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## EASTERN ZONE ROCK LOBSTER MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP MINUTES

FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER 2012, 9:30am – 3:00pm

QUEENSCLIFF

CHAIR: IAN KNUCKEY

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### In attendance:

Industry: Anthony Cicone, Bernadus Wilmink, Graham Wilson, Matthew Harry, Andrew Milliken

Seafood Industry Victoria (SIV): Renee Vajtauer

SeaNet: Hannah Arcaro

South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI): Adrian Linnane

Fisheries Victoria: Melissa Schubert, James Andrews, Mark Edwards, Bill Lussier, Mark Gibson, John Vaytauer, Candice Harwood, Peter McNamara.

### 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed participants to the 2012 Eastern Zone Rock Lobster Fishery Management Workshop and noted that the purpose of the day was to discuss matters relating to the management of the fishery.

### 2. Workshop expectations from DPI and industry participants

James Andrews, as acting Director, Fisheries Management and Science, indicated that DPI's aims for the meeting were to increase engagement with industry, discuss ways of making the assessment process more transparent and to industry and to achieve a better understanding of the new stock assessment model.

Industry participants requested that concerns be addressed about whether the biomass that exists within marine parks and other spatial closures is being taken into account in the stock assessment model.

### 3. Quota management system – IVR enhancement

Candice Harwood, Fishing Business Services, provided an overview of the Integrated Voice Recognition (IVR) system. She indicated that the recent problems with the system will be solved in the next few months. She also informed workshop participants that DPI was investigating the practicality of a new smart phone reporting application to overcome problems with poor reception, drop-outs, and time consuming processes of correcting wrong entries.

Fishers expressed concern that smart phones were not durable enough to withstand the rough treatment that is part of fishing, including exposure to water. Adrian Linnane mentioned a trial of a protective cover being conducted in South Australia that has resulted in positive outcomes. All present at the workshop expressed interest in trialling smart phones.

## 4. Fishery Economics

### 4.1 Improving the economic performance of the fishery and reviewing regulations

Mark Edwards, Director Policy and Licensing Branch, updated workshop participants on the implementation of recommendations outlined in the *Improving Economic Productivity in Victoria's Eastern Zone Rock Lobster Fishery* report.

Previously, Fisheries Victoria and SIV had commissioned Tom McClurg, of Torora Strategy, to address concerns with low economic productivity in the Eastern Zone. The broad conclusions reached included:

- That aggregate quota value is the most appropriate measure of economic productivity. Quota value in the Eastern Zone is currently low reflecting biological sustainability, economic efficiency and expectations of future earnings.
- That there are two key approaches to improving economic productivity:
  - increase catch per unit effort (CPUE), thereby reducing fishing costs, by setting a total allowable commercial catch (TACC) that restricts catch;
  - simplify regulatory entitlements in the fishery in order to improve efficiency, support investment and enhance quota value. Three tradeable entitlements in the fishery (i.e. quota, access licences and pot entitlements) are unnecessary, impede transferability and erode quota value.
- That the establishment of a representative body for commercial fishers to engage in formulation of revised management arrangements - deal with the current fragmentation is advisable.
- That improved monitoring and management of recreational catch is required.

A number of the directions suggested by Mr McClurg have been advanced:

- The 2012/13 Eastern Zone TACC was reduced to guide the recovery of the stock to the target biomass level by 2020/21.
- Fisheries Victoria has commissioned work to evaluate the most cost effective way to improve estimates of recreational take and will undertake a state-wide survey in 2013. This will be used to improve management and feed into stock assessment.

Fisheries Victoria has discussed the review's findings twice with fishers during 2011. This engagement revealed that there was little support from fishers for changing the management framework for the Eastern Zone at this time.

Fisheries Victoria is committed to discussing any proposed changes in fishery management arrangements with industry prior to embarking on change.

### 4.2 Improving confidence for investment – a banker's perspective

The presenter from the Bendigo Bank was unable to attend the meeting. Mr Ciconte offered to convey his experience with the type of information banks look for when considering the security and strength of loan applications.

He noted that banks generally look at fishing income, fishing operation costs, number of active boats, and management costs per boat. They look for an income of about one and a half times the interest repayments and are interested in the detail of the business such as who the customers are (national or international) and what affects price (exchange rate, substitutes, tariff changes, black-market issues, demand).

Mr Cicone also noted that local bank managers may have a sign-off limit unless property is attached to the business or loan application. For this reason, he suggested that it may be advantageous to use agri-business banking specialists who are more likely to understand the fishing industry.

The participants at the workshop discussed the merits of the production of an information sheet that aids in enhancing a financial institution's understanding of the nature of the fishery and securities associated with owning a rock lobster fishing business. Suggested concepts to include covered:

- The details of the management of the fishery.
- The types of entitlements in the fishery.
- The security of commercial entitlements, and the government regulations around these.
- Economic information of the fishery over time.

Mr Cicone suggested that the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) could be interested in a project of this nature.

***Action: Fisheries Victoria and SIV to develop an information sheet to assist financial institutions in understanding the implications of stock assessment/status reports, the management of the fishery, the entitlement to fish and relevant economic information.***

## 5. Fishery Management

### 5.1. Harvest strategy and stock assessment methodologies

Dr Linnane presented an overview of the Victorian rock lobster stock assessment model by simplifying it into its basic elements. The model tracks a number of sources of data over time: catch, CPUE and lobster size (length frequency and mean weight) from commercial fishing and survey sites, and uses this data to make estimates of egg production and future recruitment.

The model makes a number of assumptions:

- If CPUE increases and mean weight decreases, the interpretation is that there is increased abundance due to the recruitment of smaller lobsters into the fishery.
- If CPUE decreases and mean weight increases, the model interprets this as reduced levels of recruitment.
- If CPUE decreases and mean weight decreases, then recruitment is insufficient to prevent declining stock abundance.

The projections of recruitment into the future are used to determine the amount of lobsters that can be taken out of the water in an upcoming season while still achieving the ultimate aim of rebuilding the biomass back to the target level.

Industry raised the question of whether the effect of closed areas was considered in the stock assessment. It was suggested that this is an issue for the Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (RLRAG) to discuss.

Dr Linnane clarified comments made relating to the size of female lobsters and their fecundity: larger females produce more eggs than smaller ones but don't spawn every year. Although they produce less eggs, smaller females spawn every year, and can therefore have significant influence on total egg production. For this reason there is no upper size limit.

Puerulus collection was discussed. Dr Linnane noted that this data is not part of the model, but is used as a way to check that the model outputs are consistent with observations. Trends in the

annual levels of puerulus settlement have been shown to be highly correlated to the annual trends in levels of recruitment experienced when the lobsters reach legal minimum length.

Industry participants asked if puerulus collectors could be placed in the Eastern Zone. Given the high cost in collecting this data and the similarities in settlement trends across SE Australia, collectors may not be necessary. It was suggested that the RLRAG could consider this matter further.

The South Australian model for TACC setting based on CPUE was discussed. It was mentioned that some fishers in the Western Zone preferred this model. TACC setting models from Tasmania and Western Australia were also discussed.

***Action: RLRAG to discuss effects of area closures on stock biomass and costs/benefits of collecting puerulus in the Eastern Zone at its next meeting.***

### **5.2. Improving involvement of industry in stock assessment and TACC processes**

The workshop participants discussed the timing of the TACC setting process in relation to the flow of information such as the stock assessment report. Industry considered that there was too little time between the release of the report and the TACC workshops. They also requested that the TACC proposed by the stock assessment model be included in the report so they had time to make the necessary considerations and preparations prior to the TACC Forums. It was suggested that the stock assessment report refer to a "recommended commercial catch" rather than a TACC if there was concern that the latter term could only be used after it was presented at the workshops.

The stock assessment is completed by February and then submitted to the RLRAG for endorsement. Data could potentially be released after the RLRAG meeting if there were no major issues, noting that this would not be a final TACC.

It was agreed that it would be difficult to have a stock assessment completed any earlier.

It was suggested that industry input could be increased if meetings were held in the closed season, although with data collection ending in September this would be too early.

Workshop participants agreed that the DPI website could be used more effectively and that all information relating to the fishery should be made publicly available on the site.

***Action: Fisheries Victoria to improve the useability of the DPI website and make all fishery-relevant information available on the site.***

### **5.3. RLRAG membership and work priorities**

Fisheries Victoria informed workshop participants that the RLRAG has now been functioning for two years. During that time, the work of the group has been recognised as crucial in the operation of the fishery.

As a means of increasing industry participation in the group, Fisheries Victoria will conduct an expression of interest process to canvass the entire industry for nominations of interested and experienced candidates.

Future work priorities will include the continuation of the analysis of stock assessment data and outputs and the analysis of recreational harvest data.

Ian Knuckey, as chair of the RLRAG noted that he has announced on several occasions that observers are welcome at the RLRAG meetings, and that this will continue into the future.

Industry participants suggested that the locations of both the TACC Forums and the RLRAG meetings could be spread around the State, rather than being dominated by Queenscliff.

***Action: Fisheries Victoria to conduct an expression of interest process for membership on the RLRAG.***

#### **5.4. Census of recreational rock lobster harvest**

Simon Conron, a Fisheries Victoria scientist, presented on a survey that is currently in development to estimate the harvest of key recreational species in Victoria. The species of interest will be rock lobster, abalone, King George whiting, black bream and snapper.

He discussed the different methods to be used, which included phone surveys, respondent-driven sampling (snowball sampling) and targeting dive shops/industry for surveying. He noted the limitations of standard phone surveys to identify sufficient numbers of recreational fishers targeting rock lobster and the merits of respondent-driven sampling. The latter involves an identified recreational rock lobster fisher nominating five others, who then each nominate another five, and so on.

Industry participants stated that the matter of recreational harvest of rock lobsters continues to be a matter of concern to them. It was suggested that the Department should consider a tag program (requirement to purchase tags) or the introduction of a special recreational licence class for rock lobster so that more and better quality recreational information is available for the assessment in future. The importance of this estimate in setting a TACC was noted.

#### **5.5. Compliance update**

Mark Gibson, Fisheries Officer Geelong, presented the annual update on compliance in the commercial and recreational sectors. The rate of compliance with regulations was consistent with previous years.

The issue of whether rock lobster processors should be licenced to reduce black market trade was raised. Mr Gibson and John Vaytaufer suggested that black market in sales in the rock lobster industry are currently not a big problem, but that this can be investigated.

Industry expressed an interest in participating more in the collection of data and suggested a sampling scheme of closing the escape gaps on three pots per nominated boat. All catch taken in these pots would be recorded and provided to Fisheries Victoria.

Industry queried why rock lobster receivers in Victoria are not licenced as they are in the scallop and abalone fisheries. Fisheries Victoria noted that the introduction of rock lobster receiver licences was proposed as part of the development of the *Rock Lobster Fishery Management Plan 2009*, but industry had opposed it at the time. Fisheries Victoria agreed to seek advice from its Fisheries Policy and Licensing Branch.

***Action: Fisheries Victoria to review the introduction of licensing requirements for rock lobster receivers.***

*Action: RLRAG to discuss the option of developing an industry sampling scheme of closing of escape gaps in a number of pots at the next RLRAG.*

## **6. Science and Research**

### **6.1. Effect of environmental factors on lobster stocks**

Dr Linnane reported on the results of the FRDC project investigating the effects of environmental factors on daily catch rates of southern rock lobster in South Australia's Southern Zone and Victoria's Western Zone.

Analyses detected wave energy, bottom temperatures and moon phase as having an effect on daily catch rates. The impacts however, were considered minor and explained only a small amount of the daily variation in average catch rates in both South Australia and Victoria. Fishing season and the month of the season were far more influential in explaining the daily variations in catch rates.

The results suggest that commercial catch rates and model outputs based on catch rate data are a good index of overall rock lobster biomass.

### **6.2. Future research priorities**

The Chair asked industry participants for suggestions of future research concepts. Suggestions included: Influence of area closures on stock assessments, estimates of recreational catch, environmental drivers of recruitment (particularly water temperature and settlement), crew sampling of catch to spread research further in Eastern Zone.

Industry participants made a suggestion to consider opening of the southern part of Port Phillip Bay. The Department did not support re-opening this area.

A suggestion was made that pot limits should be removed to allow bigger boats to operate in the far east. Some industry members said they supported pot limits to avoid problems of unattended pots etc.

## **7. Closing summary and next steps**

The Chair thanked workshop participants for their attendance and contributions during the meeting.

He noted that there were a number of actions for Fisheries Victoria to follow-up and a number of suggested work topics for the RLRAG to consider.

The meeting was closed at 3pm.