



## Minutes

### SARAG 24

19 September 2005 – Hobart

## Attendance

### Members

Dr Malcolm Haddon – Chair  
Mr Martin Exel, Industry  
Mr Les Scott, Industry  
Dr Geoff Tuck, CSIRO  
Dr Andrew Constable, AAD  
Dr Graham Robertson, AAD  
Mr Barry Baker, AAD  
Ms Dana Hanna, ABARE  
Dr Rosemary Gales, DPIWE  
Mr Peter Neave – AFMA (also Executive Officer)

### Apologies

Mr Stuart Richey, Industry  
Dr Nick Gales, AAD

### Observers

Ms Trysh Stone, AFMA  
Dr Fred Pribac, CSIRO  
Mr Theo Kailis, Industry  
Ms Carolyn Robins, Consultant

## Introduction

### Agenda item 1 - Preliminaries

The 24th meeting of the Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group (SARAG 24) was opened by the Chair Dr Malcolm Haddon at 8.50am.

#### 1.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr Nick Gales and Mr Stuart Richey. Dr Graham Robertson, Dr Rosemary Gales and Mr Barry Baker attended the meeting from 10.45am. Ms Carolyn Robins, a consultant working for AFMA, attended the meeting from 11.00am.

Messrs Exel and Scott declared their interest on all agenda items. Mr Exel advised that his Company own SFRs in the HIMI Fishery and holds a Fishing Permit for the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery and he was not aware of any investigation or prosecution action by AFMA against his Company. Mr Scott advised that his Company own SFRs in the HIMI Fishery and he was not aware of any investigation or prosecution action by AFMA against his Company.

Dr Tuck, Dr Constable, Mr Hay and Dr Pribac declared their interest on research items.

#### 1.2 Adoption of agenda

The agenda for SARAG 24 was adopted, with the order in which agenda items were considered being altered to accommodate Members availability. The items are reported on as they appeared in the agenda.

### **1.3 Adoption of Minutes from SARAG 23**

The draft minutes from SARAG 23 were circulated to Members on 16 June 2005. Comments were received from Dr Rosemary Gales and Dr Robertson and incorporated into the Minutes. Members requested that the declaration of conflicts of interest be included in the Minutes. The Minutes from SARAG 23 were then accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

### **1.4 Action arising from SARAG 23**

SARAG discussed the status of action arising items from SARAG 23. Mr Neave reported that an update of actioned items had been provided out-of-session to Members on 24 August 2005, and that no further progress had been made on the items with outstanding issues.

SARAG discussed the use of logbook data from illegal vessels operating in Australian waters. Mr Neave advised that legal advice was being sought as to who could be provided this data.

#### **Action arising**

Mr Neave advised that AFMA had supplied officers from the Australian Antarctic Division (AAD) with seabird abundance data. Discussions were ongoing as to data formats. SARAG requested a progress report on the status of the data for its next meeting.

#### **Action arising**

### **1.5 Correspondence**

SARAG noted that no correspondence had been received since the last meeting.

## **Heard Island and McDonald Islands Fishery**

### **Agenda item 2 – Preliminary stock assessments**

#### **2.1 Patagonian toothfish**

Dr Constable tabled paper SARAG 24/1 entitled 'Preliminary assessment of Patagonian Toothfish, *Dissostichus eleginoides*, for the Heard Island region (CCAMLR Division 58.5.2) based on a random stratified trawl survey in June 2005'. The paper provided a preliminary assessment for the HIMI Fishery using standard CCAMLR methods which have been used in the Fishery since 1995.

The primary annual inputs into the assessment undertaken by the CCAMLR Working Group for Fish Stock Assessment (WG-FSA) are estimates of young (3-8 year old) pre-recruit fish from the annual random stratified trawl survey, which is used to update the recruitment series, and an estimate of the total removals (total commercial catch and estimated IUU vessel catch) for the season in the region.

Dr Constable reported that age three fish had not been detected for the past two years which may point to the effects of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing in earlier years. The continued absence of this age class may result in lower total allowable catches (TACs) in future years.

Dr Constable advised that the growth rate in the HIMI Fishery appeared to be slower than that used at South Georgia, and this was an issue being assessed. He also noted that determining natural mortality needed to be a major area of study. It is likely that natural mortality varies between cohorts as smaller fish are more susceptible to predators.

Mr Scott advised that the weight of the longline caught fish had increased this year compared to previous years, with many fish greater than 8 kgs (>7 years old) being taken.

Dr Constable advised that an integrated assessment which incorporated all data was being developed and was the subject of discussions at the Stock Assessment Methods workshop held in Japan in July 2005. The CASAL modelling framework developed in New Zealand enables the generation of an integrated assessment which can incorporate data from all fishing methods (trawl, longline and trap) is being developed for the HIMI Fishery. Further exploration on an integrated model will occur prior to the 2006 CCAMLR meeting.

The assessment for the 2005 CCAMLR meeting would use the existing Generalised Yield Model, and this was supported by SARAG.

## **2.2 Mackerel icefish**

Dr Constable tabled paper SARAG 24/2 entitled 'Preliminary assessment of mackerel icefish, *Champscephalus gunnari*, for the Heard Island Plateau region (CCAMLR Division 58.5.2) based on a survey in June 2005'. A survey of mackerel icefish was undertaken in the vicinity of Heard Island to provide the information for an assessment of short-term yield in the 2005/06 season. The assessment method adopted is the same that was used in the Fishery since 1997.

Dr Constable advised that the assessment is dominated by a very strong 3<sup>+</sup> year class which was evident in the 2002 juvenile icefish survey and 2003 and 2004 surveys. A recruitment pulse was not evident in the lower age classes, which would result in a lower TAC than the current year.

Dr Constable advised that the abundance of mackerel icefish rapidly decreases after age 4 even in the absence of fishing. Using a two year projection the yields were expected to be 647 tonnes in 2005/06 and 519 tonnes in 2006/07. This was less than the yield estimated in the two year projection undertaken in 2004 which estimated 1706 tonnes for the 2005/06 season.

SARAG agreed that a one-year projection be proposed to CCAMLR as the fish are likely to disappear after they become 4 years old during the coming season. This would result in an estimate of yield of 1210 tonnes for one season. It is proposed to place a limit of 650 tonnes for the period to 31 March 2006 and allow the remaining 560 tonnes (plus any uncaught catch from the period before 31 March) to be taken during the rest of the season.

A new estimate for 2006/07 would be made after the annual survey in the 2005/06 season, which may result in a zero TAC for the 2006/07 season. This rationale for this approach was considered appropriate as by the end of the 2005/06 season the current strong cohort would have been sexually mature for two years.

SARAG agreed that if no survey took place in 2005/06 a zero mackerel icefish TAC should apply for the 2006/07 season.

## **2.3 Skates**

Dr Constable advised that due to being unable to find a replacement from Dr Campbell Davies an updated assessment was unable to be done. The assessment had been given a lower priority than the other assessments and reviews of assessment methods.

He advised that over the next 12 months the assessment will be progressed and would be considered at WG-FSA in 2006. Using the comprehensive data collected to date the assessment will look at species composition and distribution by depth.

Mr Neave advised that CCAMLR was recording all skate catch against the TAC, which included tagged skates and those released alive. Dr Constable undertook to raise this issue with the CCAMLR Secretariat to ensure that the retained skate catch was recorded as the catch against the TAC.

**Action arising**



### Agenda item 3 – Fish trapping research plan

SARAG discussed the proposal from Martin Exel for his Company, Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd, to undertake trial trap fishing in the HIMI Fishery in the 2005/06 season. It was noted that the current CCAMLR Conservation Measure which applied to the HIMI Fishery would need to be changed to allow trapping as a fishing method.

SARAG noted a research plan would be developed in consultation with Dick Williams from the Australian Antarctic Division. It was anticipated the following broad areas would be investigated during the trial:

- 1 Operation of the fishery
  - seabird and marine mammal interactions.
  - benthic impacts
  - toothfish selectivity
    - trial some differing mesh sizes in the traps, to determine whether this can aid "escapement" of smaller fish from the traps.
    - comparison with longline and trawl caught fish, preferably in the same areas.
  - identification of fishing grounds
- 2 General research
  - collection of biological data and monitoring fishing operations by observer;
  - tagging
  - distribution of toothfish
  - size distribution with area or depth
  - location of spawning fish
  - investigation of Conservation Zones
- 3 Gear technology and fishing technique
  - Ghost fishing
    - dedicated trials with several traps, through leaving different pots baited and unbaited, set for extended periods of time.
    - trialling differential twine "release" systems (eg trial natural fibres in trap mesh construction, to decay after defined periods of time leaving only the frame). Sacrificial anodes is another possibility.
  - Trap effectiveness
    - trial of differing designs of trap (currently mainly using sablefish traps with modified necks).
    - bait effectiveness, time of day for setting/hauling, soak times.
  - Commercial assessment
    - there will be scope to allow comparisons between fishing methods as Austral Fisheries may well have both the trawler and trapper in the fishery at the same time. That will allow scope for direct comparisons on a daily basis in similar areas.

A report similar to that prepared for longline fishing will be prepared following the trial.



## Seabirds

### Agenda item 4 – Seabird working group – update

At SARAG 23 it was agreed, following the death of 7 black-browed albatross and 5 white chinned petrels in midwater trawl operations in the HIMI icefish fishery, to convene a sub-group to discuss the issue. It was agreed that 'The sub-group would comprise Andrew McNee, Peter Neave, Graham Robertson, Rosemary Gales, Barry Baker, Martin Exel and Les Scott. The sub-group would look at the issues including potential biological removals and develop approaches for dealing with incidents of this nature should they occur in future.'

Drs Robertson and Gales and Mr Baker prepared a draft discussion paper 'Refining the management of seabird by-catch in Australia's sub-Antarctic Patagonian toothfish and mackerel icefish fisheries'. The paper was discussed at the workshop held at AAD on 7 and 8 September 2005. The thrust of the paper is to place per vessel limits on seabird bycatch taken in trawl and longline operations, and that there need to be consistency between fishing methods.

Mr Baker provided members with an outline of the paper. He advised that some seabirds are threatened, and species such as the black-browed albatross was at high risk.

SARAG noted that AFMA had placed a 10 seabird limit on the operations of the 'Janas' and 'Avro Chieftain' in the HIMI Fishery during the period of the longline trial.

Mr Scott questioned why with a 10 seabird limit further seasonal restrictions were placed on his operations. He believed it was up to his Company, Petuna Sealord Pty Ltd, to manage the issue knowing that if the limit were reached his operations would cease for the remainder of the season.

Mr Exel advised that the catches of the 7 black-browed albatross and 5 white chinned petrels were accidental occurrences. The Company in previous years had operated midwater gear during daylight hours and had not had a similar incident. He advised the incident was unpredictable, and his Company had reverted to night setting for midwater trawl operations following the incidents which resulted in no further seabirds being taken.

Mr Exel presented a paper that his Company's skipper, Stev Paku, had prepared following discussions at the workshop and in response to the catch of the seabirds in midwater trawl operations earlier in the year. The paper focussed on a range of mitigation measures which could be adopted to mitigate incidents. Mitigation measures include, no midwater trawling permitted during February and March, only allow midwater trawling to occur at night, remove all 'stickers' from the net before setting and monitoring seabird abundance around the boat when midwater trawling and not set the gear if abundance is 'too high'. Mr Exel supported this approach and did not support placing limits that could close the fishery down.

Mr Neave advised that the midwater trawling incidents were unprecedented and the adoption of effective mitigation measures had addressed the problem. He stated that he thought it was unreasonable to close a fishery if an unforeseen accident occurred, particularly given the history of similar midwater trawl operations.

Ms Stone advised that AFMA's position was to focus on mitigation measures rather than setting absolute limits. Under the revised draft Threat Abatement Plan the proposed actions provided for bycatch rates over a season, and that target rates (0.01 seabirds/1000 hooks in the case of Antarctic fisheries) are set but did not close a fishery if a particular number was reached. She stated that the 10 seabird limit adopted for longline operations was put in place during the trial period.

Ms Stone advised that AFMA would impose limits if it was in external legislation.



Ms Stone advised that the issue should be considered by SouthMAC and AFMA. SARAG agreed that an issues paper which captures the range of views should be prepared for consideration prior to CCAMLR. Dr Robertson undertook to prepare a draft in consultation with Dr Constable and Mr Neave.

#### **Action arising**

SARAG also agreed that the issue should be discussed at the Inter-Departmental Committee meeting scheduled for 23 September 2005 which discusses CCAMLR matters for the Australian delegation.

### **Agenda item 5 – Draft Threat Abatement Plan**

SARAG discussed the draft 'Threat Abatement Plan 2005 for the incidental catch (or bycatch) of seabirds during oceanic longline fishing operations'. Mr Baker advised that the draft had been released for public comment following review of the 1998 Threat Abatement Plan (TAP). He advised the public comment period closed on 9 December 2005 and he would welcome comments from SARAG Members.

Mr Baker advised that following the public comment period a meeting of the TAP team would meet to discuss comments received and modify the draft as necessary. The draft TAP would then be provided to the Threatened Species Scientific Committee before being provided to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage.

Mr Scott referred to objective 5 of the draft TAP which states 'Innovation - Individual accreditation of longline operators who are able to demonstrate 'bird friendly' fishing practices will be supported'. He advised this would be an issue he would take up with AFMA.

Dr Gales stated that the limits outlined in the TAP should be set at a level that can be achieved. Mr Baker advised the focus of the TAP was on continual improvement. Mr Exel warned that setting rates too low may lead to pressure to close a fishery down, particularly if accidents occurred when using best practice mitigation measures.

## **Data**

### **Agenda item 6 – Data plan for Antarctic fisheries**

Ms Carolyn Robins, a consultant employed by AFMA, consulted SARAG on the development of a data plan for sub-Antarctic fisheries.

She advised that as part of AFMA's commitment to improving data-management, strategic ecosystem data plans are to be developed for each AFMA managed fishery. Data plans are to provide for fishery data collection processes to support ecosystem-based fisheries management and will assist AFMA in meeting requirements for fisheries management plans, bycatch action plans (BAP) and strategic assessments.

Ms Robins advised that data plans provide an overview of the strategic data management framework that can be used for managing and assessing the data needs of a fishery. Individual data plans include an inventory of data used/collected in the fishery; document the data needs for the fishery; outline policies and principles relevant to the data collected; identify data sources, categories and gaps for that fishery; and lists of data actions addressing data gaps and needs.

SARAG Members provided input to a draft data plan prepared by Ms Robins. She undertook to prepare a further draft based on the information provided and forward it to Mr Neave for review.

#### **Action arising**

## Other

### Agenda item 7 – Conservation Measures

SARAG discussed a number of proposed amendments to CCAMLR Conservation Measures for the forthcoming CCAMLR meeting (24 October to 4 November 2005). The proposed changes to the current Conservation measures for next season are:

- 41-08 (Limits on the fishery for *Dissostichus eleginoides* in Statistical Division 58.5.2 in the 2004/05 season) – to include trapping as a fishing method and seek an extension to the longline season (to 30 September) based on the successful implementation of mitigation measures to date;
- 33-02 (limitation of by-catch in Statistical Division 58.5.2 in the 2004/05 season) – amend the ‘move-on’ provisions for some species. Unicorn icefish are caught in conjunction with mackerel icefish and the current limit can trigger the ‘move-on’ provision with no apparent benefit. Under the current Conservation Measure the catch of one large sleeper shark can trigger a move-on provision so it is proposed to move the sleeper sharks from the one tonne move-on provision to the two tonne move-on provision. Additionally, it is proposed to exempt the move-on provision applying to research shots.

Mr Exel raised the issue of reporting to the centralised vessel monitoring system (cVMS) at CCAMLR. He advised Australia did not want to be the only country giving in-zone catches to the CCAMLR Secretariat. He raised concerns about providing the data in real time for in-zone catches, and as agreed last year understood AFMA was providing data for in-zone activity when the vessel had departed the CCAMLR Convention area.

Mr Hay advised that the United States Government were likely to insist on port to port VMS reporting if toothfish were to be imported into the United States. He believed there was a high quality security system in place at the CCAMLR Secretariat to ensure the data was handled according to agreed protocols.

### Agenda item 8 – Mackerel icefish certification

Mr Exel updated SARAG on the Marine Stewardship Council certification of mackerel icefish. He thanked Members for their assistance and advised his Company had agreed to the certification and the conditions that were required to be met. He sought to set out the conditions and seek agreement from the certifiers on the appropriate course of action. He advised that a meeting which included some SARAG Members (Dr Constable and Dr Haddon) had been scheduled for 20 September at AAD to discuss the conditions and prepare an action plan.

Mr Exel advised a major launch was proposed to highlight the mackerel icefish fishery as one that adopts world's-best practice.

### Agenda item 9 – Illegal fishing at Macquarie Island

Mr Neave updated Members on the boarding of the vessel ‘Taruman’ which was suspected of operating illegally in the Macquarie Island Exclusive Economic Zone. He advised the boat had been boarded on the high seas with the authorisation of the flag state, Cambodia. The vessel was currently in Hobart and investigations were proceeding.

Mr Exel congratulated the Government for the apprehension, and requested that any catch data or other information about activity in the Macquarie Island EEZ be provided to scientists for use in the stock assessments for the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery. Mr Neave undertook to investigate the matter.

Action arising

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## **Agenda item 10 – Ecological risk assessment - update**

Mr Neave provided SARAG with an update on the timetable for the CSIRO Ecological Risk Assessment project. He advised that the researchers were unable to meet with SARAG in November and that they would be available for the following SARAG meeting, around April 2006.

Dr Constable advised he had recently been contacted by the researchers to assist with the provision of information.

## **Agenda item 11 – Other business**

Dr Gales sought an update on the seals that had been taken by longline this season.

Mr Scott advised that three elephant seals had been caught while operating in the HIMI Fishery, and two elephant seals were taken while operating at Elan Bank. (CCAMLR Statistical Division 58.4.3a). There was no apparent pattern and no seals had been sighted while fishing.

## **Agenda item 12 – Next meeting**

Mr Neave advised that the next meeting would be post CCAMLR and was scheduled for all day on 15 November and for the morning of 16 November. It would be followed by the annual public meeting of SouthMAC on the afternoon of 16 November and a formal SouthMAC meeting on 17 November.

The meeting closed at 4.25pm.