

TASMANIAN ABALONE COUNCIL LTD

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Fishery Resource Advisory Group (FRAG)

Meeting 1/2013

Friday 22nd February 2013

IMAS, Nubeena Crescent Tarooma

Minutes

1. Present:

Members:

I. Cartwright (Chair), G Woodham,, D. Lisson M. Webster, T Johnston, B Cobbing, J. McKibben, P. Richardson, J. Hoult, M. Haddon D. Tarbath, M. Bradshaw, J. Freeman (minutes), C Gardner

Observers:

B Richardson, G Hughes, K Hoskin, M Steane, B Manning (University of Sunshine Coast)

2. Apologies:

R. Scanlon, C Mundy, V. Collins, F Ledwell, A Gray, R Rex,

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming all observers, a number of which were first time attendees. This meeting is a review of the fishery performance for 2012, and where the fishery may go in 2013. The overall role and purpose of the FRAG and its relationship with the Tasmanian Abalone Council and the Fisheries Advisory Committee (FAC) were explained. Ian is to send a note to Rob Rex wishing him the best of luck and thanking him for his work, dedication and commitment to the FRAG and the industry.

3. Adoption of agenda:

The agenda was adopted as tabled.

4. Minutes of the previous meeting:

Agreed to be an accurate record and accepted.

5. Actions Arising from Previous Meeting:

Action 1 – Development of target and limit reference points -.

Bio-economics Project – accurate data inputs are crucial to the outcomes.

Biological model - Malcolm is looking at the economics of the expected catch share of divers. 30 divers have been interviewed and Malcolm will develop the model for analysing the information for the best economic return to the fishery.

This is another source of information to make further decisions for the sustainability of the industry.

Divers concerns arose as to where the information is being derived from, and feel the industry shouldn't be fishing to the market.

Processors need to supply according to customer demand - at different times of the year customers require different sizes.

Greg gave an example of the 'Chatham Islands' being fished at 65% and remaining a sustainable fishery.

Action 2 - Follow up on funding with FRDC for Occupational Divers Course, bases on FRDC People Development Funding

Refer to AbFAC

FRDC (Patrick Hone) has indicated that more funds from FRDC & CRC should be utilised for People Development. Agreed that this should be progressed

Action 3 – Finalisation of Block 5 report and presentation of results to FRAG

Diver comment – size limits were reduced to allow this study and a reduction of size limits in 3 other blocks. To date, there has been no research information or a short list of conclusions/recommendations forthcoming from the Block 5 project.

IMAS - there have been formal reviews at each stage of the size limit reductions; key researchers have an overload of projects and this is why the final report for the block 5 project has not been completed.

DPIPWE – concern expressed at the size limit and with the current level of TAC.

Action 4 – Modification of docket book to make more user friendly and development of instructions on how to complete correctly

Completed – new books will be rolled out when the current books are used.

Suggested the future use of electronic reporting.

Action 5 – Information of processor/diver numbers and options for maintaining profitability/viability in these sectors

The Minister has accepted the TACL request to hold a moratorium on the issuing of new processor licenses for 6 months. Felmingham is to be engaged during this period to conduct a review focusing on the financial viability of the post harvest sector with consideration being given to recommending a limit on processor numbers.

Refer to AbFAC

TACL to engage Felmingham to conduct the processor review

Action 6 – Workshop to develop criteria for MCDA process –

Ongoing -

Action 7 – Meeting to discuss *scheduling of 2013 FRAG and FAC dates* –

Completed

6. Review of 2012 Fishery Performance (Dave Tarbath)

The format of the report will be changed to comply with recent changes to National fishery sustainability reporting standards.

Draft 2012 abalone assessment – February 2013

This document is a preliminary draft of the 2012 abalone fishery assessment. Its purpose is to provide fishery information to promote informed discussion at upcoming meetings around the state where abalone stock assessment is to be discussed.

While all efforts have been made to ensure accuracy of catch and effort totals, the catch data used in this document is known to contain errors concerning estimated weights, hours dived and the location of the catch (reporting block).

Total landings and gross revenue

At the end of 2012 annual totals of reported landings comprised 2,226 t of blacklip and 140 t of greenlip, a total of 2,362.7 t from a TAC of 2,366 t (Table 1). Like the previous year, total landings fell in 2012, attributable to a large reduction (171.5 t) in the Eastern Zone TAC.

Table 1. 2012 landings by zone, in tonnes

Zone	2012 TAC	2012 Landings (tonnes)
Greenlip	140.0	139.8
Eastern Blacklip	549.5	547.5
Northern Blacklip	378.0	376.4
Western Blacklip	924.0	924.6
CentralWestern	70.0	69.9
Bass Strait Blacklip	304.5	304.5
	2366.0	2362.7

The 2012 catch had a gross landed value of \$82.4 million, down by only \$2.4 million from the previous year, despite the large Eastern Zone catch reduction. Prices for live market product (mostly sourced from the Eastern, Western and Central West Zones, and the greenlip fishery) were stronger in 2012 while prices for canned product (mostly from the Northern and Bass Strait Zones) remained stable.

Like previous years, prices for live market product slumped after the Chinese New Year, but then trended higher from April to the year's end. Demand appears to have remained strong in December despite the unusually large November catch. Prices for canning abalone were mostly stable throughout the year (Figure 1).

Domestic market prices for live greenlip suffered when AVG was detected in a consignment of abalone in late August, and the largest market (NSW) ceased imports immediately. From September, most greenlip were processed, and received a lower price.

Royalties collected by the Tasmanian government in 2012 fell by \$0.63 million to \$5.72 million as a result of the smaller catch.

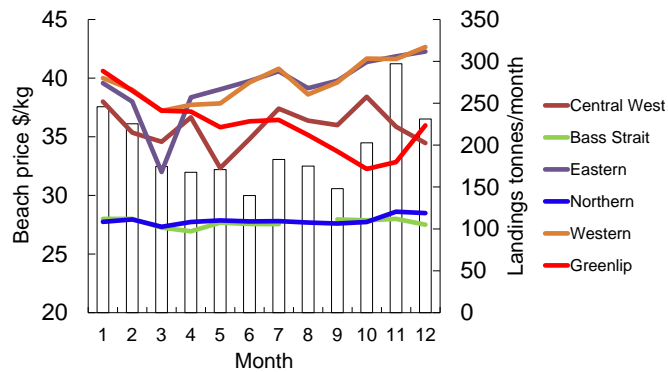
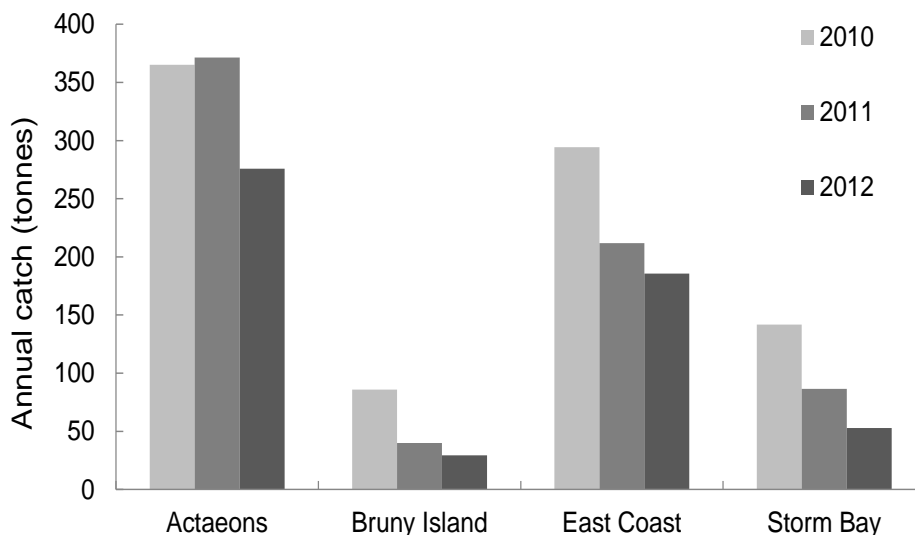


Figure 1. Monthly trends in average beach price for abalone in 2012, by zone. Bass Strait and Northern Zone abalone were predominantly used for canning; Eastern, Western and Central West Zone abalone were mostly sold to the live market. Greenlip beach price data were incomplete.

Appendix 1: Catch, catch-rates and size-composition

Eastern Zone blacklip fishery

Distribution of catch between the four main regions of the fishery:



FRAG Comments:

There was discussion on introducing measuring boards to all processors, this operation would be onerous on the processors.

Actaeons - Conclusions

- The CPUE has fallen to the low 2002-2004 levels with 268t caught
- Fish are smaller ⇒ increasing fishing pressure ⇒ less opportunity to grow
- Annual crop fishery – high % of recruits
- Monthly CPUE decline shows annual crop is running low towards end of year. But does it? To what extent is CPUE affected by economic factors at low levels of catch.

Bruny Island;

- reduced annual catch, was 150 – 200 t fishery
- most catches now 100 – 200 kg/day
- no obvious trends in median length

FRAG Comments;

There are fish there but numbers low

The long term effects of PST are unknown from the last 2 years.

The East Coast should be looked at as a whole, rather than as individual areas.

Should the size limit be increased to 145mm in 2014? Suggest 140mm 1st April 2013 and then in increments.

A reduction in TAC in 2014 for the sustainability of the industry is to be reviewed. This process is to be put on notice to the industry and AbFAC that if the trends don't change the decision will have to be made for a further reduction.

DPIPWE – at AbFAC #4 meeting it was noted that a 3yr rule was put in place at Freycinet and should it be put in place for bottom of Bruny and Actaeons to preserve the fishery. (Port Arthur and block 22)

DPIPWE suggest waiting until the East Coast opens in April when divers are in the water to check the condition of the industry.

Proposal; East Coast increase the size limit to 140mm (2mm) to leave fish on the bottom for sustainability, except Freycinet and Actaeons. Note that impacts are to be reviewed.

Refer to AbFAC

Increase size limit to 140mm at the start of Partridge Island North, whole of Bruny Island, and North 14C, D onwards.

Remainder of the East Coast;

Tony Johnston to supply export figures to show the peaks and troughs of export demand.

Refer to AbFAC

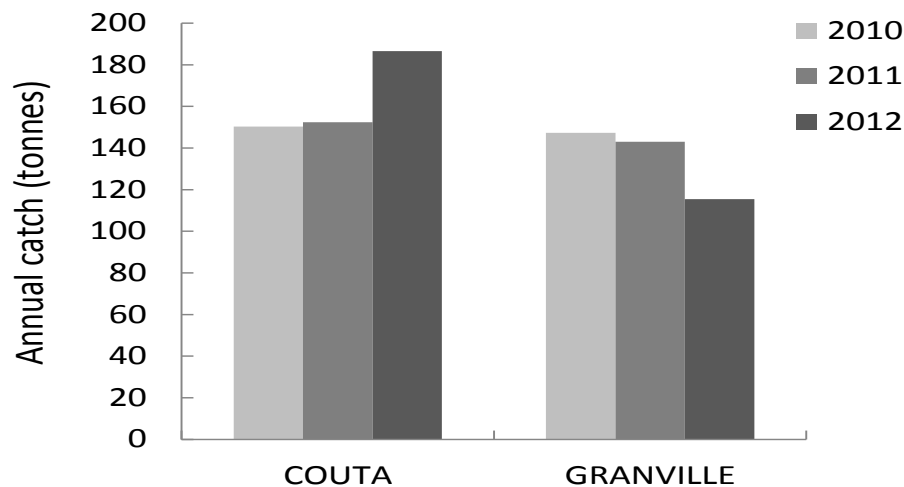
Suggest closure of the East Coast for longer than 3 months either 4 or 6 months from January.

EASTERN ZONE;

- Low catch rates everywhere
- Catch and catch rates sometimes highly correlated
- What affects the size of the daily catch? (apart from stock levels)
- What affects CPUE? double-up diving? high cost of fishing? reduced availability of quota? seasonal weed growth?

Central Western Zone blacklip fishery

Distribution of catch between the Couta Rocks region (Block 6) and the Granville Harbour region (Blocks 7 and 8):



Block 6 (6A-6C) is fully fished CPUE falling, 127t caught

Block 6D, 7, 8 (Sandy Cape, Granville, Trial Harbour, - 174t caught, falling CPUE)

FRAG Comments:

Suggest Block 6 should be a trailer boat fishery only to reduce the bio-security risks inherent in extended steaming times for mother-boats travelling back to the south east of the state.

Thoughts that the catch rates will improve with the reduction in TAC for this zone.

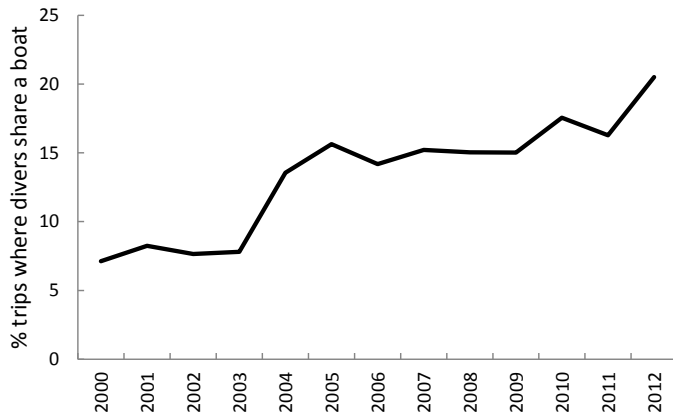
Western Zone blacklip fishery

Sharing of diving tenders (double-up diving).

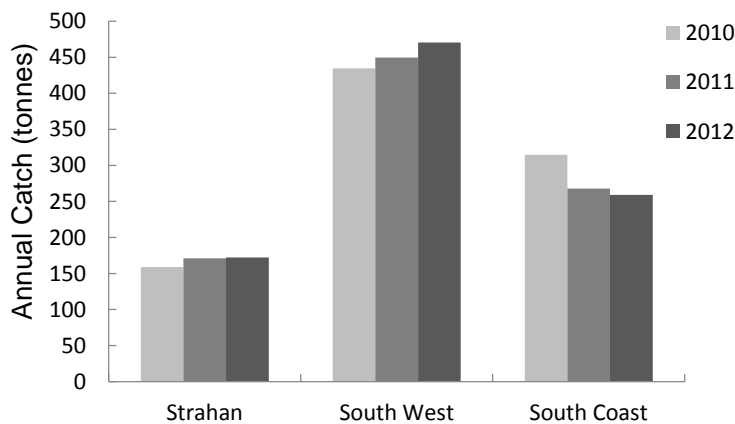
Divers have said that they now share boats more often than in past years, and that this practice may be responsible for causing nominal catch rates to fall in the South West, because it is a less efficient way to catch abalone. To investigate this claim, we counted the number of occasions where registered vessels were used by more than one diver for a fishing trip. We used this approach because it is consistent over a longer times series compared with the more recent practice of “team” diving.

Catch data were restricted to records with vessels of 8.5 metres length or less (to avoid mixing in the larger motherships). We found that the percentage of doubled-up trips has increased since 2000, with greatest rates of change between 2003-2005 and 2009-2012. The percentages shown in the chart below are indicative only, because we were unable to identify trips where unspecified mothership tenders were used (data not collected). Most motherships have at least one (maximum two) unspecified tenders. The South West is fished almost exclusively by motherships, so we would expect that the rate of doubled-up diving to be proportionally higher there (i.e. mothership tenders plus registered vessels). We assumed that the ratio of unspecified tenders to registered vessels did not change over the review period.

The implication of the increase in boat sharing for assessment purposes is that fishing efficiency in the Western Zone has diminished between 2003 and 2012.



Distribution of catch in the Western Zone:



FRAG Comments;

Divers comments - fluctuations in catch rates could be due to swell conditions, the fishery is patchy therefore diving reflects this.

Looking at the catch rate – the fishery is ok, divers are looking to cut costs of fishing out of Strahan.

TACL - The 2 year rule is insignificant in the protection of the industry overall and should be 3 years.

Is 140mm the right size? 145mm with a watching brief and if appropriate change to 150mm in 2014

Motion: 'Increase the size limit on the West Coast to 145mm from the 1st April 2013'.

Refer to AbFAC

Support increase the size limit on the Western zone to 145mm from April 1, 2013

2013 – the TAC remains the same as presented to the members at the AGM. Block allocations that were made as the target catch in 2012 will be changed into hard caps higher or lower than the target catch; and will be reviewed throughout the year; if the target is reached advice will be given to the Department to be closed by notice.

Factors influencing the CPUE in the Western zone

Strahan:

- double up diving – reduced catching efficiency
- limited capacity of live market – small catches
- weather
- average age of the divers
- smaller fish required by the market

South West:

- 470t caught, CPUE falling, fish getting smaller
- divers say fishing ok
- CPUE highest towards the end of the year, 100t @ 130kg/hr
- CPUE high when daily catches are high
- does not explain reduced median length of abalone

South Coast

- 260t cap, 259t caught
- CPUE lower than rest of Western zone, but stable
- median length small but stable

WESTERN ZONE SUMMARY;

- Not clear that abundance is falling in the South West
- Implications of reduced size in SW?
- Stock levels in Block 9 and the South Coast unchanged?

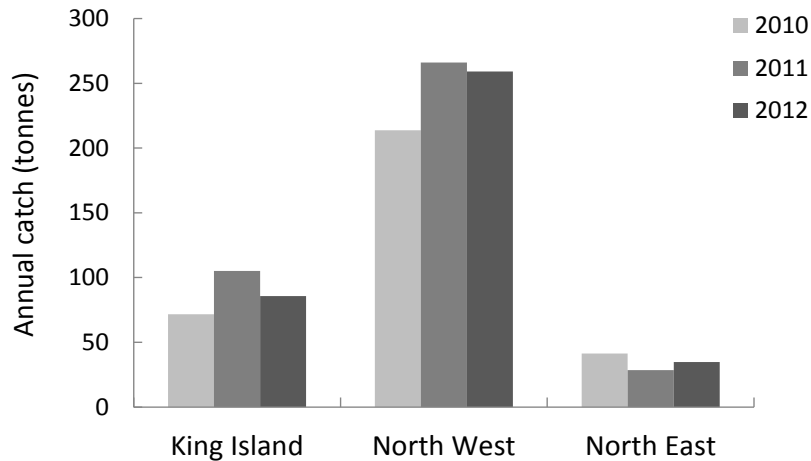
FRAG comments – looking at data from 6 months fishing over a 12 month period. The data logger information will show additional information.

Northern Zone blacklip fishery

Until 2010, the southern part of the Furneaux Group blacklip fishery was in the Northern Zone. In 2010, the size limit operating there was reduced from 127mm to 114mm, and this part of the fishery as moved to the Bass Strait Zone.

Most of the Northern Zone catch is taken from the North West, particularly from Block 5, which in 2012 has been capped at 142.5 tonnes. The remainder of the zone was by default, capped at 260 t.

Distribution of catch between Northern Zone regions:



Block 5

- Size limit reduction in 2008
- CPUE falling rapidly to pre-2008 levels
- stocks have been reduced
- weak catch-CPUE relationship

FRAG Comments:

The management of Block 5 was an experiment, and we are still waiting on the outcomes.

Suggest next FAC – ask Craig Mundy to finish his report including the outcomes from Block 5. There is some doubt whether it will give 83t, keep a watching brief and move the catch up to King Island if necessary.

Blocks 49-47 130t cap, 161t caught

- Size limit reduced to 120mm in 2012
- CPUE drifts down, picks up in 2012 – shift in effort from Albatross Island to Hunter Island
- Stocks have been reduced
- Strong catch-CPUE relationship

FRAG Comments;

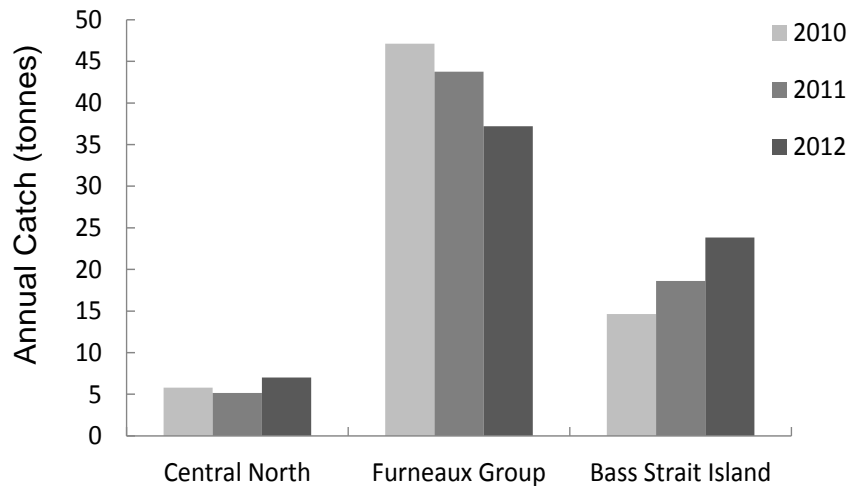
Suggest a watching brief.

The fish are creating shell instead of growth due to mud worm damage.

NORTHERN ZONE SUMMARY

- catch rates, stocks falling in Block 5
- Block 49 stocks were high, now reduced
- King Island CPUE stable, only 86t caught
- North East catch at target level, but low CPUE

Bass Strait Zone blacklip fishery



- Furneaux Group – catch mostly from Block 38 (Babel) 17t and Block 33 (Cape Barren Is) – 14t CPUE falling
- Hogan/Curtis/Kent Group, catch 24t CPUE increasing

FRAG Comments:

A cap is required to move the fishing from the Furneaux Group further north to Hogan etc.

Greenlip fishery

In 2011 a new fishing region with a cap of 10 t was developed on the Central North coast (Blocks 41 to 47) following the reduction of the size limit there in 2010 to 132mm. The 2012 greenlip TAC of 140 t was distributed between six regions:

King Island – 30 t
North West – 18 t
Perkins Bay- 20 t
Central North-10 t
North East – 23 t
Furneaux Group – 42 t

- King Island 16t, CPUE falls, major stock decline reported
- Black Reef 23t, CPUE falls but still high
- North West 22 t, CPUE stable
- North East 33t, CPUE stable
- Furneaux Group 45t, small fall in CPUE
- Central North Coast not fished

FRAG Comments;

Areas appear to be recovering slowly, when fished by local divers they are fishing in patches; there is variable data between local divers and out of area divers.

Victorian recreational fisherman may be having an impact on Greenlip fishery at King Island.

King Island may need a respite in 2014.

AbFAC - A comprehensive assessment is not available due to lack of resources and the Greenlip Fishery is not treated as a serious fishery.

North East corner of the Greenlip Fishery – do not let it overrun.

AbFAC - Suggest increasing the size limit on the North East coast and examining the minimum size limit.

Annual catches:

Year	King Island	North West	North East	Furneaux Group	Perkins Bay	Central North	Total
2000	9.6	41.0	38.9	42.5	8.1	0.1	140.1
2001	18.6	28.9	30.4	44.2	17.8	0	139.9
2002	25.0	29.9	31.3	43.3	10.0		139.5
2003	32.6	30.3	35.3	37.6	4.0	0	139.8
2004	31.0	25.3	31.4	36.8	4.0	0.1	128.5
2005	28.8	25.2	19.4	42.4	7.2	0.1	123.0
2006	27.9	22.9	16.2	39.6	16.1	0.4	122.7
2007	25.6	22.8	33.5	31.1	10.5		123.5
2008	20.0	19.1	24.4	34.9	22.1	0.2	120.5
2009	25.3	13.7	35.0	27.3	20.1	1.1	121.4
2010	33.1	22.8	24.6	33.6	19.7		133.7
2011	28.3	21.1	23.7	44.3	21.0	1.6	140.0
2012	16.1	21.7	32.7	45.4	23.0	0.2	139.1

Small quantities (<1.0t pa) have been taken in recent years from Blocks 50 to 57.

7. Re-opening of Block 30B & C

The TACL Board would like to see Blocks 30B & C re-opened with a realistic cap to avoid pulse fishing. Suggest a 145mm size limit to realise enough bio-mass, and a monitoring system to give feedback.

Paul Richardson has had a brief look and believes a healthy bio-mass of abalone has minimised the impact of *Centrostephanus* taking a hold.

The final report on the translocation research project report hasn't been completed due to lack of resources.

A re-opening strategy needs to be agreed to by FRAG and the TACL.

8. Other Business

1. Juvenile abalone collectors

IMAS has commenced a small scale study into methods for collecting juvenile abalone. If successful, this work could lead to estimates of juvenile abundance i.e. forecasting recruitment to the fishery.

The initial work involves placement of 50 steel plates at George III Rock near Southport. These plates will be examined periodically, and the number and size of small abalone underneath them will be recorded. Should this method prove successful, the project will be expanded to other areas of the south east to

investigate the best places to put the plates and whether the method can withstand heavy seas.

3. Hunter Island Shell Study Seafood CRC project 2009/746 - the Divers moved a motion at the Dive Sub-Council meeting to stop the harvest of 110mm in the fishdown until the project is reviewed.

Dave Tarbath gave a rundown on how the project came about, the funding and how the project sites were set up to collect the research data.

There are three impact sites and three control sites, each 200 – 300 metres length. The control sites are fished at 120 mm. The impact sites are fished at 110 mm, down to 100 kg/day, under special permit. All sites remain open to fishing. 5 tonnes of fish have already come out of the 'impact' sites, and abundance has been reduced, although not quite to the level required. Preliminary sampling found that approx. 1/3 fish were below 110mm, 1/3 between 110 and 120mm, 1/3 larger than 120

Monies paid for the fish is being put into a Research Fund, the \$23 beach price is \$10 to the diver and \$13 to the research fund for research. It is expected approximately \$100,000 will be available for the benefit of the industry.

Tasmanian Seafoods have provided funds and significant resources to collect the data, and the project diver has put in a lot of gratis work to get the project underway to finally get the results.

Diver Concerns;

Lack of communication that divers weren't notified of the start of the project or the locations being used as test sites. And that the project management appears to be loose.

Suggest an article be placed in the next edition of 'Fishing Today'.
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Meeting closed at 2.39pm

Next Meeting FRAG #2 Tuesday 23rd April 2013

Action Items FRAG #1 2013

	Action	Responsibility
1	Development of target and limit reference points	IMAS: Malcolm Haddon, Craig Mundy and Dave Tarbath Ongoing
2	Follow up funding with FRDC for Occupational Divers Course, based on FRDC People Development funding	TAC/IMAS: Dean Lisson and Craig Mundy Refer to AbFAC
3	Finalisation of Block 5 report and presentation of results to FRAG	IMAS: Craig Mundy Ongoing
4	Information of processor/diver numbers and options for maintaining profitability/viability in these sectors	DPIPWE: Matt Bradshaw TACL to engage Felmingham in a review of the processing sector
5	Workshop to develop criteria for MCDA process	IMAS: Craig Munday Ongoing
6	Increase size limit to 140mm Partridge Is, Bruny Is, 14c & D	Refer to AbFAC
7	Close East Coast 4 to 6 months	Refer to AbFAC
8	Increase Size limit on Western Zone to 145mm from April 1, 2013	Refer to AbFAC
9	'Shell Study' article to be inserted in 'Fishing Today'	David Tarbath, Matt Bradshaw