

### **Commission meeting**

The Commission convened for its 86<sup>th</sup> meeting in Mooloolaba Queensland on 9-10 November 2022.

The Commission met with representatives of Tuna Australia, and received written briefings from the Great Australian Bight Industry Association, Scallop Fishermen's Association of Tasmania, Atlantis Fisheries Consulting Group, The Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association, the Commonwealth Fisheries Association and Tuna Australia. The Commission recognised with appreciation the level of detail provided by industry, and the contribution that these regular briefs make to good decision making.

### Update on Commonwealth Trawl Sector

The Commission noted the advice AFMA received from the South East Management Advisory Committee (SEMAC) in relation to its decision for Danish Seiners using modified gear in Closure D. AFMA is considering the issues raised from the SEMAC meeting on 27 October 2022, including how to maintain representative sampling across the fishery to support future stock assessments and understand the impact of the closures and gear modifications.

### Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) Fishery

The Commission determined the transfer weighing procedure to be that average weight is to be calculated based on at least 100 fish each weighing 8 kilograms or more taken from the tow pontoon (to two decimal places). If 150 fish have been taken and the number of fish weighing 8 kilograms, or more, is less than 100 then the average weight shall be calculated from the 150 fish taken regardless of the individual weight of each fish. The number of fish transferred is to be tallied by a farm representative and AFMA based on a side view video recording of the opening between the tow pontoon and the farm during the transfer of fish and the weight of fish in the transfer is determined by multiplying the average weight by the number of fish transferred into the tow pontoon.

This decision was based on the ASBTIA submission on farm weight sampling in 2022-23, the ABARES Advice Note - 2022/5798, and the operational requirements of the *Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery Management Plan 1995* (the Plan) with respect to quota decrementation in the farming sector.

The Commission also determined that in accordance with the *Southern Bluefin Tuna Fishery Management Plan 1995* the Next fishing season in the SBT Fishery to be 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2023 while setting the following limits:

- ANCA for the fishing season defined in (2a) to be 5926.5 tonnes;
- ALW of a SFR for the fishing season defined in (2a) to be 1.11307856 kilograms.
- Percentage of undercatch for the fishing season defined in (2a) to be 20%, if the total commercial catch in the fishery for the season is less than the effective commercial catch limit minus 20% of ANCA for that season; or 100%, if the total commercial catch in the fishery for the season is greater than or equal to the effective commercial catch limit minus 20% of ANCA for that season.
- Overcatch: percentage to be five per cent, amount to be 100 tonnes, and additional weight to be two tonnes.

When setting the catch limits in the SBT Fishery, the Commission noted that the CCSBT has reaffirmed its decision to set the global TAC for 2022-2023 at 17,647 tonnes. Australia's CCSBT allocation is 6,238.4 tonnes. The ANCA can be no more than 95 per cent of Australia's CCSBT allocation.

### Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF)

In accordance with the *Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery Management Plan 2005* (WTBF Plan) and after The Commission determined the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) limits to be as follows:

	TACC (t)	Determined Weight (t)
Bigeye Tuna	2,000	2
Broadbill Swordfish	3,000	2
Striped Marlin	125	2
Yellowfin Tuna	2,000	2

In making this decision the Commission noted that the TACCs are consistent with MAC and RAG advice and Australia’s current obligations to the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC). Efforts by IOTC this year to review the interim yellowfin tuna rebuilding plan failed to reach any agreement. Further meetings are planned for 2023.

Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF)

The Commission decided to modify the ETBF Harvest Strategy so that:

- If the harvest strategy suggests a decrease to the TAC during the extreme under-catch period (tested to end in 2024) then:
  - If current catches are further below the Recommended Biological Commercial Catch (RBCC) than the RBCC is below the current TAC, no change is recommended;
  - If current catches are not further below the RBCC than the RBCC is below the TAC, the residual difference is discounted from the TAC reduction; and
  - If the RBCC is below current catches, then the full TAC decrease is applied.
- If the harvest strategy suggests an increase in the TAC during the extreme under-catch period, no alterations are made, and a TAC increase is applied.

The Commission noted, when making the modification to the ETBF Harvest Strategy, that the purpose of the modification is to explicitly account for recent low catch levels compared to the TAC and, in doing so, avoid unnecessary TAC reductions. The modification has been designed and tested assuming the level of recent under catching ceases from 2025 onwards. A further review of the harvest strategy is scheduled to commence in 2023. The proposed modification has been recommended by the Tropical Tuna MAC (TTMAC) and Tropical Tuna RAG (TTRAG). These new decision rules are intended to remain in place until the scheduled 2023 review of the HS is complete; that is, assuming extreme under-catch continues, these rules are likely to guide TACC setting for the 2023 and 2024 seasons.

After having made the modification to the ETBF Harvest Strategy, the Commission determined the TACC limits in accordance with the *Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery Management Plan 2010* (ETBF Plan) to be:

	TACC (t)	Overcatch %	Undercatch %	Determined Weight (t)
Albacore Tuna	2,500	10	10	2
Bigeye Tuna	1,056	10	10	2
Broadbill Swordfish	1,047	10	10	2
Striped Marlin	351	10	10	2
Yellowfin Tuna	2,400	10	10	2

When setting the TACCs for the ETBF, the Commission noted that these are consistent with MAC and RAG advice and Australia’s current obligations to the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission (WCPFC). Tuna Australia is sensitive to how future domestic TACCs may, in its view, strategically impact industry’s interests in negotiations on a new swordfish measure with WCPFC (refer to *Engagement* section below).

The Commission determined the Total Allowable Effort for the SSJF 2023 fishing year of 550 standard squid jigging machines in accordance with Section 11 of the *Southern Squid Jig Fishery Management Plan 2005* (the Management Plan), as recommended by Squid Resource Assessment Group (SquidRAG) and the South East Management Advisory Committee (SEMAC).

The Commission also endorsed a Harvest Strategy update for implementation at the start of the 2023 fishing season so that the introduction of a ‘lower catch and effort’ trigger based on more recent catches, requiring an analysis of total catch and effort, including trends in catch per unit effort (CPUE) over time when recommending a TAE. While also Noting CPUE is less informative when catches are low, if none of the triggers outlined in the Harvest Strategy are reached, SquidRAG will consider the available catch and effort data as part of the TAE setting process to ensure there are no sustainability concerns associated with recent catches. Where available, state catches will also be considered to provide context to the level of Commonwealth catch and effort.

Heard Island and McDonald Island (HIMI)

In accordance with the *Heard Island and Macquarie Islands Fishery Management Plan 2002* (HIMI Plan) the Commission, while having regard to limits set by CCAMLR, determined the Total Allowable Catch Limits as follows

<b>Target Species</b>	<b>Tonnes</b>
Patagonian toothfish ( <i>Dissostichus eleginoides</i> )	2,510
Mackerel icefish ( <i>Champsocephalus gunnari</i> )	2,616
<b>Bycatch species</b>	
Caml grenadier ( <i>Macrourus caml</i> ) and Whitson’s grenadier ( <i>M. whitsoni</i> )	409
Bigeye grenadier ( <i>M. holotrachys</i> ) and ridge scaled rattail ( <i>M. carinatus</i> )	360
Unicorn icefish ( <i>Channichthys rhinoceratus</i> )	1,663

The Commission extends its thanks and appreciation to all industry participants that help inform its decisions.

The Commission has agreed to meet in 2023 at the following dates and locations

- Melbourne, 9-10 March 2023
- Canberra, 10-11 May 2023
- Lakes Entrance 5-6 July 2023
- Port Lincoln/Adelaide, 13-14 September 2023
- Canberra, 8-9 November 2023

Helen Kroger

Chairman