



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group (SARAG)

MINUTES
SARAG 26
22 MAY 2006



SUB- ANTARCTIC RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP (SARAG)

CHAIR: Dr Malcolm Haddon

Date: 22 May 2006

Attendance

Members

Dr Malcolm Haddon – Chair
Mr Peter Neave, AFMA
Dr Andrew Constable, AAD
Dr Dirk Welsford, AAD
Mr Barry Baker, AAD
Dr Graham Robertson, AAD
Dr Geoff Tuck, CSIRO
Dr Fred Pribac, CSIRO
Dr Rosemary Gales, DPIWE
Ms Leanna Tedesco, ABARE
Mr Martin Exel, Industry Member
Mr Les Scott, Industry Member

Apologies

Mr Stuart Richey, Industry

Observers

Ms Trysh Stone, AFMA
Dr Steve Candy, AAD
Dr Ian Ball, AAD

Introduction

Agenda item 1 - Preliminaries

The twenty-sixth meeting of the Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group (SARAG 26) was opened at 8.40am by the Chair, Dr Malcolm Haddon. He welcomed the attendance of Dr Dirk Welsford from AAD and Dr Fred Pribac from CSIRO as new Members, and Ms Trysh Stone (AFMA), Dr Steve Candy (AAD) and Dr Ian Ball (AAD) as observers.

Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Stuart Richey (Industry). Dr Rosemary Gales (DPIWE), Mr Barry Baker (AAD) and Dr Graham Robertson (AAD) attended the meeting from 12.45pm. Dr Welsford attended the meeting for part of the morning.

Declaration of interests

Messrs Martin Exel and Les Scott declared their interest on all agenda items. Mr Exel advised that his Company owns 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 nor of any legal action by his Company against AFMA. Mr Scott advised that his Company owns SFRs in the HIMI Fishery and he was not aware of any investigation or prosecution action by AFMA against his Company nor of any legal action by his Company against AFMA.

Adoption of agenda

SARAG adopted the agenda without change. The order in which the agenda items were discussed was altered to accommodate the availability of Members. The Minutes report on the items as they appeared on the agenda.

Agenda item 2 – Adoption of Minutes from SARAG 25

Comments were received at the meeting and incorporated into the Minutes. The Minutes from SARAG 25 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Agenda item 3 - Action arising from SARAG 25

SARAG discussed the actions arising from SARAG 25. Mr Neave updated the meeting on the status of each item.

1. **SARAG attendance** – Members agreed to have the September SARAG meeting each year as the meeting where all members should attend, as all issues relating to the fisheries would be discussed. At other times it was recommended that at least one seabird expert out of the three Members should attend each meeting. It was agreed the Chair would write to the relevant agencies to seek their agreement.

Action arising

2. **Seabird abundance data** - New formats and protocols have been agreed for use by observers. The abundance data will be directly entered into the fishlog database by observers, which will allow AAD immediate access to the data. Members were requested to consider the most useful format to present the data. It was agreed this issue would be further discussed at the next SARAG meeting.

Action arising

3. **Fisheries Assessment Plan (FAP)** - SARAG noted that the FAP for 2005/06 had been completed and signed by all statutory fishing right owners.
4. **Taruman catch data** - Mr Neave advised that the court case for the 'Taruman' has been scheduled for 6 weeks starting on 7 August 2006 and that no information was available at this stage. He undertook to investigate the availability of the catch information from the 'Taruman' for use in the stock assessment after the court case.

Action arising

5. **Antarctic fisheries data plan** – SARAG noted that the data plan for Antarctic fisheries had been finalised and provided to Members.

SARAG also discussed action arising items on Macquarie Island toothfish stock assessment under agenda item 6 and on seabird bycatch under agenda item 10.

Agenda item 4 – Correspondence

SARAG noted the correspondence sent on behalf of SARAG regarding CCAMLR processes and correspondence received out-of-session in relation to the Ministerial Direction. The correspondence was discussed under agenda items 10 and 8 respectively.

Stock Assessments

Agenda item 5 – Integrated HIMI stock assessment

Dr Andrew Constable updated the meeting on progress with the integrated stock assessment for Patagonian toothfish in the Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) Fishery. He advised that two workshops had been held on 14 – 15 March and 10 – 11 April 2006 to discuss the development of the integrated model. The aim of the workshops was to seek input from scientists, industry and managers on the parameters to be used in the new assessment, which uses the New Zealand developed CASAL package. The skippers from the three vessels which use different fishing methods (trawl, longline and pot) in the HIMI fishery were present at the second workshop.

Dr Constable provided the meeting with two papers (draft in confidence):

1. Review of the use of survey data and length-at-age models in the assessment of *Dissostichus eleginoides* in the vicinity of Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI); and



2. An integrated assessment of *Dissostichus eleginoides* in the vicinity of Heard Island and McDonald Islands (HIMI) using data from research surveys, a mark-recapture program and fisheries in the CASAL assessment software.

SARAG discussed the papers and the parameters used in the new assessments, and in particular on the strata used from various areas in the annual random stratified trawl survey (RSTS). Following the review of the RSTS data, an assessment using the generalised yield model (GYM), used historically in the annual toothfish assessment, will be undertaken and then compared with the outputs from the new integrated model.

The papers will be finalised for consideration at the July meeting of Working Group on Fish Stock Assessment's subgroup on Assessment Methods (SAM). A final assessment is expected in August after input and feedback from the SAM meeting.

Dr Constable advised that the results of the 2006 RSTS will be used to update the integrated assessment for the 2006 CCAMLR meeting. This would be further discussed at the September 2006 SARAG meeting.

Action arising

Agenda item 6 – Update on progress with the MITF stock assessment

Dr Geoff Tuck updated members on progress with the stock assessments for the Macquarie Island Toothfish Fishery (MITF). He advised that the last of the data from the March 2006 trip by the vessel 'Southern Champion' to Macquarie Island had been recently received from AAD. In view of the delays with data receipt, SARAG recommended that in future the data necessary for the stock assessments be electronically transmitted from the vessel upon completion of fishing at Macquarie Island.

Dr Tuck advised that he and Dr Pribac would run the tag based model which was used in previous stock assessments for the Aurora Trough. Dr Pribac advised that he would aim at getting the assessment for Aurora Trough done by 2 June 2006. SARAG agreed that the assessment would be considered out-of-session and that AFMA would coordinate a phone hook-up to discuss the results with available persons. SouthMAC and the Board would then be requested to consider the assessment out-of-session with a view to setting the total allowable catches (TACs) for the 2006/07 season.

Action arising

Dr Tuck advised that as there was limited activity in Macquarie Ridge in 2006 the assessment will update last year's assessment taking into account the catch taken in 2006 and natural mortality.

Mr Neave advised that the stock assessments would be incorporated in the request for tender document which was being prepared for the sale by tender of half the statutory fishing rights under the MITF Management Plan.

Agenda item 7 – MITF integrated stock assessment

SARAG agreed to consider the integrated assessment for the MITF at SARAG 27, scheduled for September 2006. Dr Tuck advised that he expected the necessary work would be completed by this time.

The integrated assessment is based on an age-structured model of fish population dynamics and uses a maximum likelihood framework to fit to tag-recapture data and catch length-frequencies. The model estimates virgin year-class strength and annual recruitment residuals relative to an estimate of average recruitment (providing estimates of annual cohort strength).



Ministerial Direction – Implications for Antarctic fisheries

Agenda item 8 – Requirements of the Ministerial Direction

Ms Stone outlined the requirements arising from the Ministerial Direction issued to AFMA in December 2005 by the then Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Senator Ian Macdonald. She advised that AFMA had prepared a response to the Direction for Antarctic fisheries, and that the Direction had limited impact as there are currently measures in place which address the issues raised.

Ms Stone advised that the HIMI Fishery was exempt from Section 2 of the Direction (Harvest Strategy) as it has an international management component through the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). However, the MITF was not exempt and consideration needed to be given to the harvest strategies used in that fishery. She advised that SARAG needed to document the target and limit reference points, the monitoring strategies and decision rules. It was agreed this should be considered in a workshop scheduled for March 2007.

Action arising

The requirement to address discarding was also discussed. SARAG noted that AFMA's Future Operating Environment document sets out AFMA's objectives in relation to managing discards:

- discarding of species subject to a total allowable catch limit or quota management will be illegal in all Commonwealth fisheries by 2007.
- assess and implement measures to significantly reduce bycatch in all Commonwealth fisheries, with the goal to halve it by 2008.

SARAG noted that 'Guide to Addressing Bycatch in Commonwealth Fisheries' which was prepared by AFMA refers to discards in relation to target species which in the case of the HIMI Fishery is Patagonian toothfish and mackerel icefish, and just Patagonian toothfish at Macquarie Island. There are no discards of these species and all catch comes off quota.

The levels of bycatch in Antarctic fisheries are considered to be low in comparison to other fisheries. The Antarctic Fisheries Bycatch Action Plan outlines the levels of bycatch for each of the fisheries (as a percentage against the target species).

- HIMI trawl – 1.16%
- HIMI longline – 9.16%
- Macquarie Island trawl – 13.84%

SARAG recognised that:

- there was no discarding of target species in sub-Antarctic and Antarctic fisheries by Australian operators;
- CCAMLR has encouraged the tagging of Patagonian toothfish, and the results of this work were critical for stock assessments;
- CCAMLR has endorsed the return of live and vigorous skates to the sea after being captured and to encourage the tagging of these species; and
- levels of bycatch in the fisheries were low and subject to precautionary catch limits, and it would not be realistic nor necessary to seek to halve the levels by 2008, as significant modifications to fishing gear and operations have already been undertaken to constrain bycatch levels.

SARAG noted that these issues would be discussed by SouthMAC at its next meeting on 26 June 2006. Mr Neave undertook to provide this advice to SouthMAC.

Action arising



Environment

Agenda item 9 – Review of environmental interactions and gear loss

SARAG noted the tables provided by AFMA which summarised seabird interactions, marine mammal interactions, gear loss and gear recovered.

Mr Neave advised that as a result of the of interactions in midwater trawl operations in the mackerel icefish fishery in 2005 Austral Fisheries Pty Ltd had imposed a series of mitigation measures and these were placed as conditions on statutory fishing rights for the 2005/06 season for mackerel icefish operations. The principle measures are:

- no midwater trawling for mackerel icefish during February and March; and
- at other times, midwater trawling will only occur at night;

Mr Exel updated the meeting on progress with the potting trials undertaken by the vessel 'South Princess' in the HIMI Fishery in the 2005/06 season. He advised that no seabirds or marine mammals had been taken. Pot losses had been higher than anticipated and the Company were looking at using a larger American designed pot which the Company trialled during the second trip. He also advised that biodegradable twine was used on the pot openings to address ghost fishing concerns.

Mr Baker noted with concern that 5 elephant seals (3 in the HIMI Fishery and 2 at Elan Bank which is outside the HIMI Fishery) had been taken in longline operations last season. Mr Scott advised that this because this was a rare and unpredictable event it was a difficult issue to mitigate against and he advised that the vessel was moved following each incident. He noted that no other incidents of seal captures had been reported to CCAMLR by other nations, and this was considered as highly unlikely.

Mr Scott undertook in future to try to lift any elephant seals taken aboard the vessel to enable some biological samples to be taken.

Dr Gales sought to get further details of the interactions. She undertook to contact Mr Scott on the available information.

Action arising

Agenda item 10 – Seabird bycatch limits

SARAG further discussed a proposal from Mr Baker, Dr Gales and Dr Robertson (which was first raised at SARAG 24 on 19 September 2005) to place limits on seabirds in Antarctic fishing operations.

Mr Baker advised that the Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Senator Ian Campbell, had recently agreed in principle to have seabird bycatch limits placed on all fishing methods (trawl, longline and pots) in Australia's sub-Antarctic fisheries. He advised the actual limits would be subject to negotiation. He advised that the lack of limits placed Australia in a difficult position when negotiating with other nations on seabird issues at CCAMLR, and that the black-browed albatross had been recently listed as a vulnerable species.

Ms Stone requested that AFMA be notified of the requirement in writing and the legislative framework in which the decision would be taken, and this should be in a letter from Senator Campbell to the Fisheries Minister, Senator Abetz, and the AFMA Chair, Tony Rundle. She advised that given the different implications that could be involved in different legislative regimes that AFMA was not in a position to respond until this information was provided.

Ms Stone stated that AFMA was prepared to work through the issues once the letter had been received but AFMA's preferred 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.



Mr Exel expressed his strong opposition to the proposal to introduce specific bycatch limits, and sought an explanation as to why Australian operators were being 'singled out' when other fisheries (eg: French operations in the adjacent EEZ around Kerguelen Island) were having a far greater impact on seabird populations. He advised that mitigation measures such as no offal discharge and night setting when midwater trawling had proved effective in limiting seabird interactions.

Mr Scott noted his Company's operations were covered by the longline Threat Abatement Plan where the target of 0.01 seabirds per 1000 hooks was proposed to apply. He was opposed to any limits being imposed that would close a fishery as a result of the actions of an operator, and that any limits should be on a per vessel basis. He also advised that if a seabird limit were to apply, the season at HIMI should be open all year round (instead of the current 1 May to 30 September), as it would be up to each operator to manage within a limit.

SARAG recognised that SouthMAC was the appropriate forum to further address the issue.

SARAG noted that a response to a letter written on behalf of SARAG and SouthMAC to Dr Tony Press, Director of the Australian Antarctic Division, had not yet been received. The letter had requested that consideration be given to the procedures for reviewing papers that are to be submitted to CCAMLR and its associated Committees and Working Groups. Members noted that an agreed procedure had been adopted for reviewing stock assessments carried out by AAD for Australian fisheries.

The letter recommended that a similar procedure should be applied to papers going to forums, such as the Working Group on Incidental Mortality Associated with Fishing (IMAF), where it impacted on Australian fishing operations. This would ensure that operational data was reviewed prior to being submitted to CCAMLR and that a whole of Government approach was adopted.

Agenda item 11 – Review of data from HIMI Conservation Zones

Mr Neave advised that a draft report will be prepared for the Minister for the Environment and Heritage on the conservation values and fishery values of the HIMI Conservation Zones by the end of 2006.

An analysis of the conservation values is being prepared by AAD and is expected to be completed in June. Dr Constable provided Members with a progress report on the conservation assessment.

SARAG agreed to hold a 1 day forum, to run in conjunction with the next SARAG meeting (September), to discuss the fishery values assessment and consider the conservation values analysis. Further fishing activity is expected to be undertaken this season. All fishing data will need to be made available by mid August.

Action arising

The aim of the forum will be to come up with recommendations to present to the Minister on appropriate management arrangements for the Conservation Zones.

Other

Agenda item 12 – Other business

No other business was discussed.

Agenda item 13 – Next meeting

The next meeting of SARAG was tentatively scheduled for September 2006. The meeting would include discussions on seabird bycatch, seabird abundance data, the HIMI Conservation Zones and the integrated assessments for the HIMI and MITF fisheries.

The meeting closed at 3.40pm.



