Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

AFMADMW-1932364602-94492

Minutes

			AFMADMW-1932364602-94492
Meeting	South East Resource Assessment Group (SERAG)		
Meeting	Meeting 3	Dates	28th January 2026
Location	Online	Time	10.30 am – 12.50 pm
Members	Dr Paul McShane, Chair Dr Mark Grubert, Manager, AFMA Member Mr Ross Winstanley, Recreational Member Mr Daniel Hogan, Industry Member Mr Simon Boag, Industry Member Dr Jeremy Lyle, Scientific Member Dr Ian Knuckey, Scientific Member Dr Steven Rust, Economics Member Dr Paul Burch, CSIRO, Scientific Member Dr Jonathan Smart, Scientific Member Mr Keith Rowling, Industry Member		
Apologies	Mr Will Mure, Industry Member		
Invited Participants	Dr Geoff Tuck, CSIRO Dr Pia Bessell-Browne, CSIRO Ms Kristin Privitera-Johnson, CSIRO Ms Rikki Taylor, CSIRO		

	Ms Sally Weekes, AFMA Mr Will Bowman, AFMA Ms Natalie Couchman, AFMA Ms Jennifer Power-Geary, AFMA Mr Anthony Coggan, AFMA Ms Michelle Henriksen, AFMA Ms Anna Willock, Deputy CEO AFMA
Observers	Dr Daniel Wright, ABARES Dr Tim Emery, ABARES
EO	Ms Audrey Kent

Agenda Item	Title/Topic/Issue	Notes, Action & Recommendations
1.	Preliminaries	1.1 Welcome and apologies The Chair, Paul McShane, opened the meeting with an Acknowledgement of Country and welcomed participants. The Chair also facilitated the introduction of meeting participants and noted apologies, which are recorded in the table above. Meeting participants were informed that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of assisting the preparation of meeting minutes. 1.2 Declarations of interests The RAG followed the procedure outlined in Fisheries Administration Paper 12 for managing potential conflicts of interest, with the declarations in relation to specific agenda items, and the RAGs decision regarding the relevant member's participation, outlined in Attachment B. 1.3 Adoption of agenda The agenda was adopted as final (see **Attachment A**).
2.	Eastern Zone Orange Rough – RBC Advice	Presentation Highlights: • SERAG received a detailed presentation from CSIRO (Dr Paul Burch) summarising the final Tier 1 stock assessment for Eastern Zone Orange Roughy, incorporating updated data to the end of 2024 and a suite of revised model assumptions. • The assessment process involved the review of several structural configurations, including sex-specific natural mortality, sex-specific selectivity, updated maturity ogives, revised growth curves, and updated acoustic survey priors. The Intersessional Working Group had previously endorsed the model combining sex-specific natural mortality and sex-specific selectivity as the preferred base case due to improved fits to age frequency data. • The stock is modelled to have reached a rebuilding plateau given that the forecast recruitment dip should arrive (because the arrival of recruitment is so slow it is now coming from a historically depleted stock),, with MCMC-estimated 2026 spawning biomass at 32.3% B_o, compared with an MPD estimate of 35.3% B_o. • Application of the SESSF 20:35:48 Harvest Control Rule produced a 4-year RBC averaging 1,377.6 t (MPD) or 1,250.8 t (MCMC) for 2026–2029. The MCMC estimate is lower due to the lower stock status estimate. • Fixed-catch projections indicated that annual catches between 1,200–1,400 t were expected to maintain biomass around the current plateau over the next decade, however, this assumes that productivity has not changed. In the last 10–15 years, there is evidence of increased fecundity and for orange roughy growing to a larger maximum size. Fixed catch projections depend on the period forecast given to the modelling of the recruitment dip. Discussion:

		• Members discussed the appropriateness of the updated base case and noted improved fits to male and female age structures achieved through the combined sex-specific mortality and selectivity model. • Concerns raised by scientific members regarding the model's need to infer historically high pre-fishery biomass to account for early fishery extractions were noted; this was attributed to expected limitations and simplifications inherent in the model estimating relatively few parameters and orange roughy being a very long-lived species. • Members acknowledged that uncertainty in the stock–recruit relationship, the assumption of annual spawning, and variable catchability estimates remain key drivers of uncertainty, highlighting the value of maintaining a precautionary approach when setting the RBC. • In considering RBC advice, members reiterated SERAG's historical practice of using the MCMC-based RBC as the more precautionary indicator of stock status and management risk. This approach was strongly supported during the discussion. • The RAG recognised the significance of the stock's MSC certification pathway and the importance of maintaining conservative, defensible management settings to uphold the fishery's strong performance. **Actions and Recommendations:** SERAG accepted the final base-case for Eastern Zone Orange Roughy and recommended that a 4-year RBC for this stock be based on the more conservative estimate from the MCMC analysis (i.e. 1,251 t) rather than from the MPD analysis (1,378 t).
3.	Assessment of Orange Roughy Eastern Zone against the Climate Risk Framework	Presentation highlights: • Natalie Couchman from AFMA presented the draft Climate Risk Framework (CRF) species assessment for Eastern Orange Roughy, incorporating updated Tier 1 stock assessment results from this meeting in Agenda item 2. • The CRF step 1 evaluation identifies a "Neutral" climate impact for the species, supported by Atlantis modelling which indicates climate change is not expected to influence long-term stock abundance. • Updated stock assessment outcomes place the stock in the "Below Target" category (32-35% B_0), resulting in an overall Step 1 risk rating of "Very Low". • For species assessed as Very Low risk, Steps 2 and 3 of the CRF are not required. AFMA sought SERAG confirmation of Step 4 advice provided in October 2025. Discussion: • Members agreed the updated assessment did not change the previous view that climate change is not expected to have a long-term impact on Eastern Orange Roughy. • Some members noted potential short-term risks from deep marine heatwaves influencing spawning aggregation behaviour; however, these impacts were regarded as hypothetical and not indicative of population-level risk.

		• Members recommended continued monitoring of temperature-at-depth indicators in future Climate & Ecosystem Status Reports. • Industry and scientific members acknowledged the importance of maintaining survey programs (e.g., AOS) to detect any emerging climate-driven changes in stock distribution or aggregation behaviour. **Actions and Recommendations:** Following consideration of final stock assessment results, SERAG confirmed their October 2025 advice for the Assessment of Orange Roughy Eastern Zone against the Climate Risk Framework.
4.	TAC Options for Redfish	Presentation Highlights: • AFMA presented proposed TAC options for Redfish for the 2026-27 season: a 5 t TAC to allow for limited retention of unavoidable incidental catch, or a 0 t TAC making Redfish a no-take species. • Redfish has been under a rebuilding strategy since 2015, with additional measures implemented in 2023. The consequences of these additional measures are yet to be observed. • Retained catches remain extremely low (5-8 t in recent seasons), making it difficult to collect sufficient data for assessment and track rebuilding performance. • Redfish is currently under assessment for listing under the EPBC Act as Critically Endangered; AFMA has recommended a Conservation Dependent classification. Discussion: • Members acknowledged Redfish is severely depleted and agreed total mortality should be as low as possible, irrespective of the TAC option chosen. • Some members emphasised that a 0 t TAC may not materially change outcomes if unavoidable incidental catch continues, and discarding may increase without improved monitoring (noting that EM will be implemented in July) and is expected to significantly improve reporting. • The group noted that under current conditions most vessels catch less than 5 t collectively, indicating strong avoidance behaviour by Industry. • Concerns were raised regarding historical high catches by a single vessel, though this vessel has since left the fishery. It was noted that this vessel was domiciled near historical fishing grounds. Members discussed the merit in developing automated systems internally at AFMA to monitor higher than normal redfish catches. • Members highlighted the importance of EM to assist in providing accurate discard estimates. • Members discussed whether TAC settings alone would influence behaviour, noting broader need for MAC-level management measures (closures, move-on rules, trip limits). **Action and Recommendations:** SERAG noted the suggestions provided by AFMA for the Redfish TAC for 2026-27: A TAC of 5 tonnes (to allow for some retention of incidental

		catches) or a TAC of 0 tonnes (such that Redfish would become a no take species) and acknowledged the importance of minimising total mortality to the greatest extent practicable for this stock. A TAC of 5 tonnes would provide sufficient capacity to account for unavoidable incidental catches, whereas setting a TAC of zero would likely result in discarding and reduced data availability. SERAG noted that industry sampling of Redfish would continue under a research catch allowance. SERAG recommended ongoing monitoring of CDR and logbook data to assess average redfish catches and to support comparisons between logbook-reported catch and total landings. In addition, the RAG discussed the merit of developing an AFMA automated monitoring system to offer a cost-effective means of enhancing awareness for monitoring of redfish catches.
5	Alternative MYTAC Period for Blue Grenadier	Presentation Highlights: • AFMA presented a proposal to extend the Blue Grenadier MYTAC period from three to five years to ease the assessment workload scheduled for 2028. • Under the three-year MYTAC, the TAC would be 14,651 t; under the five-year MYTAC the TAC would be 13,208 t. • SERAG previously recommended a three-year MYTAC based on the 2025 Tier 1 assessment at its last meeting in November 2025. • The 2025 assessment occurred in a non-data processing year, limiting use of the most recent CPUE information. Discussion: • Members noted 2028 is a heavily loaded assessment year and acknowledged AFMA's rationale for spreading workload across years. • Members discussed the importance of maintaining frequent assessment as Blue Grenadier is a high-value and high tonnage stock on which the fishery relies. The concept of risk-catch-cost was discussed – this infers that more, not less, assessment should occur. • Economic comments noted potential benefit from greater catch planning certainty if MYTAC were extended to five years, although industry catches remain subject to annual foreign-vessel access decisions. • CSIRO advised a mid-cycle assessment update (lighter weight assessment) could be undertaken in 2028 if needed, even under a 5-year MYTAC. • Members discussed the possibility of reshuffling other species assessments if a full Blue Grenadier assessment was retained in 2028. • Members queried when NSW DPI planned for the next School Whiting Stock assessment. **Actions and Recommendations:** Action: AFMA to confirm with NSW DPI of the timing of the next stock assessment of School Whiting and if that has any implications on the planning of the assessment in the SESSF stock assessment schedule.

		SERAG supported maintaining the three-year MYTAC for Blue Grenadier as agreed to at SERAG 2 (and not the proposed five-year MYTAC). The RAG noted the concerns that were raised in the latest assessment which were discussed at SERAG 2 2025 and the out-of-session working group. It also noted the significance of this species to the SESSF and the consequent need for regular stock assessments.
Close of meeting		The Chair closed the meeting at 12:47 pm

Attachment A – Adopted agenda

SERAG 3 Meeting (28th January 2026)

Wednesday 28th January 2026

Start (Duration)	Item	Purpose	Presenter/s
10:30 (5 min)	**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
10:35 (1hr)	2. Eastern Orange Roughy – RBC Advice	For ADVICE	Paul Burch
11:35 (15 min)	3. Eastern Orange Roughy - CRF	For ADVICE	Natalie Couchman
11:50 (30 min)	4. TAC options for Redfish	For NOTING	Sally Weekes
12:20 (15 min)	5. Alternative MYTAC period for Blue Grenadier	For ADVICE	Mark Grubert
12:35 (15 min)	Finalise session actions and recommendations		Members
12:50	**End of Meeting**		