Summary of outcomes from open abalone fishery Workshop

Eden Fisherman's Club, August 19 2014

Attendance. About 20 fishery Shareholders and divers attended the meeting, with apologies being received from about 15 Shareholders and other stakeholders, particularly again with the poor weather and ECL. Two DPI representatives also attended the meeting, and the TAC discussions were recorded.

General summary

The meeting discussed the role and priorities for a representative body for the NSW Industry.

The meeting discussed a range of current management issues before considering TAC recommendations.

- Management Charges. DPI advised Management Charge invoices would be issued very soon, and be based on an amount consistent with those agreed for the 3rd year of the 3 year agreement, at about $6279 per 100 shares.
- DPI approaching divers and diver safety. This issue was raised at the last Workshop in 2013, and DPI advised they were reviewing procedures, and at this Workshop DPI advised they will get back to Industry with the outcome of that review.
- Indigenous access consultation. There is currently consultation on Indigenous access to all fisheries resources in NSW, with current consultation with Indigenous only, followed by the wider community (http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/aboriginal-fishing/cultural-fishing/regulation).
- Recreational bag limit. While there is no current process reviewing the Recreational Bag limit, there was general support for a change to 4 abalone per person per day with a boat/car limit.
- Catch reporting change. Change to an electronic, phone based catch reporting system has been coming for some time, and DPI advised the necessary legislation may be considered soon, perhaps allowing implementation in the next fishing period. These changes are important as DPI has committed to implementing, if supported by Industry, a separate quota for northern areas including free transfers.
- Separate quotas. The Workshop has raised the option of a separate quota to ensure fish are caught from northern areas. If supported by Industry, DPI has also agreed to implement such a quota, and there will be consultation with Industry about the area and amount prior to implementation.
- Size limits. There was discussion about appropriate size limits with diverse opinions from variable size limits, to 1 shareholder supporting the TAC Committee recommendations of 120 mm across the board, 1 shareholder supporting a 1 mm increase, and others to leave size limits alone. Assessment of the success of past changes in size limit range from a reduction in yield/catch from the 123 mm area to a small reduction in the number of individuals landed as average weight is about 5% larger, with most benefits likely to take at least 2-3 generations or 10-15 years, if they occur. The impact of recent size limit increases on marketing was noted, forcing the NSW production into a non-preferred size, together with variable size limits in other states where smaller size limits than NSW are available in all other fisheries.
- Mallacoota access. Industry has been consulting with Victorian Marine Parks and DPI for some time about access from Mallacoota to NSW reefs to fish, through the Cape Howe Marine Park. While there has been extensive correspondence and delays by Vic DPI, it is now clear the Victorian Minister for Marine Parks can provide a permit to allow such access through the park, and he has been briefed in July on the need. It is likely that conditions will be applied to any permit to access NSW waters from Mallacoota through the Marine Park.
- Abalone recovery and urchins project funding. Industry has been successful in gaining financial support to scale-up abalone recovery research, particularly through responses to urchins and abalone translocation. This project will commence soon.
- Urchin closures and review. There was discussion about the large number of closures in the SUTS fishery, which were initially implemented with the support of Industry, but which now are not helping development of the fishery. DPI advised there will be a full review of management of the SUTS fishery.

Research projects

The meeting received a summary of the research programs being run by the Abalone Council of NSW, including GPS, depth and measuring loggers. This included a summary of the range of data now being collected in the fishery and what is delivered to the TAC Committee process, including development of the logger data to provide estimates of biomass and likely harvest fractions, which were consistent with current catch across regions of the fishery. This project is funded by DPI through Industry Management Charges, and concerns were raised about repeated delays by DPI in implementation of contracts and payment of invoices.

Catch planning and TAC recommendations

DPI provided a brief presentation on development of a draft interim harvest strategy. This will provide greater clarity about the data collected and how it will be used to make TAC decisions. DPI asked how this would best be progressed and Industry suggested release of the current draft before consideration of need for further consultation.

The meeting expressed frustration at inaction on previous Workshop catch and TAC recommendations, and noted that if the TAC Committee continues to disregard recommendations it will further disenfranchise Industry and the workshops.

The meeting noted that the fishery is still taking catches in many areas that are well below those likely to be sustainable, and that it was difficult to discuss changing catch targets for areas by such small amounts, suggesting the need to consider catch targets at a broader scale. The final part of the meeting involved recommendations for the 2015 TAC. This involved consideration of the data about each area, and seeking consensual agreement from Industry and DPI about an appropriate TAC allocation for the area in 2015.

The meeting reached a consensus to support an increase in the TAC during 2015 to 136.6 t. Opinions ranged from maintaining a 125 t TAC for another year because of the low beach price, through to an increase to about 145 t, and 1 Shareholder only supported an increase to 136 t if the size limit was increased. There was general support to continue the gradual increases in the TAC, whilst ongoing stock recovery is maintained.

Catch remain concentrated in southern areas, particularly because of processing limitations. Catch has increased again in areas south of Wonboyn, and this should continue, particularly with several new Shareholders planning to work out of Mallacoota. In addition, new Shareholders based near Batemans Bay and Narooma, and at Sydney, should see catches spread to these areas an away from Tathra-Wonboyn.

General comments about the stock were consistent with the catch data showing increases in catch rate and mean size of abalone. The strong, ongoing recovery of stocks appears to be continuing across all areas, with several divers reporting good catches of abalone in areas that several years ago held little stock. With recent increases in catch on Green Cape, it was generally agreed that any further increase in catch in this area should be avoided, and instead spread to areas south of Wonboyn and north of Bunga.

Catch targets were increased at the last Workshop in 2013, north of Tathra and in areas around Eden (i.e. X2-Y24), where catches have now been maintained above those levels for two years. Further increases in targets were recommended in the 2014 Workshop in the area south of Bunga and from Eden-Bittangabee (i.e. U4-V2 and Y11-Y23), although the targets still remain below current catches. Reduced targets were recommended in Disaster Bay (i.e. Y32) and several northern areas (i.e. A-N), because recent catches have not reached targets.

Table 1. Table presented to and outcome from Catch Planning Workshop in August 2014. Table includes catch until end June 2014 in the 2014 Fishing Period. Assessment data compares the last 6 months to the same 6 months a year ago. Areas highlighted in green are in line with catch targets, while those in blue are behind, and those in red ahead of catch targets. Change in catch recommendations from the previous year are shown in brackets after the recommended 2015 Target.

Area	Assessment data		2014 fishing period				Current catch comparison		2015 Target
Northern Pt	Catch rate	Mean size	Catch	Target	Target ±30%	Catch % Target	2013 v 2000	Target v 2000	
01 Tweed A-E	-	-	0.2	2.0	1.4-2.6	10%			1 (-1)
02 Port Stephens F-J	-	-	0.02	2.0	1.4-2.6	1%			1(-1)
03 Kiama K-M	+41%	+5%	1.3	3.0	2.1-3.9	43%			2 (-1)
04 Ulladulla N	-	-	0.1	2.0	1.4-2.6	5%			1 (-1)
05 South Brush P	-12%	+2%	1.5	5.0	3.5-6.5	30%	-59%	-59%	5
06 Batemans Q	-	-	0.02	1.0	0.7-1.3	2%			1
07 Moruya R-S	-	-	0.2	1.0	0.7-1.3	20%			1
08 Narooma T	-	-	1.5	4.0	2.8-5.2	38%			4
09 Bermagui U1-3	+3%	+1%	2.2	7.8	5.5-10.1	28%	-82%	-76%	7.8
10 Bunga U4-V2	+22%	+1%	7.8	8.0	5.6-10.4	98%	-56%	-53%	10 (+2)
11 Moon Bay V3-W1	+9%	+3%	6.2	9.0	6.3-11.7	69%	-60%	-52%	9
12 Turingal W2-X1	+10%	0%	3.7	8.5	6.0-11.2	44%	-48%	-45%	8.5
13 Long Beach X2	+1%	+4%	2.0	5.0	3.5-6.5	40%	-60%	-48%	5
14 Eden Y11-21	-11%	+2%	6.2	10.0	7.0-13.0	62%	-58%	-59%	12 (+2)
15 Saltwater Y22-23	+7%	+2%	5.9	8.0	5.6-10.4	74%	-53%	-48%	10 (+2)
16 Bittangabee Y24	+7%	+2%	5.6	10.0	7.0-13.0	56%	-47%	-40%	10
17 Greencape Y31	+14%	+2%	4.2	10.3	7.3-13.5	41%	-55%	-45%	10.3
18 City Rock Y32	+6%	-1%	2.3	8.2	5.7-10.7	28%	-52%	-24%	6 (-2.2)
19 Wonboyn Z1-3	+25%	+1%	3.1	7.0	4.9-9.1	44%	-61%	-54%	7
20 Saltlake Z4	+28%	-4%	5.8	9.0	6.3-11.7	64%	-77%	-60%	9
21 Howe Z5	+16%	+3%	7.6	16.0	11.2-20.8	48%	-35%	-16%	16
Total			67.5 t	136.8 t		54% of 125 t	Av, -57%	-48%	136.6 t

Table 2. Current, target and likely catch for the 2014 Fishing Period, with Workshop comments and recommended catches for 2015 within 21 blocks. Red catches show areas ahead of targets for 2014, while red targets show areas with recommended increased targets for 2015, while blue catch and targets are the reverse.

Block	2014 Fishing period			Workshop comment	2015 Fishing period	
Northern Pt	to date	Target	if 125 t		Old	Target
01 Tweed A-E	**0.2**	**2**	**0.4**	Very little catch because of processing. Targets reduced as old targets have not been reached for several years.	**2**	**1**
02 Port Stephens F-J	**0.02**	**2**	**0.0**		**2**	**1**
03 Kiama K-M	**1.3**	**3**	**2.4**		**3**	**2**
04 Ulladulla N	**0.1**	**2**	**0.2**		**2**	**1**
05 South Brush P	**1.5**	**5**	**2.8**	Catch stable, could reduce with Shareholder change. Catch rate change related to divers.	**5**	**5**
06 Batemans Q	**0.02**	**1**	**0.0**	Very little catch because of processing, but some likely with new Shareholders resident in the area. Some very high catch rates, but only a few days worked.	**1**	**1**
07 Moruya R-S	**0.2**	**1**	**0.4**		**1**	**1**
08 Narooma T	**1.5**	**4**	**2.8**		**4**	**4**
09 Bermagui U1-3	**2.2**	**7.8**	**4.1**	Little catch because of processing, some recent catch with good catch rates and sizes.	**7.8**	**7.8**
10 Bunga U4-V2	**7.8**	**8**	**14.5**	Catch has increased in recent years, but catch rates and sizes increased. Stocks looking good, including on reef where little before. Increase target, but still below current catch.	**8**	**10**
11 Moon Bay V3-W1	**6.2**	**9**	**11.5**		**9**	**9**
12 Turingal W2-X1	**3.7**	**8.5**	**6.9**	Catch, catch rates and sizes have been stable. Stocks looking good.	**8.5**	**8.5**
13 Long Beach X2	**2**	**5**	**3.7**		**5**	**5**
14 Eden Y11-21	**6.2**	**10**	**11.5**	Catch increased in recent years, and now stable at higher level with targets revised up last year. No more catch to go here, but target increased to current catch. Stocks very good.	**10**	**12**
15 Saltwater Y22-23	**5.9**	**8**	**10.9**		**8**	**10**
16 Bittangabee Y24	**5.6**	**10**	**10.4**		**10**	**10**
17 Greencape Y31	**4.2**	**10.3**	**7.8**	Catch has been higher than elsewhere, but reduced this year. More catch here in summer towards end of year. Target reduced as old target had not been reached for several years.	**10.3**	**10.3**
18 City Rock Y32	**2.3**	**8.2**	**4.3**		**8.2**	**6**
19 Wonboyn Z1-3	**3.1**	**7**	**5.7**	Catch has increased following reduction previous year. Catch rates, sizes and stocks look very good. Catch may increase with several new Shareholders resident and working from Mallacoota.	**7**	**7**
20 Saltlake Z4	**5.8**	**9**	**10.8**		**9**	**9**
21 Howe Z5	**7.6**	**16**	**14.1**		**16**	**16**
Total	**67.5**	**136.8**	**125**		**136.8**	**136.6**