



Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery

**Special Meeting of the Scallop Management Advisory Committee (ScallopMAC)
and Scallop Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG)**

22 June 2012, Canberra

MINUTES

Members present

Mr John Pollock	Chair
Mr Jon Bryan	Conservation Member
Mr Darren Fearnley	Industry Member (Victoria)
Mr Allan Barnett	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Mr Stuart Richey	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Mr Steve Mantzaris	Industry Member (Victoria)
Mr David Jarvis	Permanent Observer (Tasmanian Government)
Dr Jayson Semmens	Research Member (IMAS)
Mr Richard Martin	Research Member
Dr Ilona Stobutzki	Research Member (ABARES)
Mr Michael Dredge	Research Member
Mr Neil Hughes	AFMA Member
Mr Matt Piasente	Executive Officer

Observers present

Mr Bob Lister	Executive Officer, Tasmanian Scallop Fishermen's Association (TSFA)
Mr Louis Hatzimihalis	Industry member (operator)
Mr Peter Mellios	Industry member (processor)
Mr Nic Marton	ABARES
Mr Tim Karlov	DAFF
Ms Bronwen Jagers	National Audit Office
Dr James Findlay	AFMA Chief Executive Officer
Dr Nick Rayns	AFMA Executive Manager Fisheries

Apologies

Mr John Hammond	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Ms Melissa Schubert	Permanent Observer (Victorian Government)

1. The meeting opened at 9:30am on 22 June 2012 in the Keelty room at the Novotel, 65 Northbourne Avenue, Canberra.



Agenda item 1.1 – welcome and apologies

2. The Chair, Mr John Pollock, welcomed members and observers to the special joint meeting of ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG. Apologies were received from Mr John Hammond and Ms Melissa Schubert.

Agenda item 1.2 – Declaration of interest

3. The Chair noted that all present have a generic interest in the fishery and outlined that it's the responsibility of members to raise particular conflict of interests as they arise.
4. Members noted that recently conflict of interest of particular fishery Resources Assessment Group Members has been raised in the media and requested AFMA to take actions to defend such accusations. The AFMA Member offered support to this request and agreed to follow this up where necessary.

Agenda item 1.3 – Adoption of agenda

5. The items on the Agenda were adopted (see **Attachment 2**) and the meeting agreed for Mr Mike Dredge to outline key points relating to his work on catch history as an introduction to the Harvest Strategy discussions.
6. Members questioned the consultation process given that normally advice from the RAG and MAC to AFMA is a sequential process and a joint meeting presents issues with the RAG formulating a separate position. The meeting noted that the RAG's position can be expressed through Mr Richard Martin and issues can be taken up out-of-session if required. Given the recent events and state of the fishery the benefits of a joint meeting on this occasion were acknowledged.
7. Members questioned why the previous meeting minutes were not considered in this instance. Members were advised that given this is a special joint meeting it was decided to focus the meeting on the issues to be addressed and the next meeting scheduled will return to the normal meeting structure.

Agenda item 2 – Fishery Update

Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery (BSCZSF)

8. Mr Neil Hughes provided a management update on staffing changes within the Demersal and Mid-water Trawl Section and the status of the 2011-12 and 2012-13 budgets for the fishery. Members questioned what the fixed costs are if there was not a fishery (i.e. what are the structural costs, building rent, human resources) and noted that not being able to influence the top end fixed overheads is very frustrating. Members were reminded that we are dealing with a scallop fishery with minimal income, and management costs are a very big burden for the fishery. It is critical for costs to be reduced to a practical level aligned with the fishery and in terms of this year the ultimate goal is to achieve a fishery that will pay the management levies.
9. Members noted that another meeting of the Scallop Steering Committee was held, and outcomes of this meeting in terms of the preferred options to



rationalise management of the scallop resource has been distributed to concession holders. AFMA is currently working with the Tasmanian government to address issues regarding the preferred transitional option to devolve the management of the BSCZSF to Tasmania. The Chair encouraged members to get behind and help support the move to rationalise management of the scallop resource.

Tasmania

10. Mr David Jarvis, Manager of the Tasmanian Scallop Fishery, reported that the Tasmanian Scallop Fishery Advisory Committee met earlier this year and agreed that there was not enough information to base a season for 2012. As a result, 10 authorisations to survey have been issued between, 4 June – 3 July with designated survey areas, reporting requirements and quota allocated per area. Four vessels are currently still active surveying, and to date there are no indications of commercial viable catches, although there have been areas containing juvenile scallops located.

Industry update

11. Industry members from Tasmania noted that they are encouraged by the signs of small scallops detected from the surveys and the approach undertaken in Tasmania is a practical way to assess that status of the stock and recommended that this survey process is worth looking at by AFMA. Of the new beds located there are currently not enough scallops landed to be commercial with sizes of 82-84mm producing 105 meat counts per kg which is very good given the size. Members noted that this is evidence that in some areas, the scallop shell size is not a good indicator of age or meat size. It was also noted that this new area appears to be a commercial bed which appears to be seeded by a Commonwealth bed.

Agenda item 4 – Fishery Update

12. Dr Jayson Semmens presented the results of the May/June pre-season surveys. A summary of the trips was provided in terms of areas surveyed and operational issues. Members were advised that due to delays receiving survey data, some of the data has not been incorporated in the analysis to date. The missing data from the *FV Anne B* in Area 1 was noted to be very similar to the catch data recorded by the *FV Northern Star*. In any event, the more data the better the analysis (in terms of reducing uncertainty), however at this time members agreed we have to run with what data is available. Improvements to data collection methods and quality issues were noted as areas requiring some attention for future survey work.
13. Members questioned the value of the measure of dead shell in the areas surveyed and how this is used. Members noted that in the past new dead shell is compared to old dead shell, whereby the new dead shell is used to provide an indication of recent die off. It is an indices of what might be happening, however the most important indicator to show changes in a scallop bed is the density (kg per 1000m²).



14. Members discussed Area 1 (formally known as the Western Protected Zone) noting that this area was discovered in 2009 and it has never been fished commercially. The survey results showed that scallop density has improved compared to the 2011 survey but that the biomass estimate is largely driven by a cluster of shots. Members were advised that this area contains soft course sand and survey vessels concentrated on a particular area (to work up scallops) and improve catch rates. Members noted that this area has a discard rate of 25% and that the large proportion of scallops between 80-90mm is driving the rate above 20%.
15. Members discussed how biomass estimates are regarded as a ball park figure given the survey design and how confidence limits are used as a guide. It was noted that relative densities are used in Tasmania to determine the TAC for a fishing season and that the calculation of biomass estimates use the same data. The current Harvest Strategy requires biomass to be estimated, and a move to a relative system similar to what is applied in Tasmania is worth further consideration down the track.
16. Members noted that the survey of Area 2 provided good coverage of this area with 40 tows completed. The survey area was smaller than last year and more dead shell was reported. The scallop density is the same as the 2011 survey and the discard rate is 31% with sizes between 80-90mm again driving the rate above 20%. Members noted that a commercial scallop dredge doesn't retain small scallops and sizes up to 69mm can go through the mesh.
17. Members noted that survey results for Area 3 show an increase in new dead shell to 23%, and a decline in scallop density from 31 to 9kg/1000m² compared to the 2011 survey. Members noted that this scallop die-off is clear evidence of the issues previously raised with the Harvest Strategy and the decision rules restricting areas to be harvested. In particular, it was noted that the scallops in this area are dying and the area still has a discard rate above 20%. Members agreed that current die-off rate is atypical in the fishery.
18. Members discussed management options for the 2012 season considering the survey results. Issues regarding the TAC were raised, including how to get advice back to the Commission regarding new fishing areas and whether it is still reasonable to take 2500 tonnes out of other areas.
19. Industry members expressed their frustrations regarding the requirement to restrict the area opened, and, given the state of the fishery industry members recommended removing the boxes to enable industry to look through the whole area and still have a TAC as the governing management tool. It was noted that we have been reviewing the Harvest Strategy and management for the past 2 years and little has changed in terms of industry profitability. The management of the fishery is regarded to be not working and it has reached the point where fishing industry members need to start making decisions regarding whether to continue in the industry.



20. Members discussed the appropriateness of taking beds in adjacent State jurisdictions into account within the Harvests Strategy given the discovery of the large area of small scallops on the western side of Flinders Island in state waters, which appears to have been seeded from the Commonwealth waters.
21. It was noted that the scallops in this areas are suggested to be 2 years old (heading for 3 years) and would not meet the viable bed category under the Harvest Strategy. It was highlighted that Tasmania does not undertake biomass estimates in State waters and that Tasmania under the current management arrangements, would not be taking into account any scallops that may be 'attributed' under a Commonwealth HS when determining potential future open areas for Tasmanian scallop fishers. Member outlined that the problems with the Harvest Strategy relate to the minimum size limit and the application of the discard rule.
22. It was highlighted that the size and coverage of the surveys in the fishery is a problem as we just don't know the available resource in Bass Strait and adopting an approach similar to what Tasmania trialled for this season to open up the fishery to surveys would help increase our understandings of the resource. Members acknowledged that while there are expectations of other scallop beds in the area, it was equally likely that all beds are currently unknown.
23. Opening Area 1 and issuing scientific permits for exploratory surveying was an option suggested. Industry Members questioned the need for scientific data from exploratory surveys and recommended fishing under normal operations. Members noted survey differences between Tasmania and the Commonwealth in terms of costs. The minimum 500 tonne scallops bed required to be locked-up was also highlighted as a critical component of the Harvest Strategy in terms of a pre-cautionary spawning bed. It was suggested that a bed that's on its last legs and not in a healthy state may not be a suitable option (as the minimum 500 tonne bed).
24. Members acknowledged the need to justify the removal of fishing area restrictions (boxes) to the AFMA Commission. Members were reminded that the Minister closed the fishery for 3 years and the fishery was re-opened under new Harvest Strategy to rebuild the spawning biomass and to minimise the area impacted by fishing. It was acknowledged that atypical event happening to beds in recent years (resulting in unexpected scallop die-offs) and locking up an area where a scallop die-off is occurring is not a precautionary measure. It was suggested we need to recognise and document the state of the beds and that this new approach is a one off until the issues with the Harvest Strategy are reviewed and resolved.
25. The proposals suggested and discussed, included:
 - Option 1**
 1. Removing fishing boxes
 2. Protect juvenile beds
 3. Close Area 3 and part of Area 2 (?) to meet Harvest Strategy, or



Option 2

4. Issue permits to explore throughout Bass Strait
5. Open Area 1

Option 3

6. Close Fishery until issues are addressed

26. Members asked key questions relating to the options including:
 - What is the possible damage to the fishery this year?
 - What will ensure rebuilding of stocks?
 - How do you justify opening the fishery in a less precautionary way?
 - Are we ensuring the sustainability of the resource?
 - If we adopt 1, 2, 3 and a TAC for this year how do we justify?
 - How do we determine juvenile beds and how are they closed?
27. Members noted that in the 1980s the fishery had over 100 vessels and landed 25,000 tonnes which was regarded as the virgin biomass. In contrast, today there are currently about 15 active operators. Members suggested that as a result of the fishery being closed for 3 years it did achieve the re-building of the stock in 2009. Unfortunately the uncharacteristic mortality events in recent years have brought management and Harvest Strategy issues to the forefront.
28. An industry proposal was presented at the meeting as the preferred management approach for the 2012 season. Members agreed that it needs to stand up to scrutiny and recommended one month to assess the feasibility of the proposal with a target mid August season start.
29. The key aspects of the proposal for the 2012 fishing season included:
 1. Close Area 3 and part of Area 2 (these areas contain a combined biomass estimate of up to 4,236 tonnes)
 2. Open the rest of eastern Bass Strait (total area not just management boxes)
 3. Data boards/collection protocols across fleet to collect additional data during fishing trips
 4. Areas of small scallops closed
 5. Adopt a size of 85mm (arguably scientifically sound from the 90mm size / 3+ year proxy) – 20% discard rate
 6. TAC of 2000 tonnes (this is a reduction of 500 tonnes).
30. Members acknowledged things to like about the proposal such as the two area closures and how the proposal will provide information for coming years. Additionally the further points were noted:
 - These arrangements will be a one-off for the 2012 season pending review of Harvest Strategy for 2013
 - Observers will be welcome on vessels to monitor catch and effort (noting there will be no additional budget for this)
 - Industry will investigate the acquisition of 2 more electronic monitoring boards for use during trips



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- Industry expect an outcome to be known from AFMA in around a month, but this will depend potentially on RAG/MAC and AFMA timing for consideration
 - There is no alternative plan at this stage.
31. Members questioned how you would assess if this approach worked and what would success look like? It was noted that this would depend on that activity of vessels during the season and the information obtained. If the proposal was implemented it was suggested that operators would fish Area 1 first down to non-viable commercial levels then operators would spread at least another 2 trips (research trips).
32. Member noted that initial consultation will commence next week through ScallopRAG via e-mail. Once completed further recommendations from ScallopMAC will be sought before the proposal is considered by the AFMA Commission. Members requested advice on a timeline to undertake the necessary consultation and approvals to open the fishery.

Agenda item 4 – Harvest Strategy

33. Mr Mike Dredge presented key points relating to the total production figures he has been working on. Members noted a lot of variation in all three data sets (jurisdictions) and when the data sets are summed together it is more stable. The total stock biomass needs a lot more consideration and the costs of management outweigh production. Mr Dredge agreed to distribute an updated report on the history of the scallop fishery to members for review.
34. Mr Tim Karlov (DAFF) provided an overview of the process to review the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy. It was noted that this undertaking is a requirement for the policy to be reviewed in 5 years since inception and aligned with this review will be a review of the Commonwealth Bycatch Policy.
35. The reviews will incorporate assessments of specific components of each policy and technical reviews. Subsequent consultation processes with stakeholders will be undertaken to ground truth and test any policy changes. A risk based approach is being considered for bycatch management i.e. triggers bycatch action plans including the necessity of Bycatch Action Plans for all fisheries. Members requested that the review and stakeholder consultation should target advice when seeking comments from research and industry groups. The Chair thanked Mr Karlov for his time.
36. Mr Neil Hughes provided a summary of BSCZSF Harvest Strategy review process and further issues outlined at the February 2012 ScallopMAC/RAG meetings for consideration. Dr Jayson Semmes provided an update on the 90mm size, previous changes to size limits and the confusion relating to what it was actually about. The minimum size limits adopted is a relationship between size and age whereby 85-95mm equals 3+ yrs equals 2 major spawning events which have been a foundation to the management of the fishery.



37. Members outlined that how the 20% discard rule is applied needs to be looked at, in terms of what was the original intention of the rule (designed to protect the juvenile cohort coming through). Members suggested there is a need to look more at the slope of the less than 90mm trailing edge side of the curve to better define the 20% discard. The meeting agreed to seek a recommendation from the MAC to the RAG of a better method of interpretation of a histogram to determine a harvestable bed.
38. Industry members presented a paper outlining issues to be addressed in a review of the BSCZSF Harvest Strategy. The meeting recommended that the RAG and AFMA to work through the related issues. Key issues and points raised included:
- Jurisdictional issues to incorporate beds in Harvest Strategies, at least recognise there are known beds in state waters
 - Beds should be identified by year of settlement and acknowledged as part of the spawning biomass
 - Western Bass Strait needs to be treated differently and requests for the RAG to look at evidence for cross spawning, fairly tenuous events, need prolonged easterly winds (i.e. discount west for 500 for eastern and the not the other way)
 - More flexibility for AFMA to make decisions under the Commission umbrella
 - Need to address barriers and opening areas should be encouraged
 - Changes for TACs mid season incorporated in Management plans
 - Proper design and implementation of surveys. Noting that survey protocols are a two way street, and the onus is on industry to deliver quality data
 - Explore the Tasmanian TAC setting approach and use of relative abundance
 - MAC consideration last dot point, need to work together to protect the fishery from outside and adverse impacts.
39. Members suggested the value in looking at other scallop fisheries elsewhere (e.g. NZ fisheries examples). It was noted that the Georges Banks Fishery share similar jurisdictional problems (USA & Canada) requirements to protect broad stock. Mr Mike Dredge agreed to follow-up this request on a voluntary basis at a first instance.
40. The Chair thanked Members for their contributions.

Meeting ended at 3pm



ATTACHMENT 1

Actions arising from ScallopMAC 21

Item number	Action	Action officer
1	AFMA to provide advice on a timeline for consideration of the industry proposal and season start	AFMA
2	Mike Dredge to distribute an updated report on the history of the scallop fishery to members for review.	Mike Dredge
3	The RAG to recommend better method of interpretation of a histogram to determine a harvestable bed.	ScallopRAG
4	The RAG and AFMA to work through industry issues identified with the Harvest Strategy and existing management arrangements	ScallopRAG/AFMA



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ATTACHMENT 2

Special Meeting of the Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery
Management Advisory Committee and Resource Assessment Group

22 June 2012,

Keilty Room, Novotel, 65 Northbourne Avenue, Canberra.

Draft Agenda

Friday 22 June

Time	Item	Presenter
9.30 am	1. Preliminaries	Chair
	1.1. Adoption of agenda	
9.40	2. Fishery Updates	Neil Hughes
	2.1. Management update	David Jarvis
	2.2. Industry update	Industry Members
10.00	3. Pre-season Fishery Surveys and 2012 Management arrangements	Jayson Semmens
10.45	<i>Morning tea</i>	
11.00	2012 Management arrangements cont.	
12.30 pm	<i>Lunch</i>	
1.30	4. Harvest Strategy review process	
3.15	5. Other business	
	5.1. Mike Dredge - Catch Data Interpretation	
4.00	<i>Close</i>	