



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG) Meeting 34

Meeting minutes

8 April 2020

Teleconference

Agenda item 1 Preliminaries

1.1 Welcome and apologise

The Chair welcomed members and observers to the meeting and made an Acknowledgement of Country statement recognising the Traditional Owners of the many lands in which we met and payed respect to Elders past, present and emerging.

Attendees	Membership
Brendan Kelaher	Chair
John Cull	Industry Member
Stuart Richey	Industry Member
Jayson Semmens	Scientific Member
Nic Marton	Scientific Member
Mervi Kangas	Scientific Member
Julian Morison	Economic Member
Daniel Corrie	AFMA Member
Heather Johnston	Executive Officer
Anna Willock	AFMA, Observer

1.2 Declarations of interest

ScallopRAG (the RAG) members followed the conflict of interest declarations as outlined in Fisheries Administration Paper 12. Members and participants reviewed and updated the Declarations of Interest included at Attachment B

John Cull and Stuart Richey declared a potential conflict with agenda item 2 '2020 biomass survey'. Mr Cull and Mr Richey left the meeting while the RAG considered their interests and how they should be managed. The RAG decided they could be part of the discussion, but should not participate in forming any RAG recommendations for agenda item 2.

1.3 Adoption of agenda

The agenda at **Attachment A** was adopted by the RAG as final.

Agenda item 2 - 2020 Biomass survey

AFMA introduced the agenda item, asking the RAG to provide advice to the AFMA Commission on the potential sustainability risks of not undertaking the 2020 biomass survey and consider

supporting setting the 2020 total allowable catch (TAC) above 150 t in the absence of a 2020 biomass survey.

The RAG noted the following advice from AFMA:

- The BSCZSF Harvest Strategy (the Harvest Strategy) requires the annual Commercial Scallop TAC to be set at 150 t, unless the following criteria are met:
 - Tier 1 (1000 t – 2000 t)**
 - An area (consisting of one or more defined, substantial beds of scallops) containing not less than 1500 t biomass of scallops of a size limit of 85 mm of high density scallops is closed to fishing for the entire season.
 - Tier 2 (above 2000 t)**
 - An area (consisting of one or more defined, substantial beds of scallops) containing not less than 3000 t biomass of scallops of a size limit of 85 mm of high density scallops is closed to fishing for the entire season.
- Setting a Commercial Scallop TAC above 150 t in the absence of a biomass survey will require stepping outside the requirements of the Harvest Strategy.
- AFMA have received formal requests from industry, including from Mr Bob Lister and Mr Andrew Sullivan on behalf of their respective industry associations, to cancel the 2020 biomass survey.
- The requests to cancel the surveys are due largely to Covid-19 related health concerns and industry's ability to abide by Government guidelines on social distancing and non-essential travel, and this has been supported by the operators of the vessels being considered to undertake they survey this year.
- If the AFMA Commission take the decision to cancel the 2020 biomass survey, ScallopRAG will be asked to provide formal advice regarding TAC and closures advice in early May 2020 based on a review of recent biomass survey results.

In formulating its advice, the RAG noted the following:

- The impact of Covid-19 is unprecedented, and under normal circumstances the RAG would recommend following the Harvest Strategy.
- While there is some inherent risk in not undertaking the 2020 biomass survey, these can be managed or mitigated, and some flexibility in the application of the harvest strategy is appropriate to prevent effectively closing the fishery.
- The biomass survey has been undertaken since 2015, which provides a useful time series to support decision making if the 2020 biomass survey was cancelled.
- 2019 was the largest biomass surveyed in recent years, although this is not directly comparable to previous surveys due to an increased number of beds surveyed.

- The 2019 Commercial Scallop TAC was set at 3,897 tonnes, approximately 8.2 per cent of the known biomass, of which 2,931 t, or 75 per cent of the TAC, was caught.
- Four closures were put in place in 2019 which protected approximately 10,189 t of adult scallops, or 22 per cent of the estimated spawning biomass surveyed. This is 7,000 tonnes more than what is required under the Harvest Strategy for a Tier 2 TAC.
- The Bass Strait Scallop Industry Association (BSSIA), in conjunction with Fishwell Consulting, has submitted a proposal to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) for an industry-led project to collect in-season catch and effort data. However, the data is unlikely to be used to support management decisions in 2020.

In light of the above the RAG provided the following advice on the potential sustainability risks of not undertaking the 2020 biomass survey:

The results of recent biomass surveys show the stock is healthy, and recent catches are sustainable. The risk to sustainability of setting a Commercial Scallop TAC in the absence of a 2020 biomass survey is relatively low, and can be further mitigated by considering additional measures such as:

- additional closures to protect biomass, with a particular focus on beds containing undersized scallops and recent recruitment;
- application of a discount factor to account for the uncertainty in not having a recent biomass estimate; and
- collecting in-season data as a means of monitoring for sudden changes in bed dynamics, including ageing or dying beds, and areas of new recruitment.

ScallopRAG supported setting the 2020 Commercial Scallop TAC above the default opening of 150 t in the absence of a biomass survey, and will consider measures to appropriately mitigate risk when it meets in early May 2020 to recommend a TAC and closures.

Close of meeting

The RAG noted that the Executive officer will contact members to organise the date for ScallopRAG 35.

The Chair thanked the RAG for their contribution to the meeting and wished industry all the best in the season under the difficult circumstances.

The meeting was closed at 11.00 am.

Attachment A



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Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG)

Meeting 34 – 8 April 2020

1.1 Agenda

Time (EDT): 10.00-11.30

Approximate time	Item
10.00	Agenda item 1. Preliminaries 1.1 Welcome and apologies 1.2 Declaration of interests 1.3 Adoption of agenda
10.15	Agenda item 2. 2020 biomass survey <i>ScallopRAG to provide advice on the sustainability risks of not completing the 2020 BSCZSF biomass survey</i> Attachment A – BSCZSF Harvest Strategy
11.30	Close

Attachment B- register of interest

Name	Membership	Declared interests
Brendan Kelaher	Chair	No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Nic Marton	Scientific	ABARES employee. Organisation is known to submit research funding application for consideration by ScallopRAG
Jayson Semmens	Scientific	Scallop Research Group Leader, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies. Organisation is known to submit research funding applications for consideration by ScallopRAG
Stuart Richey	Industry	Holds Commonwealth and State concessions.
John Cull	Industry	Holds Commonwealth and State concessions.
Mervi Kangas	Scientific	Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, WA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Julian Morison	Economic	Director, Kuti Co Pty Ltd – SA Pipi quota holder, Director, BDO Advisory (SA) Pty Ltd - current contracts with SA & Qld state governments collecting fisheries economic data, providing economic advice; Member, SA Snapper Management Advisory Committee (PIRSA), Economics member, Shark Resource Assessment Group (AFMA), Member, Economics Working Group (AFMA), Member, Human Dimensions Research subprogram Steering Committee (FRDC), Principal & coinvestigator on several FRDC research projects
Dan Corrie	AFMA member	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Heather Johnston	Executive Officer	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise.
Anna Willock	Observer, AFMA	AFMA employee. No interest in the fishery pecuniary or otherwise