
RecFAC 79 Meeting Minutes

Location: Lands Bld, 134 Macquarie Street, Hobart

Date: 24 June 2022

Meeting Open: 9:30 am

Present (in Person):

Max Kitchell	Chair
Rod Pearn	NRE Tas
Brody Corbett	Recreational Member
David Hawley	Recreational Member
Nepelle Crane	NRM South
Ben Cunningham	Tasmania Police
Anna Minchin	Recreational Member
Vicki Wilshaw	Executive Support (NRE Tas)

Present (via Teams):

Jane Gallichan	TARFish CEO
Sean Tracey	IMAS
Jo McBain	Recreational Member
Kimbilli Johnson	Recreational Member
Kevin Bennett	Recreational Member

Apologies:

Mike Stevens	TARFish
Jane Bendall	Recreational Member
Stephen Scott	Recreational Member
Tony Eldridge	Recreational Member
Andrew Hart	Recreational Member
Richard Sherriff	Recreational Member

Guest Presenters:

Sonja Hempel	NRE Tas
Matt Bradshaw	NRE Tas
Klaas Hartman	IMAS
Rafael Leon	IMAS

1. Meeting Formalities

- **Adoption of Agenda**

Adopted

- **Register of Interest**

No updates to the Register of Interest

- ***Minister's Correspondence/ Decisions from Previous Meeting***

No Ministerial decision or correspondence has been received.

- ***Action Items from previous meeting(s)***

Action Item 1 deferred to the next meeting.

2. Rock Lobster Fishery

Rock Lobster Management Plan – Final Advice

The Chair briefed the Committee of the process and outcomes from the Rock Lobster Working Group Meeting, held 16 June to discuss the rock lobster submissions and management proposals.

A background paper provided a summary of the Working Group deliberations. Most importantly, it contained the Working Group's consideration of alternate size limit scenarios which were raised during the consultation.

- ***Size Limits that align with rock lobster growth rates and sexual maturity***

The working group reported that extending the 120 mm size limit for females to Cape Pillar (ie to the East Coast zone) initially appeared favourable as it would remove the need for the Red Rocks boundary line forming two size limit zones and therefore would be simpler – a topic raised in several submissions. Preliminary IMAS advice indicated benefits to egg production, however not in biomass rebuilding. The working group also discussed and requested advice on male lobsters remaining at 110 mm rather than 115 mm.

- Dr Klaas Hartman from IMAS presented the analysis of the proposed size limits and alternate size limit scenarios.
 - An increase in female size limit to 120mm to Cape Pillar (ie to the East Coast zone) improves egg production however results in a slight decrease in biomass compared to the 115 mm proposals. Initially, there may be an additional drop of 5 to 10% in the catch rate; compared to 115 mm. The catch rates will improve as lobster grow through – in a season or two.
 - Analysis for maintaining a 110 mm male size limit and adopting the proposed 115 and alternative 120mm female size limit indicated that there would be less impact on catch rates with similar biomass gains for areas 2 and 3. There are slight biomass decreases in Areas 4 (NE) and Area 5 (NW) compared to a 115 mm male size.
 - The scenario of 120mm female/ 115 mm males was not analysed, however IMAS suggested the impacts on catch rates would be more than the other scenarios. This modelling will be provided and included in the report on the review.
- RecFAC noted concerns with the 110 mm male scenario as rebuilding is needed in these northern areas and voiced particular concern for the NW as this area did not have commercial catch caps.
- RecFAC noted that the 110 mm scenario appeared to be favoured by the commercial fishery as the 110 mm size was the preferred market size. During the discussion the NRE Tas Rock Lobster Fishery Manager noted that in some cases, commercial fishers may prefer to reduce the allowable commercial catch in certain areas rather than taking other management action such as increasing the size limit.
- Some RecFAC members suggested that there was benefit in implementing the proposed male size limit of 115 mm in areas 2, 3 and 4 as it could potentially displace the commercial

fleet dynamics to the southern size limit zone (notably Areas 1, 8) which had biomass levels above the 20% threshold.

The Committee supported that size limits should be aligned to the general growth rate and size at maturity as it will have significant egg production and biomass benefits.

The Committee supports the size limits and zone proposals as detailed in the Discussion Paper:

- The introduction of three zones aligning with growth rates;
- The introduction of the size limits within the zones.

Two members did not support the introduction of three zones, stating two zones would be more simplistic for recreational fishers and more efficient compliance. It would also assist biomass rebuilding.

The TARFish representative did not oppose the proposed size limits, however requested it be noted that they do not support an estimated 35% reduction to the recreational catch in the first two years of this application on the basis it was fundamentally inequitable and unfairly impacted recreational fishers. TARFish proposed a loosening of other management controls to mitigate the significance of that loss including changes to season length or consideration of other management – this was discussed further under season dates.

Later in the meeting, TARFish also advised the need to control commercial catch, as if this was left at the current level there would be an inequitable impact on the recreational sector, and it would be contrary to the Government's election commitment of facilitating an increase for the recreational sector, particularly on the East Coast.

- *Tail Marking rules for recreationally caught rock lobster*

The Committee supported this proposal. The consultation report should address the animal welfare concerns mentioned in two submissions. NRE TAS representatives indicated that they will look at the required clipped amount in the rules. Work in NZ indicated that tail fan clipping was similar to cutting fingernails. *Transiting Reporting between size limit zones proposal*

The Committee support this proposal.

- *Transiting through closed waters with rock lobster pots on board (specific to D'Entrecasteaux Channel).*

The Committee supported the proposal and supported extending this to allow transit with rock lobster catch on board.

Transiting with fish increases compliance risk, however with tight procedures and a somewhat more complex rule this could be managed and is a significant bonus to many recreational fishers. Procedures include a transit report required a minimum of 2 hours prior to landing the fish at a nominated and designated landing areas, and fishers are to transit directly to the point of landing.

- *Allowing rock lobster pot fishers to share their catch with other active fishers on water*

The Committee supported the proposal. The requests in the submissions to increase the distance beyond 250m was considered, however this was not supported due to strong compliance concerns.

- *Allowing rock lobster to be held on an unattended recreational vessel*

The Committee supported the proposal.

- *Reporting lost or unretrievable gear*

The Committee supported the proposal.

- *Recreational rock lobster mandatory catch reporting*

There were some concerns regarding this proposal. Some members emphasised that a trial period of 1 – 2 years is needed before it is made mandatory. Other concerns raised regarding the practical use of smart devices on small vessels.

NRE Tas also should consider allowing multiple fishers to report through the one pre-fishing and catch report or consider reporting boat catches, rather than individual catches.

The Committee supported mandatory reporting acknowledging there are still issues to be worked through. The Committee also wanted it noted they are confident and support the estimates and methodology of the current IMAS surveys.

- *Discontinuing the Special Rock Lobster licence*

The Committee support this proposal noting this will impact very few people.

- *Presumption of possession of rock lobster*

The Committee support this proposal.

- *The introduction of Commercial Rock Lobster boats installing VMS*

The Committee support this proposal and they noted that this will assist with size limit zonal management etc.

- *Expanding 60 pot area proposal*

The Committee did not support the expansion of the 60-pot zone, as this would increase resource sharing issues and may increase effort in the Northwest which has depleted stock levels. RecFAC also noted that similar concerns were raised to the 60-pot proposal in 2019, and that there has been no improvement in biomass in this area. The Committee reiterated the previous RecFAC advice; 60 pots on the west coast, 50 pots on the north coast and 40 rock lobster pots in the east coast.

- *Commercial rock lobster fishery carry-over provision proposal*

The Committee did not support this proposal. They were concerned about the lack of definition of what a carry-over proportion would be. They feel any uncaught quota would be beneficial to assist in the rebuilding of the stock.

Recommendation 1:

The Minister notes the RecFAC's advice for the rock lobster proposed rules as changes as follows:

- **Aligning size limits with growth rates and sexual maturity:** RecFAC support the introduction of the three zones and the introduction of the size limits within the zones as outlined in the Discussion Paper.
- **Tail Marking of recreational rock lobster:** RecFAC supports the proposal.
- **Recreational Transiting between size limit zones:** RecFAC supports the proposal.

- **Recreational Transiting through closed waters with rock lobster and pots on board:** RecFAC support the proposal. They also supported extending this to allow transit with rock lobster on board provided they make a transit report and directly transit through the D'Entrecasteaux Channel to a nominated and designated landing area.
- **Allowing recreational rock lobster pot fishers to share catch with other active fishers on water:** RecFAC supported the proposal.
- **Allowing recreational rock lobster to be held on an unattended recreational vessel:** RecFAC supported the proposal.
- **Reporting lost or unretrievable gear:** RecFAC supported the proposal.
- **Recreational rock lobster mandatory catch reporting:** RecFAC supported mandatory reporting after a substantial voluntary trial period. This should be at least after the harvest strategy is introduced. Acknowledging there are still issues to be worked through before this proposal is implemented.
- **Discontinuing the Special Rock Lobster licence:** RecFAC supported the proposal.
- **Presumption of possession of rock lobster:** RecFAC supported the proposal.
- **Installation of VMS on Commercial rock lobster boats:** RecFAC supported the proposal.
- **Expanding the 60-pot area:** RecFAC did not support the proposal. They reiterated the previous RecFAC advice; 60 pots on the west coast, 50 pots on the north coast and 40 rock lobster pots in the east coast.
- **Commercial rock lobster fishery carry-over provision:** RecFAC did not support the proposal.

Season Dates

NRE Tas proposed that the season dates for the commercial and recreational fisheries remain the same as last year.

The TARFish CEO indicated that TARFish does not support the proposed season dates for the next two years due to the reduction in the catch rate because of the proposed rock lobster size limit changes. TARFish propose the ECSRZ opening date be aligned with the Recreational East Coast opening date (State-wide opening date of 5 November) for the recreational fishery.

During discussion members supported the concerns raised by TARFish that the size limit proposals appeared to have more impact on the recreational catch, however indicated they supported NRE Tas representative's concern of relaxing any management levers at this stage given the stock concerns. The Committee provided several statements about the need to improve the fishery.

The Committee supported 5 November as the opening date for East Coast, and the opening date of 3 December for the ECSRZ.

The Committee indicated concern about the potential inequity of size limits on the recreational sector without reducing the Commercial Catch-cap, so the total catch is in line with scientific advice. The Committee were also disappointed in the catch cap decision made last year, in which the scientifically advised catch reduction was not made.

The Committee stated the commercial catch cap should be reduced so that the total east coast catch is in line with the catch levels recommended by IMAS. RecFAC indicated this and reviewing the catch share to recognise the importance of the East Coast to the recreational sector needs to be addressed to meet the election commitment of enabling increased take arrangements for recreational fishers.

TARFish does not support the status quo for the season dates as this should be the mechanism that provides equity in fishery access noting that recreational fishers will have their overall take significantly reduced with no reduction in the commercial TAC placing the burden of stock rebuilding on recreational fishers for the next two years.

Recommendation 2:

The Minister notes RecFAC's recommendation for the 2022/23 rock lobster season dates:

Opening dates (2022)

- Commercial Open season Tues 15 Nov: all waters except ECSRZ
- Recreational Open season Sat 5 Nov: all waters except ECSRZ
- Commercial Open season: Tue 6 Dec: ECSRZ
- Recreational Open season: Sat 3 Dec: ECSRZ

Closing Dates (2023)

- Recreational Closed season 1 May: Eastern Region
- Recreational Closed season 1 Sep Western Region
- Commercial Closed season: 1 Sep St Helens Point/Red Rocks – south to Sandy Cape
- Commercial Closed season: 1 Oct: State-wide

The TARFish representative dissented saying that the delay to the East Coast opening for the recreational fishery should be removed to provide a mechanism to rebalance the recreational catch and compensate the impact of new size limits on the recreational fishery.

Translocation Update

Rafael Leon (IMAS) briefed the Committee on the Translocation Project.

3. Abalone Size Limits for Commercial Fishery

Matt Bradshaw, Principal Fisheries Management Officer (Abalone) briefed the Committee about the complexity of the commercial abalone fishery and the pending changes proposed for the commercial abalone fishery size limits. The proposed commercial abalone fishery size limits will be out for public consultation within the next month.

NRE Tas will be appointing a person to review the expired Abalone Harvest Subsidy and develop a new Abalone Harvest Strategy for implementation by 1 January 2024.

4. Research and Management Updates

• **Research Update**

Rock Lobster Recreational Survey estimates are expected to be finalised within the next few weeks and the Final Report is expected to be available at the end of next month.

Scallop Survey – the draft report is with NRE Tas for comment. The survey was conducted within the D'Entrecasteaux Channel, and in addition, surveys have been included at Bull Bay and White Beach. The surveys were conducted as tow cameras, previous surveys have been conducted by divers. There are signs of recovery for both commercial and queen scallops within the D'Entrecasteaux Channel – but not to extent for an open season in the Channel in

near future. This is particularly important as this area is heavily reliant on self-recruitment and as such further rebuilding the adult stocks are necessary before any fishery could be justified.

The White Beach area had patchy small populations of scallops with signs that this popular area is impacted by fishing pressure.

There were no signs of scallops in the Bull Bay area.

- **Management Updates**

The NRE Tas member requested for nominations from the Committee to test the new fisheries website. Anna Minchin and David Hawley volunteered to test the website.

- **Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy Update**

A base line infrastructure report is being drafted. FAD's researching information regarding interactions between the FADs and whale migration to leave the FADs in the water for longer. There will be a Code of Practice developed in partnership with NRE Tas' Marine Conservation Branch.

5. Emerging Issues and Matters of Importance

- **Rec Fisher Representatives**

NRM South – Native Oyster Reef Restoration Project: two sites have been identified for restoration (Woodbridge and Taroon). Currently undertaking the permitting process.

6. Other Business/ Dates for future meetings

Next Meeting: TBA

Meeting Closed: 1:45 pm

Action Items

Action 1:	Invite IMAS to present current information to RecFAC on Maugean Skate
By: NRE Tas	Timeline: deferred to RecFAC Meeting 80