




Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



**Bass Strait  
Central Zone Scallop Fishery  
Management Advisory Committee &  
Resource Assessment Group  
(ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG)  
Joint Meeting**

**CHAIR'S SUMMARY  
7 MARCH 2005**

## **BASS STRAIT CENTRAL ZONE SCALLOP FISHERY MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (ScallopMAC) and Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG)**

**CHAIRS:** Mary Lack and Noel Coleman

**Date:** 7 March 2006

### **Present**

#### Members

Mary Lack	Chair (MAC)
Noel Coleman	Chair (RAG), Research member (MAC)
Phil Domaschenz	AFMA member (MAC & RAG)
Peter Stegmann	Industry member (MAC)
Tom Mellas	Industry (processor) member (MAC)
Allan Barnett	Industry member (MAC)
Jon Bryan	Conservation member (MAC)
Darren Fearnely	Industry member (RAG)
Malcolm Hadden	Scientific member (RAG)
Mike Dredge	Scientific member (RAG)
Kevin McLoughlin	Scientific member (RAG)
Alex Lynch	A/g Executive officer (MAC & RAG)

#### Permanent observers

Dallas D'Silva	Victorian government observer
Rod Pearn	Tasmanian government observer
Melissa Maly	Department of Environment and Heritage observer

#### Observers

Adrian Jackson	Industry
Spiros Katos	Industry
John Bennett	AFMA Board member
Julian Harrington	TAFI scientist
John Stivala	Victorian government

The main items on the ScallopMAC 15 and ScallopRAG 12 joint meeting agenda were; an overview of recent developments including the Minister's Direction to AFMA and AFMA's response; providing advice on the TAC for the 2006 fishing season; developing a harvest strategy; discussing measures to address discarding; and the 2006/07 budget.

### **Key Outcomes:**

1. ScallopMAC noted the Direction made to AFMA by the Federal Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation under section 91 of the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991* to set a zero TAC for the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery for at least 3 years from 2006. Noting the Direction and that AFMA is bound to comply with it the MAC decided not to make a recommendation on the TAC.
2. In making that decision the MAC recommended that the Board note:



- the MAC's deep concerns that the Minister did not seek its advice before issuing the Direction
  - That the decision was not consistent with the advisory and management decision making processes adopted by AFMA
  - That the Minister had failed to provide the rationale for his decision and had not identified the source and nature of the information on which he based the decision.
  - That there was no guarantee that a three-year zero TAC would generate recovery of the stock
  - That, while providing for the take of catch during the three year period for scientific research purposes, the direction would result in a drop in morale in the fishery and a reluctance of industry to participate in such research.
  - That the decision could contribute to a loss of processing infrastructure in the fishery and have a negative impact on the recently re-established market in France
3. The MAC noted the Ministerial Direction required the fishery to develop a harvest strategy. ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG provided advice on the key elements that should be incorporated in a harvest strategy. The MAC recommends that the Board note that given the zero TAC and the inability to derive income from the fishery over the next three years the MAC will need some financial assistance to support the development of the harvest strategy. The MAC will seek funding to contract Mike Dredge (ScallopRAG member) to develop the strategy with assistance from Rod Pearn (Manager, Tasmanian Scallop Fishery) and Noel Coleman (RAG Chair). The MAC seeks the Board's in-principle agreement, pending development of the terms of reference and development of a contract, that funding can be made available from the \$2m per year provided as part of the Securing our Fishing Future Package.
  4. ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG considered AFMA's new targets for reducing bycatch and discarding and discussed what these targets would mean for the scallop fishery. In particular, the MAC noted the inconsistency between the requirement to prohibit discarding of quota species in a fishery with a minimum size limit on the quota species. As requested, the MAC will provide advice to the AFMA Environment Committee about the appropriateness of the new targets related to quota and target species and the potential opportunities for reducing bycatch.
  5. ScallopMAC approved the 2006/07 budget for the fishery, noting that the management costs remained relatively high considering that no catch could be taken during the year.
  6. ScallopMAC considered the need for an industry survey in 2006, noting the advice of Mr Adrian Jackson (observer) that a number of Victorian fishers were available to undertake the survey in order to collect information that could potentially be used as a basis for seeking a reconsideration by the Minister of the zero TAC, and to provide additional information to SFR holders on which to base their decision on whether to tender for the structural adjustment package. The MAC decided not to recommend



that a survey be conducted in late March 2006 to collect more data to determine the extent of the central zone scallop resource.

### **The 2006 Total Allowable Catch (TAC)**

ScallopMAC noted the Direction made to AFMA by the Federal Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation under section 91 of the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991* to set a zero total allowable catch for the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery for at least 3 years from 2006. The MAC expressed its deepest concerns that the Minister did not seek its advice before issuing the Direction, while the RAG was disappointed that the considerable expertise of its members had not been utilised.

There was considerable discussion centred around what data the Minister had to form his position on the TAC. In this light an observer, Mr Adrian Jackson, suggested that a survey be conducted in late March 2006 to collect more data to determine the extent of the central zone scallop resource. The dual aims of the suggested survey were to collect information that could potentially be provided to Minister to trigger a rethink of the decision to have a zero TAC for at least three years, and to provide additional information to SFR holders on which to base their decision on whether to tender for the structural adjustment package. The suggestion was considered by the MAC and although some members felt that the suggestion had merit the MAC ultimately decided not to support the proposed survey.

ScallopRAG was asked hypothetically what advice it would have provided to the MAC on the TAC in the absence of the intervention by the Minister. Noting the relatively small amount of information collected through the November 2005 survey and the uncertainty about interpretation of the decision rules based on that data the MAC was advised that a small TAC may have been recommended. The MAC, when considering the RAG's advice, was reminded that they had previously considered the idea of setting a zero TAC to promote a faster recovery of the stock and that this idea had received considerable support at the April 2005 meeting. Noting the Minister's Direction and the absence of sufficient data to mount a strong case for a TAC, the MAC decided not to make a recommendation on the TAC.

### **Industry Status**

It was reported that there are scattered patches of scallops in the central zone in the area north of the closure. In 2005 the central zone fishery landed 160 tonnes shell weight from outside the closure while 12 tonnes shell weight was taken during research surveys. There were approximately 30 trips conducted by a total of 13 vessels.

The beach price for scallop meat was reported to be around \$12/kg with \$13 to \$14/kg expected next season. The French market is currently very strong with only 15 to 20% of demand being supplied. There is an expectation that better prices could be achieved if the industry could provide a steady supply of product. The local market is also strong with very little product from Queensland and Western Australia on the market. The cost of leasing quota is currently around 15% of the value of catch.

### **Harvest Strategy**

ScallopRAG noted the presentation "Harvest Strategies – what they are and how they work" and discussed the principals of a harvest strategy as outlined in that presentation in the context of how they relate to the scallop fishery. There was concern that the 40/20 notion of reducing exploitation rates when biomass drops to 40% of pre-fished levels and ceasing



fishing altogether when biomass is below 20% of pre-fished levels cannot be effectively applied to the scallop fishery for reasons including:

- the uncertainty surrounding estimates of the unfished biomass
- such a strategy was based largely on relatively long lived northern hemisphere finfish species with relatively regular and predictable spawning success whereas scallops were a relatively short lived (<10years) with very variable spawning success
- such a strategy ignores 'space' and scallops beds are generally scattered patchily across a fishery with considerable variability of ages in each bed.

The MAC and RAG consequently considered what principals should guide a scallop harvest strategy and provided the following recommendation:

The strategy should:

- be focused on the number of scallop beds or paddocks (areas of scallops that can be fished) rather than biomass;
- ensure that scallop stocks are sufficiently dispersed and abundant to support systematic rotational fishing of different areas across years;
- ensure that continuity of fishing activity can be maintained (ie. in times of high scallop abundance harvesting should be spread over successive years); and
- maintain a high degree of confidence (80%) that fishing is sustainable.

ScallopMAC noted that the feasibility and benefits from the use of rotational fishing may be increased if the BSCZSF was part of a broader Victorian and/or Tasmanian fishery. The MAC reiterated its support for rationalisation of the jurisdictional arrangements.

ScallopMAC recommended that funding support be sort from AFMA to contract Mike Dredge (ScallopRAG member) to develop the strategy with assistance from Rod Pearn (Manager, Tasmanian Scallop Fishery) and Noel Coleman (Chair, ScallopRAG). The MAC asked AFMA develop the terms of reference for the development of a harvest strategy for circulation to members out of session.

### **Discards and Bycatch**

ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG considered AFMA's response to the Minister's Direction in relation to discards and bycatch. The MAC discussed the inconsistency between the requirement in the Guide to Addressing Bycatch to make discarding of quota species illegal and the use of minimum size regulations in fisheries such as the scallop fishery. There was an overwhelming view that in relation to the discarding of quota species the scallop fishery was in a relatively unique position in that it was considered a desirable occurrence. Commercial scallops are generally only discarded because they are under the regulated size limit. The MAC noted however that doughboy scallops are discarded mainly because of poor market prospects. The RAG formed the general consensus, noting earlier work by Richard



McLoughlin, that there was sufficient scientific evidence to indicate that the survival rate of discarded scallops was high. The MAC recommended that this advice should be provided to the AFMA Environment Committee.

There were limited discussions on bycatch, the RAG supported the principle that the fishery should move to a management regime similar to that used in Tasmania whereby most of the fishery is closed while small areas of high scallop abundance are opened to fishing. There is evidence to suggest that this approach minimises bycatch as areas of high scallop abundance are generally characterised by a low abundance of other species. The MAC and RAG requested that AFMA further develop advice on this issue for consideration by members out of session before providing advice to the AFMA Environment Committee.

### **ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG Membership**

ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG noted that Allan Barnett has filled the vacant industry member position on the MAC, and that Alex Lynch had filled the vacant executive officer positions on the MAC and RAG. The MAC also noted the resignation of Geoff Richey from the industry positions on the MAC and RAG. The MAC and RAG welcomed the new members and expressed their appreciation of the long standing contribution that Geoff has made to these forums.

### **Other Items**

ScallopMAC noted the work plan, budget, compliance update and compliance plan with some minor comments.

### **Next Meeting**

ScallopMAC decided that a subgroup of the MAC will meet with the AFMA Board in May. The MAC has recommended that meetings be reduced in frequency to one meeting per year in order to reduce costs. The preliminary date for the next meeting is March 2007, although this may be brought forward to the end of 2006 if this is needed to finalise the harvest strategy.

ScallopRAG agreed to meet in August to discuss research proposals, scientific surveys and the harvest strategy.

Mary Lack

Noel Coleman

Chair, ScallopMAC

Chair ScallopRAG

