Summary of outcomes from open abalone fishery Workshop

Eden Fisherman's Club, July 15 2015

Attendance. About 20 fishery Shareholders and divers attended the meeting, with apologies being received from about 15 Shareholders and other stakeholders. The Director of Fisheries and three other DPI representatives also attended the meeting, and the discussions were recorded.

General summary

- **Management Charges**. DPI advised Management Charges for 2015-16 had been set at about $6996 per 100 shares, or about a 10% increase on the $6279 per 100 shares of 2014-15. Industry expressed concern about the increase and the response to consultation, and suggested a reduction of 15% to about 5% GVP or about $5000 per 100 shares.
- **Catch caps**. The catch cap proposal from DPI was not supported by Industry. It was noted the targets agreed by Industry were agreed as targets with 30% flexibility as is done in Victoria, not caps. Industry supported an approach similar to that used in Victoria, where broad scale targets and caps could be agreed, with voluntary control of catch at smaller scales by Industry, which was supported by DPI.
- **DPI approaching divers and diver safety**. This issue was raised in 2013 following concerns raised by several divers. Last year DPI advised they were reviewing procedures, and this year advised that review had been completed. Industry again requested a set of procedures, about Fisheries Officers approaching boats with divers in the water, that they be agreed and circulated to divers, so that the appropriate procedures were clearly known by all, before an accident occurred. Industry summarised that they felt there were no Fisheries Compliance issues important enough to risk divers' safety by boarding boats while the diver was under-water.
- **Indigenous access consultation**. Consultation on Indigenous access to all fisheries resources in NSW was completed last year, and DPI advised that the "Interim Compliance Policy" of 10 abalone per person per day bag limit and shucking on the rocks would be maintained until formal regulations were developed, with further consultation. Industry raised concerns about the lack of policing what were claimed by those involved to be 'cultural catches'. DPI confirmed there were no moves to enable any commercial access.
- **Recreational bag limit**. While there is no current process reviewing the Recreational Bag limit, at last year's meeting, there was general support from Industry for a change to 4 abalone per person per day with a boat/car limit. DPI advised changes would occur with any other recreational rule changes.
- **Catch reporting change**. Change to a phone based catch reporting system has been coming for some time, and DPI advised the necessary legislation has been delayed again, but may still progress to allow implementation in the next fishing period. These changes are important as DPI has committed once the reporting system is in place to implementing, a separate northern quota including free transfers.
- **Separate quotas**. For several years, the Workshop has raised the option of a separate quota to ensure fish are caught from northern areas. There was general support for implementation of a northern quota to spread catch, and that DPI consult with Industry about details and implement in 2016, if possible.
- **Size limits**. There was discussion about appropriate size limits with diverse opinions ranging from a trial of a voluntary size limit increase, to a preference to leave it alone, and the need to consider access to stocks at lower size limits. Assessment of the success of past changes in size limit ranged 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 also noted, including the current higher price for larger fish and options for smaller fish.
- **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. Conditions, such as a VMS, will be applied to a permit to access NSW waters from Mallacoota through the Marine Park, and divers need to consult directly with the Victorian DPI on the permit and its use.

- **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 has been delayed pending a Risk Assessment of abalone translocation.
- **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.
- **Harvest Strategy**. DPI provided a presentation on current development of the draft interim Harvest Strategy, and provided the current draft to Industry.

Catch planning and TAC recommendations

The meeting expressed frustration at inaction on previous Workshop TAC recommendations. While the TAC report had provided some break up of recommendations by Area, and there were differences with Industry's catch targets, but little justification for the difference was provided.

Last year, the meeting noted it was difficult to discuss changing catch targets for Areas by such small amounts, and suggested the need to consider catch targets at a broader scale. In response, this year consideration of the TAC started at a state-wide scale, and progressed to consideration of the data at a Regional scale. In particular, estimates of biomass and harvest fraction were provided with recent catch for each Region, and agreement was reached on regional catch targets. Areas requiring consideration, and possible catch target changes, were then identified using the Catch planning tables and estimates of change in biomass. This final part of the meeting involved seeking consensual agreement from Industry and DPI about catch recommendations for the 2015 TAC. DPI have stated they "were involved in the discussion" "but did not contribute to the proposed catch recommendations".

While there have been increases in catch rate and the mean size of abalone, estimates of biomass have increased around Tathra and south of Wonboyn, but decreased from Eden to Wonboyn. With an increased proportion of catch in the south, there was general agreement that catches in the south should remain stable, while any increase in TAC should be taken from northern areas where there has been little catch in recent years because of processing issues. There was general support for the implementation of a Northern quota (e.g. 20 t north of Bunga or 10 t north of Moruya, but with amount and details to be agreed) to ensure a better spread of catch. The meeting reached a consensus to support a TAC of 130-140 t during 2016.

At the scale of Regions, estimates of biomass increased in all Regions, except Eden to Wonboyn which had declined slightly following previous large increases. Similarly, estimates of harvest fraction (i.e. catch as a fraction of biomass) decreased in all Regions, except Eden-Wonboyn where it was stable but at a higher harvest fraction than all other regions. It was agreed that the relatively minor changes in biomass across the regions did not require changes in regional catch or targets, and that fishery operational changes would respond to the biomass changes, as needed. Area catch targets were increased in Area 16 and 19, consistent with the current distribution of catch and stock indicators.

To date, catch has remained concentrated in southern areas, particularly because of processing limitations. Catch is above targets in Areas 16 and 19, near the tip of Green Cape and at Black Head, although this is partly cause by the larger proportion of Eden catch already being landed.

General comments about the stock were consistent with the catch data showing small 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.

Table 1. Table presented to Catch Planning Workshop in July 2015, including catch until end June 2015. 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.

Area	Assessment data		2015 fishing period				Comment
Northern Pt	Catch rate	Mean size	Catch	Target	Target ±30%	Catch % Target	
01 Tweed A-E	-	-	0	1.0	0.7-1.3	0%	Behind Target , no effort, target just reduced to 1 t
02 Port Stephens F-J	-	-	0.3	1.0	0.7-1.3	27%	Behind Target , little effort, target just reduced to 1 t
03 Kiama K-M	-	-	0.4	2.0	1.4-2.6	19%	Behind Target , little effort, target just reduced to 2 t
04 Ulladulla N	-	-	0.2	1.0	0.7-1.3	20%	Behind Target , little effort, target just reduced to 1 t
05 South Brush P	-	-	0.4	5.0	3.5-6.5	8%	Behind Target, no effort
06 Batemans Q	-	-	0	1.0	0.7-1.3	0%	Behind Target, no effort
07 Moruya R-S	-	-	0.3	1.0	0.7-1.3	30%	Behind Target , little effort
08 Narooma T	-	-	0.2	4.0	2.8-5.2	4%	Behind Target , little effort, low Target
09 Bermagui U1-3	-18%	-5%	1.9	7.8	5.5-10.1	25%	Behind Target, little effort
10 Bunga U4-V2	+9%	0%	4.8	10.0	7.0-13.0	48%	On Target, catch rate up, target just increased to 10 t
11 Moon Bay V3-W1	+15%	+2%	4.2	9.0	6.3-11.7	47%	On Target, catch rate and mean size up, target up last year
12 Turingal W2-X1	+2%	+0%	4.3	8.5	6.0-11.2	50%	On Target
13 Long Beach X2	+5%	-3%	2.3	5.0	3.5-6.5	46%	On Target, catch rate up, mean size down, target up last year
14 Eden Y11-21	+12%	+1%	6.3	12.0	8.4-15.6	53%	On Target, catch rate up, target just increased to 12 t
15 Saltwater Y22-23	+2%	-2%	5.0	10.0	7.0-13.0	50%	On Target, target just increased to 10 t
16 Bittangabee Y24	+8%	0%	7.9	10.0	7.0-13.0	79%	Ahead of Target, target up last year
17 Greencape Y31	+13%	0%	4.7	10.3	7.3-13.5	46%	On Target, catch rate up
18 City Rock Y32	+5%	-1%	3.2	6.0	4.2-7.8	53%	On Target, catch rate up, target just reduced to 6 t
19 Wonboyn Z1-3	-2%	+2%	6.5	7.0	4.9-9.1	93%	Ahead of Target, mean size up
20 Saltlake Z4	+4%	+3%	6.2	9.0	6.3-11.7	69%	On Target, catch rate and mean size up
21 Howe Z5	-11%	+2%	7.2	16.0	11.2-20.8	45%	On Target, catch rate down, mean size up
Total			66.1 t of 130 t	136.6 t		51%	

Table 2. Current and target catch for the 2015 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	2015 Fishing period			Workshop comment	2015 Fishing period	
Northern Pt	to date	Target	%		Old	Target
01 Tweed A-E	**0**	**1.0**	0%	Very little catch because of processing. Targets reduced in 2014 as old targets have not been reached for several years, and may be well below sustainable. Northern quota should increase catch slowly in these areas.	**1**	**1**
02 Port Stephens F-J	**0.3**	**1.0**	27%		**1**	**1**
03 Kiama K-M	**0.4**	**2.0**	19%		**2**	**2**
04 Ulladulla N	**0.2**	**1.0**	20%		**1**	**1**
05 South Brush P	**0.4**	**5.0**	8%	Catch reduced as main diver no longer active in area. Catch rate change related to divers.	**5**	**2**
06 Batemans Q	**0**	**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	**0.3**	**1.0**	30%		**1**	**1**
08 Narooma T	**0.2**	**4.0**	4%		**4**	**4**
09 Bermagui U1-3	**1.9**	**7.8**	25%	Little catch because of processing, some recent catch with good catch rates and sizes.	**7.8**	**8**
10 Bunga U4-V2	**4.8**	**10.0**	48%	Catch has increased in recent years, but catch rates and sizes increased. Stocks looking good, including on reef where little before. Increase target last year, and catches on target.	**10**	**10**
11 Moon Bay V3-W1	**4.2**	**9.0**	47%		**9**	**9**
12 Turingal W2-X1	**4.3**	**8.5**	50%	Catch, catch rates and sizes have been stable. Stocks looking good.	**8.5**	**9**
13 Long Beach X2	**2.3**	**5.0**	46%		**5**	**5**
14 Eden Y11-21	**6.3**	**12.0**	53%	Catch increased in recent years, and now stable at higher level with targets revised up last year. Very good catch rates, particularly in Y24. Stocks very good.	**12**	**14**
15 Saltwater Y22-23	**5.0**	**10.0**	50%		**10**	**10**
16 Bittangabee Y24	**7.9**	**10.0**	79%		**10**	**10**
17 Greencape Y31	**4.7**	**10.3**	46%	Catch had been higher than elsewhere, but reduced for several years. More catch here in summer towards end of year. Target reduced as old target had not been reached for several years.	**10.3**	**10**
18 City Rock Y32	**3.2**	**6.0**	53%		**6**	**6**
19 Wonboyn Z1-3	**6.5**	**7.0**	93%	Catch has increased again following reduction previous year, particularly at Black Head in Z3. Catch rates, sizes and stocks look very good. Catch may increase with several new Shareholders resident and working from Mallacoota.	**7**	**9**
20 Saltlake Z4	**6.2**	**9.0**	69%		**9**	**9**
21 Howe Z5	**7.2**	**16.0**	45%		**16**	**16**
Total	**66.1**	**136.6**	**51%**		**136.6**	**138**