



Response to Proposed Amendments to the Fisheries (general and Fees) Regulation 2016 – Commercial Blacklip Size Limits (September 2022)

INTRODUCTION

TARFish welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission in response to the proposed changes to black limit abalone size limits for the commercial sector.

The proposed size limit changes are to increase size limits for blacklip abalone in the eastern, western and northern parts of the fishery.

The proposed size limit changes reflect application of the following “three-year rule”, approved as part of the fishery Harvest Strategy in 2018:

That, from 50 per cent size at maturity in an area, blacklip abalone should be given three years size limit protection before entering the legally exploitable biomass.

The application of that rule would be phased in over a three-year period from 2023-2025 based on growth rates specific to each region.

In summary, it is TARFish’s view that there is broad and pressing support for urgent implementation of size limit changes amongst the commercial dive sector and processors, together with the recreational sector, scientists and natural resource management sector as indicated at the Abalone Futures workshop in April 2022. We also welcome the compression of the implementation timetable from five to three years in acknowledgement of its delayed introduction.

TARFish notes that other jurisdictions, such as the Western Zone of Victoria and New Zealand are moving to a four-year rule and TARFish suggests that evaluating the pros and cons of shifting to a four-year rule using the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) simulation model would further inform the longer term needs for size limits.

In addition, TARFish seeks to understand how the implementation of the new three-year rule will be monitored and evaluated and considered in the development of the new abalone Harvest Strategy.

The following pages set out TARFish’s view in more detail.

BROAD SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SIZE LIMIT CHANGES

TARFish welcomes the introduction of size limit increases to protect spawning biomass which we consider to be the single biggest protective mechanism for the sustainability of the abalone fishery.

TARFish has strongly advocated their introduction over a number of years including representations to the Minister and Department and which also formed the basis of our support for the successful Abalone Rules Disallowance motion in November 2021.

Introducing the size limit changes has also supported by the Minister's Abalone Fishery Advisory Committee (AbFAC) and the Minister's Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee (RecFAC) over an extended period.

Specifically, the minutes of the relevant AbFAC and RecFAC meetings are shown below. Demonstrating the longstanding agreement of both the commercial and recreational sector to implement the changes:

July 2019 AbFAC meeting #92

Support the 3-year rule for size limit changes with the minutes stating "The FAC was very supportive of the size limit proposal and keen to progress it as quickly as possible.

The Department and IMAS had distributed a hand out on the three year rule to the Committee and the Chair requested members to look at the key table on page 5 showing the target for size limits by block. IMAS and the Committee were confident in the information that was presented..."

November 2019 RecFAC meeting #68

"RecFAC recommend abalone size limits be dealt with as a matter of urgency and that appropriate size limits apply to the commercial and recreational sector to adequately protect breeding stock to provide abalone the opportunity for three years spawning, instead of the current two (in accordance with the Abalone Harvest Strategy). Any resultant changes should be capable of being readily conveyed to the recreational sector and be capable of being policed.

November 2020 RecFAC meeting #73

The minutes read "During the discussion RecFAC expressed concern over continuing stock decline, and sustainability of the abalone fishery. The Department member was requested to provide an update about progress implementing the new size limits which aim to provide the three years of breeding guideline before they are harvested, as outlined in the Abalone Harvest Strategy. RecFAC reminds the Department that they support implementing the size limit changes (commercial and recreational) at a quicker rate than the 5 year plan. [Note see RecFAC68 recommendation 3].

In addition, the Department of Natural Resources Tasmania (NRE) held an Abalone Futures workshop in April 2022. The workshop brought together representatives from the commercial, recreational, indigenous sectors together with leading scientists and natural resource management representatives.

TARFish formed the view that amongst the commercial dive sector and processors, together with the recreational sector, scientists and natural resource management sector there was strong, and pressing support, for the introduction of size limit increases as a matter of urgency which was expressed to NRE representatives in very clear terms.

There are many matters that the various abalone sectors may not agree on however it is apparent that the majority from all sectors supported the urgent introduction of size limit changes.

PROTECTION OF SPAWNING BIOMASS AND THREE-YEAR RULE

TARFish welcomes the long-overdue implementation of size limit increases as well as the compression of the implementation timetable to meet the proposed 2025 target. The implementation timetable is an important aspect of the protections afforded spawning biomass by the three-year rule.

Whilst recognising this important step forward, TARFish notes that a number of other jurisdictions are moving to a four-year rule – the Western Zone of Victoria and New Zealand.

TARFish suggests that evaluating the pros and cons of shifting to a four-year rule using the Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) simulation model would further inform the longer term needs for size limits.

In addition, TARFish seeks to understand how the implementation of the new three-year rule will be monitored and evaluated and considered in the development of the new abalone Harvest Strategy.

TARFish also wishes to acknowledge the additional protection from localised depletion that the size limit changes will provide and notes the intention to include size limit changes for the recreational sector in the new Harvest Strategy.

RELATED MATTERS

TARFish takes the opportunity to re-state its position on abalone management as outlined in our presentation to the Abalone Futures workshop in April 2022, specifically and in addition to the implementation of size limit changes, TARFish supports:

1. Development of a new abalone harvest strategy

The current harvest strategy expired in 2020.

TARFish notes the government commitment to defer size limit changes for the recreational sector until a new harvest strategy is developed as noted in RecFAC 79 background note which states *“There are only two size limit zones for the recreational sector for the purposes of simplicity. The size limit zones aim to reflect the broad general growth rate.*

RecFAC67 stated that the size limit review should proceed as matter of urgency and was supportive of the limits. RecFAC has previously indicated support for reviewing recreational size limits. Notably they supported increasing the East Coast to 145 mm for all sectors – and indicated that this should be dealt with urgently. Recreational size limits will be reviewed as part of the Abalone Harvest Strategy. A future review of recreational size limits will balance the need to reflect Abalone growth rates for an area, stock pressure, simplicity and compliance.

TARFish requests further information on the timetable for the development of a new harvest strategy that includes the recreational sector (noting recreational sector was not included in the 2018 harvest strategy).

2. Development of a formal resource sharing agreement

Since at least 2019 if not before, TARFish has requested a formal resource sharing arrangement for the recreational sector be made as acknowledged in *The Report to the Minister on Proposed Alternations to the Abalone Fishery Management Plan* (September 2019).

In addition, TARFish welcomes the commitments made in the Tasmania Recreational Sea Fishing Strategy 2021-2030 to:

- Develop an overarching fisheries resource sharing policy framework to guide harvest strategies and other management instruments. The policy framework will apply to all resource users and contain criteria to guide allocation assessments.
- Guided by the resource sharing framework, develop resource sharing arrangements that include (a) recreational only fishing areas and (b) allocation arrangements for priority shared recreational fishing species. Initially these will include abalone, rock lobster, sand flathead, calamari, scallop, King George whiting, snapper and yellowtail kingfish.

3. Preserving recreational fisher access, particularly on the east coast.

As noted under point 2, the Government has committed to recreational fishing only areas and a resource sharing arrangements. TARFish supports additional access protections for recreational fishers, particularly on the east coast.

4. A healthy and abundant fishery that is actively managing challenges such as *Centrostephanus* and habitat loss (e.g. giant kelp) and mitigating effects of climate change/marine heatwaves.