



TTMAC 32, 04 February 2025 Meeting Record

Teleconference via Teams
13:00 – 15:02 hrs (AEST)

Agenda:

1. Welcome, apologies and conflicts of interest	Chair
2. Coral Sea Hook Trial Proposal	AFMA
3. Ecological Risk Assessments (ERAs)	AFMA

Agenda item 1. Welcome, apologies, and conflicts of interest

1. The Chair, Anthony Hurst, opened the meeting with an Acknowledgment of Country and welcomed the participants to the meeting.
2. The following participants attended the meeting: Anthony Hurst, Chair; Selina Stoute, AFMA member; Lara Ainley, Manager Tropical Tuna, AFMA; Daniel Casement, invited participant; Daryn Logan, industry member; David Ellis, industry member; Glen Holmes, conservation member; Grahame Williams, OAM, recreation member; Ian Bladin, invited participant; Terry Romaro, OAM, industry member; Shayer Alam, AFMA Executive Officer.
3. The following apologies were noted: Ashley Williams (scientific member) and Adam Whan (industry member).
4. The MAC noted the standing declarations of interest and updates provided by members. The updated declarations of interest are at **Attachment 1**.
5. Acknowledging the conflicts declared and that the purpose of the agenda items was to provide AFMA with advice within the context of the established fisheries regulations and harvest strategy, TTRAG scientific advice and the Commission's decision-making role, the Chair proposed that all participants engage in the discussions in their entirety. Members accepted this approach.



Agenda item 2. Coral Sea Hook Trial Proposal

6. The MAC noted that AFMA had received a new research proposal from Tuna Australia to investigate the effects of increasing hook numbers in the Coral Sea Zone under a scientific permit for three years, allowing higher hook counts from 1 March to 31 August each year.
7. AFMA had consulted with the Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group (TTRAG) and reported that TTRAG supported the proposal. TTRAG's feedback indicated that the proposal represents a valuable opportunity to study the effects of increasing the number of hooks in pelagic longlines on blue and black marlin. Additionally, TTRAG highlighted the importance of ensuring sufficient data collection, which will be periodically reviewed by the RAG. However, they emphasized that the ultimate success of the project is the responsibility of the project team.
8. AFMA sought TTMAC advice on management considerations if it supports this proposal, specifically the broader management risks, including those to blue and black marlin and protected species like turtles, that should be addressed when implementing this proposal.
9. AFMA presented background information on the previous Coral Sea Hook Trial, including the previous catch triggers for blue and black marlin and related interaction data.
 - It was noted that in the first year of the previous trial (2021), the Tier 1 trigger was met for one of the marlin species and the small working group met and agreed the catch triggers should be combined for both species for the rest of the trial.
10. David Ellis, CEO Tuna Australia, provided an overview of the proposed research project, which was developed in collaboration with Kylie Scales, Principal Investigator, University of the Sunshine Coast and highlighted:
 - The previous trial conducted in 2021-2024 lacked sufficient data and a clear method for analysis.
 - The industry engaged in extensive discussions about how the fishery has changed over time, but there is still no conclusive evidence regarding any significant differences in the survival rates of blue and black marlins when comparing the use of 500 hooks to 1,250 hooks.
 - The new proposed trial is better structured, specifically regarding data collection and analysis, and collaboration with Kylie Scales that may lead to a definitive answer.
 - The research will adopt a robust scientific approach, collecting data over three years as part of a PhD thesis chapter.
 - To address key questions, the methodology distinguishes between 500 hooks and anything greater.



11. The MAC sought clarification on the proposed research methodology to be used in the trial and discussed:

- The expected soak time between hauling “control” and “treatment” hooks is likely to be variable depending on specific fishing operations; and therefore, likely variability in the expected average soak times for each treatment. Current data suggests that for sets with 500 and 1250 hooks, the average soak time is approximately five hours and eight hours, respectively.
- The need for soak time per 100-hook bin to be measured.
- The importance of ensuring the collection of sufficient and replicable data, suggesting that at least three participating vessels may be required.

12. The MAC also discussed the importance of blue and black marlin to the recreational sector and the merit or otherwise of including catch triggers in managing risks of increased hooks for these species, including:

- The risk of exceeding catch triggers for blue and black marlin may be lower than previously thought.
- The impact of exceeding a trigger on the academic research of the PhD candidate.
- If exceeded, catch triggers would allow both TTRAG and TTMAC to review the information available and consider the current operating environment of the fishery.
- Other mechanisms in place to support managing the risks of increased hooks on blue and black marlin, and protected species, including daily electronic logbook and interaction reporting; that scientific permits can only be granted for a maximum of six months and that participating vessels need to apply each time; and, that reviewing the progress of the trial periodically can inform management arrangements for subsequent scientific permits.

Outcomes

13. TTMAC agreed to support the research proposal, emphasising the need to manage risks associated with blue and black marlin, and protected species, subject to:

- Including catch limits that, if exceeded, trigger TTMAC to review available information; that these catch limits adopt the Tier-1 combined trigger used in the previous trial.
- Regular reporting to TTRAG and TTMAC after each scientific permit period, with reference to all protected species, including turtles.



- Feedback from TTRAG and TTMAC may be considered for subsequent applications for scientific permits.

14. TTMAC requested that Tuna Australia provide additional information on:

- The robustness of the research methodology if only two vessels participate in the trial;
- The possibility of parallel data collection from game/recreational sector to validate any unusual blue and black marlin interactions during the trial

Agenda item 3. Ecological Risk Assessments

15. AFMA presented an overview of the draft results of each Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) report and the process undertaken to date for the ETBF (Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery) and WTBF (Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery), highlighting:

- A comparison between the results of the 2019 ERA and the current results.
- TTRAG identified potential data gaps regarding attributes to high-risk species and species level identification in turtles; and recommended additional information to address several data gaps be incorporated into revised ERA results.
- This additional information was collated and provided by ABARES, including recommendations for changes to some of the input data.
- An assumption that if the additional information is incorporated, the overall resulting risk score may change or be reduced for only a few of the identified high-risk species, and therefore an Ecological Risk Management (ERM) process will still need to be undertaken.
- Incorporating the additional information and revising both ERAs will incur an additional cost.
- For the purposes of Condition 6 and Condition 5 of the WTO declarations for the WTBF and ETBF, respectively, AFMA has submitted the ERA reports to the Department for both fisheries.
- AFMA further informed the Department on their intention to consult with its advisory bodies on whether to proceed to develop ERM responses in line with AFMA policy and not pursue any further updates to the ERAs at this time.

16. AFMA sought advice from the MAC on discontinuing further work on the existing draft ERA reports and commencing consultation to develop ERM responses.



17. The MAC discussed concerns regarding the overall ERA process; the need for additional funding to incorporate the additional information; and the potential impact on several fishery accreditations such as WTO and MSC.
18. The MAC noted that the additional funding was required because contractual obligations had been met with the delivery of the draft report; and that an ERA may be re-done at a later date, but that this would also require funding.
19. The MAC noted that to account for uncertainties in the ERA results, the ERM should take a more precautionary and conservative approach.

Outcomes

20. Having regard for the current time constraints and the relative benefit and costs of incorporating the additional information, the MAC agreed to use the draft ERAs as final and to progress with the development of an ERM.
21. Having regard for the concerns raised, the MAC highlighted the importance on providing feedback on the overall ERA process.

Meeting close

22. The chair thanked all participants for attending and contributing to the meeting and closed the meeting at 3:02 pm.



Attachment 1. TTMAC 31 participants declared interests.

Name	Role	Declared Interests
Anthony Hurst	Chair	Currently doing some work for Victorian Fisheries Authority on carp control in freshwater rivers, lakes, and wetlands. No pecuniary interests in tropical tuna.
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Employee of AFMA, which includes a salary. Senior Manager of the tuna and international fisheries. No pecuniary interest in tropical tuna fisheries.
Daniel Casement	Industry invited participant	Chief Executive Officer of Australian Southern Bluefin Tuna Industry Association and Chairman of Commonwealth Fisheries Association.
Daryn Logan	Industry member	Part owner and sole Director of Sniper fishing Pty Ltd, an ETBF vessel operator and quota SFR holder. Board Member of Tuna Australia.
David Ellis	Industry member	Is currently the CEO of the industry association, Tuna Australia which includes a salary paid by industry. Co-Investigator of the proposed Coral Sea Hook Trial Proposal. Is the PI on the following projects: - FRDC Project 2020-041. Improving the effectiveness, efficiency, and safety of mitigation tools for protected species interactions in the Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery - FRDC Project 2021-078. Improving the management of wildlife interactions in pelagic longline fisheries - FRDC Project 2021-063. Future Proofing: Integrating community quota, product supply, product innovation and market diversification in Australia's Tropical Tuna Industry.
Grahame Williams, OAM	Recreational member	Past President of the Game Fishing Association of Australia, Treasurer and Records Officer of the NSW Game Fishing Association and Game Fishing Association Australia Executive Officer. No pecuniary interests in tropical tuna fisheries. Member of the NSW Recreational Fishing Trust. NSW Minister for Fisheries Special Advisory Council – RF NSW.
Ian Bladin	Recreational/charter fishing invited participant	President of the Game Fishing Association of Australia, Director Australian Recreational Fishing Foundation, former Queensland charter boat



Name	Role	Declared Interests
		owner. Member FRDC Commonwealth Research Advisory Committee (COMMRAC).
Lara Ainley	Manager, Tropical Tuna	Employee of AFMA, which includes a salary. No pecuniary interest in tropical tuna fisheries.
Terry Romaro, OAM	Industry Member	Director of a company that owns Eastern Tuna and Billfish Fishery (ETBF) boat statutory fishing rights (SFRs), minor line SFRs, ETBF longline SFRs, Western Tuna and Billfish Fishery (WTBF) boat SFRs, WTBF longline SFRs, Western Skipjack Tuna Fishery (WSTF) purse seine permit, Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF) purse seine, mid-water trawl SFRs, and SPF quota SFRs. Shareholder of a company that owns shares in a proposal to fish with foreign longliners in the WTBF. Industry member on Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT) and Tropical Tuna MAC, Invited participant for TTRAG, and industry representative at the Commission for the Conservation of SBT (CCSBT) & IOTC. Invited participant for squidRAG and squid SFR holder. Director of Tuna Australia.
Shayer Alam	Executive Officer	Employee of AFMA, which includes a salary. Senior Management Officer in the tropical tuna fisheries team. No pecuniary interest in tropical tuna fisheries.