



Bass Strait Central Zone Scallop Fishery

Scallop Management Advisory Committee (ScallopMAC)

29 August 2013, Teleconference

MINUTES

Members present

Mr John Pollock	Chair
Mr Stuart Richey	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Mr Allan Barnett	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Mr John Hammond	Industry Member (Tasmania)
Mr David Jarvis	Permanent Observer (Tasmanian Government)
Ms Melissa Schubert	Permanent Observer (Victorian Government)
Mr Steve Shanks	AFMA Member
Mr Matt Piasente	AFMA Executive Officer

Observers

Dr Jayson Semmens	ScallopRAG Member
Mr Bill Talbot	ScallopRAG Chair
Mr Bob Lister	Tasmanian Scallop Fisherman's Association

Apologies

Mr Steve Mantzaris	Industry Member (Victoria)
Mr Darren Fearnley	Industry Member (Victoria)
Mr Jon Bryan	Conservation Member

1. The meeting opened at 10:00am on 29 August 2013.

Agenda item 1 – welcome and apologies

2. The Chair, Mr John Pollock, welcomed members to the ScallopMAC teleconference. An Apology was received from Mr Jon Bryan.

Agenda item 1.2 – Adoption of agenda

3. The Chair asked if the AFMA representative was able to provide an overview of the ScallopRAG report update on the harvest strategy review. Mr Stuart Richey was also asked to provide an update on catches since the opening of the fishery.

Agenda item 2 – August Survey results

4. Dr Jayson Semmens provided a summary of the August survey results from the report “*Draft BSCZSF Survey Report August 2013*”. Key findings from the report included:



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- Two main areas were surveyed, no biomass estimates were provided, as the surveying was about determining the discard rates for the purpose of establishing if areas could be defined as 'Viable Areas'.
 - Densities in both areas (Areas 3 and 4 as shown in Attachment 1) were reported to be low, 107 and 203 kg's per hour for Areas 3 and 4 respectively, which indicated the likelihood of low commercial catch rates (see **Table 1**).
 - Low densities indicated that should either Area 3 or 4 be opened they would not provide significant catches for an extended period.
 - Size distributions showed that Area 4 had a 35% discard rate, which did not meet the requirements of the discard rule (at 85mm size limit). Dr Semmens advised that his growth estimates indicated that Area 4 would meet the discard rate (at 85mm size limit) by 1 October 2013.
5. Industry members were surprised at the large number of small scallops taken in Areas 3 and 4 (which effected the discard rate) and commented that they thought the size range of scallops in these areas would resemble Areas 1 and 2. Members noted that it is the meat size and condition that counted and Areas 3 and 4 had produced 85-90 meats to the kilo with 15-16% recovery.

Agenda item 3 – Catch update since the opening of the season

6. ScallopMAC noted that since the opening of the BSCZSF, an estimated 83 tonnes have been landed from 9 vessels with a return of \$145,000. Processed catches from the BSCZSF resulted in 12.5 / 12.8 recovery possibly indicating a partial spawn or rapid shell growth. It was suggested that the same amount of tonnage could still be landed from the open area producing an estimated \$280,000 from the fishery. Industry members noted this figure was less than the annual management costs for the fishery. Industry members advised that operators have concentrated fishing effort in the core central area of the open area with very little effort north, west and south of this area. However, there were some catches near the eastern boundary of the open area.

Agenda item 4 – Declaring conflicts of interest

7. The Chair referred to the previously declared conflict of interest sheet for ScallopMAC members. Based on the information in the sheet he advised that of those in attendance Mr Barnett, Mr Richey and Mr Hammond had a pecuniary interest in the BSCZSF. Dr Jayson Semmens also declared a conflict of interest as the sole research service provider for the fishery. In order to address the procedures for MAC members with a conflict of interest the Chair asked each of the members with a conflict of interest to individually leave the conference. While absent from the teleconference the MAC considered whether it was appropriate for them to participate in discussions for each of the respective agenda items.
8. The MAC agreed that in the case of the three industry members, with a declared conflict of interest, their interests were no lesser or greater than that of any industry member and would not affect their contributions to MAC discussions.



9. Following discussions around the conflicts of interest Dr Jayson Semmens held he was also asked to leave the conference to enable MAC members to determine whether it was appropriate for him to participate in the teleconference. All members agreed that Dr Jayson Semmens should be invited to re-join the teleconference. It was noted that Dr Semmens was an observer at the meeting and not actually a member of ScallopMAC. Regardless all members of the teleconference considered it appropriate for Dr Semmens to follow the conflict of interest procedures.

Agenda Item 5 – Opening additional fishing areas for the 2013 season

10. The Chair called on the AFMA Member to present the outcomes of the ScallopRAG meeting that had been provided to ScallopMAC in the form of a meeting summary. A number of comments on the ScallopRAG meeting summary were noted including:
- Concerns from some members of ScallopMAC that ScallopRAG members did not have a detailed understanding of the fishery, including fishing operations to provide suitable advice for management purposes.
 - The ScallopRAG advice was considered to be overly precautionary in applying a restrictive Harvest Strategy that did not reflect the fishing capacity of the fleet given the small number of operators actually fishing.
 - Concerns regarding the actual size of the potential additional fishing areas given the total area of the fishery. Being restricted to fish in small strips ‘coffin beds’ is not financially viable for operators. Industry members who participated in the survey outlined that a strong tide was running during the survey, scallops move with the tide and the commercial reality of small strips is very problematic.
 - The management costs raise concerns given the state of the stock and management requirements under the Harvest Strategy. Members requested an update on how the fishery budget is tracking and an understanding of likely management costs associated with opening additional areas.
 - Members discussed options to search for further scallop beds in the fishery under scientific research permits. Industry members raised the point that instead of using research quota concession holders should be able to use their own quota holdings. The AFMA member explained from an AFMA perspective concession holders using their own quota while an area of the fishery was open to search the wider area of the fishery would undermine management objectives and create compliance concerns. Industry members advised that it would be unlikely that any operators would undertake a research trip at their expense. The ability to search other areas plus the provision to fish in the open area on the same trip is required to ensure operational costs are covered.
 - Industry members recommended opening both Areas 3 and 4 while having the ability to search for scallop beds in other areas of the fishery.
 - The AFMA member advised of the requirements under the Harvest Strategy, in particular the proportion rule whereby only 40% of viable areas can be opened to fishing which restricts the areas that can be opened during 2013.
 - Members were reluctant to make any management recommendations given the limited flexibility of the Harvest Strategy and uncertainty surrounding the costs of management.



- The point was raised that the cost of managing the fishery outweighed the benefits of opening additional areas of the fishery for the 2013 season. The AFMA member explained that should ScallopMAC consider it appropriate to open an additional area to fishing the ongoing management costs would be limited as once the area was open there would be no further work required. Industry noted there would still be compliance costs.
 - Some industry members also identified that other fishers not represented at ScallopMAC may be seeking to fish again this year, in particular those without a Tasmanian concession. As such, ScallopMAC raised the point that the MAC should give consideration to providing these fishers the opportunity to fish. Following discussion ScallopMAC agreed that an additional area should be opened for the 2013 season.
 - ScallopMAC were of the view that both Areas 3 and 4 met the requirements under the Harvest Strategy in terms of being considered 'Viable Areas' or 'Potentially Viable Areas' as such either could be opened
 - ScallopMAC members considered two management options:
 1. Open area 3 now, or
 2. Open Area 4 on 1 November
11. Members agreed that based on the available information from the survey report Area 4 offers the best return to the fishery in terms of commercial catch rates. Members requested increasing the size of the box (Area 4) as operators were being penalised for limited survey data when operators are required to cover survey costs. The AFMA Member noted that flexibility to increase the size of the area may be limited due to the requirements of the Harvest Strategy. However, if the actual surveying incorporated a slightly larger area, even if limit tows had been undertaken, then he would increase the size of the area.

The MAC agreed to recommend to AFMA that Area 4 be opened to fishing on 1 November 2013.

Agenda Item 5 – Harvest Strategy

12. The Chair recommended that this item be postponed due to the meeting running late and that a number of issues in regard to the Harvest Strategy had already been raised.
13. Industry members expressed concerns regarding the ongoing delay in the review of the Harvest Strategy, given that this has been a significant issue in the fishery since 2009. ScallopMAC members noted that the current Harvest Strategy is considered financially untenable and as a result a review of the Harvest Strategy as previously recommended is required ASAP.
14. The AFMA Member noted that an internal meeting is scheduled with the AFMA CEO tomorrow to consider variations and options more suitable for the fishery. The AFMA member advised the review was a high priority and ScallopMAC would be informed of the progress and consulted ASAP. The AFMA member also acknowledged the importance of the work in addressing the concerns with the management of the fishery industry had.



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15. The Chair thanked Members for their contributions.

Meeting ended at 12:30 am.