



Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery

**Combined meeting of the Scallop Management Advisory Committee
(ScallopMAC) and Scallop Resource Assessment Group (ScallopRAG)**

26 June 2013, Teleconference

MINUTES

Members present

Mr Bill Talbot	A/g 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)
Dr Jayson Semmens	Research Member (IMAS)
Mr John Hammond	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Ms Melissa Schubert	Permanent Observer (Victorian Government)
Mr Michael Dredge	Research Member
Mr Steve Shanks	AFMA Member
Mr Matt Piasente	Executive Officer

Observers present

Mr Bob Lister	Executive Officer, Tasmanian Scallop Fishermen's Association (TSFA)
Mr Nic Jones	IMAS
Mr Nic Marton	ABARES

Apologies

Mr David Jarvis	Permanent Observer (Tasmanian Government)
Mr Richard Martin	Research Member
Dr Ilona Stobutzki	Research Member (ABARES)
Mr John Pollock	Chair

1. The meeting opened at 3:30am on 26 June 2013.

Agenda item 1.1 – welcome and apologies

2. The A/g Chair, Mr Bill Talbot, welcomed members and observers to the combined joint meeting of ScallopMAC and ScallopRAG. Apologies were received from Mr John Pollock, Mr Richard Martin, Mr Dave Jarvis and Dr Ilona Stobutzki.



Agenda item 1.2 – Declaration of interest

3. The Chair noted the circulated list of declarations of interest and asked members of both ScallopMAC and RAG if they had any further declarations of interest they wished to acknowledge. Members were also asked if they could review the agenda and declare any additional interests regarding specific items if such interests existed. Members acknowledged that the list of declarations provided reflected the current conflicts of interest and no further declarations of interest were declared. The Chair also advised it is the responsibility of each member to raise particular conflict of interests as they arise during the teleconference.

Agenda item 1.3 – Adoption of agenda

4. The items on the Agenda were adopted, with the agenda item ‘contingency plans should scallop beds opened for the 2013 season become non-viable’ added under agenda item 4. The meeting also noted that a combined MAC and RAG meeting is being held for efficiency purposes given the dual membership of committee members and due to the meeting considering both stock and management issues concurrently.

Agenda item 2 – Harvest Strategy

5. Mr Steve Shanks provided an update on the review of the Harvest Strategy for the fishery. Mr Shanks noted that the project plan for the review of the Harvest Strategy stated that once the report from the Institute of Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS) on ‘*Establishing fine-scale industry based spatial management and harvest strategies for the commercial scallop fishery in Australia*’ had been completed information from the report would be incorporated into the Harvest Strategy. However, as the IMAS report provided no overwhelming information to justify a substantial departure from the existing Harvest Strategy there was no basis to modifying the strategy prior to providing advice on the TAC and area to be opened for the 2013 season. Mr Shanks went on to suggest that a more appropriate arrangement would be for ScallopRAG to convene at a subsequent meeting to consider the IMAS report independently. Members acknowledged that while they may not agree with the existing Harvest Strategy and had strong concerns about delays in reviewing the document, the IMAS report provided no overwhelming information that justified modifying the Harvest Strategy prior to setting the TAC and area to be fished for the 2013 season.
6. It was further identified the IMAS report was not a silver bullet and will not be able to solve all the problems members have identified with the existing Harvest Strategy. Members agreed that ScallopRAG should meet separately to both consider the IMAS report and further develop the Harvest Strategy as a matter of priority and within a defined time frame. A number of members were of the view that the current Harvest Strategy needed a complete overhaul and was simply not addressing the need to harvest scallops before they die and as a result potential income was being lost. In order to progress the harvest strategy review it was agreed that ScallopRAG would meet within the next 6-8 weeks and an open invitation should be provided to ScallopMAC members to participate in the meeting.



7. Dr Mike Dredge also asked if AFMA could provide ScallopRAG with a history of the management arrangements in the fishery and he would attempt to correlate patterns of recruitment to further enlighten their discussions. A number of scientists also gave an undertaking to provide ScallopRAG with documentation to assist discussions on the Harvest Strategy.

Dr Dredge also asked that his previously circulated paper on international scallop fishery management arrangements could be re sent to members to assist with the Harvest Strategy review.

The meeting agreed that a ScallopRAG meeting would be convened in the next 6 to 8 weeks to progress the review of the Harvest Strategy.

Agenda item 3 – Survey results

8. Dr Jayson Semmens presented the results of the May surveys. Dr Semmens referred to the results of the survey that had been sent to members.
9. Members noted the discard rates at 90mm and 85mm for both areas. Dr Semmens outlined the projected growth of the 2 areas using information from previous research. The meeting noted that assuming average growth and no small cohorts coming through in the areas at the end of September at 90mm the discard rate will be 21% for area 1 and 27% for area 2. While at the end of October the discard rate for area 2 would be 21%.
10. Members noted that using 85mm size limit and the project growth within both areas would meet the 20% discard rate requirement. Members agreed that given 85mm size limit was adopted last year it was agreed to adopt this size limit again for the 2013 season. Members noted that recent season have shown that if you wait until the 90mm discard rate it reached significantly increases the risks of losing the bed.
11. Members noted that at 85mm it is still within the science (85mm – 95mm) for the 3+ years and 2 major spawning criteria. Concerns were expressed that implementing less precautionary measures may pose a risk to the stock. Members reiterated that the management has been precautionary for 6 years and it is difficult to see how this precautionary approach has assisted stock abundance. It was noted that this precautionary approach needs to be examined in the context of the Harvest Strategy and clear objectives on what management in the fishery is trying to achieve need to be developed.
12. The meeting noted that the stronger argument is that growth rates will be achieving the 90mm discard rate in the areas later this year. Members agreed they are comfortable adopting the 85mm size limit noting ABARES concerns adopting a less precautionary approach.

The meeting agreed that an 85mm size limit should be applied for the 2013 season.



Agenda item 4 – 2013 Season arrangements

13. Members discussed the spatial management requirements of the harvest strategy. Members expressed concerns regarding operational restrictions and the limitations to open extensive areas in the fishery (i.e. can't open an area unless it is classified as viable under the harvest strategy).
14. Members discussed undertaking additional survey trips to verify the status (size / biomass) of other known areas north of area 1. The pros and cons of waiting for the survey's results were considered and it was noted that waiting for the survey results would further delay the opening of the season.
15. Members noted that both areas are similar sizes and scallops are still under developed. It was noted that area 1 has better densities and recovery rate from a harvesting perspective. Members agreed to open area 1 and closed area 2 to satisfy the requirement under the Harvest Strategy (the biomass and proportion rule) to close 40% of the viable area identified and the biomass closed is more than 500 tonnes. Members agreed that AFMA would liaise with industry to determine the appropriate boundary of area 1, noting that area 1 should be made as large as possible while ensuring compliance with the Harvest Strategy.
16. Members discussed an appropriate total allowable catch (TAC) for the season taking into account the biomass estimates provided by Dr Semmens and what would constitute a harvestable biomass based on commercial viable catch rates. Concerns were expressed that in recent years there has been a low percentage of the TAC taken and this has the potential to influence the perception of the status of the fishery.
17. Members acknowledged the difficulty in setting a TAC for the fishery considering that reports of areas north of area 1 indicated the existence of commercially viable catches. Members noted that a pragmatic decision on the TAC needs to be made given what may be caught in other areas (in the event other areas will be opened). Members noted that economic viability of area 1 will decrease over time and that the uncaught TAC could potentially be caught in other areas (in the event other areas can be surveyed and opened under the harvest strategy). Given the average biomass of area 1 was 2,197 tonnes, members agreed to recommend a 1,500 tonne TAC for the 2013 season.
18. The meeting also noted that area 1 only had the capacity to sustain commercially viable catch rates for a relatively short period of time (3 weeks). Given this predicament the meeting developed a contingency plan. The meeting considered it appropriate in the time prior to the commencement of the season (4 to 6 weeks) scientific permits should be issued to provide the opportunity to transect scallop beds that have already been located to determine biomass estimates and search for new beds. The meeting were of the view that developing biomass estimates for new beds would provide the opportunity for additional fishing once area 1 was no longer commercially viable.



Australian Government

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The meeting agreed that area 1 would be opened to fishing and area 2 would be a non-navigational area. AFMA noted this arrangement complied with the requirements of the Harvest Strategy. It was further agreed that AFMA would liaise with industry to determine the appropriate boundaries of area 1, noting that area 1 should be made as large as possible while ensuring compliance with the Harvest Strategy.

The meeting agreed that the TAC for the 2013 season should be set at 1,500 tonnes.

The meeting agreed that AFMA would provide the ability for further research permits to be issued to enable additional beds located to be transected to establish biomass estimates and to provide industry the opportunity to locate new scallop beds.

19. The Chair thanked Members for their contributions.

Meeting ended at 6pm