

Attendees

Chair: Ian Cartwright (Independent Chair)

Central Zone: Jamie Espie, Craig Miller, Hans Litjens, David Hoskin, Owen Shannessy, Michael Shannessy, Mellanie Porteus, Beverley Amos, Vinnie Hunt, Craig Fox, Johnathon Davey, John Hawkins, Priya Cardinaletti, Ryan Springall, Jason Swain, Murray Petersen, Ric Defries, Malcolm Petrie (CEO, AVCZ), Tony DeDomenico (Chair, AVCZ), Sean Buck (Director, AVCZ), Peter Johnston (Director, AVCZ), Michelle Hansen (Director, AVCZ), Allan Buck (quota holder), Duncan Worthington (Expert Consultant)

DEDJTR: Allison Webb (Director Fisheries Management and Science), Kate Simpson (Fishery Manager), Travis Dowling (Executive Director, Fisheries Victoria), Harry Gorfine (Senior Marine Research Scientist), Rod Barber (Senior Fisheries Officer)

Observer: Diana Attana (minute taker)

Executive Summary

The meeting was attended by a range of Central Zone quota holders, divers and industry stakeholders and presentations were delivered by: Kate Simpson, Duncan Worthington and Harry Gorfine.

Initial discussion was dedicated to the data logger program and its future application for the TACC process. While the program is well supported by both Industry and Government, there are a number of key issues to agree on prior to supplying data for input into the TACC decision, including potential compliance implications, cost recovery and intellectual property. The long-term objective is to efficiently, transparently and accurately provide data input to key decisions for TACC setting and the harvest strategy to ensure sustainable management of the resource.

The meeting attendees worked constructively and cooperatively to discuss the proposed quota in each SMU (item 6), and size limits in four SMUs (item 5). With regard to size limits, Industry opposed FV's recommended changes to the four SMUs (Surfcoast, Kilcunda, Liptrap and Prom Westside). To that end, AVCZ will submit a letter to FV in late January 2017 regarding Industry's position on size limits. A summary of the proposed tonnage targets as well as lower and upper thresholds and limits is summarised on page 2. The proposed 2017/18 TACC is 274 tonnes for blacklip abalone and 3.4 tonnes for greenlip abalone - a net reduction of 6.2 tonnes of blacklip abalone, compared to the 2016/17 season.

While Industry and FV hold conflicting views regarding the state of the resource in certain SMUs – a consensus view was held for a number of SMUs by both parties. These views are reflected in the comments and recommendations recorded in attachment 1.

Public consultation

The proposed TACC is now subject to public consultation. FV will issue statutory consultation documents to all stakeholders, followed by a consultative period throughout 1-15 February 2017. A final TACC decision is due to be made by 17 March 2017.

Proposed 2017/18 TACC, SMU and size limits

SMU	Size Limit	Lower limit (30%)	Lower threshold (15%)	Target	Upper threshold (15%)	Upper limit (30%)
Shipwreck Coast	123	14.8	18.0	21.2	24.4	27.6
Cape Otway	123	36.6	44.4	52.3	52.3 Upper threshold set at target	60.1 Upper limit set as 15%
Surfcoast	110	2.8	3.4	4	4.6	5.2
Port Phillip Bay	105	-	-	0	-	-
Back Beaches	117	46.3	56.3	66.2	76.1	86.1
Flinders	110	21.0	25.5	30	30 Upper threshold and upper limit set as target	
Phillip Island	110	29.2	35.4	41.7	41.7 Upper threshold set at target	48.0 Upper limit set at 15%
Kilcunda	115	9.9	12.0	14.1	16.2	18.3
Cape Liptrap	110	8.8	10.6	12.5	14.4	16.3
Prom Westside	120	14.0	17.0	20	23.0	26.0
Prom Eastside	110	4.9	6.0	7	7 Upper threshold set as target	8.1 Upper limit set at 15%
Cliffy Group	110	3.5	4.3	5	5.8	6.5
Proposed 2017/18 TACC				274		

Item 1: Welcome and Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting, and reiterated the workshop objective to:

- Inform and provide input into the TACC and size limit proposal.

Travis Dowling welcomed attendees and provided the following introductory remarks:

- There are notable environmental challenges that may be impacting the fishery;
- The key objective for the workshop is to facilitate an open and frank discussion regarding the state of reef codes and catch limits with a view to better understanding the science in comparison to what is being observed in the water; and
- Acknowledged all parties are working towards the mutual goal of rebuilding the resource as well as having a profitable and sustainable fishery.

The Abalone Victoria (Central Zone) Limited (AVCZ) directors present were introduced, along with Johnathon Davey from Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV) and Craig Fox from Western Abalone Divers Association (WADA). AVCZ undertook an industry pre-TACC meeting the day prior, where the consensus view was to maintain the current quota.

Item 2: Introduction and agenda

The Chair provided an overview of the agenda and reiterated the common interest to support the sustainability of the resource, though clearly different views exist.

Item 3: Review of actions from 2016/17 workshop and management presentation

FV provided a management presentation regarding the statutory consultation process, assessment of conditions from the previous year and an overview of the state of the fishery at the zonal scale.

In reviewing the conditions of the previous year, FV noted that numerous SMUs were not managed within the target range and reiterated that catches need to be managed within this range to promote sustainability of the fishery. FV will continue to use mandatory closures again for the 2017/18 fishing season.

The key elements of the zone assessment were summarised. The scientific data shows that over the last 15 years, CPUE (catch per unit effort e.g. kilos per hour) and pre-recruit data has shown a statistically significant negative trend, and that recruits are not showing any trend.

FV's presentation is annexed to these minutes as attachment 3.

It was NOTED:

- That FV will issue statutory consultation documents to all stakeholders, followed by a consultative period throughout 1-15 February 2017.
- A final TACC decision is due to be made by 17 March 2017.

FV commented that the data logger program was part of the conditions and that only limited progress had been made with its implementation. AVCZ provided an update on the data logger program, noting that six have been installed and installation of the remaining units is imminent.

AVCZ and FV discussed the development of a Diver survey however industry consensus could not be reached, stalling the process (incomplete).

Compliance workshop

AVCZ expressed concern over the inclusion of compliance matters in the FV presentation, which industry previously formally requested be excluded from the workshop.

Following a request from Industry to reschedule the 21 October 2016 compliance workshop cancelled on 20 October 2016, FV agreed to hold a compliance workshop with industry. It was noted that the agenda will also include issues around 'illegal take' which may be impacting the resource, as well as regulatory reform.

It was AGREED:

- To defer discussion regarding compliance matters to a separate workshop, to be called by FV as previously agreed.
- That FV will schedule a compliance workshop as soon as practicable.

Clarification of 15% threshold and 30% upper limit

Industry expressed concern regarding the additional conditions and arrangements in the 2016/17 quota order letter, which were neither discussed at the 2016 TACC workshop, nor agreed to/supported by Industry. FV noted that these conditions were implemented by the Executive Director of FV as a delegate for the Minister

FV clarified that the 30% upper limit remains the hard cap. FV assert that the 15% threshold is the limit which should be targeted, however Industry may validly fish to the 30% upper limit, when the SMU will be closed.

It was NOTED:

- That for the 2015/16 season, SMUs were managed to the 30% upper limit by FV through mandatory closures.

It was AGREED:

- That the **15% threshold** be the trigger for a **review point**, as previously agreed between FV and Industry to discuss the state of the SMU and whether it should be allowed to run past the threshold, giving regard to whether the mandated 30% upper limit be retained, or if appropriate, whether the SMU should be closed at some level below the upper limit.

- That the **30% upper limit** remains in place, consistent with the Management Plan, except where alternative arrangements have been proposed.

Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Industry expressed the need to have a FRAG system with at least four workshops per year.

FV stated its commitment to the FRAG process and agreed to move forward with the establishment of this group.

ACTIONS:

- AVCZ to clarify the specific objectives sought, the purpose of each meeting and desired outcomes.
- FV to provide AVCZ with a timeline for the establishment of the FRAG process.
- AVCZ and FV to finalise the Terms of Reference for the FRAG.

Item 4: AVCZ science presentation

Dr Worthington provided a presentation on the collection and analysis of logger data, which was commissioned at the request of AVCZ.

Presentation key points:

- Logger hardware: 14 loggers since 2014.
- New logger technology implemented (Succorfish) – enables two-way information, live data and logs boat position every minute.
- Accuracy and coverage of logger data - will play an important role in supporting harvest strategy.
- Examples of recent data observed – such as Abalone length at Shipwreck Coast whereby 3,619 fish were measured. Data shows sizes including 130mm, 134.5mm indicating there's larger fish now than in 2002.
- Survey Sites - logger data may provide guidance regarding where to conduct abundance surveys.
- Regarding development of a harvest strategy, biomass and harvest fraction – industry needs agreement on how the data will be used.
- Key issue going forward will be to agree on data sharing, reporting, audit of, coverage and use.

Dr Worthington's presentation is annexed to these minutes as attachment 4.

Logger Data

A discussion regarding the key considerations around logger data took place, with the following issues raised:

- **Compliance.** There are potential implications for compliance, for example, "*will a diver be questioned for spending idle time in the water while assessing the conditions?*" - Industry will seek agreement from FV that data will be used solely for research not compliance.

- **Cost.** Industry will seek FV approach to cost recovery to avoid duplicating cost/effort.
- **IP.** Industry will seek agreement from FV with regard to intellectual property considerations and license issues.

FV noted that the sharing of logger data was essential if the information is to be used for regulatory decision making. AVCZ stated that the intention is to ultimately share the data with FV, noting that the data shown in Dr Worthington's presentation was trial data and has only just been analysed and provided to industry. Once the logger program is fully implemented and certain agreements are in place with FV, then FV access to data will be granted.

It was NOTED:

- The Western Zone does not share its data directly with FV, but rather has an independent, expert consultant analyse the data prior to sharing with FV. FV audits the data to determine its suitability for regulatory decision making.

It was AGREED:

- There was in principle agreement, and support, by all parties for FV to have access to 2017/18 logger data, provided that it goes through an agreed process regarding: how the data is provided, when the data is provided, in what form, and with consideration to issues around data security, IP, compliance, audit and cost recovery.

Malcolm encouraged all owners and all divers to support the data logger program, which in his view will deliver efficient, transparent and accurate data input to key decisions for TACC setting and inform the harvest strategy, to ensure sustainable management of the resource.

Item 5: Size limit review

Kate Simpson, on behalf of FV, presented FV's *Central Zone Abalone Fishery – Size limit review* (November 2016).

Presentation key points:

- Only historical data was utilised in the review, no new data was collected.
- A number of criteria were identified as important when considering changes to size limits including:
 1. consistency with the L50 plus two years approach;
 2. consistency with current size limits to minimise impact on CPUE data; and
 3. a precautionary approach is to apply where there is limited or no data available, and the minimum size to be considered is that listed in the *Fisheries Regulations 2009*.
- A single size limit per SMU is required for management and compliance purposes.

Kate's presentation is annexed to these minutes as attachment 3.

SMU	Current 2016	Proposed size
Surfcoast 8.02 -10.05	110-123	110

Kilcunda 15.01-15.05	110-115	115
Liptrap 16.01-16.06	105-110	110
Prom Westside 16.07-17.13	115-120	120

The proposed size limits were discussed. Industry requested that the status quo with respect to size limits be retained and raised the following concerns:

- The harvest strategy should be developed and implemented before size limits are changed, and size limits should be kept to those prescribed in the regulations.
- There appears to be no scientific basis in support of these proposed changes to the size limit (for example, the availability of abalone feed (drift algae) may be impacting on growth rates which would have implications for size limits/size at maturity).
- If the size is increased to 115 for Kilcunda, it's predicted that Cape Paterson, Rec Beach and Inverloch won't have a catch for two years (diver comment: *"this will shut down Kilcunda"*) and some concern was expressed that the abalone there may not reach this increased size.
- With regard to Prom Westside, divers suggest that mainland sites will never achieve the 120mm size limit - *"growth is inhibited due to fish being sheltered"*.
- Industry noted that to its knowledge, there have been no compliance issues raised in relation to current size limits.

FV thanked Industry for these comments, noting that they will be carefully considered through the statutory consultation process, and requested that AVCZ provide a written response regarding size limits.

IT WAS AGREED:

- AVCZ will provide a written response (by late January) regarding size limits, including issues raised at the TACC workshop and concise information to support retaining the current size limits.

FV confirmed that any proposed size limits are for the commercial sector only.

Item 6: 2017/18 Stock assessment process

Harry Gorfine, on behalf of FV presented fishery independent and dependent data as provided in the *Reef Assessment Report Card* and presentation annexed as attachment 5 – which was considered together with diver observations for the proposed 2017/18 TACC.

The stock assessment report and associated documents were taken as read.

There was considerable discussion over the use of the word ‘significant’ with respect to trends in the data. In some cases, the trend (from a flat line) was barely discernible and industry were concerned that applying the term ‘significant’ inferred that strong management action was required to address such a trend. It was explained that the term ‘significant’ should be read in conjunction with the word ‘statistically’; i.e. statistically significant means that there is great certainty (95% sure) that a trend (positive or negative) exists. It does not infer anything about the strength of the trend i.e. the slope or rate of change in the indicator.

With regard to the SMUs where quota has not (yet) been reached for 2016/17, a number of overarching comments were made, most notably:

- Adverse weather has had considerable impact and accounts for why catch is behind usual trends for some reef codes;
- Diver preference can be influenced by market fluctuations, location/proximity to SMU. Where divers choose to fish and selective fishing may change catch rate and therefore catch rate may not necessarily reflect the status of the resource; and
- 2+ months remain for the 2016/17 season and divers will go back to certain reefs towards the end of the season.

FV commented that Industry’s feedback would be taken on board, however noted FV is likely to set a lower TACC for the reefs that are consistently not reaching the lower threshold each season.

Attachment 1: *2017/18 recommended blacklip TACC, SMU and size limits* includes:

- A summary of diver comments made during the workshop for each SMU;
- The proposed targets recommended by FV, including any changes to the upper threshold and limit; and
- Industry view of FV’s recommendations.

FV noted that in the absence of agreement of a formal method of obtaining diver input, it had completed a number of phone calls to divers to get their first-hand views of the status of the resource in various SMUs. Feedback from these phone discussions were injected into the SMU discussions by FV [see bracketed and italicised text in the table below]. Industry expressed some discomfort with this process, since it was unclear to it how many divers had been contacted or the basis on which the comments to FV had been made.

ATTACHMENT 1: 2017/18 recommended blacklip TACC, SMU and size limits

SMU	2016/17 size limit (mm)	Proposed size limit (mm)	2016/17 target	Proposed 2017/18 target	CPUE trend	Pre-recruit trend	Recruit trend	Diver observations
Shipwreck Coast	123	123	18.4	21.2	No trend 2003-15	Positive 2009-16	Positive 2009-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishing well - very positive feedback Some mixed views by divers but generally fishing well. Still not as good as pre-AVG. <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> <p>Recommendation FV and Industry consensus to increase the target.</p>
Cape Otway	123	123	61.5	52.3	Negative 2003-15	Negative 2003-16	Negative 2003-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adverse weather has been a substantial factor for the 2016/17 season - "used to get three consecutive days fishing...currently only half days" - "Not an all-weather area". Weather has not affected all divers with some being able to fish here consistently <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> Mixed views on this area with some areas are looking good while others are worse than expected <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> Observed lots of fish remaining in the water. Location/proximity is an issue (diver preference). Attendee reported that he recently enlisted unfamiliar divers – who caught 500kg without even knowing the area. Cape Otway target has already been reduced (for the current season) – need to allow time for those reductions to take effect. By end of 2016/17 season, divers expect to reach lower limit. <p>Recommendation for target FV agreed to reduce by 15% - with a 15% upper limit imposed.</p>
Surfcoast	110/123	110 (refer to item 5)	5.8	4.0	Negative 2003-15	No data	No data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most divers won't fish this area as there are more productive areas with bigger fish. Weather conditions have influenced diving at this site. Surfcoast is the last SMU to get fished.

SMU	2016/17 size limit (mm)	Proposed size limit (mm)	2016/17 target	Proposed 2017/18 target	CPUE trend	Pre-recruit trend	Recruit trend	Diver observations
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diver preference doesn't necessarily reflect the resource; and the season still has 2+ months left to fish. Areas fished are also influenced by processor directives. None of the divers that attended the meeting and provided comments had dived at this location this season <p>Recommendation for target FV intent on reducing by 1.8t (31%). Industry wants to retain status quo.</p>
Port Phillip Bay	105	105	0.0	0.0	No data 2014-15	No trend 2009-16	Negative 2003-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Noted that PPB is not closed, but rather has no quota assigned. Industry requested that a small additional permit catch allowance be taken for PPB. <p>Recommendation for target FV intent on retaining status quo. Industry wants a small permit catch allowance in addition to the TACC.</p>
Back Beaches	117	117	66.2	66.2	Negative 2003-15	Negative 2003-16	No trend 2003-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area fishing very well - "looking good". Most divers agree that this area is fishing well and the target of around 60t is at the right level [comment provided by FV] <p>Recommendation for target FV and Industry consensus to retain status quo.</p>
Flinders	110	110	30.0	30.0	Negative 2003-15	Negative 2003-16	Negative 2006-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of divers contacted by FV (8 of 9 contacted) noted that fishing is extremely poor and this area needs to be allowed to recover. [comment provided by FV] Note, industry does not believe reducing quota will rebuild quota – "until there's a harvest strategy with a clear process, we're just guessing". Low stock in deeper water (where surveys are), while stock is present in other areas.

SMU	2016/17 size limit (mm)	Proposed size limit (mm)	2016/17 target	Proposed 2017/18 target	CPUE trend	Pre-recruit trend	Recruit trend	Diver observations
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an area of low catch rates and most fish are in shallow and close to shore. It is not fishing as well as previously <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> Catch rate indicates that Flinders is a commercially viable area. Area may have been impacted by virus <i>[although there is no evidence to support this per FV]</i> – in which case reduced quota won't assist recovery. <p>Recommendation for target FV agreed to nil change but imposed target as hard close (ie limit = target). Note, AVCZ will need to carefully review ABASE updates. Upon reaching target, FV will immediately close SMU.</p>
Phillip Island	110	110	41.7	41.7	Negative 2003-15	Negative 2003-16	Negative 2003-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were mixed views from divers with some stating it is fishing well with others stating that it is difficult fishing here <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> Majority of the catch is coming from two reef codes with a lot of area that is not being fished <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> Decline in size observed, need to measure a lot of fish to check the size. <i>[comment provided by FV]</i> 2016/17 catch is getting closer to 40t and slowing down. 2016/17 catch and conditions for this SMU consistent with previous season. <p>Recommendation for target FV agreed to nil change, with 15% upper limit imposed.</p>
Kilcunda	110/115	115 (refer to item 5)	14.1	14.1	Negative 2003-15	No data	No data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This SMU gets fished late in the season. <i>"fished this time last week – 440kg for 5 hours...heaps of stock on bottom... don't know the area ... everything oversized"</i>. Divers reiterated that diver preference is not necessarily representative of the status of the resource in a particular area'...<i>"why would we move if we're fishing well elsewhere?"</i>

SMU	2016/17 size limit (mm)	Proposed size limit (mm)	2016/17 target	Proposed 2017/18 target	CPUE trend	Pre-recruit trend	Recruit trend	Diver observations
								<p>Recommendation for target FV and Industry consensus to retain status quo.</p>
Cape Liptrap	105/110	110 (refer to item 5)	12.5	12.5	Negative 2003-15	Negative 2004-16	Negative 2004-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Size has increased. Not seeing any problems at all, very good fishing, lots of Abalone left behind – <i>“Fished between 400-600kg/day this year”</i>. Survey sites – not viable sites (divers are not going to those areas). <p>Recommendation for target FV and Industry consensus to retain status quo.</p>
Prom Westside	115/120	120 (refer to item 5)	20.0	20.00	Negative 2003-15	Negative 2003-16	No trend 2009-16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences noted between mainland and island. Debate regarding fishing at 115 v 120 – <i>“we used to fish at 110”</i>. <p>Recommendation for target FV and Industry consensus to retain status quo.</p>
Prom Eastside	110	110	5.0	7.0	No trend 2003-15	No data	No data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs to increase. Quota caught early. <p>Recommendation for target FV agreed to increase from 5 to 7 with a 15% upper limit imposed.</p>
Cliffy Group	110	110	5.0	5.0	No trend 2003-15	No data	No data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divers <i>“won’t dive there unless necessary”</i>. Plenty of fish, but small. <p>Recommendation FV and Industry consensus to retain status quo.</p>
TOTAL ALLOWABLE COMMERCIAL CATCH (TACC)			280.2	274.0	Net reduction of 6.2 tonnes			

ATTACHMENT 2: 2017/18 recommended greenlip TACC

Zone	2016/17 TACC	2017/18 TACC	Industry comments	DEDJTR comments
Central	3.4t	3.4t	No comment	Recommendation FV and Industry consensus to retain status quo. TACC subject to conditions (as listed below)

Kate provided an overview of FV's basis for recommending no change to the greenlip TACC, as follows:

- Catches are low and patchy.
- The greenlip TACC hasn't been caught for a number of seasons.
- Stock assessment has classified greenlip as overfished.
- In the absence of a dedicated harvest strategy, further information needs to be gathered including:
 - Size limit of 145-150mm already applied.
 - Separate reporting of greenlip catch and effort;
 - Collection of size data from greenlip harvested;
 - Provision of an annual report and associated spreadsheet to DEDJTR; and
 - Participation in an annual audit to be undertaken by DEDJTR.

It was NOTED:

- That Allan Buck offered to lend FV the previous VADA study regarding greenlip areas, which may be used as a baseline for further analysis.

Item 7: Other matters raised***10kg quota on last day***

A representative of Tasmanian Seafoods, requested clarification regarding '10kg quota on last day'. FV acknowledged the issue of over-catch/under-catch and commented FV is advocating for a change to the FIL system. It was noted that Tasmania has a system whereby it is possible to carryover or deduct a small amount of quota between quota years.

ACTION:

- While the change won't occur for 2016/17 FV has committed to providing a resolution on the over-catch/under-catch by April 2017, noting that this is dependent on IT system changes being implemented.

Eastern bluff – confusion with boundary

An **Industry member (diver)** sought clarification on the Eastern bluff boundary GPS line - particularly with regard to compliance concerns (*note: the Eastern bluff is a few hundred metres from the divide – headland in the gateway – runs out into the part that juts out*).

FV attested that the issue had only been apparent in the 2016/17 season and catches from the boundary issue was treated as an anomaly in reporting rather than a compliance issue. The workshop was assured that no compliance action would be issued to any diver making an honest, in-good faith mistake regarding the boundary.

ACTIONS:

- FV proposed that the relevant Fisheries Officer on behalf of FV and Industry determine a mutually agreeable viewpoint and draw a new GPS line to clarify the boundary.
- The CEO of the AVCZ requested that the final agreed position be formally documented by Fisheries Victoria and circulated to all Central Zone divers.

Data loggers - revisited

FV made some further comments regarding the long-term view for logger data:

- Support for data loggers across industry.
- Data loggers considered best practice for fisheries management in abalone fisheries.
- In the long-term, data loggers will most likely be mandatory and will begin discussions in this direction this year by working with Executive Officers of the various zones.
- Looking for support from Industry to implement loggers across the industry.

ACTIONS:

- FV will write to AVCZ with a proposition on using data loggers across the Central Zone.
- FV undertook to answer the following question on notice: *"Does FV have any budget to contribute to the data logger program?"*.

Item 8: Closing remarks

Chair: Very constructive - different dynamic to previous years. Thanked Harry and Kate for their work.

FV: Encouraging workshop with regard to industry relationship. Thanked Ian, AVCZ, all industry attendees and Rod.

AVCZ: Conveyed appreciation to the owners and divers in attendance, particularly given the time of year. Thanked Duncan for his contribution. Confident the industry is moving forward in a strong and cooperative manner.

The workshop concluded at 4.24pm.