



Australian Government

Department of Climate Change, Energy,
the Environment and Water



Tasmanian
Government

National Recovery Team for the Maugean skate Meeting 3: 20-21 February 2024 – Public Communique



Maugean skate *Zearaja maugeana*. Copyright Jane Ruckert/IMAS

Meeting Overview

The National Recovery Team for the Maugean Skate met for the third time, in Strahan and online, from 20-21 February 2024. Meetings with community members and site visits were held in conjunction with the meeting. The Chair acknowledged the significant body of work undertaken since the second meeting, which included establishment of the captive breeding program, initiation of the Macquarie Harbour Oxygenation Pilot (MHOP) trial, enhanced monitoring and modelling work and community engagement activities. A short update on progress is provided below.

Captive Breeding Program

This program, which aims to establish an ex-situ insurance population to develop a long-term captive breeding program, has obtained all required animal ethics and permit approvals. The program is a collaboration between the University of Tasmania's Institute for Marine and Antarctic Studies (IMAS), SeaLife Sydney and Cradle Coast Natural Resource Management (CCNRM). Standard operating procedures for collection, transfer and housing have been developed. An independent Steering Committee has been established, including local and international experts, to provide oversight and advice for the program.

Fifty skate eggs and four adults were collected from Macquarie Harbour and transferred to the IMAS facility at Taroona in December 2023. Despite significant mitigation strategies to protect the captive skates, two of the adults (one male and one female) died in late December. An investigation into the cause and learnings from the mortality event is ongoing. The two remaining adult skates (one male and one female) are feeding and behaving as expected.

Several eggs have also successfully hatched, and the hatchlings are feeding and behaving as expected. Future management plans for the captive adults and juveniles are being developed. Facilities at IMAS Taroona will be expanded to accommodate the captive breeding program over time.

Macquarie Harbour Oxygenation Pilot (MHOP) Trial

This proof-of-concept pilot trial, which aims to offset oxygen demand associated with salmon farming by injecting oxygen into lower levels of the harbour, has obtained all relevant ethics approvals and permits. The trial commenced on 20 February 2024, beginning by injecting relatively small amounts of oxygen; amounts will be gradually increased dependent on data obtained at various stages. This will mitigate risks and enable rapid identification of any unintended consequences. An associated monitoring program is in place to allow any environmental changes to be assessed and to inform the trial. A technical working group has been established to provide guidance on operations and adaptation of the pilot over time.

Monitoring and Modelling activities

The Recovery Team discussed current and planned monitoring and modelling activities. A number of activities are currently underway to provide decision support tools. These include the use of sensors to monitor environmental parameters such as oxygen and temperature; population monitoring; hydrological modelling and potential management scenarios to identify approaches to improve dissolved oxygen levels within Macquarie Harbour. The importance of data sharing among member organisations was noted; members will follow up to ensure that agreements are in place and to minimise duplication of data collection.

EPA update

EPA gave an update on [Environmental Licence Renewals](#) in Macquarie Harbour and the [EPA submission](#) and [Tasmanian Government submission](#) to the Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) regarding reconsideration of the EPBC decision 2012/6406.

Community engagement

Members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community have participated in the collection of skate eggs and adults for the captive breeding program.

CNRM gave an update on the recruitment of a community engagement officer. It is hoped that the role will be based in Strahan and act as a point of contact between various conservation projects, Recovery Team members and the local community. The Recovery Team discussed pathways to socio-economic considerations, and the West Coast Council addressed the Recovery Team on the importance of considering community benefits and impacts in all Maugean skate recovery actions.

Recovery Team Roadmap

The Recovery Team discussed the [Roadmap](#), which was recently published on the CCNRM website. It was noted that drafting of this commenced prior to the finalisation of the Tasmanian Government Conservation Action Plan and the Australian Government Conservation Advice, to help prioritise recovery actions. Members will periodically review implementation of actions outlined in the Roadmap and monitor progress.

Registration of National Recovery Team

The Recovery Team agreed to initiate the registration process to become a [nationally registered recovery team](#). Registration will enable the team to become part of a national network and provide confidence that the team has been established and is operating using best practice methods.

EPBC Act Reconsideration Requests for Salmon Farming in Macquarie Harbour

DCCEEW provided an update on the [EPBC Act Reconsideration Requests for Salmon Farming in Macquarie Harbour](#). Submissions from the public were sought as part of the reconsideration process. The Minister will consider all relevant comments made in submissions along with other relevant information before deciding on the reconsideration request.

Australian Government Listing Assessment and Conservation Advice

The Maugean skate is under a reassessment of threatened species listing status under the EPBC Act. As part of this process, an updated Conservation Advice is being developed by the Australian Government Threatened Species Scientific Committee (TSSC). Recovery Team members were invited to provide expert advice to the TSSC on the draft documents.

Membership changes

David Midson (outgoing General Manager West Coast Council), Alyssa Giffin (DCCEEW) and Maree Fudge (UTAS engagement specialist) have stepped down from the Recovery Team. The Chair thanked David, Maree and Alyssa for their contribution to Maugean skate conservation. David will be replaced by new General Manager Ms Ciara Spencer. Alyssa is replaced by Rachel Robbins (DCCEEW). It was agreed to consider nominations to replace Maree.

Extracurricular activities

Members of the Recovery Team were invited to a barbecue hosted by the Strahan Aquaculture Community Forum. This was a great opportunity for members to better understand community views regarding the recovery of the skate and broader aquaculture considerations.

On 22 February, members of the Recovery Team participated in an optional field trip to see the oxygenation pilot trial on Macquarie Harbour as well as areas of Maugean skate habitat.

Background

The National Recovery Team for the Maugean Skate was formed in July 2023. The Tasmanian endemic Maugean skate (*Zoaraja maugeana*) is listed as endangered under both Tasmania's *Threatened Species Protection Act 1995* and the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. The species has also been included as a priority threatened species under the Australian Government's *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032*.