



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Small Pelagic Fishery Resource Assessment Group (SPF RAG) Meeting 04

Meeting minutes

07-08 December 2021

Microsoft Teams

The Chair opened the meeting at 0930.

Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

1.1 Welcome and apologise

1. Max Kitchell, 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.
2. SPF RAG (the RAG) members noted the Acknowledgement of Country; that the meeting was being recorded and commenced proceedings.
3. It was noted Anissa Lawrence was not present for Day 1 of the proceedings.

4. Membership

| <i>SPF RAG Members</i> | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Mr Max Kitchell | Chair |
| Mr Gerry Geen | Industry Member |
| Dr Tim Ward | Scientific Member |
| Dr Andrew Penney | Scientific Member |
| Prof Caleb Gardner | Economic Member |
| Mr Malcolm Poole | Recreational Member |
| Ms Anissa Lawrence | Conservation Member (Day 2 only) |
| Dr Lara Ainley | AFMA Member |
| Mr Max Bayly | Executive Officer |
| <i>Invited Participants</i> | |
| A/Prof Jeremy Lyle | Invited Participant (Virtual) |
| Mr Tony Muollo | Invited Participant (Virtual) |
| Dr Gretchen Grammer | Presenter (Agenda Item 3-4) (Day 1 only) |
| <i>Observers</i> | |
| Dr John Stewart | State Observer (NSW) (Virtual) |
| Ms Frances Seaborn | State Observer (Tas) (Virtual) (apologies from 10-11 am) |
| Ms Rocio Noriega Tronoso | ABARES Observer (Virtual) |
| Ms Fiona Hill | AFMA Observer |

1.2 Declarations of interest

5. The RAG members followed the conflict of interest declarations as outlined in *Resource Assessment Groups - Fisheries Administration Paper 12*. Members and participants reviewed and updated the Declarations of Interest included at **Attachment A**.
6. Regarding potential conflicts with agenda items, the following interests were declared:
 - Tim Ward, John Stewart and Caleb Gardner declared conflicts of interest for agenda item 10
 - Mr Muollo declared a conflict of interest for agenda item 4.
7. The RAG agreed that the members with declared conflicts should participate in the discussion for agenda item 10, however should not take part in the formation of any recommendations.
8. The RAG agreed that Mr Muollo should participate in the discussion for agenda item 4, but not take part in formation of recommendations for agenda item 4.

1.3 Adoption of agenda

9. The RAG adopted the Agenda (**Attachment B**) as final.

1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

10. The RAG noted the final minutes of the SPF RAG meeting of 01 July 2021, which are available on the [AFMA website](#) ('Fisheries Management' – 'Committees' - Resource Assessment Groups' - 'SPFRAG').

1.5 Actions arising from previous meetings

11. The RAG noted the Action Items and updates from previous meetings at **Attachment C**.
12. The RAG noted concerns surrounding the 5 boat confidentiality rule. AFMA provided an update on the Information Disclosure Policy review which is currently underway. **The RAG requested an update on the review process at its next meeting.**

Agenda Item 2 – Review of Fishery Performance / ERA Annual Checklist

13. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item, presenting data on bycatch and protected species interactions.
14. The RAG noted the following:
 - Some species are not in the appropriate lists for their classification e.g. blue marlin and manta rays.
 - Some of the larger species in the bycatch list (such as large sharks, rays, marlins) may be more appropriately reported as number of interactions rather than estimated weight.
 - Discarded species reported as "Oceanic mixed" are mostly mackerel species that cannot be identified as they were present in shots that were not able to be brought on board for various reasons.
 - Species that are high risk under the ERA results or of greater conservation concern should be examined in finer detail for future RAG meetings.

15. The RAG requested that AFMA determine the possibility of recording life status for key species of interest (e.g. sharks, rays, sunfish).

- Mr Muollo raised concerns of requiring additional work from the skippers.

16. **The RAG recommended AFMA highlight the conservation status of TEP species for future meetings and provide greater detail for species of greater conservation dependence (e.g. grey nurse sharks, albatross) and general interest (e.g. dolphins).**

17. The RAG completed the Annual ERA Checklist for the Mid-water Trawl (MWT) sector of the SPF. The following key points were noted:

- Since the reference period of the last ERA (2012-2016), new areas have been fished.
- There have been changes to mitigation measures for TEP interactions in the fishery. While the gear is similar, it is smaller on the current fishing operation than from the ERA reference period and the deployment of barrier nets has changed.

The completed SPF MWT Annual ERA Checklist is at Attachment D.

Action Item 1. AFMA will investigate currently available data, through logbooks and observer reports, to provide greater clarity in bycatch reporting around species of interest identified by the SPFRAG.

Agenda Item 3 – Redbait East DEPM Survey Results

18. Dr Gretchen Grammer presented the Redbait East DEPM survey results. The RAG noted the following key points:

- The spawning area was 19,715 km² (34 % of the 57,486 km² sampled).
- The sex ratio estimate was 0.5 in the 2020 survey. In 2005 and 2006 it was 0.3 and 0.4 respectively.
- There remains uncertainty surrounding the values of egg production in the data due to difficulties in sampling young eggs.
- A base case scenario of 54,017 tonnes was recommended as the estimate for the Redbait East stock.

Agenda Item 4 – Annual Fishery Assessment

19. Dr Gretchen Grammer presented the Annual Fishery Assessment. A full summary of RAG discussion can be found at Appendix A – SPF Species Summary.

Agenda Item 5 – RBC Advice for all SPF quota species for the 2022-23 SPF fishing season

20. The RAG agreed to a new biomass estimate, accepting the recently completed DEPM results, for redbait east and provided advice on the RBCs for all SPF quota species 2022-23 SPF fishing season. A summary of the RAG advice is provided at Appendix A – SPF Species Summary.
21. The RAG recommended the RBCs for each stock be rounded to the nearest 100 tonnes.

Agenda Item 6 – SPF Harvest Strategy Update

22. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item, seeking advice from the RAG concerning an update to the SPF Harvest Strategy (the Strategy), in particular the inclusion of text relating to the explicit consideration of harvest control rules.
23. Noting that the exploitation rates for all SPF stocks are currently well below the maximum exploitation rates at Tier 1, The RAG recommended the following text be incorporated into the Strategy to address concerns raised by the Marine Stewardship Council:
 - *“Within three years of the fishery reaching Tier 1 exploitation rates for any stock, advice from SPFRAG will be sought regarding the development of harvest control rules that reduce the exploitation rate if the spawning biomass declines below the target reference point (B50, i.e. 50% of unfished biomass*) and towards the limit reference point (B20, i.e. 20% of unfished biomass). SPFRAG will consider implementing threshold reference points that trigger lower exploitation rates that minimise the probability of the spawning biomass declining towards the point of recruitment impairment (limit reference point) and include options for increasing the frequency of data collection to enable the detection of unexpected declines in productivity.”*
 - *The proxy for unfished biomass (B0) is the largest reliable estimate of spawning biomass for each species obtained using the DEPM.
24. The RAG discussed the limit and target reference points outlined in the Strategy:
 - Some members suggested the limit reference points were not precautionary enough and did not adequately take into account the effects of climate change.
 - The RAG noted that the level of dependence of small pelagic fish on Australian marine ecosystems is not as great as it is in other parts of the world.
 - The current reference points in the Strategy are strongly justified by available science.
 - Significant MSE testing was conducted in developing the current exploitation rates prescribed under the Strategy to ensure they are sufficiently precautionary.
 - The Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy (the Policy) guides the objectives of AFMA’s Harvest Strategies to optimise the sustainable harvest of stocks.
 - The RAG noted that the Policy does not explicitly consider the biomass of fish that should remain in the water to ensure the ecosystem can function properly.

- The Strategy was developed considering ecosystem function and the role that small pelagic fish play in the food web of Southeast Australia and noted research, such as that conducted by Beth Fulton, in determining the reference points in the Strategy.
- Having a target reference point of B50 in the Strategy provides sufficient opportunity to put management arrangements in place before the limit reference point is reached. The intention is to ensure that stocks remain near or above this target, well above the limit reference level.

25. AFMA noted a handbook to address the impacts of climate change is being developed and relevant committees will be consulted over the coming years.

26. The RAG recommended the next review of the SPF Harvest Strategy consider the limit and target reference points as well as the impacts of climate change.

27. The Chair closed the meeting for Day 1 at 1530.

Agenda Item 7 – SPF Underwater Camera Project

28. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item, noting an apology from Dr Wakeford who was unable to present the agenda item.

29. The AFMA member introduced the report and highlighted the main findings, noting the 2 key recommendations arising from the project:

- Improve the tautness of the barrier net and therefore the likelihood of successful mitigation. The barrier net is a screen of mesh that is sewn inside the trawl net to prevent larger animals to pass into the cod-end and to channel them towards the escape hood and out of the net.
- Reconsider data regarding the relationship between tow depth and dolphin interactions.

30. The RAG discussed the need to clearly define the forward barrier net because a barrier net was used on the Geelong Star operations, but is different to the forward barrier net being used now.

31. The RAG noted SPFIA have commenced a project following on from the outcomes of this report to continue to develop effective mitigation in the SPF MWT sector.

Agenda Item 8 – SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan

32. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item seeking RAG support for the draft SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan. If supported, the draft Workplan plan will be taken to the South East Management Advisory Committee (SEMAC) for support.

33. The RAG supported the draft Workplan and recommended it be taken to the next meeting of SEMAC for comment.

Agenda Item 9 – SPF Five Year Strategic Research Plan

34. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item, seeking RAG support for the draft SPF Five Year Strategic Research Plan. If supported, the draft research plan will be taken to the SEMAC for comment.

35. The RAG supported the SPF Five Year Strategic Research Plan and recommended that it be taken to SEMAC for comment and support.

Agenda Item 10 – SPF Annual Research Priorities 2023-24

36. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item, seeking advice from the RAG on the contents of the draft 2023-24 Annual Research Statement, which was provided to the RAG prior to the meeting.

37. The RAG noted no new research priorities included in the 2023-24 Annual Research Statement. It was further noted the any DEPM surveys in the western sub-area of the fishery are currently considered a low priority due to a lack of fishing effort.

38. The RAG identified potential future research priorities, including spatially explicit fisheries risk assessments for key species in the SPF.

39. Members who declared a conflict of interest for this agenda item left the meeting while a recommendation was made. The RAG supported the SPF Annual Research Priority 2023/23 noting no research priorities other than those that are currently funded.

Agenda Item 11 – Review of the SPF Dolphin Strategy

40. The AFMA member introduced the agenda item, noting a review of the SPF Dolphin Strategy (the Strategy) is underway and seeking RAG advice on analysis completed by AFMA while developing interim management arrangements.

41. The AFMA member updated the RAG on current management arrangements, including those prescribed under the Strategy and the interim management arrangements that were put in place 1 November 2021.

42. The interim management arrangements are to be in place until the review of the Strategy is completed. They include a winter move on rule, a maximum interaction cap and a variation of how the interaction rate can be calculated.

43. The RAG supported the analysis completed by AFMA during the early stages of the review and recommended the following:

- **Examine the correlation between number of dolphin interactions (or interaction events) and sea temperature.**
- **Use an interaction rate, rather than number of interactions, which is a better indicator of impact.**
- **The spatial extent (i.e. smaller move on grids) of the move on rule could be examined further.**

44. The industry representatives commented on the practical implications of the current strategy from an industry perspective:

- The interaction rate does not assist in minimising TEP interactions, but rather leads to fishers inflating their effort in order to keep the rate low which may, counter-intuitively, increase the risk of TEP interactions.

- Interactions that may be considered as “bad luck events” do occur in the fishery and this should be considered in the Strategy.
- A six month exclusion will likely cause the fishery to shut down because of minimal boats operating in the SPF and this may deter further investment into the fishery.

45. The RAG discussed the following key points concerning the Strategy:

- The Strategy was developed as a way to incentivise industry to change fishing behaviour to minimise interactions with dolphins.
- The interaction rate is the key performance indicator within the Strategy and is important in monitoring the likelihood of an interaction.
- Social perspective is important but the review should primarily focus on the biological factors such as sustainability and populations size.
- The Commonwealth has not accepted a Potential Biological Removal (PBR) for dolphins as it does not align with the legislative objective to avoid and minimise protected species interactions.

46. The RAG agreed there needs to be a better way to incentivise industry to develop innovative mitigation measures to reduce interactions, including the use of scientific permits.

47. The RAG agreed that the interim management arrangements are an important step forward and would better incentivise changes to fishing behaviours than the current management arrangements in the Strategy, such as those associated with the interaction rate.

48. The RAG supported the recommendation that the interaction rate be used as a monitoring tool (in events where an interaction occurs and the number of dolphins interacted with) while a review of the Strategy is being completed.

49. The RAG further supported the use of the interaction rate as a monitoring tool in the revised Strategy.

Agenda item 12 – Other Business

50. The RAG discussed other business raised by the recreation member, noting the issues raised were outside of the scope of the RAG.

51. The AFMA member agreed the AFMA website was out of date, however had not been a priority for the section in the last year.

52. The AFMA member noted the catch-watch reports had been updated overnight in response to the Recreational Member’s comments.

53. The Chair noted RAG membership is due for renewal in June 2022 and thanked the RAG for their tenure as members, invited participants and observers.

Close of meeting

54. The Chair thanked the RAG for their contribution and closed the meeting at 1410.

Attachment A - Agenda

| Day 01 | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|------------------|
| 7 December 2021 | | | |
| Approximate time | Item | Purpose | Lead presenter |
| 09:30 (30 min) | Agenda item 1. Preliminaries | | |
| | 1.1 Welcome and apologies | For action | Chair |
| | 1.2 Declaration of interests | For action | Chair |
| | 1.3 Adoption of agenda | For action | Chair |
| | 1.4 Minutes from previous meeting | For noting | Chair |
| | 1.5 Actions arising from previous meetings | For noting | AFMA |
| 10:00 (20 min) | Agenda item 2. Review of fisheries performance: Update on bycatch and protected species interactions | For noting | AFMA |
| 10:30 (45 min) | Agenda item 3. Redbait East DEPM results | For noting | Gretchen Grammer |
| 11:15 (45 min) | Agenda item 4. Annual Fishery Assessment | For discussion | Gretchen Grammer |
| Morning Tea Break (15 mins) | | | |
| 12:15 (90 min) | Agenda item 5. RBC advice for all SPF quota species for the 2022-23 fishing season | For advice | AFMA |
| Lunch Break (30 mins) | | | |
| 14:15 (60 mins) | Agenda item 6. SPF Harvest Strategy Update | For advice | AFMA |

Day 02**8 December 2021**

| Approximate time | Item | Purpose | Lead Presenter |
|-----------------------------|--|----------------|-----------------------|
| 09:30 (45 mins) | Agenda item 7. SPF Underwater Camera Project | For noting | John Wakeford |
| 10:15 (45 mins) | Agenda item 8. SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan | For advice | AFMA |
| Morning Tea Break (15 mins) | | | |
| 11:15 (30 mins) | Agenda item 9. SPF Five Year Strategic Research Plan 2022-26 | For advice | AFMA |
| 11:45 (30 mins) | Agenda item 10. SPF Annual Research Priorities 2023-24 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Review of SPF research proposals for 2022-23 | For advice | AFMA |
| Lunch (30 mins) | | | |
| 12:15 (90 mins) | Agenda item 11. Review of the SPF Dolphin Strategy | For advice | AFMA |
| 13:45 (15 min) | Agenda item 12. Other Business | For discussion | AFMA |
| 14:00 (5 min) | Agenda item 13. Next Meeting December 2022 – Annual assessment of SPF stocks and RBC advice, Research Priorities 2024-25 | For noting | AFMA |
| 14:05 | Close | | |

Attachment B- Declarations of Interest

| Name | Membership | Declared interests |
|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| Mr Max Kitchell | Chair | No interest, pecuniary or otherwise, in the SPF. Chair of the Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Advisory Committee. |
| Mr Gerry Geen | Industry Member | A partner in Seafish Tasmania Pty Ltd that holds a SESSF trawl boat SFR. |
| Dr Tim Ward | Scientific Member | <p>Associate Professor in Fisheries Science Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) College of Sciences and Engineering University of Tasmania</p> <p>Director, Pelamis Pty Ltd Pelamis is an environmental consulting company that has started a small project for SPFIA. The aim of the project is to evaluate the effectiveness of the forward barrier net.</p> |
| Dr Andrew Penney | Scientific Member | Director of Pisces Australis (Pty) Ltd which has a potential interest in research in relation to the SPF. |
| Prof Caleb Gardner | Economic Member | No interest, pecuniary or otherwise, in the SPF. Employee of Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), which conducts research on a range of fisheries issues including at times the SPF. |
| Mr Malcolm Poole | Recreational Member | <p>No pecuniary interest</p> <p>Recfish Australia - Treasurer and RFANSW member NSW delegate Recreational Fishing Alliance of NSW RFANSW - Committee Member and Recreational Fishing Safety Officer Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation ARFF - Alternate member for the RFANSW</p> |
| Ms Anissa Lawrence | Conservation Member | <p>No pecuniary interest</p> <p>Director of TierraMar Ltd Independent consultant</p> <p>Undertakes contracts for a number of Conservation NGOs, government departments, non-government agencies and the private sector on a range of fishery related matters</p> <p>Conservation member on GABMAC, SPFRAG, SEMAC and the South Australian Rock Lobster MAC</p> |
| Dr Lara Ainley | AFMA Member | AFMA – Manager, Small Pelagic, Squid and Scallop Fisheries- no interest pecuniary or otherwise. |

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| Mr Max Bayly | Executive Officer | AFMA – Senior Management Officer, Small Pelagic and Coral Sea Fisheries. No interest pecuniary or otherwise. |
| Dr Jeremy Lyle | Invited Participant | Senior Research Scientist, Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies which undertakes research in relation to the SPF from time to time. Has led several research projects relevant to the SPF and is involved in the assessment of Tasmania’s scalefish fishery. |
| Mr Tony Muollo | Invited Participant | Majority SPF quota holder and actively fishing in the fishery. Also involved in other Commonwealth fisheries. |
| Ms Rocio Noriega Tronoso | Invited Participant | No interest pecuniary or otherwise. |
| Ms Frances Seaborne | State Observer | No interest pecuniary or otherwise. |
| Dr John Stewart | State Observer | No interest pecuniary or otherwise. |

Attachment C- Action items

| | | | |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Complete/Redundant | Underway | Yet to start | SPFRAG advice required / for noting |
|--------------------|----------|--------------|-------------------------------------|

| | Meeting | Agenda item reference | No. | Description | Responsibility | Timeframe | Status update |
|--|-----------|--|-----|---|-------------------|-----------|--|
| | SPFRAG 01 | 5.2 Triggers for bycatch and Ecological Risk re-Assessment | 1.1 | AFMA to prepare a checklist that can be reviewed annually, specific to the SPF, based on the pro-forma detailed in Attachment A of the 'Guidelines for ERA reassessment triggers for Commonwealth Fisheries' and provide back to the RAG for comments out of session. | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | Checklist provided at Agenda Item 2 of SPFRAG04. |
| | SPFRAG 01 | 5.2 Triggers for bycatch and Ecological Risk re-Assessment | 1.2 | AFMA to include the updated list of bycatch species weight and number of protected species interactions provided as part of the annual update on catch and effort in the fishery, in the ERA checklist. | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | Provided at Agenda Item 2 of SPFRAG04. |
| | SPFRAG 02 | 1.2 Declarations of Interest | 2.1 | The RAG suggested re-wording the agenda for future meetings to explicitly make 'agreeing the biomass' part of the RBC agenda item to assist managing declared conflicts with this item. | Executive Officer | SPFRAG 03 | Updated in the Agenda (item 5) |
| | SPFRAG 02 | 2. Review of fishery performance | 2.2 | AFMA to develop a draft report for protected species interactions that captures a broader suite of information than just interaction numbers (eg that includes life status, historical trends, monitoring level, mitigation being used and management response for consideration by the RAG at its next meeting. The report | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | AFMA have developed a more detailed report which will be presented at SPFRAG 04 Agenda item 2. |

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|--|-----------|--|-----|--|-------------------|---------------|--|
| | | | | could be done as part of or sit alongside the ERA trigger report that is also under development. In addition to protected species, information should also be collated on species of interest such as sunfish. | | | |
| | SPFRAG 02 | 3.3. RBC advice for SPF stocks, including agreeing new biomass estimates | 2.4 | Tim Ward to include monthly catch figures to accompany the weekly CPUE graphs presented as part of the Annual Fishery Assessment. | Tim Ward | SPFRAG 03 | Tim ward / Gretchen to provide update at SPFRAG 04, December 2021. |
| | SPFRAG 02 | 4. Harvest Strategy Review | 2.5 | For the RAGs consideration at its July meeting, AFMA to update the SPF HS, including the development of a draft metarule that outlines if the stock moves outside of the range tested under the MSE that the RAG would consider an appropriate response. | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | To be discussed at SPFRAG 04 at Agenda Item 6 |
| | SPFRAG 03 | 3. SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan | 3.1 | AFMA to enquire into the purpose of the confidentiality arrangements of Vessel Management Plans across Commonwealth fisheries and provide the RAG with an update at its next meeting in December 2021. | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | Yet to commence |
| | SPFRAG 03 | 3. SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan | 3.2 | The results of the SPF Underwater Camera Project be presented to the RAG at its next meeting | John Wakeford | SPFRAG 04 | To be presented at SPFRAG 04 Agenda Item 7 |
| | SPFRAG 03 | 3. SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan | 3.3 | The Draft SPF Bycatch and Discard Workplan be updated with recommendations from SPFRAG noted in the minutes | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | To be presented at SPFRAG 04 Agenda Item 8 |
| | SPFRAG 03 | 4. ERA Annual Triggers | 3.4 | AFMA and Tim Ward to update the secondary indicators in the Checklist to ensure they are specific to the SPF | AFMA and Tim Ward | December 2021 | Completed and reflected in Agenda Item 2 attachment C. |

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|--|-----------|---|-----|---|------------------|-----------|--|
| | SPFRAG 03 | 4. ERA Annual Triggers | 3.5 | AFMA to provide the SPFRAG with maps of annual fishing effort, graphs showing historical trends of TEP interactions, effort (number of shots and number of hours trawled) and interaction rates (shots per interaction and shots per number of individuals) | AFMA | SPFRAG 04 | Included at Agenda Item 2 Attachment A |
| | SPFRAG 03 | 5.1 5 year strategic research plan | 3.6 | The Economics Member to provide research priorities which reflect the "Economic and Social" for the RAG at its meeting in December 2021 | Economics Member | SPFRAG 04 | Included at Agenda Item 8 |
| | SPFRAG 04 | 2. Review of Fishery Performance / Annual ERA checklist | 2.1 | AFMA will investigate currently available data, through logbooks and observer reports, to provide greater clarity in bycatch reporting around species of interest identified by the SPFRAG. | AFMA | SPFRAG 05 | |