



**Australian Government**

**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

## **Small Pelagic Fishery Resource Assessment Group (SPFRAG) Meeting 10**

**Meeting minutes**

**2 December 2025**

**AFMA Offices/Microsoft Teams**

<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Membership</b>
<b>Max Kitchell</b>	Chair
<b>Tim Ward</b>	Scientific Member
<b>Paul Rogers</b>	Scientific Member
<b>Simon Boag</b>	Industry Member
<b>Gerry Geen</b>	Industry Member - Apology
<b>Caleb Gardner</b>	Economic Member
<b>Danielle Ghosn</b>	Recreational Member
<b>Anissa Lawrence</b>	Conservation Member
<b>Yvette Lamont</b>	AFMA Member
<b>Rebecca Jol</b>	Executive Officer
<b>Dan Corrie</b>	AFMA presenter (Climate Change update)
<b>Steph Brodie</b>	CSIRO presenter (Climate Change report)
<b>Matt Koopman</b>	Fishwell Consulting
<b>Nicolas Blay</b>	Invited Participant
<b>Tony Muollo</b>	<i>SPF Concession holder Observer</i>
<b>John Stewart</b>	<i>State Observer (NSW)</i>
<b>Annabel Jones</b>	<i>State Observer (SA)</i>
<b>Kurt Davis</b>	<i>ABARES Observer</i>

**Day 1 - 17 December 2024**

Time	Item	Purpose	Lead presenter
09:30 (30 min)	<b>Agenda item 1. Preliminaries</b>		
	1.1 Welcome and apologies	For action	Chair
	1.2 Adoption of agenda	For action	Chair
	1.3 Declaration of interests	For action	Chair
	1.4 Minutes from previous meeting	For noting	Chair
	1.5 Actions arising from previous meetings	For noting	AFMA
10:00 (45 min)	<b>Agenda item 2. Fishery update</b>		
	2.1 AFMA Management	For noting	AFMA
	2.2 Industry	For noting	Simon Boag
	2.3 Economic Update	For noting	Caleb Gardner
	2.4 Recreation Member	For noting	Danielle Ghosn
	2.5 Other Jurisdictions (SA, Tas & NSW)	For noting	PIRSA, NRE & NSW Fisheries
<b>10:45 Morning Tea Break (15 mins)</b>			
11:00 (15 mins)	<b>Agenda item 3. Economics of SPF</b>	For noting	Economic member
11:15 (60 mins)	<b>Agenda item 4. Climate Adaptation</b>		
	4.1 Climate and Ecosystem Status Report	For discussion	Steph Brodie
	4.2 Climate Risk Framework (CRF) Overview	For discussion	Dan Corrie
12:15 (45 mins)	<b>Agenda item 5. Annual Fishery Assessment</b> 7.1 Presentation	For Noting/discussion	Fishwell Consulting
<b>13:00 Lunch Break (30 mins)</b>			

13:30 (60 min)	<b>Agenda item 6. DEPM Reports &amp; Methodology</b>	For discussion	Tim Ward
14:30 (45 min)	<b>Agenda item 7. RBC advice for SPF quota species for the 2026-27 fishing season</b>	For Advice	AFMA
<b>15.15 Afternoon Tea Break (15 mins)</b>			
15:30 (30 mins)	<b>Agenda Item 8. Research priorities</b>	For advice	AFMA
16:00 (15 mins)	<b>Agenda item 9. Other Business</b>	For Noting	Chair
16:15	<b>Close</b>		Chair

The Chair opened the meeting at 9.00 AEDT.

## Agenda item 1. Preliminaries

### 1.1 Welcome and apologise

The Chair, Max Kitchell, formally opened the 10th meeting of SPFRAG with an Acknowledgement of Country, recognising the Traditional Owners of the various regions where participants were joining from. He welcomed all members, invited participants, and observers.

Paul Rogers, recently appointed as the scientific member on SPFRAG, introduced himself. An apology was noted for Gerry Geen.

The Chair reminded participants that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of accurate minute-taking.

### Membership

<i>SPF RAG Members</i>	
Max Kitchell	Chair
Tim Ward	Scientific member
Paul Rogers	Scientific member
Simon Boag	Industry member
Gerry Geen	Industry member
Caleb Gardner	Invited Participant (previous Economic Member)
Anissa Lawrence	Conservation member
Danielle Ghosn	Recreational fishing member

Yvette Lamont	AFMA member
Rebecca Jol	Executive officer
Invited Participants	
Matt Koopman	Fishwell Consulting (Annual Assessment)
Observers	
Sally Weekes	AFMA Observer
John Stewart	State Observer (NSW)
Nicholas Blay	State Observer (Tas)
Annabelle Jones	State Observer (SA)
Tony Muollo	SPF Concession Holder
Kurt Davis	ABARES Observer

## 1.2 Adoption of agenda

The Chair sought confirmation from members regarding the proposed agenda.

The agenda was adopted as final (see [Attachment A](#)).

## 1.3 Declaration of interests

The SPFRAG noted, in line with Section 15 of Fisheries Management Paper 1 – Consultative Committees (FMP1), the requirement for all meeting participants to declare relevant interests, not limited to pecuniary gain, regarding all agenda items proposed for SPFRAG 10.

- The Chair invited members to declare any new or changed interests relevant to the meeting. It was agreed that standing declarations, as circulated in the meeting papers, would be accepted unless otherwise noted [Attachment B](#).
- Timothy Ward and Matt Koopman declared an interest in Agenda item 8 (SPF Annual Research Priorities).
- Mr Simon Boag declared an interest in Agenda items 6 (Fishery assessment) and 7 (RBC advice)
- Prof Caleb Gardner declared an interest in Agenda item 8 (SPF Annual Research Priorities)
- Steph Brodie declared a research conflict of interest.
- Mr Tony Muollo declared an interest in Agenda items 6 (Fishery assessment) and 7 (RBC advice).

## 1.4 Minutes of previous meeting

The RAG noted that the minutes of SPFRAG 9 which were circulated to members be adopted and made available on the [AFMA website](#).

## 1.5 Actions arising from previous meetings

SPFRAG noted that all actions from previous meetings have been completed. No outstanding items were carried forward. Actions arising from this meeting (SPFRAG 10) can be found at [Attachment C](#).

## Agenda item 2 – Fishery Update

SPFRAG noted updates from AFMA and industry regarding current management arrangements and activities in the Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF). Updates from other relevant jurisdictions were also provided.

### 2.1 AFMA Management

- Large vessel Rezk1 is preparing to operate in the Western Zone; currently in WA, expected to fish out of Albany.
- AFMA reviewing conditions for Western Zone fishing due to historically low effort.
- Bycatch and ETP interactions were discussed; sardine retention remains prohibited in WA and SA waters.

AFMA referenced Commonwealth Government correspondence on productivity priorities, encouraging RAGs and MACs to consider efficiency improvements in advice.

### 2.2 Industry

- The 2024–25 season was the most successful to date, with catches up 20% on previous years.
- Current season began slowly due to warm water eddies off Ulladulla, displacing small pelagics, but recent months saw record catches.
- Industry highlighted growing demand for SPF products in pharmaceutical and pet food sectors, supported by MSC certification.
- Discussion on climate impacts: abnormal water temperatures influencing spawning timing and fishing patterns.

### 2.3 Economic Update

- Linked Western Zone development to the Treasurer’s call for national productivity gains.
- Emphasized opportunities to better utilize underexploited resources and improve economic yield.
- Emphasized need for improved economic performance tracking (e.g., management cost ratios, economic yield indicators).
- The RAG noted AFMA’s Red Tape Reduction Tracker as an example of efforts to streamline regulatory processes.

### 2.4 Recreation Member

- Reported no current issues from the recreational sector as the summer season approaches.
- Confirmed that conflicts between commercial and recreational fisheries have been well managed in recent years.
- Highlighted that all SPF species remain at high sustainability tiers, with exploitation rates very low.
- Will continue monitoring for any emerging conflicts or concerns during the season.
- Mentioned anecdotal observations:
  - exceptional catches of yellowfin and bluefin tuna closer to shore in recent months.
  - increased bait fish availability noted by recreational fishers.
- Confirmed that tournament schedules have been shared with industry and coordination is in place.

- Noted that data collection for the tournament fishery occurred last year, but analysis was delayed due to funding; new funding secured for the next three years.

## 2.5 Other Jurisdictions:

### South Australia:

- The South Australian sardine fishery operates on a calendar-year basis.
- TAC for 2025: Initially set at 50,000 tonnes, allocated as:
  - 30,000 t in Spencer Gulf
  - 6,000 t in Gulf St Vincent
  - 14,000 t in other SA waters.

### Operational Challenges:

- Harmful algal bloom in Gulf St Vincent significantly disrupted fishing activity.
- Industry was unable to catch allocated quota in Gulf St Vincent.
- To support tuna aquaculture feed requirements, PIRSA approved an additional 4,500 t quota in Spencer Gulf mid-year.

### Catch Status:

- Nearly all quota now caught, with minor fishing continuing in the outside zone.
- No sardine mortalities observed; fish likely moved offshore to deeper waters during bloom.

### Stock Assessment:

- February DEPM survey estimated biomass at over 500,000 tonnes, the highest on record.
- Indicates stock remains in very good condition despite environmental challenges.

### Industry Concerns:

- Interest in the new vessel entering the SPF Western Zone.
- Mixed views: some see opportunity, others raised concerns about sardine bycatch and potential resource-sharing issues.

**Recommendation 1:** AFMA to continue discussions with WA regarding flexibility on sardine bycatch rules (currently zero retention) to enable development of the western zone fishery.

### Tasmania Sardine Fishery Update:

- Stock Assessment: Estimated biomass of ~200,000 tonnes (assessment completed ~12 months ago).
- Development Framework: Guidelines released based on four principles—environmental sustainability, governance, economic return, and return to state.
- Community Engagement: Roadshow held earlier in the year to explain science and guidelines; feedback gathered on concerns.

- Policy Paper: In progress; addresses issues raised during engagement, including:
  - Where and how fishing will occur.
  - Allocation and access (still preliminary).
  - Precautionary catch limits.
  - Commitment to a harvest strategy.
  - Future research programs (adult reproductive biology, ecological studies, tuna diet studies).
  - Market use of sardine products.
- Next Steps: Policy paper expected soon; draft management plan for statutory consultation planned for next year.

#### **Community Concerns:**

- Northern areas: potential impact on southern bluefin tuna fishery.
- Southern areas: use of sardines for salmon feed (preference for human consumption).

#### **Next Steps:**

- Policy paper expected soon; draft management plan for statutory consultation planned for next year.
- Funding is limited but sufficient for initial research (tuna diet and market studies); allocation and access discussions still pending.
- Bycatch Rules: Yet to be finalised; likely guided by Offshore Constitutional Settlement (OCS) arrangements.
- Timeline: Policy paper → draft management plan → consultation in 2026.

#### **NSW Fishery Update:**

- Current Status: Fishery operating under normal conditions.
- Catch for 2024–25 Season:
  - **Blue Mackerel:** 468 tonnes (≈62% of allocated TAC).
  - **Sardines:** 189 tonnes (≈7% of allocated TAC).
- Performance: Purse seine fishery continues to underperform relative to allocated TACs.
- TAC Allocations for Current Season:
  - Sardines: 2,744 tonnes.
  - Blue Mackerel: 1,010 tonnes.
  - Yellowtail Scad: 864 tonnes.
- Recreational Harvest: New estimate for blue mackerel at ~112 tonnes (retained catch only; excludes bait use).
- Monitoring: Ongoing sampling of blue mackerel and yellowtail scad for length and age composition; ageing of blue mackerel planned (hasn't been done for some time).

**Key Point:** No sustainability concerns; exploitation rates remain very low

## Agenda item 3 – Economics of SPF (Caleb Gardner)

SPFRAG noted an update on the economic performance of the Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF), including market trends, cost structures, and productivity considerations. The discussion focused on:

- The importance of measuring economic yield and management efficiency, including suggestions to track management cost as a ratio to Gross Value of Production (GVP)
- The need to improve reporting of economic indicators to identify productivity gains and inform management decisions.

### Industry Perspective:

Industry reported strong market developments:

- SPF products increasingly used in pharmaceuticals and pet food supplements, supported by MSC certification.
- A new pharmaceutical plant in Western Sydney is expected to increase demand for high-strength omega-3 oils.
- SPF species have high DHA/EHA levels, making them attractive for health products.
- Industry noted that gross value production is rising due to diversification and improved product quality.

**Recommendation 2:** Support development of a framework for tracking economic performance indicators across Commonwealth fisheries, including SPF.

## Agenda item 4 – Climate Adaptation

### 4.1 Climate and Ecosystem Status Report (Steph Brodie)

#### Global and Regional Trends:

- Global sea surface temperatures have been at record highs for the past three years.
- Australia's waters also experienced significant warming, with marine heatwaves off South Australia and Tasmania.
- Harmful algal bloom in SA linked to these heatwaves. Industry confirmed operational impacts.
- Bureau of Meteorology reclassified last summer as La Niña, influencing warm-core eddy formation off southern NSW.
- Warm-core eddy off Ulladulla during winter/spring caused displacement of small pelagics which impacted fishing, with reported catch being unseasonable low during this period.
- Bottom temperature anomalies and chlorophyll-a data indicate ecosystem productivity shifts.
- [Fishing Vessels as Ships of Opportunity \(FishSOOP\)](#) data is showing temperature-depth profiles with seasonal stratification and warming trends.
- BOM forecasts continued warmer-than-average conditions for coming months with an increased likelihood of marine heatwaves during La Niña phases.

#### Key Discussion Points:

- Industry reported altered spawning timing and distribution due to abnormal water temperatures.
- Fishing effort shifted further south to avoid warm eddies off the New South Wales Coast.

**Recommendation 3:** Industry to maintain anecdotal observations on environmental changes for inclusion in annual climate reporting. Monitor climate-related changes in fish distribution and spawning timing

## 4.2 Climate Risk Framework (CRF) Overview (Dan Corrie)

### Framework Overview:

- The CRF was recently signed off by AFMA Commission; with rollout expected to begin in 2026.
- This provides a structured risk assessment for climate impacts on Commonwealth fisheries.

**Application to SPF:** Initial assessments for sardine, blue mackerel (east), jack mackerel (east), and redbait (east) scheduled for early 2026.

To support the implementation of the CRF, AFMA has convened an expert Working Group to provide technical guidance and oversight. AFMA is seeking advice on attendance at the CRF Working Group meeting.

### Key Discussion Points:

- Industry stressed the need for real-time climate data to inform operational decisions.
- Members supported refining CSIRO reports to focus on active fishing areas using AFMA spatial heat maps.
- Recognition that climate variability is influencing spawning and migration patterns, requiring adaptive management.

**Recommendation 4:** SPFRAG members Tim Ward, Paul Rogers, Yvette Lamont and Simon Boag will attend the CRF Working Group meeting scheduled for 18 March 2026.

## Agenda item 5 – Annual fishery assessment (Matt Koopman)

SPFRAG reviewed catch and effort data, biological sampling results, and trends for SPF species based on the 2024–25 season. The presentation was delivered by Matt Koopman (Fishwell Consulting).

### Presentation Highlights:

- **Data Sources:** AFMA logbook and CDR data from 2000–01 to 2024–25; State data from NSW, SA, Tasmania, and WA (noting NSW 2024–25 data unavailable).
- Biological samples processed for blue mackerel, jack mackerel, and redbait.
- **Catch Trends:** Trawl catch increased significantly in recent years; 2024–25 season saw strong catches for jack mackerel and blue mackerel. Purse Seine catch remains minimal since 2010. Redbait catches stable but concentrated in southern NSW.
- **Biological Observations:** Jack mackerel modal length ~200 mm; age distribution consistent with previous years. Blue mackerel modal length ~260 mm; age distribution slightly wider than previous years. Redbait showed a notable shift: modal age increased to 6 years, compared to 2–3 years in recent years.
- **Spatial Patterns:** Purse seine catches concentrated in northern sub-area (~30° latitude) Trawl catches occurred further south, overlapping areas where jack mackerel and blue mackerel are targeted.

- **Biological Sampling:** Ageing lab reported 97% agreement between age estimates, confirming reliability. Redbait identified as easiest species to age; blue mackerel more challenging. Larger fish often correspond to older age classes; redbait can reach advanced ages even at modest size.
- **Future Data Management:** Plan to consolidate historical biological data into a single database for consistency. Calibration images from previous otolith readings to be integrated for training and accuracy. Discussion on sampling from new vessels entering the Western Zone; observers will cover first 10 trips and ~10% ongoing.

#### **Key Discussion Points:**

- Members noted climate variability may be influencing spawning timing and distribution.
- No significant changes identified for jack mackerel or blue mackerel that would affect RBC decisions.
- Redbait age structure flagged for further consideration.
- Australian sardine jumped from ~10–20 t in previous years to over 300 t.
- Industry confirmed unprecedented sardine abundance, with large surface schools observed.
- Purse seine catch and effort have declined over recent years, with catch rates trending lower.
- Trawl catch rates highly variable; largest catches occurred around September.
- RAG supported collecting biological samples from new trawl vessels and maintaining East Coast sampling regime - Industry offered assistance in coordinating sample collection and liaising with crews.
- Discussion on potential role of warm-core eddies and marine heatwaves in shifting sardine distribution and spawning patterns.

#### **Key Considerations:**

- Maintain current sampling regime for sardine and expand if high catches persist.
- Continue monitoring CPUE and spatial catch patterns for signs of distribution shifts.
- Consider adaptive survey timing and coverage in response to climate-driven changes Spatial distribution of effort has expanded over the last ten fishing seasons; however fishing effort is predominately concentrated off the east coast of NSW.

## **Agenda item 6 – DEPM Reports (Tim Ward)**

SPFRAG received a detailed presentation from Tim Ward (CSIRO) on the application of the Daily Egg Production Method (DEPM) for estimating spawning biomass of SPF species, focusing on Australian sardine, blue mackerel and the 2024 DEPM survey for Jack Mackerel. The discussion covered methodology, survey results, data pooling, and implications for management.

#### **Methodology Overview:**

- DEPM estimates spawning biomass by combining:
  - Egg production data (eggs/m<sup>2</sup>/day) from plankton surveys.
  - Adult reproductive parameters: spawning fraction, sex ratio, relative fecundity.

**Key finding:**

- Spawning area is the most reliable index of abundance; egg density alone is highly variable.
- Pooling adult parameters across years improves precision and reduces confidence intervals.

**Australian Sardine Results:**

- Surveys conducted in 2014, 2019, and 2024:
- Spawning area ranged 14,200–24,000 km<sup>2</sup> noting a recent shift southward.
- Biomass estimates revised using pooled adult parameters and exclusion of outliers:
- 2014: ~67,000 t
- 2024: ~46,600 t (69% of B<sub>0</sub>).
- Decline (~31% lower than 2014) likely environmentally driven, not fishing-related.
- Recommended exclusion of three extreme egg-density outliers for model fitting.

**Blue Mackerel Results:**

- Spawning area increased significantly in 2024 (31,000 km<sup>2</sup>), suggesting stock expansion.
- Adult sampling project (2022–24) provided robust spawning fraction estimates (~0.13), similar to SA sardine values.
- Combined multi-year egg production data and conservative spawning fraction yields biomass estimates around 80,000 t.
- SEAMES trawl surveys indicate sevenfold increase in CPUE since 1990s, supporting positive stock status.

**Key Methodological Points:**

- Combining data across years reduces sampling error and improves reliability.
- Excluding outliers in egg density is precautionary and justified.
- Future surveys should extend further south to capture full spawning distribution.

**Jack Mackerel East:**

Survey Timing Issue: The January 2024 DEPM survey likely missed the peak spawning period. Evidence from industry observations and CSIRO trawl data indicated spawning occurred earlier (late October to early December), suggesting future surveys should be conducted in December rather than January.

- Spawning Area and Egg Abundance: Spawning area in 2024 was only 22% smaller than in 2019, despite very low egg counts.
- Decline in egg numbers was attributed mainly to timing and possibly climate-related changes, not necessarily reduced stock size.
- Climate and Environmental Factors: Unusual oceanographic conditions during summer 2023–24 (record-strength upwelling and warm water pools) may have influenced spawning distribution and egg densities.

- Stock Structure: Jack mackerel across southeastern Australia likely represents one continuous stock, not two discrete stocks, even though management divides it into eastern and western sub-areas.
- Eggs and adults are continuously distributed through Bass Strait, reinforcing the need to consider connectivity when setting quotas.
- Biomass Estimation Challenges: No robust spawning biomass estimate was possible due to uncertainty in adult parameters, especially spawning fraction.
- Historical data show spawning fraction estimates are very low (0.049–0.056), which strongly influences biomass calculations.
- Current understanding of reproductive biology is based on limited sampling (two weeks over a decade), highlighting a major knowledge gap.

#### **Proposed Interim Approach:**

- Use combined egg production data from all years and the most conservative spawning fraction (0.056) to derive a likely minimum spawning biomass of ~98,000 tonnes.
- This approach is considered precautionary because:
  - Spawning area remains large.
  - Additional biomass exists in the western sub-area (not accounted for in eastern TAC).
  - CPUE data from recent trawl surveys show a ~1.8× increase compared to the 1990s.

#### **Key Considerations:**

- Consideration of a reproductive study to better understand spatial and temporal variability in spawning fraction.
- Collect Jack mackerel and redbait samples during upcoming surveys.
- Establish an adaptive monitoring approach with industry to confirm spawning timing before future DEPM surveys.
- Consider extending surveys further south to capture full spawning distribution

## **Agenda item 7 – RBC Advice for SPF quota species for the 2026-27 Season (AFMA)**

SPFRAG considered the updated biomass estimates and methodological approaches presented for Australian sardine, Blue mackerel, and Jack mackerel Eastern stocks to inform RBC settings for the 2026–27 fishing season. The discussion focused on tier classification, data pooling, and precautionary measures given uncertainties. RAG recommendations are tabled at [Attachment C](#).

#### **Key Considerations: P<sub>0</sub>**

##### **Jack Mackerel East**

A conservative minimum spawning biomass estimate of ~98,000 t was proposed, derived by:

- Combining egg production data across all years.
- Applying the most conservative spawning fraction (.056 from 2014).

- Using spawning area from 2024 survey.
- Scenario using combined spawning fraction (.049) gives ~112,000 t.

The RAG acknowledged high uncertainty but agreed this approach is precautionary and pragmatic given lack of robust single-year estimate.

**Other Considerations:**

- Missed peak spawning likely due to survey timing.
- Evidence of biomass outside surveyed area (Western Bass Strait).

Positive CPUE trends compared to 1990s

**Recommendation 5:** The RAG adopted the most conservative minimum spawning biomass estimate of 98,000 t and classified as Tier 1 for management purposes.

**Blue Mackerel East:**

- Biomass estimates stable across surveys; pooled data and conservative spawning fraction (.13) recommended.
- Proposed RBC based on ~80,200 t spawning biomass.

**Recommendation 6:** The RAG adopted the 2024-25 spawning biomass estimate of 80,200 t and supported this approach as a Tier 1; noting improved confidence from recent spawning fraction study.

**Australian Sardine:**

- Revised biomass estimate ~46,600 t after excluding outliers and pooling egg production data.
- Decline (~31% since 2014) likely environment rather than fishing related.

**Recommendation 7:** The RAG supported an RBC based on ~46,600 t spawning biomass (pooled data, outliers excluded). Supported as Tier 1.

**Other considerations:**

- Apply agreed biomass estimates and tier classifications in RBC calculations.
- Document rationale for pooling data and exclusion of outliers for transparency.
- Plan reproductive biology studies for jack mackerel and sardine.
- Develop adaptive monitoring framework for survey timing.

**Recommendation 5:** The SPFRAG supported the RBCs for SPF quota species for the 2026-27 fishing season as outlined in [Table 1](#) in Attachment 3.

## Agenda item 8 – Research Priorities

The RAG reviewed current and proposed research projects to ensure SPF stocks remain at Tier 1 and to address key knowledge gaps. Discussion focused on timing of DEPM surveys, integration with other projects, and prioritization of spawning biology studies.

### Current Funded Projects:

- ERA for Midwater Trawl – Environmental Risk Assessment for midwater trawl operations.
- Monitoring & Assessment of SPF Quota Species – Multi-year project underway.
- Both projects are funded and scheduled through 2026–27, with final decisions on extensions expected in February 2026.

### Proposed Research Priorities:

- Redbait East DEPM Survey. Scheduled for 2026–27. Project scope circulated to RAG for comment (deadline: 11 December 2025). Decision by AFMA's ARC in Feb–Mar 2026.
- RAG reaffirmed support; rated as essential to maintain Tier 1 status.

Note: Redbait East will drop to Tier 2 for one year due to timing gap before survey completion.

### Jack Mackerel East DEPM Survey

- Originally scheduled for 2028–29; proposal to bring forward to 2027–28 discussed.
- RAG agreed priority is completing spawning biology study first (currently with FRDC for funding).
- If FRDC does not fund, AFMA to explore alternative options.
- DEPM timing likely remains 2028–29, but preparatory work on spawning dynamics is critical.

### Integration & Synergies:

- Redbait DEPM & Jack Mackerel Spawning Study:
- Overlap in sampling periods (October for redbait; later for jack mackerel).
- Collecting Jack mackerel eggs during redbait survey could inform timing for future DEPM.
- Adult sampling for Jack mackerel could also provide redbait samples for DEPM.

### Additional Points:

#### Blue Mackerel East:

- Major gap (spawning fraction) addressed by recent study.
- Minor refinements planned via student projects: re-estimate relative fecundity using multiple methods.
- Develop improved egg validation technique (in-situ staining).
- Overall, blue mackerel considered low priority for new research.

### Industry Input:

- Industry emphasized need for confidence in Jack mackerel DEPM timing to avoid repeat of previous missed spawning window.
- Industry vessels assisting with early-season sampling to monitor spawning onset.

**Other considerations:**

- Ensure adaptive survey timing for all species under changing environmental conditions.

Continue leveraging industry partnerships for pre-survey sampling.

**Recommendation:** The SPFRAG supported the research priorities as outlined in [Table 2](#), noting the following points:

- Redbait East DEPM in 2026–27; RAG members to provide feedback on project scope by 11 December 2025; decision by ARC in March 2026.
- Push Jack Mackerel East DEPM back to original timing (2028–29) and prioritize spawning biology study first.
- Explore synergy between Redbait DEPM and Jack Mackerel spawning biology project for cost efficiency.

**Table 2:** Research priorities for the SPF

Proposal	Timing	Priority Level	Notes
Redbait East DEPM Survey	2026-27	Essential	Project scope circulated; decision expected Feb–Mar 2026; Tier 2 for one year before survey.
Jack Mackerel East DEPM Survey	2028–29 (discussion to bring forward to 2027–28)	Essential	Dependent on spawning biology study; FRDC funding decision pending; AFMA to explore alternatives.
Jack Mackerel East Spawning Biology Study	Prior to DEPM (target 2026–27)	Critical	Prerequisite for DEPM; proposal with FRDC; essential to reduce uncertainty in adult parameters.
Blue Mackerel East Refinement Projects	Ongoing (student projects)	Low	Minor refinements: fecundity re-estimation, egg validation; major gaps addressed by recent study.

**Agenda item 9 – Other Business (Chair)**

- No other business was raised. The meeting concluded with thanks to members for contributions and acknowledgment of extended discussions on RBC and research priorities.
- The Chair wished all participants a safe and happy holiday season.

**Agenda item 10 – Close of Business (Chair)**

The Chair closed the meeting at 2.26 pm.

Attachment A - Register of interest

**Table 2. Members, invited participants and observers declarations of interests.**

Name	Membership	Declared interests
Max Kitchell	Chair	No interest, pecuniary or otherwise, in the SPF. Chair of the Southern Bluefin Tuna Management Advisory Committee.
Tim Ward	Scientific Member	<p>Institute Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania, Associate Professor, Fisheries Scientist</p> <p>AFMA Small Pelagic Fishery Resource Assessment Group, Scientific Member</p> <p>AFMA Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group, Independent Scientific Member</p> <p>AFMA Great Australian Bight Management Advisory Committee, Conservation Scientist</p> <p>AFMA Research Projects (SPF Monitoring, Blue Mackerel Spawning Fraction, Jack Mackerel DEPM), Principal Investigator</p> <p>Natural Environment and Resources, Tasmania (Developmental Tasmanian Sardine Fishery), Scientific Advisor, Principal Investigator</p> <p>South Australian Marine Scalefish Fishery Management Advisory Committee, Independent Conservation Scientist, Member</p> <p>Updated via email 24 February 2025.</p>
Andrew Penney	Scientific Member	Director of Pisces Australis (Pty) Ltd which has a potential interest in research in relation to the SPF.
Simon Boag	Industry Member	<p>Industry member on SERAG.</p> <p>Executive Officers to SETFIA, SSIA and SPFIA.</p> <p>SETFIA and SSIA receives funding from AFMA to complete projects under co-management agreements.</p> <p>Undertakes contracts as an independent consultant.</p>
Gerry Geen	Industry Member	No interest, pecuniary or otherwise, in the SPF
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
Danielle Ghosn	Recreational/Charter Fishing Member	Sole trader under Ghosn Consulting Services with ongoing funding from the NSW Recreational Saltwater Fishing Trust, NSW Game Fishing Association, Game Fishing Association of Australia and Australian Fishing Museum. Declared 18 Oct 2024.
Anissa Lawrence	Conservation Member	<p>No interest, pecuniary or otherwise in the SPF. Declared via email 7 November 2023.</p> <p>Director of TierraMar Ltd (trading as OceanEarth Foundation)</p>

		<p>Chair, Ocean Future Fund Inc. Independent consultant</p> <p>Undertakes contracts for several Conservation NGOs, government departments, non-government agencies and the private sector on a range of fishery related matters</p> <p>Conservation member on SPFRAG, SEMAC, SHARKRAG, Spencer Gulf Prawn Trawl RSC and the South Australian Rock Lobster MAC</p>
<b>Yvette Lamont</b>	<b>AFMA Member</b>	AFMA – Manager, Small Pelagic, Squid and Scallop Fisheries- no interest pecuniary or otherwise.
<b>Alannah Wood</b>	<b>Executive Officer</b>	AFMA – Senior Management Officer, Small Pelagic Fishery. No interest pecuniary or otherwise.
<b>Sally Weekes</b>	<b>AFMA</b>	AFMA – Senior Manager, Demersal and Midwater Fisheries. No interest pecuniary or otherwise.
<b>Steve Hall</b>	<b>Hall</b>	AFMA – Manager, Small Pelagic, Squid and Scallop Fisheries. No interest pecuniary or otherwise.
<b>Dan Corrie</b>	<b>AFMA</b>	AFMA – Senior Program Manager, Climate Adaptation. No interest, pecuniary or otherwise, in the SPF
<b>Steph Brodie</b>	<b>CSIRO</b>	Employed by the CSIRO and through the organisation either has in the past or in the future, receive funding for research related to the fishery. Completed confidentiality and declared interest document via email 10 December 2024.
<b>Tony Muollo</b>	<b>Observer</b>	<p>Managing director of;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Three Friends Fishing Pty Ltd – fishing vessel operating in SPF</li> <li>• Three Friends Quota Holdings – Quota owner in SPF</li> <li>• Muollo Fishing Pty Ltd – Fishing vessel operating in SPF and quota owner</li> </ul> <p>Declared 2 May 2024.</p>
<b>Kurt Davis</b>	<b>Observer</b>	Employed by ABARES. No interest pecuniary or otherwise, in the SPF. completed confidentiality and declared interest document via email 9 December 2024.
<b>Dr John Stewart</b>	<b>State Observer</b>	Employee of the NSW Department of Primary Industries that manages shared stocks in state waters. No interest pecuniary or otherwise in the SPF. Completed confidentiality and declared interest document via email 11 December 2024.
<b>Nicolas Blay</b>	<b>Invited Participant</b>	No interest pecuniary or otherwise in the SPF. Completed confidentiality and declared interest document via email 9 December 2024.
<b>Rosie Kutunar</b>	<b>State Observer</b>	
<b>Andrew</b>	<b>State Observer</b>	No interest pecuniary or otherwise in the SPF. Completed confidentiality and declared interest document via email 9

## Attachment B- Action items

Table 3. New recommendations from SPFRAG09

Agenda Item	No.	Action Item
5	1	The proposed exploitation rates be adopted and come into effect when calculating the recommended biological catch (RBC) for the 2025-26 fishing season.
7	2	The SPFRAG supported Jack mackerel east dropping to Tier two, as per the harvest strategy, with the provision to amend under catch from 10% to 20% to partially offset the decrease in RBC for the 2025-26 season noting that catches up to 13 000 t would be sustainable.
7	3	The SPFRAG supported the recommended RBCs for SPF quota species for the 2024 25 fishing season as outlined in Table 1.