

Attendees (list annexed to these minutes)

Chair: Ian Cartwright (Independent Chair)

Central Zone: John O'Neill, Vinnie Hunt, Hans Litjens, Reinhart Strauss, Bob Peime, David Forbes, Owen Shannessy, Aaron Crocombe, Joel Theodore, Jason York, Ric Devries, Malcolm Petrie (CEO, AVCZ), Tony DeDomenico (Chair, AVCZ), Kaz Bartaska (Director, AVCZ), Peter Johnston (Director, AVCZ), Michelle Hansen (Director, AVCZ), Allan Buck (quota holder), Duncan Worthington (Expert Consultant)

VFA: Kate Simpson (VFA Fisheries Manager), Dallas D'Silva (VFA Director), Harry Gorfine (Fisheries Scientist), Rod Barber (Senior Fisheries Officer)

VR Fish: Michael Burgess

Observer: Diana Attana (minute taker)

Apologies: Jamie Espie, Fred Glasbrennar, Natalie Bilborough

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, Malcom Petrie and Harry Gorfine.

The recent initial meeting of the Fisheries Resource Advisory Group (FRAG), draft harvest strategy and fishery independent survey (FIS) review were discussed in detail leading up to the discussion of proposed quota for each spatial management unit (SMU).

The meeting attendees worked constructively and cooperatively to discuss the proposed quota in each SMU, including size limits. Meeting attendees reached a general consensus that overall the quota should remain the same for 2018/19, with a 30% tonnage increase for the Shipwreck Coast which has been yielding elevated catch rates, and a number of smaller decreases in other SMUs reflecting the need for stock rebuilding in those areas. A summary of the proposed tonnage targets as well as lower and upper thresholds and limits is summarised on page 2. The proposed 2018/19 TACC remains unchanged at 274 tonnes for Blacklip abalone and 3.4 tonnes for Greenlip abalone.

While a consensus view could be reached on quota, it was agreed to defer discussion on size limit reviews (except for the increased size at Shipwreck) until further information is available and the issue of size limits will be revisited at the next FRAG meeting proposed for February 2018.

Public consultation

The proposed TACC is subject to statutory public consultation. VFA will issue consultation documents to all stakeholders, followed by a consultative period throughout early to mid-January 2018. A final TACC decision is due to be made in March 2018.

Proposed 2018/19 TACC, SMU and size limits

SMU	Size limit (mm)	Lower limit (30%)	Lower threshold (15%)	2017/18 target	Upper threshold (15%) ¹	Upper limit (30%)
Shipwreck Coast	125	20.1	24.4	28.7	TBC	33.0 Upper limit set as 15%
Cape Otway	123	36.6	44.5	52.3	TBC	60.1 Upper limit set as 15%
Surfcoast	110	1.0	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.8
Port Phillip Bay	105	0.0	0.0	0.0	TBC	5
Back Beaches	117	45.5	55.3	65.0	60/ 65.0 Upper threshold and upper limit set as target	
Flinders	110	21.0	25.5	30.0	25.5/ 30.0 Upper threshold and upper limit set as target	
Phillip Island	110	28.0	34.0	40.0	42.5	46.0 Upper limit set at 15%
Kilcunda	115	8.5	10.3	12.1	13.9	15.7
Cape Liptrap	110	8.8	10.6	12.5	10.6/12.5 Upper threshold and upper limit set as target	
Prom Westside	120	14.0	17.0	20.00	23.0	26.0
Prom Eastside	110	4.9	6.0	7.0	TBC	8.1 Upper limit set at 15%
Cliffy Group	110	3.5	4.3	5.0	5.8	6.5
TOTAL PROPOSED ALLOWABLE COMMERCIAL CATCH (TACC)				274.0		

¹ Where upper threshold values were not discussed at the workshop, the VFA has nominated values and will use these values as the trigger to notify AV(CZ) when catch is getting close to the upper limit.

Item 1: Welcome and Introduction

The Chair opened the meeting, noting that the workshop was the final meeting for the 2017/18 quota year under the newly-established FRAG process. The objective of the meeting was to inform and provide a recommendation on the overall TACC and the spatial distribution and management of that catch.

Dallas D'Silva welcomed attendees and acknowledged the significant progress made by the Central Zone during the year. Kate Simpson also welcomed attendees and highlighted the FRAG and its role in informing the TACC setting process.

Malcolm Petrie referenced the consultation with divers undertaken to form an industry view on the proposed 2018/19 TACC, to be discussed throughout the workshop.

Item 2: Overview of the day

The Chair provided an overview of the agenda and the process to be undertaken.

Item 3: Draft harvest strategy presentation

VFA provided a management presentation regarding the draft harvest strategy, including:

- *Status*: draft harvest strategy is ready to be 'tested' and peer review will be undertaken
- *Key objectives*: to rebuild biomass and increase pre-recruits
- *Future use*: The new harvest strategy will form the basis for setting the 2019/20 quota and distribution of catch
- *Performance indicators*: Primary indicator (4yr CPUE), secondary indicator (2 year CPUE) and tertiary indicator (either mean weight or fishery independent pre-recruit data)

VFA's draft harvest strategy presentation is annexed to these minutes as [attachment 1](#).

Item 4: Recap and actions from September 2017 FRAG meeting

AV(CZ) provided a presentation on the inaugural FRAG meeting held in September 2017. It was noted that the FRAG Terms of Reference had been confirmed and four meetings will be held each year. A summary of the September 2017 FRAG meeting was provided as follows:

- Recent logger data findings
- Industry development of the online diver survey
- Overview the Hart Review regarding inconsistencies with the FIS
- VFA's commitment to reviewing 1992-2003 data
- Future FRAG meeting dates: February, July, October/November, December

AV(CZ)'s presentation on the FRAG is annexed to these minutes as [attachment 2](#).

ACTION:

- Consolidate the actions from the previous FRAG meeting and TACC workshop for discussion at the next FRAG meeting. (AV(CZ))

Item 5: Recap and conditions from January 2017 stock assessment and quota workshop and general overview of the Central Zone fishery

AV(CZ) commented on the industry's review of the Stock Assessment and outlined its view of the key objectives for the stock assessment:

1. Present relevant data
2. Summarise the uncertainties in the data
3. Provide the range of interpretations of the data and justification for each
4. Assess the likely outcome of possible management actions, given the data, uncertainty and interpretation

It was AGREED:

- That VFA will take into consideration the aforementioned objectives in future stock assessments.

AV(CZ) commented on the 2016/17 Stock Assessment Report, noting that:

- The industry has identified shortcomings with the FIS, some of which were not previously acknowledged by VFA
- There is a limited interpretation presented in the Stock Assessment report (i.e., there is a lack of data to understand other potential factors impacting the resource)
- The management approach appears to be one-dimensional, given the narrow view on how to manage the resource (e.g. focus on rebuilding stock)

AV(CZ) also noted the inconsistencies with the stock assessment for 2016/17 and the current harvest strategy.

It was NOTED:

- *Review of FIS*
 - VFA noted its previous discussion with AV(CZ) on the issues with FIS. VFA values the data provided by the surveys. VFA advised that it will be reviewing the surveys to ensure they are fit for purpose to ensure they can be incorporated into the harvest strategy. Industry attendees were encouraged by the potential value of redesigned surveys.
- *Other sources of mortality of Abalone*
 - While VFA acknowledged that there may be other sources of mortality of Abalone, there is only limited published information on such factors which may be impacting the resource (e.g. impact of climate on habitat, impact of illegal fishing).
 - Attendees raised the issue of using 2003 as a benchmark against subsequent years as it provides a distorted result given that the highest catch in ~30 years was recorded in 2003. VFA advised that they have taken this feedback into account by additionally including reporting on a shorter/more recent time period.
- *Management Plan discussion*
 - VFA reiterated the primary objective of the management plan to rebuild Abalone biomass
- *Inconsistencies with Stock Assessment and harvest strategy*

- VFA acknowledged the inconsistencies between the Stock Assessment and harvest strategy, noting that VFA had been advised not to use the strategy in preparing the Stock Assessment. It was noted that the FRAG meetings will enable a better feedback loop for future years.

Central Zone Stock Assessment

VFA provided a management presentation regarding the statutory consultation process and an overview of the state of the fishery at the zonal scale. VFA advised that they are required to consider the information received during the consultation process, before recommending a final TACC to the Minister's delegate, the Chief Executive Officer, VFA. The two-week statutory consultation period is expected to occur around early to mid-January 2018, to allow sufficient time for all stakeholders to provide feedback on the draft TACC. The Abalone fishery objectives were outlined in accordance with the five-year management plan.

VFA reiterated the requirement to separately report Greenlip catch and effort (i.e. on separate dockets). AV(CZ) noted it has new software to be implemented which will enable recording the distinction between Greenlip or Blacklip via the shell measuring devices.

AV(CZ) asked about VFA's role in harnessing the economic and tourism benefits associated with the Victorian Abalone industry. VFA advised that its focus is primarily on the resource but is currently working with Seafood Industry Victoria to assist in linking industry to various Government agencies, such as Visit Victoria.

Zonal scale assessment

VFA outlined that the current performance indicators used are CPUE, recruit abundance and pre-recruit abundance. In reviewing the previous year (2016/17), VFA 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. Given that a recent voluntary closure was not followed by industry, VFA will continue to use mandatory closures next fishing season.

It was noted that no upper limits have been reached for the current 2017/18.

VFA's presentation is annexed to these minutes as [attachment 3](#).

Item 6: 2018/19 Stock assessment process

Harry Gorfine, on behalf of VFA presented fishery independent and dependent data as provided in the presentation annexed as [attachment 4](#) – which was considered together with diver observations for the proposed 2018/19 TACC.

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

ATTACHMENT 5: 2018/19 recommended Blacklip TACC, SMU and size limits

SMU	2016/17 size limit (mm)	Proposed size limit (mm)	2017/18 target	Proposed 2018/19 target	Diver observations
Shipwreck Coast	123	125 [+2.0]	21.2	28.7 [+7.5]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VFA noted that industry put in a voluntary closure recently however further fishing occurred. AV(CZ) proposed an increase of 15 tonne Diver comments: <i>"Fishing exceptionally well... catching at a phenomenal rate...as good as anywhere I've ever seen in 20 years"</i> (note, half the season's target was caught in one day by one diver) <p>Recommendation VFA and Industry agreed to increase the target by 7.5 tonnes with a 15% upper limit imposed, and an increase to the size limit of 2mm.</p>
Cape Otway	123	123	52.3	52.3 [nil change]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Divers wish to examine the size limits for Point Franklin to Lorne (refer to Action for FRAG below) <p>Recommendation for target VFA and industry agreed to retaining status quo and retaining the currently imposed 15% upper limit.</p>
Surfcoast	110	110	4.0	1.4 [-2.6]	<p>Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to reduce the target to 1.4 tonne from 4.0 tonne.</p>
Port Phillip Bay	105	105	0.0	0.0 [nil change]	<p>Recommendation for target it was agreed to retain the status quo of no allocation with an upper limit of 5 tonne.</p>
Back Beaches	117	117	66.2	65.0 [-1.2]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allan Buck passed on Diver comments that the <i>"area is fishing very well ... looking good"</i>. <p>Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to reduce quota by 1.2 tonnes and with an upper limit at target.</p>
Flinders	110	110	30.0	30.0 [nil change]	<p>Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to nil change and retention of the upper limit at target.</p>

SMU	2016/17 size limit (mm)	Proposed size limit (mm)	2017/18 target	Proposed 2018/19 target	Diver observations
Phillip Island	110	110	41.7	40.0 [-1.7]	Recommendation for target VFA and industry agreed to a reduction of 1.7 tonnes while retaining the 15% upper limit currently imposed.
Kilcunda	115	115	14.1	12.1 [-2.0]	Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to reduce the quota by 2 tonnes.
Cape Liptrap	110	110	12.5	12.5 [nil change]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Size limit discussion referred to FRAG Proposed that this SMU will be reviewed/monitored at each FRAG meeting Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to nil change with the upper limit as the target.
Prom Westside	*120	*120	20.00	20.00 [nil change]	<p>* Size limit is 120 for Prom Westside Islands (LML enforced by fishery notice) and 115 for Prom Westside Mainland (LML enforced by fishery notice)</p> Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to retain status quo.
Prom Eastside	110	110	7.0	7.0 [nil change]	Recommendation for target VFA and Industry agreed to retain status quo with the 15% upper limit retained.
Cliffy Group	110	110	5.0	5.0 [nil change]	Recommendation VFA and Industry agreed to retain status quo.
TOTAL ALLOWABLE COMMERCIAL CATCH (TACC)			274.0	274.0	

ACTIONS:

- That the potential to increase the size limits for Cape Otway (for Point Franklin to Lorne) be discussed at the next FRAG meeting.
- That the current size limits for Cape Liptrap be reviewed at the next FRAG meeting and that this SMU will be reviewed/monitored at each FRAG meeting.
- That a clarification be provided around the legal implications for when divers unwittingly exceed the upper limit during the course of a dive day (where it was lawful to catch in that SMU at the beginning of the day). This issue is to be discussed at the next FRAG meeting, with concise summary advice to be circulated to industry following the meeting.
- That AV(CZ) proactively SMS divers when the upper limit is close to being reached.
- That access to Port Phillip Bay (5 tonnes) be confirmed.
- That Greenlip abalone be discussed at the next FRAG meeting.

ATTACHMENT 2: 2018/19 recommended Greenlip TACC

VFA provided an overview for recommending no change to the Greenlip TACC with current conditions retained. It was noted that the Greenlip TACC hasn't been caught for a number of seasons and that the stock assessment has classified Greenlip as overfished. VFA reiterated the need to separately report Greenlip catch and effort.

Zone	2017/18 TACC	2018/19 TACC	Industry comments	DEDJTR comments
Central	3.4t	3.4t	No comment	Recommendation FV and Industry agreed to retain status quo.

Item 8: Closing remarks

The Chair and AV(CZ) each expressed their thanks and appreciation to the owners and divers in attendance, and also to the VFA for a frank and constructive discussion.

The workshop concluded at 3.10pm.