

Coral Sea Zone Hook Trial TTRAG Scientists Meeting

FINAL MEETING RECORD

16 MAY 2023

Chair: Kate Martin

Date: 16 May 2023

Format: Online 10am – 11am

ATTENDEES:

Dr Ian Knuckey, TTRAG Science Member

Dr Julian Pepperell, TTRAG Science/Recreational Fisheries Member

Acting Senior Fisheries Manager Tuna and International Matthew Daniel, AFMA

Kate Martin, TTRAG AFMA Member

Lachlan Farquhar, TTRAG Executive Officer, AFMA

APOLOGIES:

Dr Ashley Williams, TTRAG Science Member

Meeting Objectives

The meeting was convened following recommendation from TTRAG 37¹ that scientific advice be developed out-of-session by the Scientific Members of the Small Working Group (Dr Ashley Williams, Dr Ian Knuckey and Dr Julian Pepperell) to determine whether the methodology for collecting data to address key data/information priorities, should be revised. The current trial arrangements rely on collecting information during normal fishing effort. Data collection is therefore contingent on the level and nature of fishing effort, which will be analysed to determine the impacts of increasing the CSZ hook limit on interactions with marlin species and TEPS (in particular turtles). Scientific members were asked to consider, if any changes to trial arrangements are necessary to ensure sufficient information is collected to inform a future decision to amend or retain the current hook limit in the CSZ.

Trial Results

The members noted the high-level summary of the Coral Sea Zone (CSZ) Hook Trial including;

- the reduction in effort in the 2022 season compared to the 2021 season as well as the baseline average (2016-2019). 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.
- a large proportion of sets west of 148°E set between 01 March and 31 August are <500 hooks.
- marlin interaction life status reporting and species identification verification from electronic monitoring (EM).

Size Class and Life Status 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, AFMA presently doesn't have the ability to determine the size class of each individual marlin interaction and are reported as overall weight of marlin, per shot, through electronic logs. Electronic reporting logs would need to be amended to obtain this information, timeframe approximately 5-6 months. A subset of life status (alive, dead, unknown) reporting verification using EM was undertaken by AFMA to confirm status reporting of marlin interactions. However, due to angles of cameras, night fishing, cleanliness of cameras and marlin being cut off out of frame, EM wasn't able to be used to determine life status.

¹ TTRAG 37 - 15-16th July

Discussion

The Members recognised that the reduced effort and uptake of using sets with greater than 500 hooks was driven by several operational externalities, including COVID 19 impacts. However, Members noted that this was an Industry request, to increase 1,250 hooks in the CSZ and should be utilised to enable analysis and review of trial performance. It was also noted that there is a risk that if fishing effort remains low (in particular fishing effort using the sets with increased hook numbers) during the trial extension, the data collected may be insufficient to determine the likely impacts of increasing the hook limit on interactions with marlin species and TEPS (in particular turtles).

One Member noted the concerns from the recreational fishing sector regarding vessel numbers within the CSZ and queried that if the trial continued, whether determining future operational aspirations from vessels permitted to fish within the CSZ, to determine potential risks of increased effort should be investigated. The Members discussed that there are 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.

Scientific Members recommended no changes to the trial arrangements, noting that the arrangements for the trial were carefully designed and included safeguards to minimise impacts on marlin (catch based management triggers, together with an annual stakeholder review process). Rather members agreed that AFMA should contact trial vessels and permitted vessels to determine aspirational future fishing operations in the CSZ, along with any operational limitations. AFMA is to inform industry to set greater than 500 hooks west of 148°E during March to August period, and that if the sampling requirements were not met, the trial may be discontinued until such time that industry has the capacity to complete the sampling.

AFMA to provide trial arrangements update at TTRAG 38 July 2023 to scientific members and TTRAG.

Next Steps

1. Scientific Members recommended that there no changes to the trial arrangements.
2. AFMA to contact current trial vessels and permitted vessels to determine fishing aspirational future operations in the CSZ, along with any operational limitations
3. AFMA is to inform industry to set greater than 500 hooks west of 148°E during March to August period, and that if the sampling requirements were not met, the trial may be discontinued until such time that industry has the capacity to complete the sampling.
4. AFMA to provide trial arrangements update at TTRAG 38 July 2023.