



Coral Sea Zone Hook Trial Annual Review

FINAL meeting record
Small Working Group meeting # 4

15 February 2023

11:00am – 12:00pm Online

Chair: Selina Stoute

Participants:

Name	Position
Selina Stoute,	AFMA
Dr Ashley Williams	Scientific Member TTRAG and TTMAC
Bob Lamason	Industry Representative, Coral Sea Zone Boat SFR Owner
Rowan Lamason	Industry Representative
Kyle Lamason	Industry Representative
Paul Zolezzi	Industry Representative
Dr Julian Pepperell	Recreational/Charter Fishing Member TTRAG
Ian Bladin	Recreational/Charter Fishing Invited Participant TTMAC
Grahame Williams	Recreational/Charter Fishing Member TTMAC
David Ellis	Tuna Australia, CEO. TTMAC Member
Phil Ravello	Tuna Australia, Program Manager
Kate Martin	AFMA
Lachlan Farquhar	AFMA

Apologies: Dr Ian Knuckey, Scientific Member, TTRAG

Meeting Objectives

The meeting was convened to review the results to date of the trial and compare the results with the 2015-2019 baseline data. The Working Group was asked to consider both whether the trial should continue, and if so, if any changes to trial parameters are needed.

Updates

Recreational Fishing Sector

Recreational fishing sector members provided an update on the 2022/23 season and noted it had been a good season yielding variable results. Currently there are high catches of juvenile Black Marlin both in the

Coral Sea and off the New South Wales coast. Relationships between the charter fishing and longline sectors were reported to be strong with the charter groups off Cairns increasing effort following slow years due to COVID-19.

Dr Pepperell advised the Working Group that funding has been secured from the Ocean Health Foundation, to conduct an analysis of historic black marlin catch-effort data. The project will receive contributions from Game Fishing Association of Australia, Queensland Game Fishing Association and the Cairns Professional Game Fishing Association (charter boat operators). This will provide an additional 25 years of catch-effort data and will aim to recognise variability of catch rates over time. It is anticipated the project will take approximately 2 years to complete.

Commercial Fishing Sector

Industry members provided an update on the 2022 season and noted high target species catch rates during the winter months (notably Bigeye Tuna), and very low interactions with marlin. Setting up to 1250 hooks in single sets in the late afternoon increased target species catch rates and reduced marlin interactions due to avoiding setting during marlin bite times. Industry members noted that setting up to 1250 hooks on a single shot was highly beneficial as it reduced running costs, shortened trips and allowed them to fish more efficiently. Members advised that one vessel was diversifying their fishing practices by targeting lobster in the Queensland East Coast Crayfish and Rocklobster Fishery during new moon and then longlining during the full moon phases. This, coupled with poor weather conditions, led to low fishing effort in the Coral Sea Zone (CSZ). Industry members advised that winch capacity and line thickness varied between vessels which limits some vessels ability to set greater than ~800 hooks. Sets using varied amounts of hooks were seen during the 2021 season in the CSZ, however the variability in hooks/set reduced in 2022. Industry members advised they may set fewer hooks/set due to poor weather or during periods of high catch rates to ensure they can retain the quality of their catch. Industry members noted that while they deployed sets with greater than 500 hooks, they did not utilize deep setting options in the CSZ during 2022 due to the setting preferences of their skippers. It was also noted by the Working Group that the data showed reduced marlin mortality when setting shots with greater than 500 hooks.

Trial results

Participants noted the summary of results of the two-year CSZ Hook Trial compared to the baseline period (2015-2019) as detailed in the discussion paper for the meeting (**Attachment A**). AFMA noted:

- there was reduction in effort in the 2022 season compared to the 2021 season as well as the baseline average (2015-2019). In total, three vessels fished in the CSZ in 2022 compared with only two in 2021. Total sets and hooks deployed during trial period were significantly lower than the baseline period average.
- marlin interactions recorded during the baseline period and trial period were: ~955 in the baseline period (average); 641 in 2021; and 168 in 2022. The combined marlin interactions recorded on sets with greater than 500 hooks West of 148°E in 2021 was 54, and in 2022 was five; and
- trigger limits were not reached West of 148°E between March and August in either 2021 or 2022.

A recreational fishing sector member raised vessel numbers within the CSZ and queried that if the trial continued, whether it would be restricted to three vessels. The Working Group discussed concession latency and the safeguards in place such as the trigger limits, and it was recommended that if the trial continued, a vessel cap in the CSZ would not be required. Industry members advised there was possibly one other vessel likely to fish the CSZ.

Size Class information

AFMA advised that size class data, used to measure interactions with either juvenile or adult marlin, had been submitted by fishers during the trial however in error, AFMA had not extracted the data in its latest data query. AFMA advised that it would correct the discussion paper to reflect this and provide a summary of the size class data to Working Group members out of session.

Action Item 1. AFMA to update CSZ WG 3 Discussion Paper to acknowledge that fishers have correctly reported size class data through e-logs. COMPLETE.

Action Item 2. AFMA to provide a summary of size class data collected during the trial to the Working Group out of session. INCOMPLETE.

Next Steps

The Working Group:

1. supported AFMA's recommendation to continue the trial in its current form (retain working group and arrangements) for the next two fishing seasons during which time the Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group (TTRAG) and Tropical Tuna Management Advisory Committee (TTMAC) will consider the outcomes of the trial to date;
2. agreed that the intended maximum hook limit for the trial was 1250 hooks and not 1200 hooks; and
3. agreed, noting industry's support at the meeting, for the meeting discussion paper to be made public.