxing the SMU/reef code rules upfront

14. Blacklip SMU assessment

The TACC Forum considered the status of each SMU, and some key reefs within each SMU were considered. There was general support for maintaining catch at or around the current TACC.

In a slight shift in previous meetings, the TACC Forum identified those reefs that required attention due to stock condition, i.e. a catch reduction and others where some increase may be justified. Attendees agreed that stocks on Tullaberga, Benedore, Gabo Island and the Skerries were looking positive; that Marlo could sustain a moderate increase in fishing effort and that Big Rame and Mueller should be given a rest.

The recommendations were:

- Marlo SMU – increased from 10 to 12 tonnes:
 - Cape Conran 22.04: increased from 3 to 4 tonnes
 - East Cape 22.05: increased from 1 to 2 tonnes
- Mallacoota West SMU – no change to OT but movement within SMU:
 - Mueller 23.03: reduced from 3 to 1 tonne
 - Petrel Point 23.04: increased from 3 to 4 tonnes
 - Island Point 23.05: increased from 3 to 4 tonnes
- Mallacoota Large SMU – reduced from 19 to 16 tonnes:
 - Big Rame 23.06: decreased from 12 to 9 tonnes
- Mallacoota East SMU – increased from 21.3 to 24.3 tonnes:

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- Gabo Island 24.17: increased from 15 to 17 tonnes
- Gunshot 24.18: increased from 2 to 2.5 tonnes
- Iron Prince 24.19: increased from 4.3 to 4.8 tonnes

These changes in quota distribution resulted in a recommendation for a 2 tonne increase from the 2025/26 TACC (182.6 to 184.6 tonnes).

The end result of the discussions was a recommended increase in the TACC of 2 tonnes to 184.6 tonnes (see Attachment 2), which was deemed acceptable by industry, VFA and MRAG.

Action	Responsibility
Fix broken link to enable EZAIA EO and MAL access to catch data; in meantime provide updates monthly or as required	VFA
Review provision loggers and of assistance to support the collection and use of more comprehensive logger data (including length/frequency data).	VFA and ACV (Substantial progress made)
Raise issues on data collection and use discussed at the workshop with the Scientific Committee.	Cam Dixon, EZAIA – report next meeting
Consider rebuilding targets to inform future TAC decisions	VFA/ EZAIA - tied to new management plan/harvest strategy under EPBC Export Approval,
Consider strategy to better manage Airport quota	VFA/ EZAIA – Strategy agreed (see above)
Arrange permit and associated conditions for East Cape translocation	EZAIA to provide proposal and liaise with VFA
Arrange permit and associated conditions for Airport translocation	EZAIA to provide proposal and liaise with VFA
Funding for shell measurer at MAL	VFA
Review options for MAL to access temperature data from loggers	VFA/ EZAIA
Explore the possibility of grant funding to support projects of relevance to the abalone stock/fishery, including urchin removal	VSUDA/VFA
Flexibility in relation to catch limits, review in 6 months time	EZAIA/VFA

EASTERN ZONE ABALONE TACC FORUM

Date: Tuesday 3 February 2026

Time: 9:00am – 2:15pm

Location: Mallacoota Community Club Rooms, Greer St, Mallacoota

Chairperson: Ian Cartwright

Invitees: Eastern Zone Abalone Licence holders
 Eastern Zone Abalone Quota holders
 Eastern Zone Abalone Divers
 Helen Burvill - Executive Officer, EZAIA
 Craig Fox – Chair, Abalone Council Victoria (ACV)
 Luke O’Sullivan – Director, Fisheries Management & Boating, VFA
 Paul Shea – A/Director Community Engagement & Major Crime, VFA
 Melissa Schubert – Senior Manager, Commercial Fisheries & Science, VFA
 Cameron Dixon - MRAG Asia Pacific

Agenda items

	Item	Who	Est. Time
1	Overview of the day <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome and introductions • Meeting objectives 	Chair	9:00 – 9:05
2	Recap of December meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair’s summary • Fishery Independent Survey • East Cape translocation trial and ARM Survey 	Chair (lead) Chair MRAG EZAIA	9:05 – 9:30
3	Abalone Council Victoria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro and ACV overview • Data collection program update 	ACV	9:30 – 9:45
4	Management update <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Victorian Abalone Governance Review • Export approval 	VFA	9:45 – 10:00
5	Compliance update	VFA Compliance Advisor	10:00 – 10:15
6	Stock assessment process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to assessment and report • Overview of 2025 stock assessment 	MRAG	10:15 – 10:45
7	Industry views	Industry	10:45 – 11:00

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	Item	Who	Est. Time
8	Blacklip SMU assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of science at SMU level • Application of harvest strategy • Diver observations • Discussions and OT recommendations 	All	11:00 – 2:00
	<i>Lunch</i>		<i>12:00 – 12:30</i>
9	Summary and 2026/27 TACC recommendation	Chair	2:00 – 2:15

Reef code	Reef name	Lower limit	Lower threshold	Optimum target	Upper threshold	Upper limit
MARLO SMU						
22.01	Marlo	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
22.02	French's	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2
22.03	Point Ricardo	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2
22.04	Cape Conran	3.4	3.9	4.0	4.3	4.6
22.05	East Cape	1.7	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.3
22.06	Yeerung Reef	0.9	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2
22.08	Pearl Point	2.6	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.5
22.09	Tamboon Reef	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
22.10	Clinton Rocks	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
23.01	Point Hicks	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
TOTAL				12.0	13.2	
MALLACOOTA WEST SMU						
23.02	Whaleback	2.55	2.93	3.00	3.23	3.45
23.03	Mueller	0.85	0.98	1.00	1.08	1.15
23.04	Petrel Point	3.40	3.90	4.00	4.30	4.60
23.05	Island Point	3.40	3.90	4.00	4.30	4.60
TOTAL				12.0	13.2	
MALLACOOTA LARGE SMU						
23.06	Big Rame	7.7	8.8	9.0	12.0	12.0
24.00	The Skerries	4.3	4.9	5.0	5.0	5.0
24.03	Easby Creek	1.7	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0
TOTAL				16.0	19.0	
MALLACOOTA CENTRAL SMU						
24.04	Red River	0.6	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.9
24.05	Secret Reef	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0
24.06	Sandpatch Point	10.9	12.5	12.8	13.8	14.7
24.07	Sandpatch Point lee	13.6	15.6	16.0	17.2	18.4
24.08	Benedore	4.5	5.1	5.3	5.6	6.0
TOTAL				34.8	40.0	
MALLACOOTA SMALL SMU						
24.09	Little Rame	2.6	2.9	3.0	3.2	3.5
24.14	Bastion Point	2.1	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.9
TOTAL				5.5	6.1	
AIRPORT SMU						
24.10 & 25.10	Little Rame lee	19.6	22.4	23.0	24.7	26.5
24.11 & 25.11	Shipwreck - Seal Ck	5.1	5.9	6.0	6.5	6.9
24.15 & 25.15	Tullaberga Island	5.1	5.9	6.0	6.5	6.9
24.16 & 25.16	Gabo Harbour	9.4	10.7	11.0	11.8	12.7
24.21 & 25.21	Quarry Beach/Betka	28.9	33.2	34.0	36.6	39.1
TOTAL				80.0	88.0	
MALLACOOTA EAST				125.0	137.5	
24.17	Gabo Island	12.8	14.6	17.0	18.3	19.6
24.18	Gunshot	1.7	2.4	2.5	2.7	2.9
24.19	Iron Prince	4.0	4.6	4.8	5.1	5.5
TOTAL				24.3	26.7	
EASTERN 2025/26 TACC				184.6		