



ScallopFAG

Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery Assessment Group

FISHERY ASSESSMENT REPORT – Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery

Update for 2003

In March 2003 the Department of the Environment and Heritage declared the scallop fishery an approved Wildlife Trade Operation. Two conditions placed on the granting of this approval were that the vulnerability of doughboy scallops to overfishing be assessed and that areas be closed to fishing by 30 June 2005.

A review of available data on doughboy scallops was undertaken. Doughboys are widely distributed along the southern and south-east coasts of Australia. They are abundant throughout the area of the Central Zone scallop fishery, as well as in adjacent waters of Victoria and Tasmania, and may be found in areas and habitats that are not accessible to the scallop fishery. Although fishers are permitted to take doughboy scallops, and there is a total allowable catch of 100 tonnes; there is at present no fishery for this species. They are taken as bycatch during fishing for commercial scallops but are returned to the sea. The widespread distribution of doughboys, their abundance and the fact that they are not a target species all suggest that they are not currently vulnerable to overfishing.

Area closures, required as a condition of declaring the scallop fishery an approved Wildlife Trade Operation, are of three kinds: unfishable areas; areas of representative habitats and ecological communities in areas of the fishery where fishing does not currently occur; and areas of representative habitats and ecological communities in areas where fishing does currently occur. Independently of the process of fisheries assessment, the Department of the Environment and Heritage has identified 11 Broad Areas of Interest in southeastern Australia. Marine Protected Areas will be established within these Broad Areas of Interest and will require the closure of areas to fishing.

The timetable for area closures required as the result of fisheries assessment and the timetable for closures required by the creation of Marine Protected Areas are different. Industry was therefore concerned that they could lose areas to fishing under both processes when one set of closures might satisfy both requirements. ScallopMAC therefore made representation to the Department of the Environment and Heritage asking that timetables for choosing closures under the two processes be brought into line with each other, or that some other process be put in place for rationalising closures.

A further survey of the closed area east of Flinders Island was carried out in March 2003 (Haddon and Semmens 2003). Recruitment appeared to have been fairly limited in 2002. Large numbers of scallops in excess of 80 mm shell length were found and the proportion of scallops below 80 mm was low (<20%) in some areas. The oldest scallops were estimated to be 6+ years old. The proportion of clappers was low (mostly <1%) at all stations, suggesting low rates of natural mortality.

Estimating abundance and biomass was difficult because the proportion of scallops caught in the sampling gear is not known. Assuming 100% of the scallops were caught gave an estimated abundance of 29 million and assuming only 20% were caught gave an estimate of 143 million. Mean estimates of total biomass were 2,868 tonnes assuming 100% of scallops were caught and 14,338 tonnes assuming only 20% were caught.

On the basis of the survey results, areas 1, 2 and 3 (of the closed area) were opened to fishing in 2003. Estimates of biomass in these strata ranged from 1,457 tonnes to 2,615 tonnes (Haddon and Semmens 2003; Haddon et al. 2004). As in previous years, the remainder of the Central Zone was also open to fishing.

The catch taken from areas 1, 2 and 3 was 1,344 tonnes. An additional 75 tonnes was taken from areas close by but outside of the closed area. Given the uncertainties involved in carrying out stock assessments, the agreement between the estimated biomass and the actual catch was close. Subsequent survey work, carried out in 2004 (Haddon et al. 2004), showed that some commercial size scallops remained in these areas. The fact that the beds may not have been fully exploited during the 2003 season resulted from problems in marketing the catch.

Due to poor fishing seasons over the last few years, the supply of scallops from both State and Commonwealth fisheries in Bass Strait has been limited and has lacked continuity. As a result, the processing sector has declined and the local market has become dominated by imported scallops.

At the start of the season there was little demand for local scallops. Although demand increased as the season progressed, processors received more scallops than could be marketed fresh and a portion of the catch was frozen and stored. Because of the difficulties in marketing fresh scallops, fishing effort during the season was more limited than would otherwise have been the case.

References

Haddon, M. and Semmens, J. M. (2003). Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Survey, March 2003. AFMA Final Report for Project No. 2003/R01/1192. Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute, Taroona, Tasmania.

Haddon M., Semmens J.M. and Harrington, J. (2004). Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Survey, March 2004. FRDC Project No. 2003/017, Tasmanian Aquaculture and Fisheries Institute, Taroona Tasmania.