

**TORRES STRAIT FINFISH WORKING GROUP MEETING 2018.1****20 March 2018****Venue Bowl's Club, Victoria Parade, Thursday Island****MEETING TIME: 8:30am – 5:00pm Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018****DRAFT AGENDA****1. Preliminaries**

- 1.1. Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome / Apologies
- 1.2. Adoption of agenda
- 1.3. Declaration of interests
- 1.4. Actions arising from Finfish Working Group Meeting 16-17 March 2017

**2. Fishery Updates**

- 2.1. Management agencies updates
- 2.2. Finfish Fishery export approval under the EPBC Act
- 2.3. Update on Fish Receiver System program since 1 December 2017 implementation
- 2.4. Legislative amendments update
- 2.5. Native Title update
- 2.6. Torres Strait fisheries strategic issues including economic trends

**3. Finfish Resource Assessment Group Report: Meeting 1, 9-10 Nov 2017****4. Recommended Total Allowable Catches for 2018-19 Fishing Season**

- 4.1. Spanish Mackerel – TAC recommendation for 2018-19 season
- 4.2. Coral Trout - TAC recommendation for 2018-19 season
- 4.3. Other reef line species

**5. Research Updates**

- 5.1. Updates on Torres Strait Finfish Fishery research projects
- 5.2. Research priorities

## **6. Management**

- 6.1. Formalising Total Allowable Catches
- 6.2. Western line closure
- 6.3. Draft AFMA Finfish Fishery budget 2018/19
- 6.4. Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector catch estimates

## **7. Future Management Priorities and Work Plans**

## **8. Other Business**

## **9. Date and venue for next meeting**

Individuals seeking to attend the meeting as an observer must contact the Executive Officer – Andrew Trappett ([andrew.trappett@afma.gov.au](mailto:andrew.trappett@afma.gov.au)) beforehand.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1 20 March 2018</b>
<b>PRELIMINARIES</b> <b>Welcome and meeting preliminaries</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 1.1 FOR NOTING</b>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Working Group **NOTE:**

- a. an opening prayer;
- b. an acknowledgement of traditional owners;
- c. the chairperson's welcome address; and
- d. apologies received from members unable to attend.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. No **apologies** have been received.
2. Tenny Elisala, Eliziah Wasaga were not contactable for the meeting.

<b>PZJA TORRES STRAIT FINFISH WORKING GROUP</b>	<b>Meeting No. 2018.1 20 March 2018</b>
<b>PRELIMINARIES Adoption of the Agenda</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 1.2 For Adoption</b>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Working Group **NOTE** and **ADOPT** the Agenda.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. A **draft agenda (APPENDIX A)** was circulated to members and other participants on 2 March 2018 with some minor changes made subsequent to this.

# **TORRES STRAIT FINFISH WORKING GROUP MEETING 2018.1**

**20 March 2018**

**Venue Bowl's Club, Victoria Parade, Thursday Island**

**MEETING TIME: 8:30am – 5:00pm Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

## **DRAFT AGENDA**

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### **4. Recommended Total Allowable Catches for 2018-19 Fishing Season**

- 4.1. Spanish Mackerel – TAC recommendation for 2018-19 season
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<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>PRELIMINARIES</b> <b>Declarations of interests</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 1.3</b> <b>FOR ACTION</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group:

- a. **DECLARE** all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait Finfish Fisheries at the commencement of the meeting;
- b. **DETERMINE** whether the member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict;
- c. **ABIDE** by decisions of the Working Group (WG) regarding the management of conflicts of interest; and
- d. **NOTE** that the record of the meeting must record the fact of any disclosure, and the determination of the Working Group as to whether the member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.

## BACKGROUND

1. Consistent with the *Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1)*, which guides the operation and administration of PZJA consultative forums, members are asked to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest (**APPENDIX A**).
2. WG members are asked to provide the executive officer with a list of declared interests.
3. FMP1 recognises that members are appointed to provide input based on their knowledge and expertise and as a consequence, may face potential or direct conflicts of interest. Where a member has a material personal interest in a matter being considered, including a direct or indirect financial or economic interest; the interest could conflict with the proper performance of the member's duties. Of greater concern is the specific conflict created where a member is in a position to derive direct benefit from a recommendation if it is implemented.
4. When a member recognises that a real or potential conflict of interest exists, the conflict must be disclosed as soon as possible. Where this relates to an issue on the agenda of a meeting this can normally wait until that meeting, but where the conflict relates to decisions already made, members must be informed immediately. Conflicts of interest should be dealt with at the start of each meeting. If members become aware of a potential conflict of interest during the meeting, they must immediately disclose the conflict of interest.
5. Where it is determined that a direct conflict of interest exists, the forum may allow the member to continue to participate in the discussions relating to the matter but not in any decision making process. They may also determine that, having made their contribution to the discussions, the member should retire from the meeting for the remainder of discussions on that issue. Declarations of interest, and subsequent decisions by the forum, must be recorded accurately in the meeting minutes.

### Item 1.3 Appendix A, REGISTER OF DECLARED INTERESTS

Member	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM (recently developed Torres Strait Finfish Action Plan report for TSRA/FRDC) and on project team for TSRA-FRDC Scoping Study for Top Western Barra, Jewfish, Crab
Andrew Trappett	FWG Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
Mariana Nahas	TSRA Member	Nil
Michael O'Neill	Research Member	Principal Fisheries Scientists, QDAF.  Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
David Brewer	Research Member	Independent Consultant.  Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.  Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member	TIB licence holder.  Chairperson Malu Lamar.
Tenny Elisala	Industry Member	TIB licence holder.  Ranger, TSRA.
Frank Faud	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Tony Vass	Industry permanent observer – Sunset sector representative	No financial interest in Torres Strait Fisheries.  Holds Queensland East Coast quota for coral trout and 'other' finfish species.  Previous Torres Strait finfish operator.  Representative for sunset licence holders.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>PRELIMINARIES</b> <b>Actions arising from the last Working Group meeting</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 1.4</b> <b>For Noting</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** the:
  - a. the progress of actions arising from the previous meeting held on 16-17 March 2017; and
  - b. final meeting record of the 16-17 March 2017 Working Group meeting.

## KEY ISSUES

### Meeting record

1. This record was circulated for comments on 6 April 2017. The period for comments was closed on 24 April 2017.
2. Suggested comments were received from TSRA, some of which were incorporated into the final report which was circulated to members on 2 June 2017. **Attachment A** outlines the changes made to amend the record.
3. The final meeting record for Finfish Working Group meeting of 16-17 March 2017 is provided at **Attachment B**.
4. The meeting record was closed and ratified as a true and accurate record and posted on the PZJA website for public viewing.

### Actions arising

5. Progress against the actions arising from Working Group meeting is listed in **Table 1**.

## ATTACHMENTS

**Attachment A** - Finfish Working Group Meeting 16-17 March 2017 meeting record showing marked up changes based on member comments.

**Attachment B** - Finfish Working Group Meeting 16-17 March 2017 final meeting record

**Table 1:** Progress against action items from FWG meeting 16-17 March 2017

Action Item	Action	Agency	Completion Date	Status
1	AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure.	AFMA TSRA Malu Lamar	None specified.	<b>COMPLETE</b> Meeting was held April 2017.  Consideration has been given to actioning stakeholder consultation on removal of closure through 2018. Update paper provided at Agenda item 6.2.
2	The FWG to meet again in October 2017 to consider the TACs for the 2018-19 season.	FWG	October 2017	<b>INCOMPLETE</b>  Due to priority focus on RAG and Harvest Strategy business logical opportunity to convene FWG is March 2018.
3	AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock assessment being assessed as part of the 2018 east coast coral trout assessment.	AFMA, CSIRO	Planned August 2018	<b>COMPLETE</b>  Harvest strategy project team will present a preliminary coral trout stock assessment to the RAG in August 2018.

# Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2017.01

Meeting Record

16-17 March ~~2016~~2017

Note all meeting papers and records are available on the PZJA webpage:

[www.pzja.gov.au](http://www.pzja.gov.au)



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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5.6. Future management priorities.....	<u>2018</u>
5.7. Crewing of traditional inhabitant boats.....	<u>2018</u>
5.8. Draft 2017/18 AFMA finfish fishery budget .....	<u>2119</u>
5.9. Grant of carrier licenses to non-traditional inhabitants .....	<u>2119</u>
Agenda Item 6 – Other Business .....	<u>2119</u>

## Meeting Participants

### Members and declaration of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM (recently developed Torres Strait Finfish Action Plan report for TSRA/FRDC), <a href="#">co-investigator on FRDC and TSRA Top Western Fisheries Feasibility project led by A Tobin.</a>
Andrew Trappett	FWG Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
Mariana Nahas	TSRA Member	Nil
Michael O'Neill	Research Member	Principal Fisheries Scientist, QDAF. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
David Brewer	Research Member	Independent Consultant. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. Chairperson Malu Lamar.
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. President Kos and Abob Fisheries
Frank Faud	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Tony Vass	*Industry (sunset licence holder representative)	No financial interest in Torres Strait Fisheries. Holds Queensland East Coast quota for coral trout and 'other' finfish species. Previous Torres Strait finfish operator. Representative for sunset licence holders.

### Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jerry Stephen	*TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio	TIB licence holder. Traditional Owner, Ugar Island. Member, Fisheries Quota Management Committee Deputy chair TSRA

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Joseph Posu	PNG NFA	Nil
Ian Liviko	PNG NFA	Nil
John Ramsay	TSRA Program Manager, Fisheries	Nil
Andrew Tobin	Researcher	Independent consultant. Investigator on TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. PI on FRDC barramundi, crab fishery project. Owns a retail seafood outlet that buys product from the Torres Strait.
John Matthew	TSRA	Nil

\* Permanent observer

## Apologies

Name	Position
Eliziah Wasaga	Industry Member
Tenny Elisala	Industry Member

## Action items

Number	Action
1.	<u>AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure</u>
2.	<u>The FWG to meet again in October 2017 to consider the TACs for the 2018 – 2019 season.</u>
3.	<u>AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock being assessed as part of the 2018 east coast coral trout assessment scheduled to be undertaken by the Queensland Government.</u>

## Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	<p><u>The FWG recommended a Spanish mackerel TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 fishing season based on:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>a target biomass reference point of <math>B_{60}</math></u></li> <li><u>applying a step-down TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 season only (to minimise the operation impact of the proposed TAC reduction from 187t), supported subject to further advice from the Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock if catches exceed the Recommended Biological Catch in the 2017/18 season</u></li> </ul>

Number	Recommendation
	<u>without a step-down the recommended TAC would be 113t (RBC 125t - 12t for estimated subsistence catch taken outside the commercial fishery)</u>
2.	<u>Consistent with the FWG recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 the coral trout TAC (134.4t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 fishing season.</u>

## Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

### 1.1. Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome / Apologies

Mr Frank Faud opened the meeting in prayer.

Meeting chairperson, Andy Bodsworth, welcomed members and observers and noted that the fishery was in an important stage of development and the advice collected through this working group would provide valuable input to the upcoming PZJA decision making process.

Apologies were received from members Tenny Elisala and Elizah Wasaga. Meeting observer, Patrick Mills attended up to agenda item 2.7 and returned to present item 5.7. Andrew Tobin was noted as an apology for the second day of the meeting.

### 1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The Finfish Working Group (FWG) adopted the agenda with one change to remove agenda item 5.1. It was noted that the harvest strategy project had not yet commenced due to contracting delays. The FWG therefore agreed for an update on the harvest strategy project to be provided out of session.

### 1.3. Declaration of Interests

The FWG generally noted that there could be potential conflicts of interest for members and observers when providing information and advice on some agenda items.

All members provided an update on their declaration of interests. Observers also advised on their interests which are recorded under the section titled: *Meeting Participants*.

### 1.4. Actions Arising

The FWG noted the status of the previous action items including an update on the nature of changes to AFMA logbooks as detailed in the tabled paper.

## Agenda Item 2 – Fishery Updates

### 2.1. AFMA management

The FWG noted the AFMA management update as detailed in the tabled agenda paper and discussed the following:

#### ***Western line closure***

The FWG noted progress since the last FWG meeting to remove the western line closure (as detailed in the agenda paper, work is ongoing to compile outcomes of previous consultation

processes). The FWG noted again that the western closure reflects a historical jurisdictional boundary rather than a specific management purpose.

An industry member advised that if the area of the western closure was to be reopened consideration should first be given to:

- how much fishing the area could support noting that the fishing grounds are different from those in the east and concern that the area may not be able to support the number of licences in the fishery; and
- the potential for alternative livelihoods or business opportunities for traditional owners such as ecotourism.

Other industry members were generally supportive of this proposal and advised that further community consultation should occur before the western area of the fishery was reopened, to gauge community aspirations on future usage.

Noting there are no existing agreements in place to guide resource sharing between sectors (fishing, tourism etc) the FWG agreed for following **action**:

- AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure.

### ***Foreign compliance update***

The FWG noted the update from the AFMA Foreign Compliance Operations officer as detailed in the agenda paper. Members and observers provided the following updates and comments:

- communities are concerned that PNG Daru markets are reportedly selling turtle and dugong caught in the Torres Strait;
- future compliance risks assessment should include a level of consultation with stakeholders to ensure community concerns and knowledge are taken into account; and
- industry was very concerned ~~with~~ that a tanker went off-course in the Torres Strait the previous week and that AFMA should respond to such risks. AFMA acknowledged that it was indeed a serious matter and that AMSA were the appropriate body to respond.

## **2.2. TSRA update**

The FWG noted an update from the TSRA as detailed the paper distributed at the meeting (**Attachment A**).

## **2.3. Native Title**

Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, Mr Maluwap Nona advised that Malu Lamar would be establishing a company for the purposes of holding any future allocations of fishing access rights and quota. It was also advised that Malu Lamar and the TSIRC would be signing an official partnership agreement and similar partnerships are being discussed with Kauareg and Northern Peninsula Area traditional owners.

## **2.4. PNG – National Fisheries Authority Update**

The FWG noted the following updates from PNG-NFA officers:

- Very little interest exists in PNG in fishing for finfish species at present with the exception of barramundi. It was advised that barramundi catches have reportedly been declining in

recent years (e.g. year 2000 catches were over 100 tonnes, 2015 catches were around five tonnes).

- More fishers were using lures nowadays which are considered less selective (capturing all size classes) than mesh gillnets which have historically been used which are selective for certain size classes. PNG-NFA are giving some consideration to regulating against the use of lures in the barramundi fishery.
- Funding is set aside for research and stock assessment work for barramundi but a work plan is yet to be finalised. Assistance from AFMA and CSIRO to support a stock assessment may be sought.
- Indonesian buyers were having a heavy influence in PNG marketplaces placing a strong demand for seafood species with commercial value which are purchased and exported across the border.
- PNG-NFA advised that as the majority of their catch data comes from commercial export companies, they are reviewing catch-reporting in the western province; with a focus on artisanal fishery and local market fisher's data.
- Reports have been received that the invasive species snakehead and climbing perch are present in the area of the western province. It was reported that snakehead fish have commercial value and are sold in marketplaces.

Some industry members queried whether any consideration had been given to trading and developmental opportunities between Torres Strait and PNG treaty villages. PNG-NFA advised that there could be some future opportunities for co-operation. The AFMA member advised that the PNG-Australian Bilateral Treaty meetings would be the best forum to progress these issues and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is the responsible agency.

## 2.5. QDAF update

The FWG noted the following general updates from the QDAF member:

- Consultation on the Queensland Government's Green paper to guide fisheries reform has been completed and the outcomes are under consideration.
- QDAF is updating their Spanish mackerel stock assessment which is expected to be published September/October and will be used to inform future Total Allowable Catch setting.
- There is no east coast harvest strategy for Spanish mackerel. The Queensland government has committed to using the updated assessment to guide the development of a harvest strategy.
- A decision was pending on setting coral trout quota following a recent meeting with industry. It was expected that industry would be advised of the outcomes mid-April.
- White spot disease had recently been detected in prawns in Moreton Bay, outside of the area of the original Logan River outbreak. It was noted that trawlers operating in the Moreton Bay do not also operate in the Torres Strait.

### **Charter and recreational catch data**

As requested from the July 2016 FWG meeting, the QDAF member provided an overview of available data for the Queensland state charter boat and recreational fish catches from the area of the Torres Strait.

#### *Charter fishing catch data*

- Under the QDAF information disclosure policy, data stemming from less than five boats could not be released. It was advised that charter boats keep a daily logbook of: area fished (main reef fished), number of fishers, crew, species and numbers caught, species and numbers released and kilograms retained for the trip.
- For the time period 1995-2014 (a 19 year timespan) a total of 360 days had been fished by 10 licensed charter operators in the Torres Strait. 19.58 tonnes of reef-fish had been retained with the majority being reef fish such as coral trout with minor catches of Spanish

mackerel. The eastern islands of the Torres Strait were the main areas fished. Bag and size limits apply to charter boat operators.

- The 10 nm island closures (as per sunset licence conditions) do not apply for charter boat operators. Recreational and charter boat fishing is regulated under the laws of Queensland which is separate to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.

#### *Recreational fishing catch data*

- Only limited data with large amounts of error is available on recreational catch by fishers in the Torres Strait. Only 3 households provided data during the 2014/15 Queensland recreational survey.

The FWG noted the following comments from members:

- Communities are concerned that they have no say in the regulation of charter fishing operations in the Torres Strait. ~~It was further noted that TSRA would liaise directly with QDAF on this matter.~~
- The industry permanent observer advised that it was unlikely charter vessels would have fished the waters around Bramble Cay due to its remoteness.
- Malu Lamar would like to be involved in any future recreational fishing survey in the Torres Strait.

The FWG agreed to the following:

- overall the data indicates that charter catches have likely been low to date;
- the Queensland recreational survey data as currently analysed is not adequate to produce a meaningful catch estimate.
- Whilst recreational catches are also likely to be relatively low, a future priority should be to explore options to develop a reliable recreational catch estimate (for example supplement the survey coverage in the region, consider options to extrapolate from other data, fishing diaries).
- understanding the scale and therefore the likely impacts of recreational and charter fishing on commercial stocks is important for the management of the fishery.

## **2.6. Domestic compliance update**

The FWG noted the update on domestic compliance provided by the QDAF member as detailed in the agenda paper and advice from members:

- industry and community concern remains over the limited number of days spent on the water in the Torres Strait by Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. It was suggested that a QBFP office should be re-established in the Torres Strait and that the traditional owners should be engaged as fisheries officers as per the functional model of the Torres Strait Ranger program.
- AFMA advised that initiatives were being progressed to improve compliance beyond on-the-water patrols such as the implementation of vessel monitoring systems, mandatory fish receiver reporting and the development of a public register of fishing licences held.
- Malu Lamar advised that consideration should be given to listing barramundi cod as a protected species in the Torres Strait (given that commercial and traditional fishers could take this species here) due to its potential future value for ecotourism.

## 2.7. Strategic overview and update (including economic and market trends)

The FWG noted the following update by industry members and observers on recent fishery performance, trends, activities and issues occurring in the Torres Strait finfish and relevant fisheries issues:

- industry is eager for more Traditional Owners to enter the Finfish Fishery.
- Meriam fishers have been successfully increasing their effort with recent finfish catches around 500kg per day being taken by five to six dories. This catch is being frozen for the local market and also being sent to Cairns via barge.
- more representation from active fishers is needed on the working groups to ensure on-water fishing practices and business development issues were understood. It was also noted that this would broaden the on-water knowledge base of how data is used for fishery management purposes and could facilitate uptake of logbooks. An active fisher from Mer (e.g. preferably Alan Passi), should be invited to the next FWG meeting as an observer for this purpose.
- a new finfish business is being established at Poruma.
- local restaurants are seeking locally caught Spanish mackerel but are finding supply difficult.
- the Ugar industry association is working to develop a five year business plan following on from its success with its bech de mer. The plan will assist the association to become commercially independent. The association is advocating for a similar joint business plan to be developed among the eastern communities. This association is seeking to have this should be done prior to making investments in things such as freezers to ensure smart/viable investments are made.

The FWG noted the following update from the QDAF member:

- it QDAF was reported that coral trout caught southwards of Bowen ~~were~~ attracting a price premium of \$5 to \$10 per kilogram due to ~~their strong red colouration~~ a market preference for fish with a strong red colouration.
- QDAF member advised that some east coast operators were currently tied up due to not being able to acquire coral trout quota.

The FWG noted an update on the FRDC funded project on scoping the development of Barramundi, jewfish and crab fisheries in the top-western waters of the Torres Strait by Andrew Tobin, the Principle Investigator for the project.

Mr Tobin advised that the project has four elements:

1. A desktop scoping study. Collate past research findings etc.
2. Field surveys to understand local stock abundance and whether it could support a local fishery. Aim to commence field work after Easter.
3. A stop-go review to determine if there is enough industry interest and stock available to justify proceeding with the study.
4. An evaluation of infrastructure, skills and business needs to support an active fishery.

The FWG noted the PZJA will likely require advice from the FWG to evaluate any proposal to develop and/or expand new fisheries to ensure they are sustainable. –The FWG encourage early engagement with the FWG to ensure any future proposals may be considered in a timely manner.

The FWG Dr Tobin also noted ~~advice from AFMA~~ that a PZJA scientific permit will be required to ~~authorise-undertake~~ the field activities.

Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, the representative requested that the PBCs in the relevant communities be engaged as soon as possible and that the terms and conditions of the work ~~for this~~for this project be clearly agreed.

## Agenda Item 3 – Recommending Total Allowable Catches for the 2017/18 fishing season

### 3.1. Spanish mackerel

The FWG noted advice from the Finfish Technical Scientific Working Group (STWG) arising from its November 2016 meeting and catch estimates from outside the fishery (traditional and recreational take).

Subject to further advice from the Finfish Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock should the Recommended Biological Catch be exceeded in the upcoming season the FWG **recommended** a Spanish mackerel TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 fishing season based on:

- A target biomass reference point of  $B_{60}$ . The FWG supported a higher biomass target above  $B_{MSY}$  and the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ , to ensure a healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives. The FWG noted that a harvest strategy is being developed for the fishery which will establish long term reference points for the stock.
- Advice from the TSWG for a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t (referred to at the current meeting as the 'total kill' recommended for the stock by all fishers both commercial and non-commercial). The FWG noted that the TSWG accepted the updated stock assessment as the best available stock assessment for Spanish mackerel whilst also noting sources of uncertainty in the assessment. The FWG further noted advice from the TSWG that a level of uncertainty is expected in fishery stock assessments and that the current assessment should serve to guide future research and data priorities for the fishery.
- Best estimates of other sources of fishing mortality (subsistence (-12 t), recreational (no estimates available), charter (negligible catches recorded), PNG catch sharing (0 t) as detailed in **Table 1** (below).
- Applying TAC step-down for the 2017/18 fishing season only. Noting the scale of the proposed TAC change (down from 187t) a phased reduction in the TAC (or step-down) for the 2017/18 season was supported subject to further advice from the Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock if catches exceed the Recommended Biological Catch in the 2017/18 season. The FWG also noted that the current TAC has not been caught in recent years and therefore the operational impact of a TAC reduction should be relatively small. the adjustment to actual catches is less. The FWG noted that without the suggested step-down approach a step-down the recommended TAC would be 113t (RBC 125t - 12t taken outside the fishery).



### Discounting other sources of fishing mortality

The FWG noted the requirements of the Australian Government policy (detailed in the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines 2007*), that all sources of mortality (catch) must-should be taken into account when setting a TAC. This generally means the TAC equates to the RBC for the species minus expected catches to be taken outside of the fishery.

The FWG discussed both the accuracy of available catch estimates and ~~the~~ whether it was still necessary to discount other catches when pursuing a higher target biomass (i.e. having a target reference point of  $B_{60}$  rather than  $B_{MSY}$  or the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ ).

TSRA representatives noted that other fisheries, such as TRL followed a different approach and did not necessarily deduct other sources of mortality in setting a TAC. The TSRA member queried whether that, if the RBC is derived from commercial fishery data only, other sources of mortality are 'accounted for' by not being included in the model used to estimate the spawning biomass. The Scientific Member confirmed that the RBC (125t) does not include a discount for non-commercial catches (for example subsistence catches).

TSRA representatives suggested that the 12 t subsistence catch estimate (from Bussilacchi research papers) was likely to be an overestimate. This estimate was referred to the TSWG for clarification out of session.

The FWG ~~concluded~~ noted that:

- consistent with contemporary fisheries management, the precautionary principle and Australian Government harvest strategy policy, estimates of other Spanish mackerel catches should be discounted from the RBC when developing a TAC recommendation. Catch estimates may change overtime as new data becomes available. ~~The Scientific Member confirmed that the RBC (125t) does not include a discount for non-commercial catches (for example subsistence catches);~~ and
- the purpose of the higher biomass target  $B_{60}$  is to ensure a healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives. A higher biomass means that more fish will be available for purposes other than commercial fishing. For example more fish will be left to support traditional fishing.

**Table 1.** Agreed Spanish mackerel catch estimates outside of the fishery for the 2017/18

Source of catches	Expected catch (t)	Comments
Subsistence catch (kai kai) by traditional inhabitants	12	Based on data from <i>Busilacchi 2013</i> . Note this includes total of catch estimates for Mer, Masig and Erub Islands. The FWG agreed in July 2016 that the catch figures from the <i>Busilacchi 2008 research</i> are the best estimates of traditional take of finfish. <del>Whilst</del> While some members considered this figure to be an overestimate, the FWG had no further empirical information available to recommend a different estimate.
Recreational	No estimates available	The FWG agreed that the QLD recreational data for the Torres Strait region is too limited to derive a catch estimate. Total catches are expected to be low. The FWG agreed for it to be a priority in future years to explore possible cost-effective options to develop a reliable estimate for recreational catches.
Charter	Negligible catches recorded	Available QLD logbook records show Charter boat line catches are low. Logbook records for the period between 1995 and 2014

		report a total of 19.58 tonnes of mixed species taken from Torres Strait waters. The FWG agreed that catches are likely to be negligible.
PNG catch sharing	0	PNG_NFA have declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2017/18.
<b>Total discounts</b>	<b>- 12</b>	
<b>RBC (125t) – total for other catches (12t)</b>	<b>113t</b>	
<b>TAC with step-down applied</b>	<b>125t</b>	

### Concerns over exceeding the RBC

The FWG noted advice that the TSRA Board had approved for 110 t of Spanish mackerel to be leased to sunset license holders in the upcoming season and that the Finfish Quota Management Committee considered a TIB take of 15 t (10 t being the highest recorded catch following the 2008 buyout plus a 5 t buffer noting that under reporting of catch is known to be occurring).

The FWG noted the recommendation from the STWG that if harvests increase above 150 t and/or fishing effort increases above 1000 operation days, then catch rates may erode in the long term.

Concerns were raised by some industry members that the reduction in TAC coupled with the high proportion of catch proposed to be leased to the sunset sector would limit potential economic growth for the TIB sector particularly if more freezers would likely come back into operation. The FWG noted that leasing arrangements were separate to providing advice on recommended TACs, and that. Further discussion on implementing the TAC ~~was is~~ scheduled for ~~agenda~~ Agenda Item 5.4.

### Other

- While noting that this is outside the scope of the FWG, ~~The~~ Malu Lamar representative recommended that the FQMC membership be expanded to include representatives from both Malu Lamar and the fishing industry.
- TSRA representatives strongly expressed their disappointment that the FWG had not met to consider the TAC prior to the end of 2016. The TSRA has previously advised the PZJA that it is a business requirement for the TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee to meet in February each year in order to make leasing recommendations to the March Board Meeting. The TSRA stated again the requirement for the FWG to meet no later than October 2017. The TSRA representative made it clear that it was a non-negotiable business requirement of the TSRA Board to consider the leasing recommendations of the Finfish Quota Management Committee in March each year.
- ~~TSRA representatives recommended that the FWG meet in October in order to provide advice on TAC's prior the annual TSRA leasing process which is includes a Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) meeting in February followed by a TSRA Board meeting in March.~~

## 3.2 Coral trout

The FWG reaffirmed its recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 that the coral trout TAC (134.9 t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 season.

The FWG noted that there was no new information to guide a different recommendation at this time. It was further noted that the harvest strategy to be developed will guide future assessments and TAC recommendations.

The FWG noted that based on catches being significantly below the TAC (reported catches remaining around 20-40t) it was not deemed necessary to reconsider the TAC to discount estimates of other fishing mortality (e.g. subsistence take) at this time. The FWG however agreed that this should be undertaken when new information becomes available to review status of the stock and subsequent TACs.

The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- a Queensland east coast coral trout assessment is planned for 2018 and there is potential for the Torres Strait stock to be included in the assessment;
- feedback from boats fishing for live coral trout in the 2016/17 season to date had been favourable with good catch rates and survival rates;
- the status of live boats returning to the Torres Strait in upcoming seasons would be dependent on maintaining high catch rates and market dynamics across both the TS and east coast. A price premium paid is paid for red coloured fish which are found in southern Queensland

**Recommendation:** Consistent with the FWG recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 the coral trout TAC (134.4t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 fishing season.

**Action:** AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock being assessed as part of the scheduled 2018 east coast coral trout assessment scheduled to be undertaken by the Queensland Government.

## 3.3 Other reef line species

The FWG noted previous advice from its 12-13 July 2016 meeting that subject to further consideration by the Technical Scientific Working Group (TSWG) of coral trout to by-product catch ratios when targeting coral trout and total take of 'other species' by other sectors –

*there should be no further increase above 30 tonnes until systems are in place to independently verify catches, a species-specific risk assessment has been undertaken and where applicable catch triggers and control rules have been agreed.*

The FWG noted advice that the Technical Scientific Working Group was unable to discuss the development of a work plan to assess risk and manage expansion on other reef line species at its meeting on 10 November 2016 due to time limitations.

The FWG reaffirmed its advice that future expansion in effort for 'other' species requires effective risk assessment and management measures. The FWG agreed that taking into account the risks identified by the FWG at its last meeting there is also a need to review the 30t limit in light of the species composition of catches taken this season.

The FWG noted advice that targeted fishing for other species by sunset sector boats had not yet occurred in the 2016/17 season. Instead operators had focused on fishing for live coral trout.

TSRA advised that there is less interest from sunset licence applicants to target other species in 2017/18 fishing season.

The FWG noted that the scope of [the](#) harvest strategy project does not include other reef-line species though there may be capacity to commission work in parallel to this project should the need arise. In the immediate-term the FWG supported in-principle for any further work to assess the potential to expand effort on other species be undertaken subject to having:

- a. a detailed fishing proposal [describing the nature of any proposed](#) ~~for~~ expansion;
- b. scientific advice on the conditions for any expansion in terms of species, location, catch levels, data collection requirements and any other matters required to mitigate risks to the stocks;
- c. where appropriate, management measures and policies be considered by the FWG; and
- d. funding available to support the required scientific advice.

## Agenda Item 4 – Research

### 4.1. Traditional take catch estimates: past estimates (Dr Busilacchi) and future research (CSIRO)

The FWG noted the update on the research project titled “*The subsistence coral reef fish fishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment*” as detailed in the agenda paper and the milestone report.

The FWG noted that the:

- initial pilot phase survey work on Erub Island is now complete. Reports indicate that the project was well received by the Erub community with good attendance and support given at a community meeting introducing the project and CSIRO scientists;
- survey ~~however~~ was unable to engage a long-term community monitor with the pre-arranged candidate falling through due to other commitments. Instead a revised single ‘snapshot’ survey was taken by the CSIRO staff while on the island. Despite community support, the survey was limited by time and participation levels. Some people were not entirely comfortable with providing their individual catch data;
- Erub fishers association Chairperson remained very positive about the work conducted at Erub noting that it was likely the first step of a longer process required to get monitoring arrangements established;
- ~~the~~ project team had met with Malu Lamar, AFMA and TSRA in 2016 before the project began to get general project guidance advice including community engagement;
- ~~the~~ project had been recommended by the FQMC and subsequently funded by the TSRA (administered by AFMA);
- ~~the~~ project is planning to roll out training of monitors on Poruma and Masig islands with community permission being given. The Mer community is also supportive.

In light of findings from the Erub pilot phase the FWG recognised there is a risk that without change the project may not be able:

- to obtain sufficient data to produce a reliable estimate of traditional take; or
- [to](#) establish an on-going community-based data collection program.

The FWG generally agreed however the project will likely provide a baseline for further investment in data-collection and establishing ongoing data collection programmes. It was also noted that realistically achieving these aims could be expected to take some time.

The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- close engagement with the PBCs is central to the success of these kind of projects. Ideally the PBC would be given responsibility to manage the data collection programmes in the same way that they have responsibility for the Turtle and Dugong Management Plans;
- further community awareness is required to encourage reporting and that small incentives (financial or material) could improve the participation rates;
- paid positions need to be created at the community level (not within government agencies) to progress and resolve fisheries issues and improve community awareness and communication. This would also provide employment. The TSRA member advised that TSRA were investigating the potential to establish fishery extension officers that could assist communities with these projects.
- Malu Lamar and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member further emphasised that all research projects occurring in the Torres Strait should engage with them before the projects begin to ensure that communities are aware of the purpose of the research and any terms and conditions are agreed and understood.

The FWG **agreed** ~~for that~~ AFMA ~~should to~~ convene another meeting of the traditional-take project team to consider possible options for addressing ongoing project risks in light of lessons learnt from work completed at Erub.

## 4.2. Update – Smart phone technology for remote data collection

The FWG noted the project update was available for members in the agenda paper and did not discuss it further.

## 4.3. Update – defining the status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing

The FWG noted the project update was available for members in the agenda paper and did not discuss it further.

## 4.4. Research priorities

The FWG noted that consideration of research priorities is an important standing item for the FWG to ensure research investment and management resources are effectively targeted. The FWG noted the research priorities identified at its last meeting and agreed to revisit the list alongside the development of the harvest strategy. The harvest strategy is expected to assist in identifying future data and research needs.

# Agenda Item 5 – Management

## 5.1. Finfish harvest strategy project update

The FWG noted that an out-of-session update would be provided on this project once the funding contract had been completed.

## 5.2. Options for ongoing scientific advice

The FWG noted the tabled paper which outlined options for gaining future scientific advice and recommended that a formal Resource Assessment Group (RAG) be established:

- using the standard Terms of Reference for the PZJA RAGs as set out in the PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (PZJA FMP No. 1);
- comprise the membership: a Chairperson; Government (AFMA, QDAF, TSRA); three industry members (note TSWG has two industry members); and three scientific (members)

The FWG noted that AFMA would make an open call for applicants for the scientific and industry members and applicants would be assessed by a PZJA agency selection panel.

The FWG also noted the following advice from members:

- Malu Lamar representative advised that they do not wish to attend a RAG directly but strongly recommend that traditional owners be present who are active fishers. It was suggested that a Finfish RAG would benefit from having advice from fishers from Ugar, Erub and Mer Islands. Rocky Stephen, Dan Sailor and Alan Passi were recommended; and
- to minimise costs and time, RAG meetings ~~should~~could potentially be held alongside working group meetings.

## 5.3. Formalising finfish total allowable catches

The FWG noted advice that although a plan of management is in place for the Finfish Fishery, under the finfish management plan TACs may only be determined by the PZJA following the allocation of quota units (or units of fishing capacity). The plan of management allows for the allocation of quota units however this has not yet been undertaken. Until such time that an allocation occurs, TACs may be implemented by way of licence condition. The FWG noted that catch limits are currently only applied to sunset licences. TIB catches are not limited.

The FWG agreed that limiting catches to an agreed total allowable catch (TAC) is important for ensuring the sustainability of the fishery and achieving agreed management targets. The FWG further noted that with a reduced Spanish mackerel TAC for the 2017/18 fishing season, and depending on future growth in TIB sector catches, Spanish mackerel catches ~~are likely to may~~ approach (or possibly exceed) the RBC (or total recommended kill).

The TSRA advised that for as long as there is a leasing process (i.e. TIB sector not fishing the whole TAC) it is unlikely that a TAC would be exceeded as catches could be reduced by reducing the amount of tonnage being made available to sunset operators.

The FWG considered regulatory and non-regulatory (by other agreements/arrangements) management options for limiting catches to the TAC and noted the following comments and advice from some members:

- a TAC could be difficult to enforce in the absence of improved catch reporting (for example will management be able to detect when the TAC is exceeded);
- a level of overcatch may be sustainable when there is a higher target biomass reference point (i.e. having a target reference point of  $B_{60}$  rather than  $B_{MSY}$  or the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ ) and given catch reductions since the buyout;
- ~~the risk of overcatching could be managed by within season leasing adjustments and/or adjustments in the subsequent year if the notional TAC was overcaught;~~

- sufficient catch should be reserved for the TIB sector to allow sustainable expansion without risking an overcatch and impacting the stock. In the absence of reliable TIB catch data the TSRA advised that they rely on the expertise of the members of the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) to provide a best estimate of the TIB commercial catch. For 2017/18 season this was estimated by the FQMC at 15 tonnes;
- measures should be introduced as a matter of priority to limit the risk of overcatching in any year; and
- Research members advised that regular over-catching of the RBC would likely have negative impacts on the stock. These impacts can take a long time to remedy. It was also noted that if the stock was assessed as subject to overfishing by ABARES further downstream effects may occur such as future market access, branding of products etc.
- TSRA advised, in their opinion, that the finfish leasing process is already an effective non-regulatory measure to constrain catches to below the TAC, as the amount made available for leasing out each year is dependent on the TIB sector's catch and aspirations of the coming season.

Two options were identified:

**Option 1** – status quo for the 2017/18 fishing season; catch limits only on sunset licences with proposed leasing (110t) then for the 2018/19 fishing season; implement the TAC across all licence holders and if necessary adjust leasing to further minimise the risk of overcatching. Under this option there is a risk that recommended TAC will be overcaught in 2017/18 (having regard for catch estimates and proposed sunset licence leasing). This option was supported by TIB representatives and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member.

**Option 2** – minimise the risk of overcatching for the 2017/18 fishing season by lowering the proposed lease amount.

It was noted that option two was a more precautionary approach while option one provided phased introduction of management change. The FWG noted-agreed to seek advice from Scientific Technical Working Group on likely impacts on the stock from exceeding the Spanish mackerel RBC in 2017/18. is-relevant-to-evaluating-these-options-out-of-session.

## 5.4. Estimates of traditional inhabitant boat sector catches

The FWG noted catch estimates of TIB commercial sector reported in-various-research-papers-from-reports-and-journals ranged-ranging from 9t to 22 t for Spanish mackerel (a-peak-catch-of-7.5t-was-recorded-at-Masig-only-in-1999) as detailed in the agenda paper. The FWG also noted the FQMC agreed a reasonable estimate for TIB catches for the upcoming season to be 15t or less (based on maximum reported catch of 10t since the 2008 buyout and adding 5t).

The FWG discussed the accuracy and relevance of these estimates for predicting future TIB catches. One of the TIB representatives noted that 10 tonnes was the likely current catch level, although future improvements to infrastructure would likely increase annual catches to above 15 tonnes beyond the 2017/18 season. It was noted that C-changes have occurred in the fishery overtime (e.g. participation levels, buyout, 10\_nm closures) which may influence total TIB catch.- It was further noted however that in the absence of new-information-accurate catch estimates a precautionary approach should be taken.

The FWG agreed-noted that underestimating the total take either by adopting less precautionary estimates and/or under reporting, increases the risk that the RBC (or recommended total kill) will be exceeded. This can negatively impact the status of the stock and should be avoided.

The FWG encouraged all fishers to fill out logbooks to provide accurate information and reiterated its support for improving data collection systems, in particular implementing a mandatory fish receiver system.

## 5.5. Development of a public register

The FWG supported the development of a public licensing register noting it is proposed to cover all fishers, all fisheries, scientific permits and PNG cross endorsed vessels and make the following details of each licensee available:

- a. Company or individual's name
- b. Licence type (Fishing licence (TIB, TVH), Sunset, Carrier A, B or C)
- c. Licence Number
- d. Vessel identifying number (the boat mark), or "No Boat" status
- e. Licence expiry date
- f. Fishery endorsements (TRL, CT, SM, Prawn, BDM, Treaty endorsement)
- g. Catch or Effort allocation where applicable (Prawn effort, sunset catch allocation)

The FWG noted that the register would not include contact details for licensees and is proposed to be made available on the PZJA website and updated at least monthly.

## 5.6. Future management priorities

The FWG noted that consideration of management priorities is an important standing item for the FWG to ensure management resources are effectively targeted. The FWG noted the management priorities identified at its last meeting and recommended no change. The FWG however noted that climate change impacts and management responses should be considered for FWG work plan in the medium-term.

## 5.7. Crewing of traditional inhabitant boats

The FWG noted the proposal by Torres Strait Fishers Association (TSFA) to allow for more non-indigenous fishers to be employed as crew on Traditional Inhabitant Boat licenced vessels. Mr Mills advised that TRL primary/tender vessel operators cannot get crew run their tenders and some are tied-up altogether. Mr Mills further advised that the current crewing restrictions make it difficult for operators to be viable (for example to pay back loans) and discourage investment. TSFA were seeking the flexibility to have three non-traditional inhabitant crews on the primary/tender operations and were focused on getting skilled foreign divers from the PNG treaty villages (utilising the 457 visa scheme as other fisheries do). The FWG noted advice from the AFMA member that approvals under the relevant immigration laws would be required to use foreign divers and that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade might be able to provide some useful guidance.

Noting that the general level of support from the industry members and in-principle support for removing impediments to traditional inhabitant participation in the fisheries, the FWG recommended

consultation with the broader industry and communities be undertaken to develop possible management options for further consideration.

## 5.8. Draft 2017/18 AFMA Finfish Fishery budget

The FWG noted the draft AFMA 2017/18 Finfish Fishery budget which is based on convening two FWG meetings.

## 5.9. Grant of carrier licenses to non-traditional inhabitants

The FWG noted advice that there is interest from small non-traditional inhabitant businesses to freight seafood in the Torres Strait and that these vessels require a carrier licence. The FWG noted advice that the PZJA licencing policy, as described in the 2004 licencing guide, is ambiguous for these types of applications. AFMA sought FWG advice on any concerns with the grant of new carrier licences to non-traditional inhabitant persons/businesses subject to specific conditions.

In line with advice from industry members the FWG **recommended** that further industry and community consultation take place to gauge stakeholder opinions on the grant of new carrier licences to non-traditional inhabitant persons/businesses.

## Agenda Item 6 – Other Business

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The FWG Chairperson thanked participants for their input into the meeting. AFMA advised the next meeting would likely be held in October or November 2017 and participants would be advised on the meeting date out-of-session.

Mr Frank Faud closed the meeting in prayer at 12:45 PM.

## Attachment A – TSRA Update Paper



### Torres Strait Regional Authority Update

#### Finfish Leasing

- The Finfish Quota Management Committee met on 16-17 February
- The TSRA Board considered the recommendations of the Committee on 1-2 March

#### Fisheries Programme projects

- Five projects are currently in progress that stem from the Finfish Action Plan:
  - Feasibility study for barramundi, jewfish and mud crab commercial fisheries in Gudumalulgal communities
  - Feasibility study for development of a bait fishery
  - Marketing, branding and export requirements for Torres Strait seafood
  - Infrastructure and services audit, and
  - Fishing skills audit
- The TSRA has published a Torres Strait Fisheries Guidebook, which sets out the management arrangements for fisheries in a small waterproof booklet.
- The Fisheries Programme will be supporting TIB fishers with the installation of VMS systems on primary vessels
- An Indigenous Cadetship Programme will commence in 2017
  - The cadetship will provide mentoring to tertiary students by the Fisheries Programme
  - The longer-term goal is develop Torres Strait Islanders to be employed in the TSRA Fisheries Programme
- The Fisheries Programme is seeking support from AFMA to train Torres Strait Islanders to be trained and employed in the AFMA observer programme
- The TSRA has completed a review of the New Zealand Maori model of community ownership of fisheries access rights
  - Further work on the development of a Torres Strait community management framework will continue through 2017 based on these results and the TSRA Board's direction
  - This work is a key component of the Road map to 100 per cent ownership of Torres Strait fisheries by Traditional Inhabitants
- The TSRA Economic Development Programme is currently seeking applications for the REIS Fisheries Growth Package
  - This package is available to both existing and new businesses seeking to build commercial fishing businesses in the Torres Strait.

# Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2017.01

Meeting Record

16-17 March 2017

Note all meeting papers and records are available on the PZJA webpage:

[www.pzja.gov.au](http://www.pzja.gov.au)



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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## Meeting Participants

### Members and declaration of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM (recently developed Torres Strait Finfish Action Plan report for TSRA/FRDC), co-investigator on FRDC and TSRA Top Western Fisheries Feasibility project led by A Tobin.
Andrew Trappett	FWG Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
Mariana Nahas	TSRA Member	Nil
Michael O'Neill	Research Member	Principal Fisheries Scientist, QDAF. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
David Brewer	Research Member	Independent Consultant. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. Chairperson Malu Lamar.
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. President Kos and Abob Fisheries
Frank Faud	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Tony Vass	*Industry (sunset licence holder representative)	No financial interest in Torres Strait Fisheries. Holds Queensland East Coast quota for coral trout and 'other' finfish species. Previous Torres Strait finfish operator. Representative for sunset licence holders.

### Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jerry Stephen	*TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio	TIB licence holder. Traditional Owner, Ugar Island. Member, Fisheries Quota Management Committee Deputy chair TSRA

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Joseph Posu	PNG NFA	Nil
Ian Liviko	PNG NFA	Nil
John Ramsay	TSRA Program Manager, Fisheries	Nil
Andrew Tobin	Researcher	Independent consultant. Investigator on TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. PI on FRDC barramundi, crab fishery project. Owns a retail seafood outlet that buys product from the Torres Strait.
John Matthew	TSRA	Nil

\* Permanent observer

## Apologies

Name	Position
Eliziah Wasaga	Industry Member
Tenny Elisala	Industry Member

## Action items

Number	Action
1.	AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure
2.	The FWG to meet again in October 2017 to consider the TACs for the 2018 – 2019 season.
3.	AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock being assessed as part of the 2018 east coast coral trout assessment scheduled to be undertaken by the Queensland Government.

## Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	<p>The FWG recommended a Spanish mackerel TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 fishing season based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a target biomass reference point of <math>B_{60}</math></li> <li>applying a step-down TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 season only (to minimise the operation impact of the proposed TAC reduction from 187t), supported subject to further advice from the Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock if catches exceed the Recommended Biological Catch in the 2017/18 season</li> </ul>

Number	Recommendation
	without a step-down the recommended TAC would be 113t (RBC 125t - 12t for estimated subsistence catch taken outside the commercial fishery)
2.	Consistent with the FWG recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 the coral trout TAC (134.4t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 fishing season.

## Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

### 1.1. Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome / Apologies

Mr Frank Favid opened the meeting in prayer.

Meeting chairperson, Andy Bodsworth, welcomed members and observers and noted that the fishery was in an important stage of development and the advice collected through this working group would provide valuable input to the upcoming PZJA decision making process.

Apologies were received from members Tenny Elisala and Elizah Wasaga. Meeting observer, Patrick Mills attended up to agenda item 2.7 and returned to present item 5.7. Andrew Tobin was noted as an apology for the second day of the meeting.

### 1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The Finfish Working Group (FWG) adopted the agenda with one change to remove agenda item 5.1. It was noted that the harvest strategy project had not yet commenced due to contracting delays. The FWG therefore agreed for an update on the harvest strategy project to be provided out of session.

### 1.3. Declaration of Interests

The FWG generally noted that there could be potential conflicts of interest for members and observers when providing information and advice on some agenda items.

All members provided an update on their declaration of interests. Observers also advised on their interests which are recorded under the section titled: *Meeting Participants*.

### 1.4. Actions Arising

The FWG noted the status of the previous action items including an update on the nature of changes to AFMA logbooks as detailed in the tabled paper.

## Agenda Item 2 – Fishery Updates

### 2.1. AFMA management

The FWG noted the AFMA management update as detailed in the tabled agenda paper and discussed the following:

#### ***Western line closure***

The FWG noted progress since the last FWG meeting to remove the western line closure (as detailed in the agenda paper, work is ongoing to compile outcomes of previous consultation

processes). The FWG noted again that the western closure reflects a historical jurisdictional boundary rather than a specific management purpose.

An industry member advised that if the area of the western closure was to be reopened consideration should first be given to:

- how much fishing the area could support noting that the fishing grounds are different from those in the east and concern that the area may not be able to support the number of licences in the fishery; and
- the potential for alternative livelihoods or business opportunities for traditional owners such as ecotourism.

Other industry members were generally supportive of this proposal and advised that further community consultation should occur before the western area of the fishery was reopened, to gauge community aspirations on future usage.

Noting there are no existing agreements in place to guide resource sharing between sectors (fishing, tourism etc) the FWG agreed for following **action**:

- AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure.

### ***Foreign compliance update***

The FWG noted the update from the AFMA Foreign Compliance Operations officer as detailed in the agenda paper. Members and observers provided the following updates and comments:

- communities are concerned that PNG Daru markets are reportedly selling turtle and dugong caught in the Torres Strait;
- future compliance risks assessment should include a level of consultation with stakeholders to ensure community concerns and knowledge are taken into account; and
- industry was very concerned that a tanker went off-course in the Torres Strait the previous week and that AFMA should respond to such risks. AFMA acknowledged that it was indeed a serious matter and that AMSA were the appropriate body to respond.

## **2.2. TSRA update**

The FWG noted an update from the TSRA as detailed the paper distributed at the meeting (**Attachment A**).

## **2.3. Native Title**

Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, Mr Maluwap Nona advised that Malu Lamar would be establishing a company for the purposes of holding any future allocations of fishing access rights and quota. It was also advised that Malu Lamar and the TSIRC would be signing an official partnership agreement and similar partnerships are being discussed with Kauareg and Northern Peninsula Area traditional owners.

## **2.4. PNG – National Fisheries Authority Update**

The FWG noted the following updates from PNG-NFA officers:

- Very little interest exists in PNG in fishing for finfish species at present with the exception of barramundi. It was advised that barramundi catches have reportedly been declining in recent years (e.g. year 2000 catches were over 100 tonnes, 2015 catches were around five tonnes).

- More fishers were using lures nowadays which are considered less selective (capturing all size classes) than mesh gillnets which have historically been used which are selective for certain size classes. PNG-NFA are giving some consideration to regulating against the use of lures in the barramundi fishery.
- Funding is set aside for research and stock assessment work for barramundi but a work plan is yet to be finalised. Assistance from AFMA and CSIRO to support a stock assessment may be sought.
- Indonesian buyers were having a heavy influence in PNG marketplaces placing a strong demand for seafood species with commercial value which are purchased and exported across the border.
- PNG-NFA advised that as the majority of their catch data comes from commercial export companies, they are reviewing catch-reporting in the western province; with a focus on artisanal fishery and local market fisher's data.
- Reports have been received that the invasive species snakehead and climbing perch are present in the area of the western province. It was reported that snakehead fish have commercial value and are sold in marketplaces.

Some industry members queried whether any consideration had been given to trading and developmental opportunities between Torres Strait and PNG treaty villages. PNG-NFA advised that there could be some future opportunities for co-operation. The AFMA member advised that the PNG-Australian Bilateral Treaty meetings would be the best forum to progress these issues and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is the responsible agency.

## 2.5. QDAF update

The FWG noted the following general updates from the QDAF member:

- Consultation on the Queensland Government's Green paper to guide fisheries reform has been completed and the outcomes are under consideration.
- QDAF is updating their Spanish mackerel stock assessment which is expected to be published September/October and will be used to inform future Total Allowable Catch setting.
- There is no east coast harvest strategy for Spanish mackerel. The Queensland government has committed to using the updated assessment to guide the development of a harvest strategy.
- A decision was pending on setting coral trout quota following a recent meeting with industry. It was expected that industry would be advised of the outcomes mid-April.
- White spot disease had recently been detected in prawns in Moreton Bay, outside of the area of the original Logan River outbreak. It was noted that trawlers operating in the Moreton Bay do not also operate in the Torres Strait.

### ***Charter and recreational catch data***

As requested from the July 2016 FWG meeting, the QDAF member provided an overview of available data for the Queensland state charter boat and recreational fish catches from the area of the Torres Strait.

#### ***Charter fishing catch data***

- Under the QDAF information disclosure policy, data stemming from less than five boats could not be released. It was advised that charter boats keep a daily logbook of: area fished (main reef fished), number of fishers, crew, species and numbers caught, species and numbers released and kilograms retained for the trip.
- For the time period 1995-2014 (a 19 year timespan) a total of 360 days had been fished by 10 licensed charter operators in the Torres Strait. 19.58 tonnes of reef-fish had been retained with the majority being reef fish such as coral trout with minor catches of Spanish mackerel. The eastern islands of the Torres Strait were the main areas fished. Bag and size limits apply to charter boat operators.

- The 10 nm island closures (as per sunset licence conditions) do not apply for charter boat operators. Recreational and charter boat fishing is regulated under the laws of Queensland which is separate to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.

#### *Recreational fishing catch data*

- Only limited data with large amounts of error is available on recreational catch by fishers in the Torres Strait. Only 3 households provided data during the 2014/15 Queensland recreational survey.

The FWG noted the following comments from members:

- Communities are concerned that they have no say in the regulation of charter fishing operations in the Torres Strait. The industry permanent observer advised that it was unlikely charter vessels would have fished the waters around Bramble Cay due to its remoteness.
- Malu Lamar would like to be involved in any future recreational fishing survey in the Torres Strait.

The FWG agreed to the following:

- overall the data indicates that charter catches have likely been low to date;
- the Queensland recreational survey data as currently analysed is not adequate to produce a meaningful catch estimate.
- while recreational catches are also likely to be relatively low, a future priority should be to explore options to develop a reliable recreational catch estimate (for example supplement the survey coverage in the region, consider options to extrapolate from other data, fishing diaries).
- understanding the scale and therefore the likely impacts of recreational and charter fishing on commercial stocks is important for the management of the fishery.

## **2.6. Domestic compliance update**

The FWG noted the update on domestic compliance provided by the QDAF member as detailed in the agenda paper and advice from members:

- industry and community concern remains over the limited number of days spent on the water in the Torres Strait by Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. It was suggested that a QBFP office should be re-established in the Torres Strait and that the traditional owners should be engaged as fisheries officers as per the functional model of the Torres Strait Ranger program.
- AFMA advised that initiatives were being progressed to improve compliance beyond on-the-water patrols such as the implementation of vessel monitoring systems, mandatory fish receiver reporting and the development of a public register of fishing licences held.
- Malu Lamar advised that consideration should be given to listing barramundi cod as a protected species in the Torres Strait (given that commercial and traditional fishers could take this species here) due to its potential future value for ecotourism.

## **2.7. Strategic overview and update (including economic and market trends)**

The FWG noted the following update by industry members and observers on recent fishery performance, trends, activities and issues occurring in the Torres Strait finfish and relevant fisheries issues:

- industry is eager for more Traditional Owners to enter the Finfish Fishery.

- Meriam fishers have been successfully increasing their effort with recent finfish catches around 500kg per day being taken by five to six dories. This catch is being frozen for the local market and also being sent to Cairns via barge.
- more representation from active fishers is needed on the working groups to ensure on-water fishing practices and business development issues were understood. It was also noted that this would broaden the on-water knowledge base of how data is used for fishery management purposes and could facilitate uptake of logbooks. An active fisher from Mer (e.g. Alan Passi), should be invited to the next FWG meeting as an observer for this purpose.
- a new finfish business is being established at Poruma.
- local restaurants are seeking locally caught Spanish mackerel but are finding supply difficult.
- the Ugar industry association is working to develop a five year business plan following on from its success with its bech de mer. The plan will assist the association to become commercially independent. The association is advocating for a similar joint business plan to be developed among the eastern communities. This association is seeking to have this done prior to making investments in things such as freezers to ensure smart/viable investments are made.

The FWG noted the following update from the QDAF member:

- QDAF reported that coral trout caught southwards of Bowen attract a price premium of \$5 to \$10 per kilogram due to a market preference for fish with a strong red colouration.
- QDAF member advised that some east coast operators were currently tied up due to not being able to acquire coral trout quota.

The FWG noted an update on the FRDC funded project on scoping the development of Barramundi, jewfish and crab fisheries in the top-western waters of the Torres Strait by Andrew Tobin, the Principle Investigator for the project.

Mr Tobin advised that the project has four elements:

1. A desktop scoping study. Collate past research findings etc.
2. Field surveys to understand local stock abundance and whether it could support a local fishery. Aim to commence field work after Easter.
3. A stop-go review to determine if there is enough industry interest and stock available to justify proceeding with the study.
4. An evaluation of infrastructure, skills and business needs to support an active fishery.

The FWG noted the PZJA will likely require advice from the FWG to evaluate any proposal to develop and/or expand new fisheries to ensure they are sustainable. The FWG encourage early engagement with the FWG to ensure any future proposals may be considered in a timely manner.

Dr Tobin also noted that a PZJA scientific permit will be required to undertake the field activities.

Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, the representative requested that the PBCs in the relevant communities be engaged as soon as possible and that the terms and conditions of the work for this project be clearly agreed.

## Agenda Item 3 – Recommending Total Allowable Catches for the 2017/18 fishing season

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### 3.1. Spanish mackerel

The FWG noted advice from the Finfish Technical Scientific Working Group (STWG) arising from its November 2016 meeting and catch estimates from outside the fishery (traditional and recreational take).

Subject to further advice from the Finfish Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock should the Recommended Biological Catch be exceeded in the upcoming season the FWG **recommended** a Spanish mackerel TAC of 125 t for the 2017-18 fishing season based on:

- A target biomass reference point of  $B_{60}$ . The FWG supported a higher biomass target above  $B_{MSY}$  and the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ , to ensure a healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives. The FWG noted that a harvest strategy is being developed for the fishery which will establish long term reference points for the stock.
- Advice from the TSWG for a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t (referred to at the current meeting as the ‘total kill’ recommended for the stock by all fishers both commercial and non-commercial). The FWG noted that the TSWG accepted the updated stock assessment as the best available stock assessment for Spanish mackerel whilst also noting sources of uncertainty in the assessment. The FWG further noted advice from the TSWG that a level of uncertainty is expected in fishery stock assessments and that the current assessment should serve to guide future research and data priorities for the fishery.
- Best estimates of other sources of fishing mortality (subsistence (-12 t), recreational (no estimates available), charter (negligible catches recorded), PNG catch sharing (0 t) as detailed in **Table 1** (below).
- Applying TAC step-down for the 2017/18 fishing season only. Noting the scale of the proposed TAC change (down from 187t) a phased reduction in the TAC (or step-down) for the 2017/18 season was supported subject to further advice from the Scientific Technical Working Group on the likely impacts on the stock if catches exceed the Recommended Biological Catch in the 2017/18 season. The FWG also noted that the current TAC has not been caught in recent years and therefore the operational impact of a TAC reduction should be relatively small. The FWG noted that without the suggested step-down approach the recommended TAC would be 113t (RBC 125t - 12t taken outside the fishery).

#### ***Discounting other sources of fishing mortality***

The FWG noted the requirements of the Australian Government policy (detailed in the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines 2007*), that all sources of mortality (catch) should be taken into account when setting a TAC. This generally means the TAC equates to the RBC for the species minus expected catches to be taken outside of the fishery.

The FWG discussed both the accuracy of available catch estimates and whether it was still necessary to discount other catches when pursuing a higher target biomass (i.e. having a target reference point of  $B_{60}$  rather than  $B_{MSY}$  or the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ ).

TSRA representatives noted that other fisheries, such as TRL followed a different approach and did not necessarily deduct other sources of mortality in setting a TAC. The TSRA member queried whether that, if the RBC is derived from commercial fishery data only, other sources of mortality

are 'accounted for' by not being included in the model used to estimate the spawning biomass. The Scientific Member confirmed that the RBC (125t) does not include a discount for non-commercial catches (for example subsistence catches).

TSRA representatives suggested that the 12 t subsistence catch estimate (from Bussilacchi research papers) was likely to be an overestimate. This estimate was referred to the TSWG for clarification out of session.

The FWG noted that:

- consistent with contemporary fisheries management, the precautionary principle and Australian Government harvest strategy policy, estimates of other Spanish mackerel catches should be discounted from the RBC when developing a TAC recommendation. Catch estimates may change overtime as new data becomes available. ; and
- the purpose of the higher biomass target  $B_{60}$  is to ensure a healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives. A higher biomass means that more fish will be available for purposes other than commercial fishing. For example more fish will be left to support traditional fishing.

**Table 1.** Agreed Spanish mackerel catch estimates outside of the fishery for the 2017/18

Source of catches	Expected catch (t)	Comments
Subsistence catch (kai kai) by traditional inhabitants	12	Based on data from <i>Busilacchi 2013</i> . Note this includes total of catch estimates for Mer, Masig and Erub Islands. The FWG agreed in July 2016 that the catch figures from the <i>Busilacchi 2008</i> research are the best estimates of traditional take of finfish. While some members considered this figure to be an overestimate, the FWG had no further empirical information available to recommend a different estimate.
Recreational	No estimates available	The FWG agreed that the QLD recreational data for the Torres Strait region is too limited to derive a catch estimate. Total catches are expected to be low. The FWG agreed for it to be a priority in future years to explore possible cost-effective options to develop a reliable estimate for recreational catches.
Charter	Negligible catches recorded	Available QLD logbook records show Charter boat line catches are low. Logbook records for the period between 1995 and 2014 report a total of 19.58 tonnes of mixed species taken from Torres Strait waters. The FWG agreed that catches are likely to be negligible.
PNG catch sharing	0	PNG_NFA have declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2017/18.
<b>Total discounts</b>	<b>- 12</b>	
<b>RBC (125t) – total for other catches (12t)</b>	<b>113t</b>	
<b>TAC with step-down applied</b>	<b>125t</b>	

### **Concerns over exceeding the RBC**

The FWG noted advice that the TSRA Board had approved for 110 t of Spanish mackerel to be leased to sunset license holders in the upcoming season and that the Finfish Quota Management Committee considered a TIB take of 15 t (10 t being the highest recorded catch following the 2008 buyout plus a 5 t buffer noting that under reporting of catch is known to be occurring).

The FWG noted the recommendation from the STWG that if harvests increase above 150 t and/or fishing effort increases above 1000 operation days, then catch rates may erode in the long term.

Concerns were raised by some industry members that the reduction in TAC coupled with the high proportion of catch proposed to be leased to the sunset sector would limit potential economic growth for the TIB sector particularly if more freezers would likely come back into operation. The FWG noted that leasing arrangements were separate to providing advice on recommended TACs, and that discussion on implementing the TAC was scheduled for Agenda Item 5.4.

### **Other**

- While noting that this is outside the scope of the FWG, the Malu Lamar representative recommended that the FQMC membership be expanded to include representatives from both Malu Lamar and the fishing industry.
- TSRA representatives strongly expressed their disappointment that the FWG had not met to consider the TAC prior to the end of 2016. The TSRA has previously advised the PZJA that it is a business requirement for the TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee to meet in February each year in order to make leasing recommendations to the March Board Meeting. The TSRA stated again the requirement for the FWG to meet no later than October 2017. The TSRA representative made it clear that it was a non-negotiable business requirement of the TSRA Board to consider the leasing recommendations of the Finfish Quota Management Committee in March each year.

## **3.2 Coral trout**

The FWG reaffirmed its recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 that the coral trout TAC (134.9 t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 season.

The FWG noted that there was no new information to guide a different recommendation at this time. It was further noted that the harvest strategy to be developed will guide future assessments and TAC recommendations.

The FWG noted that based on catches being significantly below the TAC (reported catches remaining around 20-40t) it was not deemed necessary to reconsider the TAC to discount estimates of other fishing mortality (e.g. subsistence take) at this time. The FWG however agreed that this should be undertaken when new information becomes available to review status of the stock and subsequent TACs.

The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- a Queensland east coast coral trout assessment is planned for 2018 and there is potential for the Torres Strait stock to be included in the assessment;
- feedback from boats fishing for live coral trout in the 2016/17 season to date had been favourable with good catch rates and survival rates;
- the status of live boats returning to the Torres Strait in upcoming seasons would be dependent on maintaining high catch rates and market dynamics across both the TS and east coast. A price premium paid is paid for red coloured fish which are found in southern Queensland

**Recommendation:** Consistent with the FWG recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 the coral trout TAC (134.4t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 fishing season.

**Action:** AFMA to investigate the feasibility of the Torres Strait coral trout stock being assessed as part of the scheduled 2018 east coast coral trout assessment scheduled to be undertaken by the Queensland Government.

### 3.3 Other reef line species

The FWG noted previous advice from its 12-13 July 2016 meeting that subject to further consideration by the Technical Scientific Working Group (TSWG) of coral trout to by-product catch ratios when targeting coral trout and total take of 'other species' by other sectors –

*there should be no further increase above 30 tonnes until systems are in place to independently verify catches, a species-specific risk assessment has been undertaken and where applicable catch triggers and control rules have been agreed.*

The FWG noted advice that the Technical Scientific Working Group was unable to discuss the development of a work plan to assess risk and manage expansion on other reef line species at its meeting on 10 November 2016 due to time limitations.

The FWG reaffirmed its advice that future expansion in effort for 'other' species requires effective risk assessment and management measures. The FWG agreed that taking into account the risks identified by the FWG at its last meeting there is also a need to review the 30t limit in light of the species composition of catches taken this season.

The FWG noted advice that targeted fishing for other species by sunset sector boats had not yet occurred in the 2016/17 season. Instead operators had focused on fishing for live coral trout. TSRA advised that there is less interest from sunset licence applicants to target other species in 2017/18 fishing season.

The FWG noted that the scope of the harvest strategy project does not include other reef-line species though there may be capacity to commission work in parallel to this project should the need arise. In the immediate-term the FWG supported in-principle for any further work to assess the potential to expand effort on other species be undertaken subject to having:

- a. a detailed fishing proposal describing the nature of any proposed expansion;
- b. scientific advice on the conditions for any expansion in terms of species, location, catch levels, data collection requirements and any other matters required to mitigate risks to the stocks;
- c. where appropriate, management measures and policies be considered by the FWG; and
- d. funding available to support the required scientific advice.

## Agenda Item 4 – Research

### 4.1. Traditional take catch estimates: past estimates (Dr Busilacchi) and future research (CSIRO)

The FWG noted the update on the research project titled “*The subsistence coral reef fish fishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment*” as detailed in the agenda paper and the milestone report.

The FWG noted that the:

- initial pilot phase survey work on Erub Island is now complete. Reports indicate that the project was well received by the Erub community with good attendance and support given at a community meeting introducing the project and CSIRO scientists;
- survey was unable to engage a long-term community monitor with the pre-arranged candidate falling through due to other commitments. Instead a revised single 'snapshot' survey was taken by the CSIRO staff while on the island. Despite community support, the survey was limited by time and participation levels. Some people were not entirely comfortable with providing their individual catch data;
- Erub fishers association Chairperson remained very positive about the work conducted at Erub noting that it was likely the first step of a longer process required to get monitoring arrangements established;
- project team had met with Malu Lamar, AFMA and TSRA in 2016 before the project began to get general project guidance advice including community engagement;
- project had been recommended by the FQMC and subsequently funded by the TSRA (administered by AFMA);
- project is planning to roll out training of monitors on Poruma and Masig islands with community permission being given. The Mer community is also supportive.

In light of findings from the Erub pilot phase the FWG recognised there is a risk that without change the project may not be able:

- to obtain sufficient data to produce a reliable estimate of traditional take; or
- to establish an on-going community-based data collection program.

The FWG generally agreed however the project will likely provide a baseline for further investment in data-collection and establishing ongoing data collection programmes. It was also noted that realistically achieving these aims could be expected to take some time.

The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- close engagement with the PBCs is central to the success of these kind of projects. Ideally the PBC would be given responsibility to manage the data collection programmes in the same way that they have responsibility for the Turtle and Dugong Management Plans;
- further community awareness is required to encourage reporting and that small incentives (financial or material) could improve the participation rates;
- paid positions need to be created at the community level (not within government agencies) to progress and resolve fisheries issues and improve community awareness and communication. This would also provide employment. The TSRA member advised that TSRA were investigating the potential to establish fishery extension officers that could assist communities with these projects.
- Malu Lamar and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member further emphasised that all research projects occurring in the Torres Strait should engage with them before the projects begin to ensure that communities are aware of the purpose of the research and any terms and conditions are agreed and understood.

The FWG **agreed** that AFMA should convene another meeting of the traditional-take project team to consider possible options for addressing ongoing project risks in light of lessons learnt from work completed at Erub.

## 4.2. Update – Smart phone technology for remote data collection

The FWG noted the project update was available for members in the agenda paper and did not discuss it further.

## 4.3. Update – defining the status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing

The FWG noted the project update was available for members in the agenda paper and did not discuss it further.

## 4.4. Research priorities

The FWG noted that consideration of research priorities is an important standing item for the FWG to ensure research investment and management resources are effectively targeted. The FWG noted the research priorities identified at its last meeting and agreed to revisit the list alongside the development of the harvest strategy. The harvest strategy is expected to assist in identifying future data and research needs.

# Agenda Item 5 – Management

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## 5.1. Finfish harvest strategy project update

The FWG noted that an out-of-session update would be provided on this project once the funding contract had been completed.

## 5.2. Options for ongoing scientific advice

The FWG noted the tabled paper which outlined options for gaining future scientific advice and recommended that a formal Resource Assessment Group (RAG) be established:

- using the standard Terms of Reference for the PZJA RAGs as set out in the PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (PZJA FMP No. 1);
- comprise the membership: a Chairperson; Government (AFMA, QDAF, TSRA); three industry members (note TSWG has two industry members); and three scientific (members)

The FWG noted that AFMA would make an open call for applicants for the scientific and industry members and applicants would be assessed by a PZJA agency selection panel.

The FWG also noted the following advice from members:

- Malu Lamar representative advised that they do not wish to attend a RAG directly but strongly recommend that traditional owners be present who are active fishers. It was suggested that a Finfish RAG would benefit from having advice from fishers from Ugar, Erub and Mer Islands. Rocky Stephen, Dan Sailor and Alan Passi were recommended; and to minimise costs and time, RAG meetings could potentially be held alongside working group meetings.

### 5.3. Formalising finfish total allowable catches

The FWG noted advice that although a plan of management is in place for the Finfish Fishery, under the finfish management plan TACs may only be determined by the PZJA following the allocation of quota units (or units of fishing capacity). The plan of management allows for the allocation of quota units however this has not yet been undertaken. Until such time that an allocation occurs, TACs may be implemented by way of licence condition. The FWG noted that catch limits are currently only applied to sunset licences. TIB catches are not limited.

The FWG agreed that limiting catches to an agreed total allowable catch (TAC) is important for ensuring the sustainability of the fishery and achieving agreed management targets. The FWG further noted that with a reduced Spanish mackerel TAC for the 2017/18 fishing season, and depending on future growth in TIB sector catches, Spanish mackerel catches may approach (or possibly exceed) the RBC (or total recommended kill).

The TSRA advised that for as long as there is a leasing process (i.e. TIB sector not fishing the whole TAC) it is unlikely that a TAC would be exceeded as catches could be reduced by reducing the amount of tonnage being made available to sunset operators.

The FWG considered regulatory and non-regulatory (by other agreements/arrangements) management options for limiting catches to the TAC and noted the following comments and advice from some members:

- a TAC could be difficult to enforce in the absence of improved catch reporting (for example will management be able to detect when the TAC is exceeded);
- a level of overcatch may be sustainable when there is a higher target biomass reference point (i.e. having a target reference point of  $B_{60}$  rather than  $B_{MSY}$  or the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ ) and given catch reductions since the buyout;
- sufficient catch should be reserved for the TIB sector to allow sustainable expansion without risking an overcatch and impacting the stock. In the absence of reliable TIB catch data the TSRA advised that they rely on the expertise of the members of the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) to provide a best estimate of the TIB commercial catch. For 2017/18 season this was estimated by the FQMC at 15 tonnes;
- measures should be introduced as a matter of priority to limit the risk of overcatching in any year; and
- Research members advised that regular over-catching of the RBC would likely have negative impacts on the stock. These impacts can take a long time to remedy. It was also noted that if the stock was assessed as subject to overfishing by ABARES further downstream effects may occur such as future market access, branding of products etc.
- TSRA advised, in their opinion, that the finfish leasing process is already an effective non-regulatory measure to constrain catches to below the TAC, as the amount made available for leasing out each year is dependent on the TIB sector's catch and aspirations of the coming season.

Two options were identified:

**Option 1** – status quo for the 2017/18 fishing season; catch limits only on sunset licences with proposed leasing (110t) then for the 2018/19 fishing season; implement the TAC across all licence holders and if necessary adjust leasing to further minimise the risk of overcatching. Under this option there is a risk that recommended TAC will be overcaught in 2017/18 (having regard for catch estimates and proposed sunset licence leasing). This option was supported by TIB representatives and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member.

**Option 2** – minimise the risk of overcatching for the 2017/18 fishing season by lowering the proposed lease amount.

It was noted that option two was a more precautionary approach while option one provided phased introduction of management change. The FWG agreed to seek advice from Scientific Technical Working Group on likely impacts on the stock from exceeding the Spanish mackerel RBC in 2017/18. .

## 5.4. Estimates of traditional inhabitant boat sector catches

The FWG noted catch estimates of TIB commercial sector reported from reports and journals ranging from 9t to 22 t for Spanish mackerel as detailed in the agenda paper. The FWG also noted the FQMC agreed a reasonable estimate for TIB catches for the upcoming season to be 15t or less (based on maximum reported catch of 10t since the 2008 buyout and adding 5t).

The FWG discussed the accuracy and relevance of these estimates for predicting future TIB catches. One of the TIB representatives noted that 10 tonnes was the likely current catch level, although future improvements to infrastructure would likely increase annual catches to above 15 tonnes beyond the 2017/18 season. It was noted that changes have occurred in the fishery overtime (e.g. participation levels, buyout, 10 nm closures) which may influence total TIB catch. It was further noted however that in the absence of accurate catch estimates a precautionary approach should be taken.

The FWG noted that underestimating the total take either by adopting less precautionary estimates and/or under reporting, increases the risk that the RBC (or recommended total kill) will be exceeded. This can negatively impact the status of the stock and should be avoided.

The FWG encouraged all fishers to fill out logbooks to provide accurate information and reiterated its support for improving data collection systems, in particular implementing a mandatory fish receiver system.

## 5.5. Development of a public register

The FWG supported the development of a public licensing register noting it is proposed to cover all fishers, all fisheries, scientific permits and PNG cross endorsed vessels and make the following details of each licensee available:

- a. Company or individual's name
- b. Licence type (Fishing licence (TIB, TVH), Sunset, Carrier A, B or C)
- c. Licence Number
- d. Vessel identifying number (the boat mark), or "No Boat" status
- e. Licence expiry date
- f. Fishery endorsements (TRL, CT, SM, Prawn, BDM, Treaty endorsement)
- g. Catch or Effort allocation where applicable (Prawn effort, sunset catch allocation)

The FWG noted that the register would ***not*** include contact details for licensees and is proposed to be made available on the PZJA website and updated at least monthly.

## 5.6. Future management priorities

The FWG noted that consideration of management priorities is an important standing item for the FWG to ensure management resources are effectively targeted. The FWG noted the management priorities identified at its last meeting and recommended no change. The FWG however noted that climate change impacts and management responses should be considered for FWG work plan in the medium-term.

## 5.7. Crewing of traditional inhabitant boats

The FWG noted the proposal by Torres Strait Fishers Association (TSFA) to allow for more non-indigenous fishers to be employed as crew on Traditional Inhabitant Boat licenced vessels. Mr Mills advised that TRL primary/tender vessel operators cannot get crew run their tenders and some are tied-up altogether. Mr Mills further advised that the current crewing restrictions make it difficult for operators to be viable (for example to pay back loans) and discourage investment. TSFA were seeking the flexibility to have three non-traditional inhabitant crews on the primary/tender operations and were focused on getting skilled foreign divers from the PNG treaty villages (utilising the 457 visa scheme as other fisheries do). The FWG noted advice from the AFMA member that approvals under the relevant immigration laws would be required to use foreign divers and that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade might be able to provide some useful guidance.

Noting that the general level of support from the industry members and in-principle support for removing impediments to traditional inhabitant participation in the fisheries, the FWG recommended consultation with the broader industry and communities be undertaken to develop possible management options for further consideration.

## 5.8. Draft 2017/18 AFMA Finfish Fishery budget

The FWG noted the draft AFMA 2017/18 Finfish Fishery budget which is based on convening two FWG meetings.

## 5.9. Grant of carrier licenses to non-traditional inhabitants

The FWG noted advice that there is interest from small non-traditional inhabitant businesses to freight seafood in the Torres Strait and that these vessels require a carrier licence. The FWG noted advice that the PZJA licencing policy, as described in the 2004 licencing guide, is ambiguous for these types of applications. AFMA sought FWG advice on any concerns with the grant of new carrier licences to non-traditional inhabitant persons/businesses subject to specific conditions.

In line with advice from industry members the FWG **recommended** that further industry and community consultation take place to gauge stakeholder opinions on the grant of new carrier licences to non-traditional inhabitant persons/businesses.

## Agenda Item 6 – Other Business

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The FWG Chairperson thanked participants for their input into the meeting. AFMA advised the next meeting would likely be held in October or November 2017 and participants would be advised on the meeting date out-of-session.

Mr Frank Faud closed the meeting in prayer at 12:45 PM.

## Attachment A – TSRA Update Paper



### Torres Strait Regional Authority Update

#### Finfish Leasing

- The Finfish Quota Management Committee met on 16-17 February
- The TSRA Board considered the recommendations of the Committee on 1-2 March

#### Fisheries Programme projects

- Five projects are currently in progress that stem from the Finfish Action Plan:
  - Feasibility study for barramundi, jewfish and mud crab commercial fisheries in Gudumalulgal communities
  - Feasibility study for development of a bait fishery
  - Marketing, branding and export requirements for Torres Strait seafood
  - Infrastructure and services audit, and
  - Fishing skills audit
- The TSRA has published a Torres Strait Fisheries Guidebook, which sets out the management arrangements for fisheries in a small waterproof booklet.
- The Fisheries Programme will be supporting TIB fishers with the installation of VMS systems on primary vessels
- An Indigenous Cadetship Programme will commence in 2017
  - The cadetship will provide mentoring to tertiary students by the Fisheries Programme
  - The longer-term goal is develop Torres Strait Islanders to be employed in the TSRA Fisheries Programme
- The Fisheries Programme is seeking support from AFMA to train Torres Strait Islanders to be trained and employed in the AFMA observer programme
- The TSRA has completed a review of the New Zealand Maori model of community ownership of fisheries access rights
  - Further work on the development of a Torres Strait community management framework will continue through 2017 based on these results and the TSRA Board's direction
  - This work is a key component of the Road map to 100 per cent ownership of Torres Strait fisheries by Traditional Inhabitants
- The TSRA Economic Development Programme is currently seeking applications for the REIS Fisheries Growth Package
  - This package is available to both existing and new businesses seeking to build commercial fishing businesses in the Torres Strait.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>FISHERY UPDATES</b> <b>Updates from management agencies</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 2.1</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group **NOTE:**

- a. the update provided by AFMA below; and
- b. a verbal update will be provided by the QDAF, TSRA and Papua New Guinea Fisheries Management Authority.

## RECENT FISHERY CATCHES

1. Reported fishing activity in both the Spanish mackerel and reef line fisheries is provided in **Attachment A**.
2. Since 2008-09 catches of Spanish mackerel have generally been around 80-100 tonnes. Recent catches of Spanish mackerel have been:
  - **83.9** tonnes in 2014-15
  - **86.9** tonnes in 2015-16
  - **93.2** tonnes in 2016-17
3. Annual catches of coral trout have been below 50 t for the last 10 years. Recent catches have been:
  - **21** tonnes in 2014-15
  - **38.4** tonnes in 2015-16.
  - **25.7** tonnes in 2016-17
4. Annual catches of other reef-line species (e.g. barramundi cod, red emperor) have been below five tonnes in recent years. Recent catches (all species combined) have been:
  - **2.1** tonnes in 2014-15
  - **3.9** tonnes in 2015-16
  - **4.4** tonnes in 2016-17
5. Finfish catches reported by Traditional Inhabitant licenced (TIB) fishers through a voluntary reporting system (referred to as the docket-book system) remained low, generally less than 1 tonne per season in recent years (**Figure 3, Attachment A**). However, this is likely to be an underestimate due to catch reporting through daily fishing logbooks being voluntary for the TIB sector.
6. Mandatory Catch Disposal Records as part of the Fish Receiver System for both sunset and TIB fishers were implemented on 1 December 2017. These CDRs have begun yielding improved landing data for the TIB sector (update provided at Agenda Item 2.3). In three months, the Fish Receiver System has already yielded approximately three tonnes of finfish

catch from the TIB sector which represents a three-fold increase in reporting compared to recent seasons. AFMA will continue to work closely with fishers and fish receivers to improve the quality and quantity of data being reported through this system.

7. To date fish receivers have been actively filling out CDRs and returning them to AFMA from the following communities:
  - a. Mer
  - b. Erub
  - c. Ugar
  - d. Masig
8. Eleven different TIB fishers have reported catch through the fish receiver system:
9. Daily fishing logbook reporting by TIB licenced fishers will remain voluntary however this is encouraged.
10. AFMA is aware of growing interest and preparation among some TIB operators to increase their effort in the Finfish Fishery.
11. The 2016-17 season saw the first landing of live Torres Strait coral trout and barramundi cod since the 2011 removal of the live-take prohibition. The seasons live reef fish were reportedly sold live for export into the Asian market for a premium prices – as per the existing east coast trade. Prior to last season the removal of the ban on live exports in Torres Strait had done little to increase activity in the fishery, primarily because of difficulties and costs associated with transporting live fish from remote areas.
12. Targeting the Bramble Cay spawning aggregation remains the focus of the Spanish mackerel sector with 88 per cent of the mackerel being captured at this location in the 2016-17 season.
13. Both coral trout and Spanish mackerel stocks remain classified by ABARES as not overfished or subject to overfishing.

## **AUSTRALIA-PAPUA NEW GUINEA TREATY BILATERAL MEETING UPDATE**

14. The Joint Advisory Council (JAC) met on 8 February 2018 in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, in accordance with Article 19 of the Torres Strait Treaty.
15. A Fisheries Committee Meeting met prior to this meeting on 5 February 2018 (meeting record at **Attachment B**) and provided advice to the JAC which is summarised below.
16. Australia and PNG both declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements for the 2017-18 fishing season.
17. Some additional advice on fisheries related matters were recorded at a separate Environment Committee Meeting on 6 February 2018 which were also reported to the JAC and are summarised below.

### **Fisheries Committee report to the JAC**

- The JAC reiterated the importance of fisheries management, including managing and deterring illegal fishing in the protected zone.
- The JAC welcomed the close and ongoing cooperation between PNG and Australian agencies in fisheries management, compliance and enforcement.

- The JAC noted advice from PNG Traditional Inhabitants that they have not been able to realise the benefits envisaged under the Treaty as it relates to commercial fisheries. The PNG Traditional Inhabitants advised they have not been able to utilise the catch sharing arrangements provided under the treaty and do not have expansive territorial seas in which to commercially fish.
- JAC noted PNG NFA's commitment to support Treaty villages, and welcomed advice on securing a budget to support consultation and awareness raising visit to Treaty villages, fisheries intervention activities, and developmental projects. All stakeholders will be working together to develop strategies and programmes to assist Treaty villages in fishing projects.
- The JAC welcomed the commitment of AFMA and PNG-NFA to work together to ensure catch sharing arrangements are administered in line with the Treaty and in a manner that does not impede traditional inhabitants from utilising those entitlements.
- The JAC noted ongoing interest by the PNG prawn trawl fishing industry to retain tropical rock lobster and agreed that any departures from the current ban must be assessed in line with the Treaty. The JAC recognised the importance of the resource to Traditional inhabitants noting that it is a shared stock and the potential for trawling to impact spawning migration pathways and biomass in the Torres Strait. The JAC welcomed AFMA and PNG-NFAs commitment to work together in evaluating the impacts of trawl fishing.
- The JAC noted advice of the likely reduction in the tropical rock lobster catch in the 2018 season and the need for both AFMA and PNG-NFA to work with their industries to ensure that catches are kept at or below the catch limit.

#### **Environment Committee report to the JAC**

18. Concerns were expressed on the potential spread of Climbing Perch and Snake Head Fish into Australian waters and impacts on Barramundi and other native fish stocks. The EMC encouraged PNG and Australian Traditional Inhabitants and agencies to work together to prevent and report to authorities cane toad incursions into PNG and the spread of Climbing Perch and Snake Head fish into Australia.
19. In addition to the formal Bilateral Treaty meetings, AFMA and CSIRO staff attended the PNG National Fisheries Authority office to provide an update on Tropical Rock Lobster science related to our shared stock and to emphasise the importance of timely and accurate data sharing between our countries fisheries management agencies.

#### **AFMA FOREIGN COMPLIANCE OPERATIONS UPDATE AND QDAF DOMESTIC COMPLIANCE**

20. To be circulated to members prior to the meeting.

#### **AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE (ANAO) PERFORMANCE AUDIT**

21. The ANAO has commenced a Performance Audit of Australian Government Coordination Arrangements in the Torres Strait.
22. Currently prescribed audited entities are the:
  - a. Australian Fisheries Management Authority
  - b. Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
  - c. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
  - d. Department of Home Affairs
  - e. Torres Strait Regional Authority

23. An officer from the ANAO will be visiting the Torres Strait in April as part of the performance audit.
24. The objective of the Audit is to assess the effectiveness of the coordination arrangements of Australian Government entities operating in the Torres Strait.
25. The Audit will apply two criteria:
- Criteria 1: Do Australian Government entities operating in the Torres Strait have appropriate governance arrangements to support the coordination of their activities?
  - Criteria 2: Are the coordination arrangements effective in supporting Australian Government activities in the Torres Strait?
26. Further information on the Performance Audit can be found at **Attachment C** and the ANAO website: <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/coordination-arrangements-australian-government-entities-operating-torres-strait#0-0-auditcriteria>

## LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

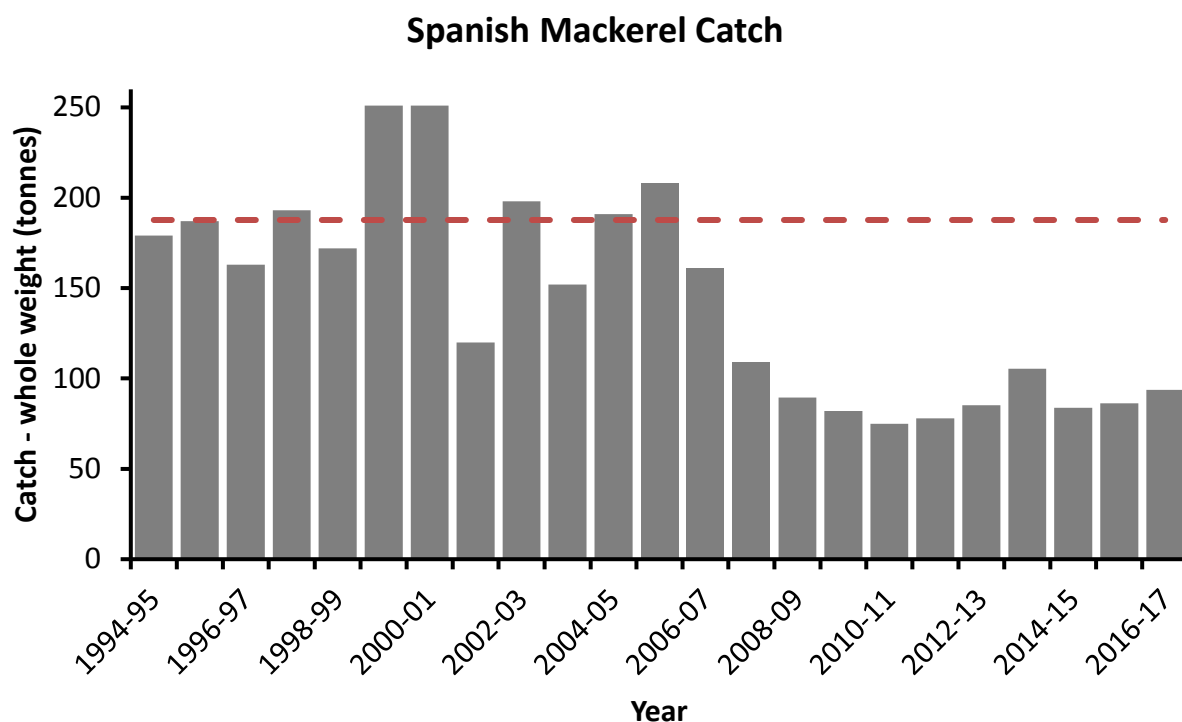
**Attachment A** – Summary of finfish fishery catch data

**Attachment B** – Record of Fisheries Committee Meeting, Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilaterals, 5 February 2017.

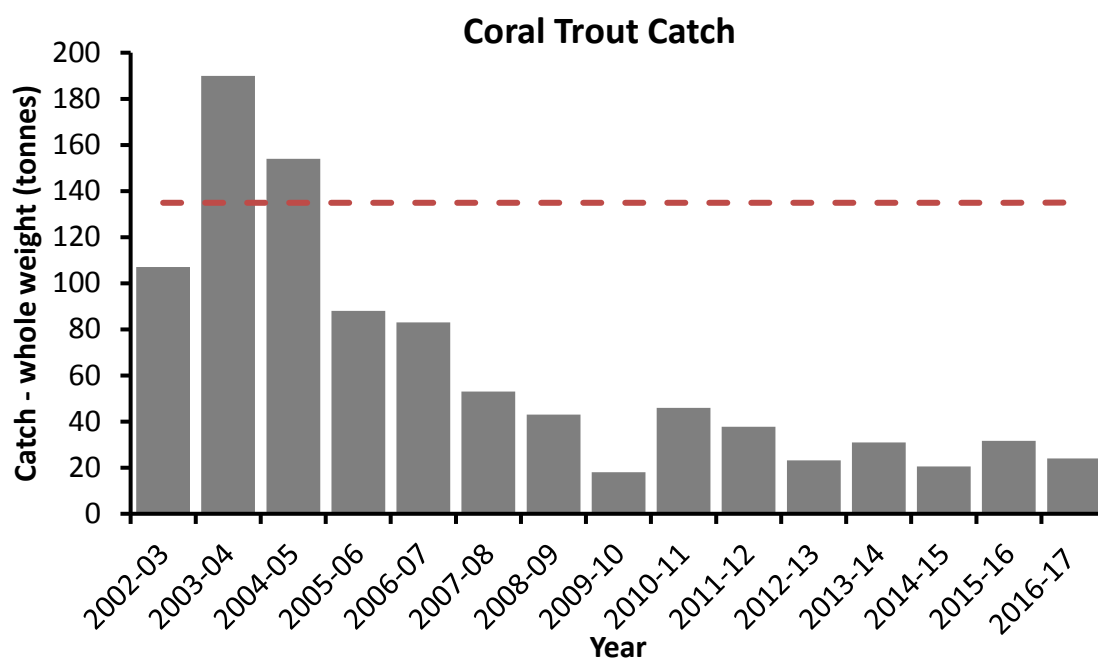
**Attachment C** – ANAO Performance Audit of Australian Government Coordination Arrangements in the Torres Strait outline.

## 2.1 Attachment A

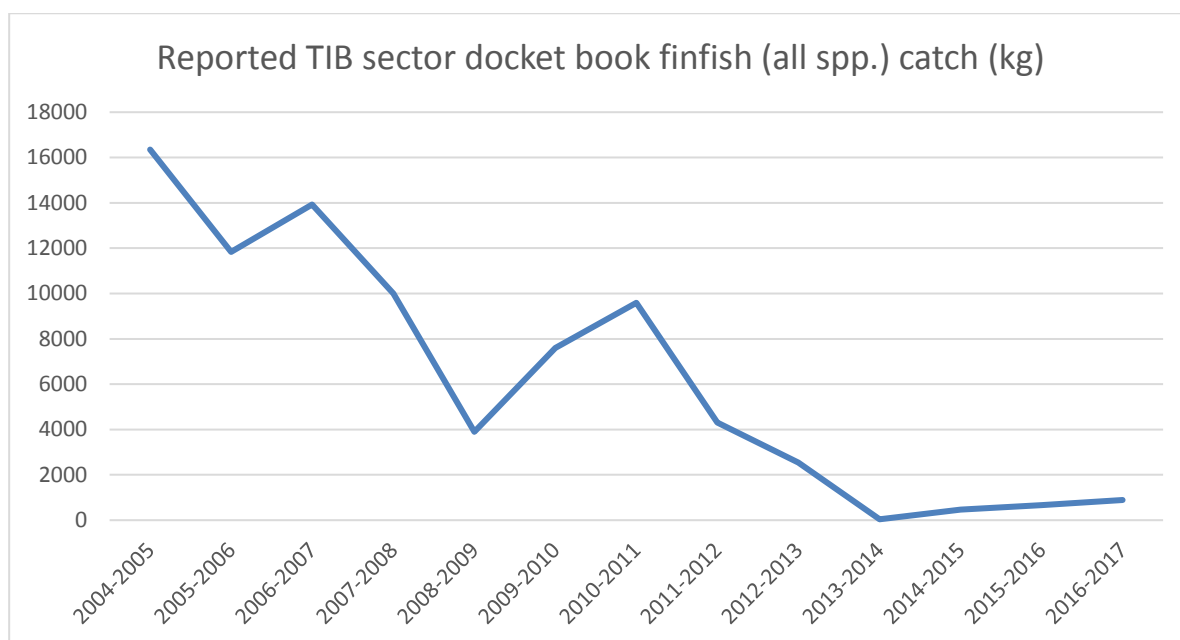
## Summary of finfish fishery catch data



**Figure 1:** Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery historical catch records including the previous TAC (187.7t) (source: AFMA docket book/logbook database).



**Figure 2:** Torres Strait Coral trout historical catch records including the TAC (134.9t) (Source: AFMA docket book/logbook database).



**Figure 3.** Reported TIB sector docket book catches (fishers selling to buyers) from TDB01 by financial year for all finfish species combined.

**Table 1.** Seasonal sunset sector catches of other reef-line fish species since the 2008-09 season. Source: AFMA TSF01 logbooks. Average reported seasonal catch of other reef-line species per season is 2.8 tonnes.

Species	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Barramundi cod	542	238	1086	745	429	756	646	1223	782
Red Emperor	223	70	398	202	125	160	207	256	457
Sea Bass	843	10	79				15	84	143
Spangled Emperor	197	68	244	29	35		8	45	56
Emperor	1968				18			4	
Rock cods	125	280	706	1017	480	932	575	1364	655
Trevally	1314					785	649	775	2377
Silver Trevally						172			
Venus Tuskfish		93	341	145	34	79			
Black Kingfish								11	
Jobfish			8					29	
Sea Bream Snapper								43	
Blue-toothed Tuskfish							1	30	
Australian Tusk								4	
Mangrove Jack								9	
Maori Sea Perch								6	
Parrotfishes								6	
Green Jobfish								5	
<b>Total (other species)</b>	<b>5212</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>2862</b>	<b>2138</b>	<b>1121</b>	<b>2884</b>	<b>2101</b>	<b>3894</b>	<b>4470</b>

## 2.1 Attachment B

### Report of the Fisheries Committee Bilateral Meeting

5 February 2018

Sir Manasupe Haus

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

#### 1. Welcome

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- 1.1. The Fisheries Committee Bilateral Meeting was held on 5 February 2018, at Sir Manasupe Haus, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea to discuss items under Articles 20-28 of the Torres Strait Treaty (the Treaty).
- 1.2. The meeting was opened at 1400 hrs and co-chaired by Mr Ian Liviko, Prawn and Lobster Fisheries Manager, Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority (PNG-NFA) and Dr Nicholas Rayns, Executive Manager, Fisheries Management Branch, Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA). A delegation list is provided at **Attachment A**.
- 1.3. The meeting **NOTED** the importance of Fisheries Bilateral meetings as valuable fora to discuss fisheries matters in relation to shared common resources of great importance to both countries for cultural, community and commercial purposes.
- 1.4. The meeting **NOTED** that several key issues discussed at the Traditional Inhabitant's Meeting (TIM meeting) were directly relevant to the Fisheries Committee Meeting. The Co-Chair thanked the TIM Co-Chairs for the opportunity to observe the TIM meeting held prior to the Fisheries Committee Meeting.
- 1.5. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice on improvements made to management arrangements across Australian managed Torres Strait fisheries in 2017 to improve monitoring and data gathering. These reforms included the implementation of mandatory vessel monitoring systems (satellite tracking) on all primary and processor-carrier boats in the Torres Strait. Also implemented was the fish receiver system which makes it mandatory for all commercial catches to be weighed at point of landing and catch disposal records filled out and returned to AFMA.

#### 2. Review of actions items: Fisheries Bilateral Meeting 2016

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- 2.1. The meeting **NOTED** the progress on actions arising items from the 2016 Fisheries Bilateral Meeting.

#### 3. Compliance and Licensing

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- 3.1. The meeting **NOTED** the co-operation between Australian and Papuan New Guinean compliance teams to deliver compliance services under the Treaty. The meeting further **NOTED** that the joint approach in conducting patrols, intelligence sharing and investigations has led to successful prosecutions in both jurisdictions. The meeting strongly **SUPPORTED** the continuation of this approach to address compliance risks in the region.
- 3.2. The meeting **NOTED** that cross-decking of compliance officers would remain a priority.

- 3.3. The meeting **NOTED** advice that PNG-NFA's capacity to respond in a timely manner to compliance reports relies on assets being available. The meeting further **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that compliance patrols were problematic within the 'dogleg' area as it is an uncharted area of waters making navigation hazardous.

#### ***Amendment of the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984***

- 3.4. The meeting **NOTED** advice from AFMA that it is working to progress a limited number of amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act). The amendments have a narrow focus, intended to deliver immediate improvement to the administration of the Act. The amendments include the introduction of infringements notices, streamlining delegations and removing impediments to implementing mandatory reporting across all licences.
- 3.5. The meeting **RECOGNISED** the importance of involving Traditional Inhabitant members in any legislative amendments noting the Act was created to implement the Australian government's responsibilities under the Treaty. The meeting **WELCOMED** the Australian Government's Commitment to consult with communities, native title holders and the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) advisory committees.

#### **4. Prawn Fishery**

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- 4.1. The meeting **NOTED** prawn fishing activity in the Australian zone remains low with effort dropping to 1004 nights fished in 2007. This is down from 2472 nights fished in 2016. Total catch reported in 2017 was 111 tonnes and 25 tonnes for tiger prawn and endeavour prawns respectively. The meeting **NOTED** that effort was largely driven by economic factors rather than stock availability.
- 4.2. The meeting **NOTED** that amendments had been made to the Australian prawn fishery and AFMA plans to update the stock assessment and undertake an Ecological Risk Assessment of the fishery over the next two years.
- 4.3. PNG-NFA **ADVISED** that there is little interest in prawn fishing in PNG waters of the TSPZ and declined the offer of catch sharing arrangements in the Australian Torres Strait Prawn Fishery. Australia did not seek to take up its entitlement in PNG waters for 2017.

#### ***PNG Treaty Traditional Inhabitants benefiting from the Treaty***

- 4.4. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG Traditional Inhabitants that they have not been able to realise any of the benefits envisaged under the Treaty as it relates to commercial fishing. The PNG Traditional Inhabitants advised that have not been able to utilise the catch sharing arrangements provided under the Treaty and do not have expansive territorial seas in which to commercially fish.
- 4.5. The meeting **NOTED** support from the Australian Traditional Inhabitants for opportunities to ensure PNG Traditional Inhabitants are able to derive benefits from fisheries resources in the TSPZ in line with the Treaty.
- 4.6. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG-NFA that the authority confirms its commitment to support Treaty villages and has secured a budget to fund consultation and awareness raising visits to Treaty villages and fisheries intervention activities & projects. PNG-NFA further advised that they have the ability to deliver practical

assistance, several administrative matters need to be resolved and stakeholders need to agree on their needs.

- 4.7. PNG-NFA **REQUESTED** to work collaboratively with AFMA to develop options on how PNG can effectively take up catch sharing options. AFMA welcomed the opportunity to assist PNG-NFA.
- 4.8. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA and PNG-NFA's strong commitment to ensure catch sharing arrangements are administered in line with the Treaty and in a manner that that does not unnecessarily impede traditional inhabitants from utilising those entitlements.

## **5. Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery**

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- 5.1. The meeting **NOTED** outcomes of the pre-season survey conducted in Australian waters in November 2017 and preliminary outcomes of the updated stock assessment. Based on the updated stock assessment the total recommended catch for 2018 is 299 tonnes.
- 5.2. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice that the pre-season survey index abundance for Tropical Rock Lobsters (TRL) was very low. While TRL is characterised as having highly variable recruitment, consideration of other contributing factors to the low pre-season abundance is ongoing. Factors likely include, environmental anomalies experienced over the last three years including, strong El Nino events, record high sea temperatures, habitat changes (industry reported significant sand incursions over certain fishing grounds) and coral bleaching events.
- 5.3. The meeting **AGREED** that 2018 catch sharing arrangements are to be finalised out of session in April once the final consideration of the stock assessment has been finalised and considered by the PZJA advisory committee. AFMA reiterated the standing invitation for PNG-NFA to attend the PZJA advisory committee meetings.
- 5.4. AFMA and PNG-NFA **REAFFIRMED** their commitment to providing timely and accurate catch reporting to ensure the integrity of future stock assessments. This includes the reporting of catch from all sectors.

### ***PNG trawlers retaining Tropical Rock Lobster***

- 5.5. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that the PNG prawn trawl industry are interested in retaining Tropical Rock Lobster that are incidentally caught and dead when brought on-board.
- 5.6. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFAs **REQUEST** to work with AFMA to further evaluate the impacts of various levels of trawl catch on the TRL stock and identify possible management options (seasonal or spatial closures) that could be developed to benefit all sectors. AFMA welcomed the opportunity to assist PNG-NFA and reiterated the importance of a taking a precautionary approach when considering any amendments to the current trawl ban.
- 5.7. The meeting **NOTED** advice from traditional inhabitants that the longstanding trawl bans in both jurisdictions where implemented after much negotiation to protect the sustainability of TRL and there would need to be strong case put forward to depart from this arrangement.
- 5.8. The meeting **REITERATED** the need to manage the take of tropical rock lobsters to the agreed global Total Allowable Catch irrespective of fishing method.

### **Stock structure**

- 5.9. The meeting **NOTED** draft modelling outcomes of likely larval movements of tropical rock lobsters within the region. The meeting **NOTED** the research was undertaken by CSIRO and was an update of previous work using an updated model and data from additional years.
- 5.10. The meeting **NOTED** the following key findings:
- Australian and Papua New Guinea tropical rock lobster fisheries are based on single stock;
  - recruitment success to Torres Strait is highly variable with recruits coming from Yule Island and northern Queensland placing further importance on having a healthy spawning biomass across its range; and
  - the model did not find a clear relationship between larval dispersal and pre-season survey results (abundance and distribution of tropical rock lobster). This means the current model cannot assist in predicting how the stock may be influenced by catches or changing environmental conditions. Further work may be considered to improve the model, such as including fine scale tidal information for the Torres Strait.

## **6. Traditional Fisheries**

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- 6.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on turtle and dugong management in Australian waters.
- 6.2. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG traditional inhabitants that the *Moro Momoro Gamo* management plan has been completed but has not yet been implemented. Noting that the plan covers a large number of communities (14 maritime boundaries), work is in progress to develop individual management plans to suit each community.
- 6.3. The meeting **NOTED** previous committee advice that the issue of illegal netting of dugong and turtle needs to be considered within the broader issues of livelihoods in PNG Treaty Villages.
- 6.4. PNG traditional inhabitants **ADVISE** that while illegal fishing was not supported, the incentive for Treaty villagers to fish illegally is likely linked to their immediate needs to provide food for themselves and their families. It was further **RECOGNISED** that this incentive is only likely to increase with population growth together with a lack of alternative livelihoods and persistent poverty in the PNG Treaty Villages. Advice from PNG traditional inhabitants was **NOTED** that the Treaty, in their view, has removed access to historical fishing grounds and provided little benefit to the PNG Treaty villagers.
- 6.5. Australian Traditional Inhabitant representatives **SUGGESTED** that gear restrictions in Torres Strait, limiting take of turtle and dugong to traditional methods only, could also be reflected in PNG community management plans under development. PNG Traditional Inhabitant representatives advised that they will encourage their members to discuss this suggestion with communities.

## **7. Spanish Mackerel**

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- 7.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on Spanish mackerel as detailed in the agenda paper.

- 7.2. The meeting **NOTED** that a harvest strategy was under development for Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (which will apply to Spanish mackerel and coral trout) which would guide future management decisions for fishery.
- 7.3. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG-NFA that the PNG industry remains very small scale and did not yet have the capacity to utilise catch sharing arrangements under the Treaty.
- 7.4. Australia and Papua New Guinea both graciously **DECLINED** to enter into catch sharing arrangements for the 2017-18 fishing season.

## 8. Pearl Shell

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- 8.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on pearl shell as detailed in the agenda paper.
- 8.2. The meeting **NOTED** advice from AFMA and PNG-NFA that fishing activity for pearl shell remains negligible in both jurisdictions.
- 8.3. The meeting **NOTED** further advice from PNG-NFA that there are many skilled pearl shell divers within Treaty communities and **REQUESTED** to work with AFMA to explore opportunities under the Treaty to develop the pearl shell fishery. AFMA welcomed the opportunity to assist with PNG-NFA.
- 8.4. Australia and Papua New Guinea both graciously **DECLINED** to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2018.

## 9. Other Fisheries

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### Beche-de-mer

- 9.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on the Australian Beche-de-mer Fishery as detailed in the agenda paper.
- 9.2. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice that interest was increasing in the Australian beche-de-mer fishery with fishers focussing on providing the market with alternative species such as curryfish.
- 9.3. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice that it was working with scientists and traditional inhabitants in developing a harvest strategy for beche-de-mer which would guide future management decisions and support the sustainable development of the fishery.
- 9.4. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that the PNG moratorium on the take and possession of beche-de-mer was lifted in April 2017. The total allowable catches were taken quickly resulting in all provinces closed again to beche-de-mer fishing by July 2017. The Fishery remains closed.
- 9.5. The meeting **NOTED** the PNG-NFA is currently reviewing management arrangements for the Fishery in consultation with stakeholders and monitoring stocks with monitors regularly visiting fishing communities. A further opening of the fishery will be informed by the review. PNG-NFA **AGREED** to provide the Fisheries Committee with an update on any changes to management arrangements for the Fishery.
- 9.6. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that illegal fishing for beche-de-mer is prevalent and that Indonesian buyers were very active in PNG during the beche-de-mer season creating strong demand for product.

### **Barramundi**

- 9.7. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG-NFA that fishers had raised concerns that catches of Barramundi appear to be declining.
- 9.8. The meeting **NOTED** that a stock assessment scheduled for barramundi had not occurred due to funding limitations. PNG-NFA now plans to undertake a desk-top study this year using information from previous studies on harvest rates (for example research by Dr Sara Bussliachi).
- 9.9. The meeting **WELCOMED** further advice and acknowledgement from PNG-NFA that the South Fly Government has supported the reopening of the barramundi hatchery on Daru and continues to support efforts to re-establish the restocking exercise in to the wild.

### **Finfish fishery – reef-line sector - update on activity in the Australian jurisdiction**

- 9.10. The meeting **NOTED** the update on finfish activity in Australian waters was detailed in the agenda paper.
- 9.11. The meeting **NOTED** that a harvest strategy was under development for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (Spanish mackerel and coral trout) which would guide future management decisions for the Fishery.
- 9.12. The meeting **NOTED** that an initial stock assessment for coral trout would be conducted as part of the harvest strategy development.

## **10. Other Business**

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### **Research in the Torres Strait**

- 10.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on research projects in progress, or proposals under consideration relevant to the Torres Strait as detailed in the agenda paper.
- 10.2. The meeting co-chair **ADVISED** the meeting of broader research projects of relevance to the Torres Strait including CSIRO work to support Australia wide decadal monitoring for the effects of climate change which is due for completion in mid-2018. Also **NOTED** was another CSIRO project looking to examine optimising the yield that could be gained from Australian commercial seafood species which includes Torres Strait.
- 10.3. The meeting **REQUESTED** to revisit the outcomes of prior CSIRO research presented by James Butler ‘Developing legal value chains and alternative markets for South Fly District fisheries’.

### **Presentation “Value-chains in Western Province Fisheries” by Dr Sara Busillachi.**

- 10.4. The meeting **NOTED** the presentation from Dr Sara Busillachi, CSIRO which outlined recent findings from the collection of economic data from sales of PNG marine-derived commodities through the market chain into the Asian market. These commodities include beche-de-mer, shark fin and fish maw (swim bladder) from jewfish and barramundi.

- 10.5. The meeting **NOTED** that the research indicates that fishers in the Western Province are paid only a small proportion of the final market price of these commodities and face many risks in harvesting the products.
- 10.6. The meeting **NOTED** that the collection of supply chain data was the initial phase of the project with data still being analysed until July 2018. Funding for a second stage will likely be sought.

#### **Next meeting**

- 10.7. The meeting **NOTED** that the 2018 bilateral meeting is to be held in Australia and delegates will be advised by the Australian government on the arrangements for the meeting.

### **11. Closing Prayer**

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- 11.1. The meeting closed at 1700hrs with a closing prayer from TSRA Chairperson Pedro Stephen.

**Table of actions arising from the 2017 Fisheries Bilateral Meeting (5 Feb 2018)**

<b>Item Number</b>	<b>Agenda #</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsible Agency</b>
2017-1	4	AFMA and PNG-NFA to work collaboratively to investigate how treaty villages may effectively engage in commercial fisheries under the Treaty.	AFMA and PNG-NFA
2017-1	5.1	AFMA and PNG-NFA to work to collaboratively to further evaluate the impact of PNG prawn trawl catches impacting the Tropical Rock Lobster stock.	AFMA and PNG-NFA
2017-2	10.1	The outcomes of the CSIRO research project “Developing legal value chains and alternative markets for South Fly District fisheries” are to be made available to the meeting attendees.	AFMA

**Attachment A  
Fisheries Committee Bilateral Meeting 2016  
Delegation List**

**Australian Delegation**

Australian Traditional Inhabitant Representatives

Cr Getano Lui (Jr), Iama (Yam) Island (Traditional Inhabitant Meeting Co-chair)

Cr Fraser Nai, Masig (Yorke) Island

Cr Patrick Thaiaday, Erub (Darnley) Island

Mr Erik Peter, Torres Strait Regional Authority, Member for Boigu

Australian Government Representatives

Dr Nick Rayns, Australian Fisheries Management Authority – Australian Co-Chair

Ms Leilani Bin-Juda, Treaty Liaison Officer, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Mr Pedro Stephen, Chairperson, Torres Strait Regional Authority

Mr Charlie Caddy, A/g Chief Executive Officer, Torres Strait Regional Authority

Mr Stan Lui, A/g Environment Program Manager, Torres Strait Regional Authority

Ms Fiona Pemberton, Department of Immigration and Border Protection

Mr Lyndon Peddell, A/g Manager Foreign Compliance, Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Ms Selina Stoute, Manager Torres Strait Fisheries, Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Mr Andrew Trappett, Senior Fisheries Management Officer, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Fisheries Committee Meeting Secretariat

**Papua New Guinea Delegation**

Papua New Guinea Traditional Inhabitant Representatives

Cr Kebei Salee, Councillor for Sigabaduru, Traditional Inhabitant Meeting co-chair

Cr Frank Warapa, Councillor for Buji/Ber

Cr Tibau Kaware, Councillor for Katatai

Cr Murray Dimia, Councillor for Sui

Cr Peter Papua, Councillor for Mabudauan

Papua New Guinea Government Representatives

Mr Ian Liviko, Manager, Prawn and Lobster Fisheries, Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority

Mr Joseph Posu, Management Officer, Prawn and Lobster Fisheries, Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority

Mr Rei Vagi, Conservation and Environment Officer, CEPA

## Report of the Fisheries Committee Bilateral Meeting

5 February 2018

Sir Manasupe Haus

Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea

### 1. Welcome

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- 1.1. The Fisheries Committee Bilateral Meeting was held on 5 February 2018, at Sir Manasupe Haus, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea to discuss items under Articles 20-28 of the Torres Strait Treaty (the Treaty).
- 1.2. The meeting was opened at 1400 hrs and co-chaired by Mr Ian Liviko, Prawn and Lobster Fisheries Manager, Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority (PNG-NFA) and Dr Nicholas Rayns, Executive Manager, Fisheries Management Branch, Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA). A delegation list is provided at **Attachment A**.
- 1.3. The meeting **NOTED** the importance of Fisheries Bilateral meetings as valuable fora to discuss fisheries matters in relation to shared common resources of great importance to both countries for cultural, community and commercial purposes.
- 1.4. The meeting **NOTED** that several key issues discussed at the Traditional Inhabitant's Meeting (TIM meeting) were directly relevant to the Fisheries Committee Meeting. The Co-Chair thanked the TIM Co-Chairs for the opportunity to observe the TIM meeting held prior to the Fisheries Committee Meeting.
- 1.5. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice on improvements made to management arrangements across Australian managed Torres Strait fisheries in 2017 to improve monitoring and data gathering. These reforms included the implementation of mandatory vessel monitoring systems (satellite tracking) on all primary and processor-carrier boats in the Torres Strait. Also implemented was the fish receiver system which makes it mandatory for all commercial catches to be weighed at point of landing and catch disposal records filled out and returned to AFMA.

### 2. Review of actions items: Fisheries Bilateral Meeting 2016

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- 2.1. The meeting **NOTED** the progress on actions arising items from the 2016 Fisheries Bilateral Meeting.

### 3. Compliance and Licensing

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- 3.1. The meeting **NOTED** the co-operation between Australian and Papuan New Guinean compliance teams to deliver compliance services under the Treaty. The meeting further **NOTED** that the joint approach in conducting patrols, intelligence sharing and investigations has led to successful prosecutions in both jurisdictions. The meeting strongly **SUPPORTED** the continuation of this approach to address compliance risks in the region.
- 3.2. The meeting **NOTED** that cross-decking of compliance officers would remain a priority.
- 3.3. The meeting **NOTED** advice that PNG-NFA's capacity to respond in a timely manner to compliance reports relies on assets being available. The meeting further **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that compliance patrols were problematic within the 'dogleg' area as it is an uncharted area of waters making navigation hazardous.

### ***Amendment of the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984***

- 3.4. The meeting **NOTED** advice from AFMA that it is working to progress a limited number of amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act). The amendments have a narrow focus, intended to deliver immediate improvement to the administration of the Act. The amendments include the introduction of infringements notices, streamlining delegations and removing impediments to implementing mandatory reporting across all licences.
- 3.5. The meeting **RECOGNISED** the importance of involving Traditional Inhabitant members in any legislative amendments noting the Act was created to implement the Australian government's responsibilities under the Treaty. The meeting **WELCOMED** the Australian Government's Commitment to consult with communities, native title holders and the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) advisory committees.

### **4. Prawn Fishery**

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- 4.1. The meeting **NOTED** prawn fishing activity in the Australian zone remains low with effort dropping to 1004 nights fished in 2007. This is down from 2472 nights fished in 2016. Total catch reported in 2017 was 111 tonnes and 25 tonnes for tiger prawn and endeavour prawns respectively. The meeting **NOTED** that effort was largely driven by economic factors rather than stock availability.
- 4.2. The meeting **NOTED** that amendments had been made to the Australian prawn fishery and AFMA plans to update the stock assessment and undertake an Ecological Risk Assessment of the fishery over the next two years.
- 4.3. PNG-NFA **ADVISED** that there is little interest in prawn fishing in PNG waters of the TSPZ and declined the offer of catch sharing arrangements in the Australian Torres Strait Prawn Fishery. Australia did not seek to take up its entitlement in PNG waters for 2017.

### ***PNG Treaty Traditional Inhabitants benefiting from the Treaty***

- 4.4. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG Traditional Inhabitants that they have not been able to realise any of the benefits envisaged under the Treaty as it relates to commercial fishing. The PNG Traditional Inhabitants advised that have not been able to utilise the catch sharing arrangements provided under the Treaty and do not have expansive territorial seas in which to commercially fish.
- 4.5. The meeting **NOTED** support from the Australian Traditional Inhabitants for opportunities to ensure PNG Traditional Inhabitants are able to derive benefits from fisheries resources in the TSPZ in line with the Treaty.
- 4.6. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG-NFA that the authority confirms its commitment to support Treaty villages and has secured a budget to fund consultation and awareness raising visits to Treaty villages and fisheries intervention activities & projects. PNG-NFA further advised that they have the ability to deliver practical assistance, several administrative matters need to be resolved and stakeholders need to agree on their needs.
- 4.7. PNG-NFA **REQUESTED** to work collaboratively with AFMA to develop options on how PNG can effectively take up catch sharing options. AFMA welcomed the opportunity to assist PNG-NFA.

- 4.8. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA and PNG-NFA's strong commitment to ensure catch sharing arrangements are administered in line with the Treaty and in a manner that that does not unnecessarily impede traditional inhabitants from utilising those entitlements.

## 5. Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery

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- 5.1. The meeting **NOTED** outcomes of the pre-season survey conducted in Australian waters in November 2017 and preliminary outcomes of the updated stock assessment. Based on the updated stock assessment the total recommended catch for 2018 is 299 tonnes.
- 5.2. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice that the pre-season survey index abundance for Tropical Rock Lobsters (TRL) was very low. While TRL is characterised as having highly variable recruitment, consideration of other contributing factors to the low pre-season abundance is ongoing. Factors likely include, environmental anomalies experienced over the last three years including, strong El Nino events, record high sea temperatures, habitat changes (industry reported significant sand incursions over certain fishing grounds) and coral bleaching events.
- 5.3. The meeting **AGREED** that 2018 catch sharing arrangements are to be finalised out of session in April once the final consideration of the stock assessment has been finalised and considered by the PZJA advisory committee. AFMA reiterated the standing invitation for PNG-NFA to attend the PZJA advisory committee meetings.
- 5.4. AFMA and PNG-NFA **REAFFIRMED** their commitment to providing timely and accurate catch reporting to ensure the integrity of future stock assessments. This includes the reporting of catch from all sectors.

### ***PNG trawlers retaining Tropical Rock Lobster***

- 5.5. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that the PNG prawn trawl industry are interested in retaining Tropical Rock Lobster that are incidentally caught and dead when brought on-board.
- 5.6. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFAs **REQUEST** to work with AFMA to further evaluate the impacts of various levels of trawl catch on the TRL stock and identify possible management options (seasonal or spatial closures) that could be developed to benefit all sectors. AFMA welcomed the opportunity to assist PNG-NFA and reiterated the importance of a taking a precautionary approach when considering any amendments to the current trawl ban.
- 5.7. The meeting **NOTED** advice from traditional inhabitants that the longstanding trawl bans in both jurisdictions were implemented after much negotiation to protect the sustainability of TRL and there would need to be strong case put forward to depart from this arrangement.
- 5.8. The meeting **REITERATED** the need to manage the take of tropical rock lobsters to the agreed global Total Allowable Catch irrespective of fishing method.

### ***Stock structure***

- 5.9. The meeting **NOTED** draft modelling outcomes of likely larval movements of tropical rock lobsters within the region. The meeting **NOTED** the research was undertaken by CSIRO and was an update of previous work using an updated model and data from additional years.
- 5.10. The meeting **NOTED** the following key findings:

- Australian and Papua New Guinea tropical rock lobster fisheries are based on single stock;
- recruitment success to Torres Strait is highly variable with recruits coming from Yule Island and northern Queensland placing further importance on having a healthy spawning biomass across its range; and
- the model did not find a clear relationship between larval dispersal and pre-season survey results (abundance and distribution of tropical rock lobster). This means the current model cannot assist in predicting how the stock may be influenced by catches or changing environmental conditions. Further work may be considered to improve the model, such as including fine scale tidal information for the Torres Strait.

## 6. Traditional Fisheries

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- 6.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on turtle and dugong management in Australian waters.
- 6.2. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG traditional inhabitants that the *Moro Momoro Gamo* management plan has been completed but has not yet been implemented. Noting that the plan covers a large number of communities (14 maritime boundaries), work is in progress to develop individual management plans to suit each community.
- 6.3. The meeting **NOTED** previous committee advice that the issue of illegal netting of dugong and turtle needs to be considered within the broader issues of livelihoods in PNG Treaty Villages.
- 6.4. PNG traditional inhabitants **ADVISE** that while illegal fishing was not supported, the incentive for Treaty villagers to fish illegally is likely linked to their immediate needs to provide food for themselves and their families. It was further **RECOGNISED** that this incentive is only likely to increase with population growth together with a lack of alternative livelihoods and persistent poverty in the PNG Treaty Villages. Advice from PNG traditional inhabitants was **NOTED** that the Treaty, in their view, has removed access to historical fishing grounds and provided little benefit to the PNG Treaty villagers.
- 6.5. Australian Traditional Inhabitant representatives **SUGGESTED** that gear restrictions in Torres Strait, limiting take of turtle and dugong to traditional methods only, could also be reflected in PNG community management plans under development. PNG Traditional Inhabitant representatives advised that they will encourage their members to discuss this suggestion with communities.

## 7. Spanish Mackerel

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- 7.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on Spanish mackerel as detailed in the agenda paper.
- 7.2. The meeting **NOTED** that a harvest strategy was under development for Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (which will apply to Spanish mackerel and coral trout) which would guide future management decisions for fishery.
- 7.3. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG-NFA that the PNG industry remains very small scale and did not yet have the capacity to utilise catch sharing arrangements under the Treaty.
- 7.4. Australia and Papua New Guinea both graciously **DECLINED** to enter into catch sharing arrangements for the 2017-18 fishing season.

## 8. Pearl Shell

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- 8.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on pearl shell as detailed in the agenda paper.

- 8.2. The meeting **NOTED** advice from AFMA and PNG-NFA that fishing activity for pearl shell remains negligible in both jurisdictions.
- 8.3. The meeting **NOTED** further advice from PNG-NFA that there are many skilled pearl shell divers within Treaty communities and **REQUESTED** to work with AFMA to explore opportunities under the Treaty to develop the pearl shell fishery. AFMA welcomed the opportunity to assist with PNG-NFA.
- 8.4. Australia and Papua New Guinea both graciously **DECLINED** to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2018.

## 9. Other Fisheries

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### Beche-de-mer

- 9.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on the Australian Beche-de-mer Fishery as detailed in the agenda paper.
- 9.2. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice that interest was increasing in the Australian beche-de-mer fishery with fishers focussing on providing the market with alternative species such as curryfish.
- 9.3. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA advice that it was working with scientists and traditional inhabitants in developing a harvest strategy for beche-de-mer which would guide future management decisions and support the sustainable development of the fishery.
- 9.4. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that the PNG moratorium on the take and possession of beche-de-mer was lifted in April 2017. The total allowable catches were taken quickly resulting in all provinces closed again to beche-de-mer fishing by July 2017. The Fishery remains closed.
- 9.5. The meeting **NOTED** the PNG-NFA is currently reviewing management arrangements for the Fishery in consultation with stakeholders and monitoring stocks with monitors regularly visiting fishing communities. A further opening of the fishery will be informed by the review. PNG-NFA **AGREED** to provide the Fisheries Committee with an update on any changes to management arrangements for the Fishery.
- 9.6. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that illegal fishing for beche-de-mer is prevalent and that Indonesian buyers were very active in PNG during the beche-de-mer season creating strong demand for product.

### Barramundi

- 9.7. The meeting **NOTED** advice from PNG-NFA that fishers had raised concerns that catches of Barramundi appear to be declining.
- 9.8. The meeting **NOTED** that a stock assessment scheduled for barramundi had not occurred due to funding limitations. PNG-NFA now plans to undertake a desk-top study this year using information from previous studies on harvest rates (for example research by Dr Sara Bussliachi).
- 9.9. The meeting **WELCOMED** further advice and acknowledgement from PNG-NFA that the South Fly Government has supported the reopening of the barramundi hatchery on Daru and continues to support efforts to re-establish the restocking exercise in to the wild.

### **Finfish fishery – reef-line sector - update on activity in the Australian jurisdiction**

- 9.10. The meeting **NOTED** the update on finfish activity in Australian waters was detailed in the agenda paper.
- 9.11. The meeting **NOTED** that a harvest strategy was under development for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (Spanish mackerel and coral trout) which would guide future management decisions for the Fishery.
- 9.12. The meeting **NOTED** that an initial stock assessment for coral trout would be conducted as part of the harvest strategy development.

## **10. Other Business**

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### **Research in the Torres Strait**

- 10.1. The meeting **NOTED** the update on research projects in progress, or proposals under consideration relevant to the Torres Strait as detailed in the agenda paper.
- 10.2. The meeting co-chair **ADVISED** the meeting of broader research projects of relevance to the Torres Strait including CSIRO work to support Australia wide decadal monitoring for the effects of climate change which is due for completion in mid-2018. Also **NOTED** was another CSIRO project looking to examine optimising the yield that could be gained from Australian commercial seafood species which includes Torres Strait.
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### **Next meeting**

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## **11. Closing Prayer**

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- 11.1. The meeting closed at 1700hrs with a closing prayer from TSRA Chairperson Pedro Stephen.

**Table of actions arising from the 2017 Fisheries Bilateral Meeting (5 Feb 2018)**

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**Attachment A**  
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**Delegation List**

**Australian Delegation**

Australian Traditional Inhabitant Representatives

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Mr Lyndon Peddell, A/g Manager Foreign Compliance, Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Ms Selina Stoute, Manager Torres Strait Fisheries, Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Mr Andrew Trappett, Senior Fisheries Management Officer, Australian Fisheries Management Authority, Fisheries Committee Meeting Secretariat

**Papua New Guinea Delegation**

Papua New Guinea Traditional Inhabitant Representatives

Cr Kebei Salee, Councillor for Sigabaduru, Traditional Inhabitant Meeting co-chair

Cr Frank Warapa, Councillor for Buji/Ber

Cr Tibau Kaware, Councillor for Katatai

Cr Murray Dimia, Councillor for Sui

Cr Peter Papua, Councillor for Mabudauan

Papua New Guinea Government Representatives

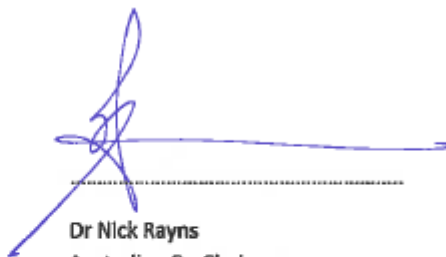
Mr Ian Liviko, Manager, Prawn and Lobster Fisheries, Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority

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Mr Rei Vagi, Conservation and Environment Officer, CEPA



Mr Ian Liviko  
Papua New Guinean Co-Chairperson  
Manager, Prawn and Lobster Fisheries, Papua  
New Guinea National Fisheries Authority



Dr Nick Rayns  
Australian Co-Chairperson  
Executive Manager, Fisheries Management  
Branch, Australian Fisheries Management  
Authority

## ANAO Performance Audit: Australian Government Coordination Arrangements in the Torres Strait

Objective	To assess the effectiveness of the coordination arrangements of Australian Government entities operating in the Torres Strait.							
Criteria	1. Do Australian Government entities operating in the Torres Strait have appropriate governance arrangements to support the coordination of their activities?				2. Are the coordination arrangements effective in supporting Australian Government activities in the Torres Strait?			
Sub-criteria	<div>1.1 Entities assess the risks and benefits associated with the conduct of coordinated activities, and prioritise coordinated activities accordingly.</div> <div>1.2 As part of their risk assessment, entities consider the impact of their operations on Torres Strait communities and community engagement is prioritised accordingly.</div> <div>1.3 Entities have agreements in place to support the coordination of their activities with other government and non-government entities.</div> <div>1.4 Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and agreed between entities.</div> <div>1.5 Governance structures (such as committees and communication mechanisms) are effective in supporting the coordination of activities.</div> <div>1.6 Entities have developed mechanisms to support coordinated activities (including data sharing and IT systems integration).</div>				<div>2.1 The coordination arrangements are effective in supporting the Torres Strait Treaty and Border Control operations, including through:</div> <div><div><div></div><div>the management of the biosecurity risk (people, animal and plant health);</div></div><div><div></div><div>the control of people movements (including under the Treaty’s traditional visits provisions); and</div></div><div><div></div><div>the monitoring of fishing activities (to control illegal and over fishing).</div></div></div> <div>2.2 The coordination arrangements are effective in facilitating better integration of services in the Torres Strait, including through:</div> <div><div><div></div><div>the mapping of services and the identification of gaps and duplications;</div></div><div><div></div><div>the alignment of services to agreed regional and Australian Government objectives; and</div></div><div><div></div><div>the alignment of performance measures to support effective service performance monitoring and assessment.</div></div></div> <div>2.3 The coordination arrangements are effective in optimising the use of facilities and resources, including sharing and pooling of transport, accommodation, corporate services and skills of government officials.</div>			
Audit details	<div>Audit team</div> <div><div><div>Dr Isabelle Favre</div><div>Senior Director (Audit Manager)</div><div>02 6203 7513</div><div>isabelle.favre@anao.gov.au</div></div><div><div>Elizabeth Wedgwood</div><div>Director</div><div>02 6203 7867</div><div>elizabeth.wedgwood@anao.gov.au</div></div><div><div>Hugh Balgarnie</div><div>Performance Analyst</div><div>02 6203 7522</div><div>hugh.balgarnie@anao.gov.au</div></div><div><div>Yvonne Buresch</div><div>Performance Analyst</div><div>02 6203 7617</div><div>yvonne.buresch@anao.gov.au</div></div><div><div>Deborah Jackson</div><div>Executive Director</div><div>02 6203 7584</div><div>deborah.jackson@anao.gov.au</div></div></div>				<div>Contribute to the audit</div> <div>via email on the ANAO website:</div> <div><a href="http://www.anao.gov.au">www.anao.gov.au</a></div>		<div>Audit timeframe</div> <div><div>Fieldwork</div><div>Mar-Sept 2018</div></div> <div><div>Report Preparation Papers to auditee</div><div>Sept 2018</div></div> <div><div>Proposed (s.19) report to auditee</div><div>Nov 2018</div></div> <div><div>Report tabled</div><div>Jan 2019</div></div>	

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1 20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT</b> <b>Finfish Fishery export approval under the EPBC Act.</b>	<b>Agenda Item 2.2 FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** that the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery has, subject to conditions, received export approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* until 2020.

## KEY ISSUES

2. The Torres Strait Finfish Fishery has been declared an approved Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) for a further three years, valid under 18 December 2020 (**Attachment A**).
3. This approval is:
  - a. necessary in order to legally export commercially wild caught seafood from Australia; and
  - b. subject to conditions which require ongoing work by the PZJA (**Table 1**).
4. The Working Group will need to have regard for the conditions currently in place when developing management advice for the Fishery.
5. New conditions have been added to the WTO including the need to perform an environmental risk assessment for the fishery and to implement strategies to improve data collection, and monitoring and management of catch in all sectors of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery by 2019.
6. Conditions carried over from the previous certification include the need to develop and implement reference points and relevant management triggers, including timeframes for management responses, for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery which is being actioned through the development of a harvest strategy for the fishery target species.

**Table 1** WTO conditions for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery, a comparison with previous consideration and status of any relevant management actions.

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Number	Condition	Comparison to previous WTO	Status of any relevant management actions
1.	Operation of the Fishery will be carried out in accordance with management arrangements in force under the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> .	Previous condition made reference to the Management Plan (which is an arrangement in force under the Act).	Condition adhered to.
2.	The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 decisions are made.	Carry over – standard condition on all WTOs.	Amendments to management arrangements (if any performed) are reported to DoEE through scheduled Strategic Assessment Reports.
3.	The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition.	Carry over -standard condition on all WTOs.	Reports are submitted to DoEE in support of renewing WTO export accreditation.
4.	The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement strategies to improve data collection, and monitoring and management of catch in all sectors of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery by 2019.	New condition wording. Previous condition was focused on understanding estimates of all fishery-related removals.	AFMA continues to promote catch reporting with industry across all sectors and collects data from daily fishing logbooks (mandatory in sunset sector), docket books and, as of 1 December 2017, catch disposal records from both sectors. AFMA is also working to introduce enforceable TACs.
5.	The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to complete an ecological risk assessment for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.	New condition.	ERA is scheduled for 2019.
6.	The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to improve estimates of stock abundance and harvest potential for all target species in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.	Carry over.	Being progressed through the harvest strategy development.
7.	The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to develop and implement reference points and relevant management triggers, including timeframes for management responses, for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery	Carry over.	Being progressed through the harvest strategy development.

## BACKGROUND

7. The *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) requires the Australian Government to assess the environmental performance of fisheries and promote ecologically sustainable fisheries management.
8. The Minister for the Department of the Environment and Energy is responsible for the assessment of fisheries managed under Commonwealth legislation and state export fisheries in accordance with the EPBC Act.
9. Several separate assessments are undertaken under the EPBC Act:
  - the strategic assessment of fisheries under Part 10 of the EPBC Act;
  - assessments relating to impacts on protected marine species under Part 13; and,
  - assessments for the purpose of export approval under Part 13A.
10. In assessing a management plan under Part 10 of the EPBC Act the Minister for the Environment is assessing the framework for managing the fishery and declaring that actions approved in accordance with the accredited plan do not require approval under Part 9 for impact on the environment (approval of actions relating to matters of national environmental significance).
11. In assessing a management plan under Part 13 of the EPBC Act the Minister for the Environment is determining that all reasonable steps are being taken to avoid killing or injuring protected species and that the fishery to which the plan relates does not, or is not likely to, adversely affect the survival or recovery in nature of any listed threatened species or the conservation status of a listed migratory species, cetacean, or listed marine species or a population of that species.
12. In assessing a management plan under Part 13A of the EPBC Act the Minister for the Environment is determining whether species taken in the fishery should be included on the list of exempt native specimens (LENS) and therefore allowed to be exported. For each specimen on the list there is to be a notation that states whether the inclusion of the specimen in the list is subject to restrictions or conditions and, if so, the nature of those restrictions or conditions.
13. The Torres Strait Finfish Fishery was first assessed 2004 under Parts 10, 13 and 13 A of the EPBC Act. Export approval was granted through amending the LENS and declaring the Finfish Fishery a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) for a period of three years, valid until 25 November 2008. A further two WTO approvals were granted with the last valid until 26 May 2016.
14. On 12 April 2017, AFMA submitted an application on behalf of the PZJA, for reassessment of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery under the EPBC Act as a wildlife trade operation (**Attachment B**).
15. The Department of the Environment and Energy assessed this application against the Australian Government 'Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries – 2nd Edition'. Public consultation was undertaken on the application between 26 April and 31 May 2017. No comments were received.
16. The Department of the Environment and Energy assessment is at **Attachment C**.

17. The Delegate of the Minister for the Environment and Energy wrote to AFMA and Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources on 20 December 2017 advising of her decision in relation to the reassessment of seven Commonwealth-managed fisheries including the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (**Attachment D**).

#### **LIST OF ATTACHMENTS**

**Attachment A** – Declaration of an approved Wildlife Trade Operation – Torres Strait Finfish Fishery, December 2017.

**Attachment B** – Report submitted by AFMA to DoEE on behalf of PZJA, April 2017

**Attachment C** – DoEE Assessment of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. December 2017.

**Attachment D** – Letter from delegate on decision to declare WTO, 20 December 2017



## COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*

### **DECLARATION OF AN APPROVED WILDLIFE TRADE OPERATION –TORRES STRAIT FINFISH FISHERY, DECEMBER 2017**

I, ILSE KIESSLING, Acting Assistant Secretary, Wildlife Trade and Biosecurity Branch, as Delegate of the Minister for the Environment and Energy, have considered in accordance with section 303FN of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) the application from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and advice on the ecological sustainability of the operation. I am satisfied on those matters specified in section 303FN of the EPBC Act. I hereby declare the operations for the harvesting of specimens that are or are derived from fish or invertebrates, other than specimens that belong to species listed under Part 13 of the EPBC Act (other than a species listed in the conservation dependent category), and specimens that belong to taxa listed under section 303CA of the EPBC Act (Australia's CITES list), taken in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery as defined in the management regime in force under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (Cth) and the Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985 (Cth), to be an approved wildlife trade operation, in accordance with subsection 303FN(2) and paragraph 303FN(10)(d), for the purposes of the EPBC Act.

Unless amended or revoked, this declaration:

- a) is valid until 18 December 2020 and;
- b) is subject to the conditions applied under section 303FT specified in the Schedule.

Dated this        20                                day of                December                2017

.....  
Delegate of the Minister for the Environment and Energy

A person whose interests are affected by this declaration may, within 28 days, make an application in writing to the Department of the Environment and Energy for the reasons for the decision.

An application for independent review of the decision (under section 303GJ(1) of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*) may be made to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), on payment of the relevant fee by the applicant, either within 28 days of receipt of the reasons for the decision, or within 28 days of this declaration if reasons for the decision are not sought. Applications should be made to the Deputy Registrar, AAT in your Capital City. Please visit the AAT's website at <http://www.aat.gov.au/> for further information.

You may make an application under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Cth) to access documents relevant to this decision. For further information, please visit <http://www.environment.gov.au/foi/index.html>.

Further enquiries should be directed to the Director, Wildlife Trade Assessments Section, Department of the Environment and Energy, Telephone: (02) 6274 1917 Email: [sustainablefisheries@environment.gov.au](mailto:sustainablefisheries@environment.gov.au).

## SCHEDULE

### **Declaration of the Harvest Operations of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery as an approved wildlife trade operation, December 2017**

#### **ADDITIONAL PROVISIONS (section 303FT)**

Relating to the harvesting of specimens that are or are derived from fish or invertebrates, other than specimens that belong to species listed under Part 13 of the EPBC Act (other than a species listed in the conservation dependent category), and specimens that belong to taxa listed under section 303CA of the EPBC Act (Australia's CITES list), taken in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery:

1. Operation of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery will be carried out in accordance with management arrangements in force under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.
2. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* decisions are made.
3. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.
4. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement strategies to improve data collection, and monitoring and management of catch in all sectors of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery by 2019.
5. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to complete an ecological risk assessment for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
6. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to improve estimates of stock abundance and harvest potential for all target species in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
7. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to develop and implement reference points and relevant management triggers, including timeframes for management responses, for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.

# Application for reassessment under the EPBC Act of the

## **TORRES STRAIT Finfish (Spanish mackerel & reef line) FISHERY**

GENERAL INFORMATION	
<b>Area of the fishery</b>	<p>The Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (TSFF) is comprised of the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery (TSSMF), and the Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery (TSRLF). The term 'finfish' is used as a collective term to describe these fisheries.</p> <p>The TSFF comprises tidal waters within the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) and the area declared under the TSF Act to be 'outside but near' the TSPZ for commercial fishing for finfish (<b>Attachment 1</b>). For the TSFF, the outside but near area extends to waters just south of Prince of Wales Island to the west and to due east of Cape York Peninsula.</p> <p>There is a closure to the Reef Line Fishery west of Longitude 142° 31'49" set out in Fisheries Management Instrument No. 8.</p> <p>In addition, there are restrictions on fishing within 10 nautical miles of Mer (Murray), Ugar (Stephen), Masig (Yorke), and Erub (Darnley) Islands, as well as on Big Mary, Little Mary and Kaliko reefs, for those fishers operating under a sunset licence (i.e. non- traditional inhabitant licenced operations that lease annual finfish quota). These restrictions are implemented through licence conditions.</p>
<b>Gear used</b>	<p>Spanish mackerel is targeted using troll lines with hooks baited with garfish or occasionally an artificial lure. Troll lines are typically deployed from dories of between five and six metres in length.</p> <p>The TSRLF mainly uses hand lines with single hooks baited. Fishing rods or mechanically operated reels may also be used.</p> <p>Sunset licence holders operate dories from primary vessels of up to 20 metres in length with freezers allowing them to stay at sea for over a month. TIB licence holders typically fish from smaller vessels of less than six metres in length with limited holding capacity and return their catch to community or private freezer facilities.</p>
<b>Information page</b>	<p>Information on the TSSMF and TSRLF can be found on the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) website: <a href="http://pzja.gov.au/the-fisheries/torres-strait-spanish-mackerel-fishery/">http://pzja.gov.au/the-fisheries/torres-strait-spanish-mackerel-fishery/</a> and <a href="http://pzja.gov.au/the-fisheries/torres-strait-finfish-reef-line-fishery/">http://pzja.gov.au/the-fisheries/torres-strait-finfish-reef-line-fishery/</a></p>
MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS	

<b>Legislation</b>	<p>The TSFF is managed by the PZJA that consists of the Australian Government (represented by the Minister responsible for fisheries, as the Chair of the PZJA), the Queensland Government (represented by the Minister responsible for fisheries) and the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) (represented by the TSRA Chair). The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) coordinates and delivers fisheries management, while the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) delivers compliance programs in the Torres Strait on behalf of the PZJA and in accordance with the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> (TSF Act).</p> <p>Management objectives for the fishery, with regard to the the rights and obligations conferred on Australia by the <i>Torres Strait Treaty 1984</i> (the Treaty) and the objectives to be pursued under the and TSF Act, are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) to acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of traditional inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing<sup>1</sup>;</li> <li>b) to protect and preserve the marine environment and indigenous fauna and flora in and in the vicinity of the Protected Zone;</li> <li>c) to adopt conservation measures necessary for the conservation of a species in such a way as to minimise any restrictive effects of the measures on traditional fishing;</li> <li>d) to manage the fishery for optimum utilisation;</li> <li>e) to have regard, in developing and implementing licensing policy, to the desirability of promoting economic development in the Torres Strait area and employment opportunities for traditional inhabitants.</li> </ul> <p>In accordance with Articles 22 and 23 of the Treaty, catch sharing arrangements exist between Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) that entitles 40 per cent of the total catch of Spanish mackerel from the Australian jurisdiction to be provided to PNG licensed vessels. To date, PNG has not taken up this entitlement.</p> <p>Licences are granted under either subsection 19(2) or 19(3) of the TSF Act that entitles that person to take, process or carry finfish.</p> <p><a href="https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00677">https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2016C00677</a></p>
<b>Regulations, exemptions and/or licence designations</b>	<p>1. Fisheries Management Instruments (FMIs) and Fisheries Management Notices (FMNs) are issued under the TSF Act and give effect to the regulations in place for each of the Torres Strait fisheries.</p> <p><u>Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 14 (Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery)</u></p> <p>Prohibitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prohibition on the taking, processing or carrying of finfish</li> </ul> <p>Exemptions from the prohibitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A person holding a licence to take, process or carry mackerel;</li> <li>• A person holding a licence to take, process or carry finfish may take a maximum of 20 kilograms of mackerel in any form at any one time;</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> Traditional fishing means non-commercial fishing as defined in the TSF Act.

- A person holding a licence other than the kind mentioned above (i.e. Torres Strait fisheries other than finfish & mackerel) may take a maximum combined weight of 20 kilograms of finfish and mackerel in any form at any one time;
- A person using a boat holds a licence that was issued under the law of Papua New Guinea that is endorsed by Australia under Section 20 of the TSF Act, authorising that boat to be used to take Spanish mackerel in the area of Australian jurisdiction; and
- A person who takes, processes or carries finfish in the course of traditional fishing.

Size Limit:

- minimum and maximum size limits apply, except in the course of traditional fishing.

Gear restrictions:

- restricts fishing methods to trolling, handlining or droplining, except in the course of traditional fishing.

Gear restrictions – Bramble Cay/Black Rocks:

- Except in the course of traditional fishing, holders of sunset licences operating in the Australian territorial sea surrounding Bramble Cay and Black Rocks are prohibited to take mackerel:
  - a) between the hours of 0930 and 1500 (eastern standard time) each day during the months of August to December; and
  - b) by any method other than trolling.

<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016L01395>

Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 8 (Torres Strait Finfish Fishery) [TSRFF]

Prohibitions:

- Prohibition on the taking, processing or carrying of finfish

Exemptions from the prohibitions:

- A person holding a licence to take, process or carry finfish;
- A person holding a licence to take, process or carry mackerel may take a maximum of 20 kilograms of finfish in any form at any one time;
- A person holding a licence other than the kind mentioned above (i.e. Torres Strait fisheries other than finfish & mackerel) may take a maximum combined weight of 20 kilograms of finfish and mackerel in any form at any one time;
- A person holding a licence to take, process or carry mackerel use a bait net to take bait for their own use; and
- A person who takes, processes or carries finfish in the course of traditional fishing.

Size Limit:

- minimum and maximum size limits apply, except in the course of traditional fishing.

No Take Species:

- Prohibition on taking, processing or carry finfish listed 'no take species' in the instrument, except in the course of traditional fishing.

Shark Finning:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prohibition on the removal the fins from a shark and discarding the torso into the sea.</li> </ul> <p>Gear restrictions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>limiting the method of taking finfish to line fishing or the use of a bait net, except in the case of traditional fishing.</li> <li>A person in the course of traditional fishing is prohibited to take finfish by the use of a mesh net of more than 100 metres in length, 2.5 metres in depth and having a mesh size greater than 100 millimetres.</li> </ul> <p>Permanent Closures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prohibition on line fishing methods in that part of the finfish fishery west of Longitude 142°31'49".minimum and maximum size limits, except in the course of traditional fishing, except in the course of traditional fishing.</li> </ul> <p>Seasonal Closure – Barramundi:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the taking of barramundi, except in the course of traditional fishing, is prohibited in the area of the finfish fishery during the period commencing from 1200 hours on 1 November in a year and ending 1200 hours on 1 February the following year.</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2011L01837">https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2011L01837</a></p> <p><u>Fisheries Management Notice No. 47 – Torres Strait Fisheries (restriction on size of boats)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>prohibits the use of boats longer than 20 m in the fishery</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2008B00528">https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2008B00528</a></p> <p>2. Licensing arrangements</p> <p>Fishing is limited to traditional inhabitants only in the commercial finfish fishery. Traditional inhabitants can enter this fishery by obtaining a Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) fishing licence with a mackerel (MK) or reef line (LN) endorsement. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) assesses and issues licences on behalf of the PZJA.</p>
<b>Management plan</b>	The <i>Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013</i> is currently in effect: <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2013L01394">https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2013L01394</a>
<b>Other management documents</b>	A harvest strategy is currently being developed for the fishery.
<b>FISHERY STATUS</b>	
<b>Annual report</b>	<p>PZJA Annual Report 2011-2014: <a href="http://pzja.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/8125-AFMA-PZJA-Annual-Report-20112014_Accessible-updated.pdf">http://pzja.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/8125-AFMA-PZJA-Annual-Report-20112014_Accessible-updated.pdf</a></p> <p>ABARES Fishery Status Report 2016: <a href="http://data.daff.gov.au/data/warehouse/9aam/fsrXXd9abm_/fsr16d9abm_20160930/16_FishStatus2016TorresStraitFinfish_1.0.0.pdf">http://data.daff.gov.au/data/warehouse/9aam/fsrXXd9abm_/fsr16d9abm_20160930/16_FishStatus2016TorresStraitFinfish_1.0.0.pdf</a></p>
<b>Stock assessment</b>	A stock assessment conducted in 2006 considered the Spanish mackerel stock fully exploited, despite catch being relatively stable over several decades (Begg et al. 2006). The 2006 stock assessment estimated stocks to be between 26 and 67 per cent of unfished biomass. However, the buyout of the non-Traditional

	<p>Inhabitant sector in 2007-08 resulted in a catch decrease to such an extent that the fishery has not since been considered overfished or subject to overfishing.</p> <p>O'Neill (2016) has updated the previous assessment performed by Begg et al. (2006). The new assessment examines 11 further years of logbook data where harvest levels and fishing effort have declined since 2006 (average 64 to 105 t compared to an average of 98-233 t from 1989 to 2006). The updated stock advised that if harvests increase above 150 t and/or fishing effort increases above 1000 operation days, then catch rates may erode long term. Based on this and other recommendations from this and other reports, the Torres Strait Hand Collectable Working Group have recommended a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 tonnes (from the previous relatively arbitrary TAC of 187.7 tonnes) for the 2017-18 Spanish mackerel fishing season.</p> <p>A stock assessment of the target species in the TSRLF has not been completed, though Williams et al. (2007) completed a management strategy evaluation (MSE) of the fishery. The outcomes indicated that the current arrangements, and all other management strategies evaluated, were predicted to maintain coral trout stocks above 40 per cent available virgin biomass. The size limits applied to relevant commercial species in this fishery have been chosen to allow at least 50 per cent of the stock to reach maturity and spawn at least once before capture. In 2004, a biomass estimate indicated a biomass above 60 per cent virgin biomass. Coral trout catches in recent years have been well below the lowest catch level simulation in the 2007 MSE, which estimated stocks would increase to more than 80 per cent of virgin biomass within 20 years. However, the buyout of the non-Traditional Inhabitant sector in 2007-08 resulted in a catch decrease to such an extent that the fishery has not since been considered overfished or subject to overfishing.</p> <p><a href="http://sophoswebproxy.afma.gov.au/cgi-bin/patience.cgi?id=5e061b17-17ae-468f-91fd-0a8d4f8117f5">http://sophoswebproxy.afma.gov.au/cgi-bin/patience.cgi?id=5e061b17-17ae-468f-91fd-0a8d4f8117f5</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ashley_Williams10/publication/268327243_Evaluation_of_the_Eastern_Torres_Strait_Reef_Line_Fishery/links/546d99d50cf2193b94c58a18.pdf">https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ashley_Williams10/publication/268327243_Evaluation_of_the_Eastern_Torres_Strait_Reef_Line_Fishery/links/546d99d50cf2193b94c58a18.pdf</a></p>
<b>Ecological risk assessment</b>	An ERA has not been developed for the fishery. Because finfish are caught using single line methods the ecological impact on the benthos from harvesting these species is negligible.
<b>SPECIES</b>	
<b>Target species</b>	The TSRLF targets high value species including the coral trout group ( <i>Plectropomus</i> spp and <i>Variola</i> spp), red emperor and barramundi cod, however up to 100 species may be taken in the fishery and sold as 'reef fish'. The TSSMF primarily targets Spanish mackerel ( <i>Scomberomorus commerson</i> ), with minor take of other mackerel species.

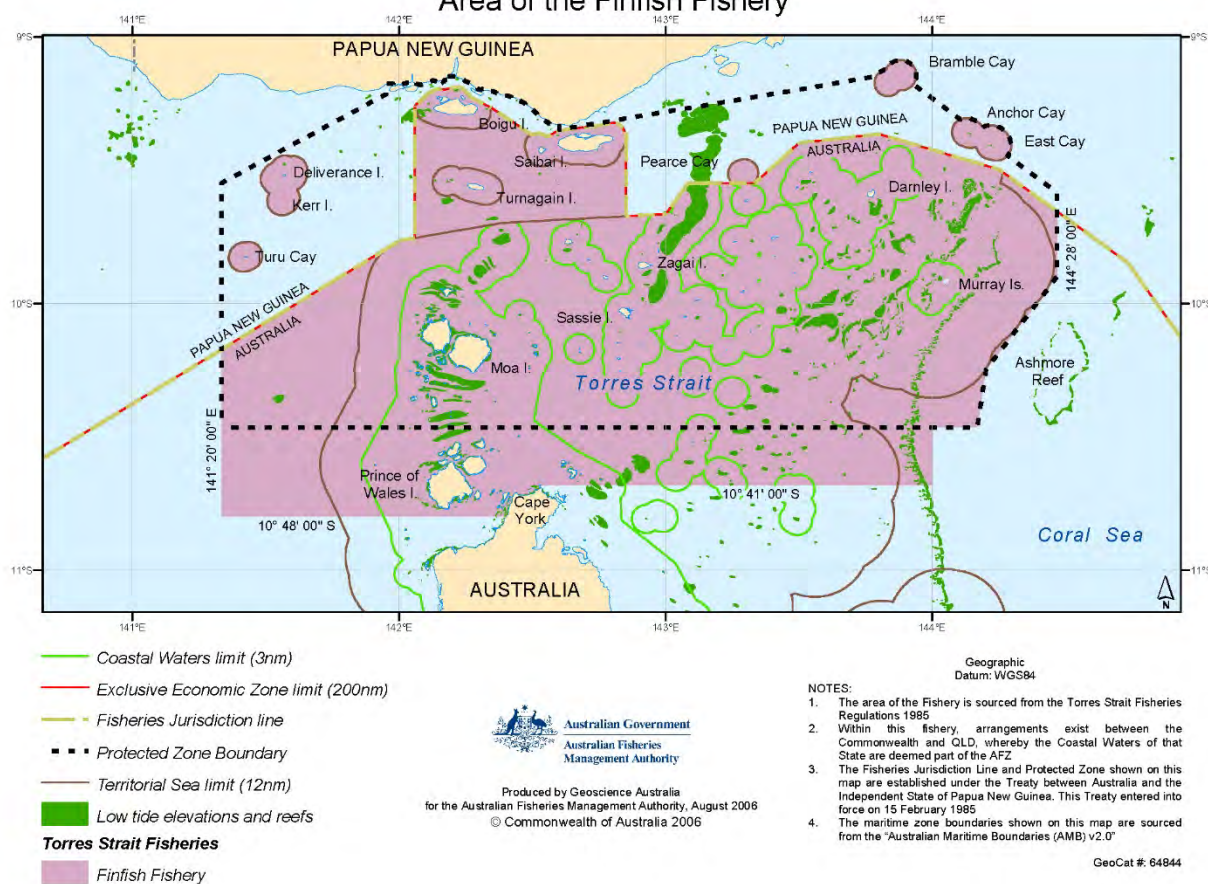
<b>Byproduct species (retained)</b>	Due to the high selectivity of fishing methods used to catch finfish (i.e. line caught) there is no byproduct (of non-fish species) other than the many non-target finfish species that may be taken and sold as 'reef fish'.
<b>Bycatch species (non-retained)</b>	Due to the high selectivity of fishing methods used to catch finfish (i.e. line caught) only small number of non-target finfish species may be discarded.
<b>Protected species</b>	<p>The following list of 'no take' finfish species for which a prohibition on fishing applies (as provided in FMI No.8) includes species that are protected under Queensland and/or Commonwealth legislation:</p> <p>potato cod (<i>Epinephelus tukula</i>)          Queensland groper (<i>Epinephelus lanceolatus</i>)          chinaman fish (<i>Symphorus nematophorus</i>)          paddletail (<i>Lutjanus gibbus</i>)          humphead Maori wrasse (<i>Cheilinus undulatus</i>)          hammerhead shark (<i>Sphyrna lewini</i>)          grey nurse shark (<i>Carcharias taurus</i>)          tiger shark (<i>Galeocerdo cuvier</i>)</p> <p>Incidental catch of the above species may occur in the finfish fishery. However, due to the high selectivity of fishing methods employed, this is rare.</p> <p>Due to the non-destructive nature of fishing methods employed in the finfish fishery, interactions with other protected species is highly unlikely.</p> <p>AFMA requires interactions with Threatened, Endangered or Protected (TEP) species to be recorded in logbooks. There have been no interactions with TEP species reported in this fishery to date.</p>
<b>PROGRESS AGAINST PREVIOUS EPBC CONDITIONS (DELETE IF NOT APPLICABLE)</b>	
<b>Condition 1:</b> Operation of the fishery will be carried out in accordance with the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013 in force under the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> .	Condition adhered to.
<b>Condition 2:</b> The Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment of any intended amendments to the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery's management	There have been no amendments to the management regime for the TSFF since the last Strategic Assessment report.

<p>arrangements that may affect the assessment of the TSFF against the criteria on which EPBC Act decisions are based.</p>	
<p><b>Condition 3:</b> The PZJA to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy as per Appendix B of the <i>Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition</i>.</p>	<p>This submission, as requested by the Department of the Environment and Energy, adheres to the Guidelines as the 'Standard' level of information required for assessment outlined under 'Option 1'.</p> <p>This report contains all the information required for assessment as described within Appendix B of the Guidelines.</p>
<p><b>PROGRESS AGAINST PREVIOUS EPBC RECOMMENDATIONS (DELETE IF NOT APPLICABLE)</b></p>	
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> The Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement strategies to improve estimates of all fishery-related removals from the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</p>	<p>AFMA continues to collect catch information through the <i>Torres Strait Finfish Daily Fishing Log – TSF01</i> and the docket book system.</p> <p>AFMA continues to promote catch reporting with industry across all fisheries. The importance of catch reporting is discussed in all consultative forums and community consultations.</p> <p>Despite low levels of effort in the fishery and subsequent low levels of risk, AFMA is continually looking for ways to improve catch reporting. AFMA is exploring the introduction of fish receiver licenses, and mandatory catch reporting in all sectors. A project is currently underway to quantify traditional take of finfish species.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> The Protected Zone Joint Authority to develop and implement reference points and relevant management responses, including timeframes for management responses, for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</p>	<p>The <i>Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013</i> provides the basis of current management responses in the TSFF. In November 2015, the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee invited expressions of interest in the development of a Harvest Strategy for the TSFF. The intention is that a Harvest Strategy should be developed for implementation in late 2017.</p> <p>The current TAC is 135 tonnes in the Reef Line fishery, and 125 tonnes in the Spanish mackerel fishery.</p>



## Torres Strait Fisheries

### Area of the Finfish Fishery





Queensland  
Government



TORRES STRAIT  
**PZJA**  
PROTECTED ZONE  
JOINT AUTHORITY

## Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Export Accreditation Application

May 2016

This report has been prepared by AFMA for consideration by the Department of the Environment in relation to the exemption of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery from export controls under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.



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## Purpose

This document has been developed by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) on behalf of the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) to apply for the exemption of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (TSFF) from export controls under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). The TSFF was strategically assessed in 2012 under Parts 10, 13 and 13A of the EPBC Act. Export approval was granted through declaring the TSFF a Wildlife Trade Operation for a period of three years, valid until 26 May 2016. This document is to be submitted to the Department of the Environment in support of renewing WTO export accreditation for the TSFF.

## Description of the Fishery

### **Governing legislation**

The TSFF is managed by the PZJA considering advice from its consultative bodies. This Authority consists of the Australian Government (represented by the Minister responsible for fisheries, as the Chair of the PZJA), the Queensland Government (represented by the Minister responsible for fisheries) and the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) (represented by the TSRA Chair). The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) coordinates and delivers fisheries management, while the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) delivers compliance programs in the Torres Strait on behalf of the PZJA and in accordance with the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (TSF Act). Aquaculture and recreational fishing, including charter fishing, are managed under Queensland law. The TSRA represents the interests of Traditional Inhabitants through programs facilitating sustainable economic development and ensuring protection of the environment. The TSRA implements quota leasing arrangements through leasing of sunset licenses in the TSFF.

The management regime is legislated through Fisheries Management Instruments (FMIs) and Fisheries Management Notices (FMNs) under the TSF Act and conditions on fishing permits. FMNs are issued under the TSF Act and give effect to the fisheries responsibilities of the *Torres Strait Treaty 1985* (the Treaty) and related management arrangements between Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) (see section 3.4). Under Section 16 of the TSF Act amendments regulating fishing activities require the Minister to issue a legislative instrument published in such a manner as is prescribed. The Minister or his/her delegate also has the power to add, vary or revoke conditions listed on fishing licenses.

### **Target species**

1 The TSFF (Figure 1) is comprised of the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery (TSSMF), and the Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery (TSRLF). The term ‘finfish’ is used as a collective term to describe these fisheries.

2 The Reef Line Fishery targets high value species including the coral trout group (*Plectropomus* spp and *Variola* spp), red emperor and barramundi cod, however up to 100 species may be taken in the fishery and sold as “reef fish”. The Spanish Mackerel Fishery primarily targets Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*), with minor take of other mackerel species.



## **Management arrangements**

3 Management objectives for the fishery as described in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013 (the Management Plan), in accordance with the Treaty and the TSF Act are:

- i. To acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of Traditional Inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing for finfish
- ii. Harvest levels are at, or below levels that maintain biologically viable stocks of target and non-target species
- iii. To provide for the use and conservation of TSFF resources in a way that minimizes impact on the marine environment
- iv. To optimise economic viability of the fishery
- v. To provide for optimal utilisation, cooperative management, and for catch sharing to occur with PNG

AFMA has been responsible for issuing licences on behalf of the PZJA since 1 July 2015. Prior to this QDAF was responsible for issuing licences. All commercial finfish catch entitlements are held by Australian Traditional Inhabitants, however, non-traditional inhabitant fishers can access the fishery by leasing sunset licences with catch limits for Spanish mackerel and coral trout. The leasing process is managed by the TSRA on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. Traditional Inhabitants can enter this fishery by obtaining a Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) fishing licence with Spanish mackerel (MK) and reef line (RF) endorsements. Entry to Traditional Inhabitants is not restricted. The majority of the catch is taken by a small number of sunset licenced commercial operators. In 2014 there were five sunset licenced operators in the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery, and one sunset licenced operator in the Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery. Sunset licences and associated catch limits are reviewed by the TSRA Board on an annual basis. As at 28 January 2016 there were 170 TIB licences endorsed for finfish (43 Spanish mackerel, 32 reef line and 95 with both).

Management arrangements currently in place for the Australian area of the TSFF include:

### **1. Fisheries Management Notices**

Community Fishing Notice No. 1 – Prohibits taking fish in the course of community fishing without a licence

Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 8 includes -

- limiting the method of taking finfish to line fishing or the use of a bait net, except in the case of traditional fishing<sup>2</sup>;
- no take species;
- maximum size limits for elasmobranchs and a prohibition on shark finning; and
- finfish minimum and maximum size limits, except in the case of traditional fishing.

Torres Strait Fisheries Management Notice No. 47 – Torres Strait Fisheries (restriction on size of boats) includes –

- prohibits the use of boats longer than 20 m in the fishery

<sup>2</sup> Traditional fishing means non-commercial fishing as defined in the TSF Act.



Torres Strait Fisheries Management Notice No. 79 – Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery – Prohibitions relating to the taking, processing and carrying of Spanish mackerel (gear and size restrictions and take and carry limit)

- Spanish mackerel size limits
- restricts fishing methods to trolling, handlining or droplining in the TSPMF.

## 2. Notional Total Allowable Catch (TAC)

- A notional TAC of 135 tonnes for coral trout and 187.7 tonnes for Spanish mackerel has been in place since 2008. The TAC facilitates Australia to meet its obligations under the Torres Strait Treaty, and supports fishery performance management and temporary quota leasing for the key target finfish species (coral trout and Spanish mackerel) in the Australian zone. The TSRA Board's recommendation on catch limits applied to sunset licences includes consideration of potential TIB catch in relation to the Australian share of the notional TAC.

## 3. Licensing arrangements

- The issue of new licences is restricted to boats wholly owned and operated by Traditional Inhabitants.
- The TSRA holds and leases quota to temporary licence holders (sunset licences) annually. Each sunset licence has a defined quota attached, and sunset licence holders are required to submit catch records to AFMA.

## 4. Recreational and Traditional Fishing

- The level of harvest within the recreational and traditional fishing sectors is unknown. A research project, *Monitoring the Traditional Take of Finfish Species in the Torres Strait Protected Zone*, administered by CSIRO was initiated in 2015.

## ***Fishing methods***

Spanish mackerel is targeted using troll lines with hooks baited with garfish or occasionally an artificial lure. Troll lines are deployed from dories of between five and six metres in length. Sunset licence holders operate dories from primary vessels that are typically between nine and sixteen metres in length with freezers allowing them to stay at sea for over a month. TIB licence holders typically fish from smaller vessels with limited holding capacity and return their catch to community or private freezer facilities.

The TSRLF mainly uses hand lines with single hooks baited with pilchards. Fishing rods or mechanically operated reels may also be used. TIB fishers operate from dories of less than six metres in length, while sunset licence holders operate dories from larger primary vessels of up to 20 metres in length.

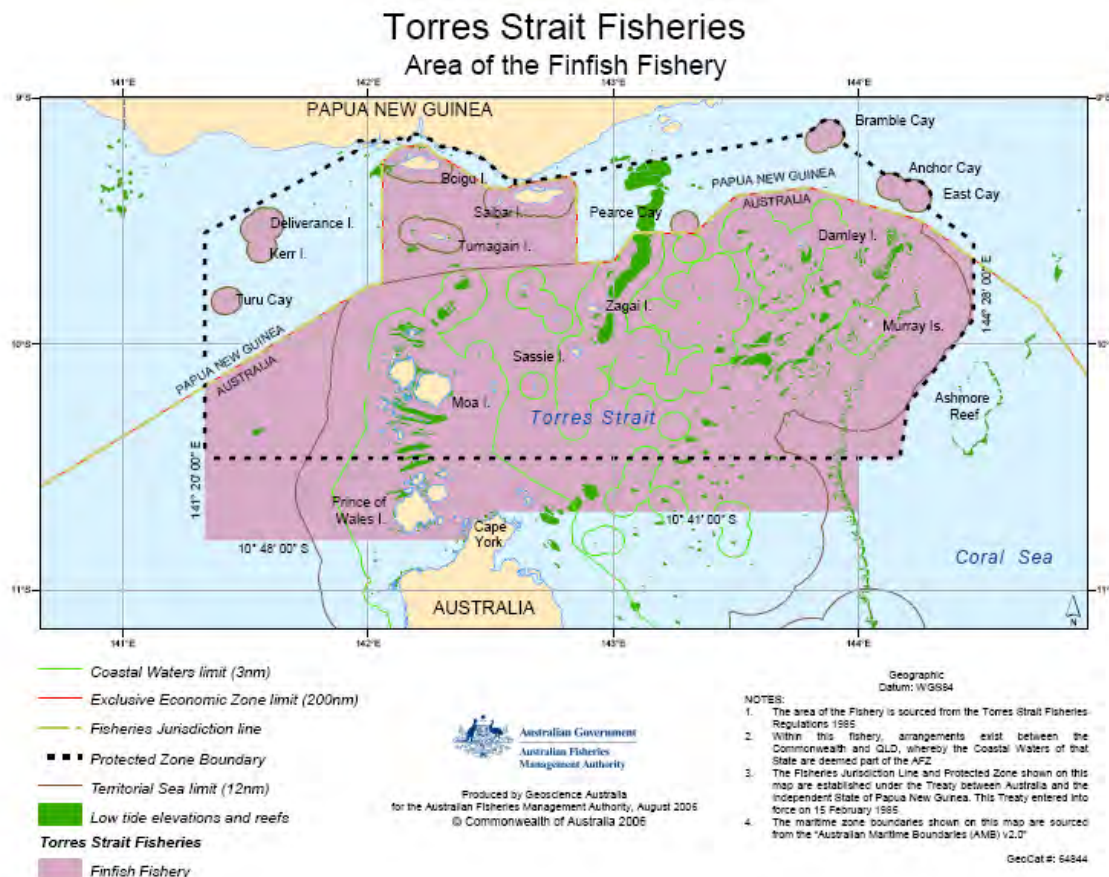
Effort in the fishery decreased from the mid 2000s and has since stabilised. Several factors contributed to the decline, including the voluntary surrender of TVH fishing licenses, government funded structural adjustment and logistical difficulties related to freezer capacity. Catch in the TIB and sunset sectors has followed these trends in effort.



## Fishing area

The TSFF comprises tidal waters within the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) and the area declared under the TSF Act to be 'outside but near' the TSPZ for commercial fishing for finfish (Figure 1). For the TSFF, the outside but near area extends to waters just south of Prince of Wales Island to the west and to due east of Cape York Peninsula.

There is a closure to the Reef Line Fishery west of Longitude 142° 31'49" set out in Fisheries Management Instrument No. 8. In addition, there are restrictions on fishing within 10 nautical miles of Mer (Murray) Island, Ugar (Stephen) Island, Masig (Yorke) Island, and Erub (Darnley) Island for those fishers operating under a sunset licence. In addition, Big Mary, Little Mary and Kaliko reefs are closed to fishing under sunset licence conditions. These restrictions are implemented through conditions on the licences.



**Figure 1: Area of the TSFF.**

### ***Allocation between sectors***

Following the restructure of the fishery in 2007/2008, 100 per cent of the Australian share of the fishery is now allocated to Australian Traditional Inhabitants, however, Non-traditional inhabitant operators may lease licenses temporarily (sunset licences). A quota management committee provides advice to the TSRA Board on the recommended amount of coral trout and Spanish mackerel to be available annually for leasing through sunset licences. The TSSMF is an Article 22 fishery under the Treaty, and the resource is shared between PNG and Australia under guidelines set out in the Treaty. Forty per cent of the Spanish mackerel allocation is made available to PNG in accordance with catch sharing arrangements under the Treaty (see section 3.4).

A 2008 study of Traditional Inhabitant subsistence (non-commercial) catch found that subsistence fishing yielded similar quantities of fish to the combined TIB and TVH commercial sectors (Busilacchi 2008). However, species composition of subsistence catch differed markedly from commercial catch. As a result, subsistence fishing is considered unlikely to have a large impact on the fish stocks targeted by commercial fisheries.

# Management

## ***Statement of performance of the fishery against objectives, performance indicators and measures***

The TSFF Fishery is managed in accordance with the objectives specified in the TSF Act, as implemented through the Management Plan. The performance of the fishery is reported in the PZJA annual report.

As per the Management Plan, the TSFF is managed against the following objectives:

**Objective 1: To acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of Traditional Inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing for finfish**

**Objective 2: Harvest levels are at, or below levels that maintain biologically viable stocks of target and non-target species**

**Objective 3: To provide for the use and conservation of TSFF resources in a way that minimizes impact on the marine environment**

**Objective 4: To optimise economic viability of the fishery**

**Objective 5: To provide for optimal utilisation, cooperative management, and for catch sharing to occur with PNG**

Strategy	Objective	Performance Criteria	Outcome
Facilitate implementation of management arrangements on the taking, processing and carrying of finfish for commercial purposes	1	Total commercial catch of target and non-target species or species groups is at or below agreed annual catch limits	Spanish mackerel catch in 2013-14 was 105.4t, which is below the global notional TAC of 187.7t for Spanish mackerel in the TSPZ.  Coral trout and other finfish catch in 2013-14 was 30.9t and 2.1t respectively, which is below the 135t notional TAC.
Facilitate implementation of management arrangements on the taking, processing and carrying of finfish (gear, size and area restrictions, take and carry limits)	2	Total catch of target species or species groups is at or below agreed annual catch limits	All finfish catches were below agreed quota in 2013-14
	3	Number of commercial fishery interactions with listed marine and threatened species	0 interactions reported 2012-2015
		Total catch of target and non-target species or species group	Catch of target species groups falls within leasing arrangement parameters (ie annual catch is below the notional TAC)
Implement Quota Management System (QMS) (TAC/TAE) if determined by the PZJA	2, 3	Total catch of target and non-target species or species groups is at or below agreed annual catch limits	Total catch of target and non-target species below nominal TAC 2012-2015
Facilitate effective fisheries management arrangements that allow for efficient fishing operations	4	Total number of used and unused Units of Fishing Capacity	TSSMF fished to 93% of notional Australian TAC in 2014/15  TSRLF fished to 23% of notional TAC in 2014/15
Provide for Units of Fishing Capacity (if QMS is implemented)		The number of transfers of Units of Fishing Capacity per fishing season (if QMS is implemented)	Not implemented
Allow for non-Traditional inhabitant fishers to hold a temporary licence (sunset license) and fish in the fishery		Total weight of quota species issued to temporary licence holders per fishing season	5 sunset licences accessed TSSPM quota in the 2014/15 season 1 sunset licence only in TSRLF in the 2014/15 season
Provide for the transfer of licenses		Numbers of sunset licences transferred to non-Traditional Inhabitants	6 sunset licences leased in the 2014/15 season
Allow for PNG licence holder to be issued cross endorsement for the fishery	5	Cross endorsements issued to PNG, if requested, in a timely manner	PNG has so far declined offers to participate in the Spanish mackerel fishery, so cross endorsements have not been issued. At the 2015 Australia-PNG bilateral meeting PNG confirmed they would not access their entitlement in 2016-17.
Allow for the conditions on PNG cross endorsements to be complementary to TSFF licence holders		Conditions on cross endorsements issued are consistent with Treaty obligations	

### ***Compliance risks present in the fishery and actions taken to reduce these risks***

4 Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol (QB&FP) enforcement officers check for compliance with regulations such as gear restrictions and size limits, as well as any unlicensed fishing for commercial purposes for domestic fishers. The TSF Act outlines the penalties associated with non-compliance. There were no reported breaches of regulations in the TSFF in 2015.

5 Compliance in the TSFF is difficult as much of the fishing occurs in remote areas amongst many boats that are spread over a vast area. The current compliance program is restricted by the costs of implementing a program in these circumstances.

Foreign illegal fishing is not considered a significant risk for the main TSFF species due to low value. The trade in shark fin presents a risk, though the use of nets by PNG fishers targeting barramundi and jewfish means the take of shark tends to be incidental. Historically, incursions by Indonesian vessels targeting shark through longlining were a risk, but longlining for sharks by Indonesian fishermen has not been sighted in the Torres Strait Protected Zone since the mid 2000's. AFMA, one of Maritime Border Command's partner agencies, maintains a high level of compliance presence in the Torres Strait to ensure the risk of incursions by foreign fishing vessels is kept to a minimum. This is achieved with the co-operation of other Commonwealth government agencies and, in particular, the Australian Border Force. There was no reported foreign non-compliance targeting the Finfish Fishery in 2015.

### ***Consultation processes***

6 The PZJA established its current structure of consultative forums in 2003 (Figure 2). Traditional Inhabitant industry representatives, together with non-traditional inhabitant industry and government representatives, actively participate in the development of management arrangements and make recommendation to the PZJA.

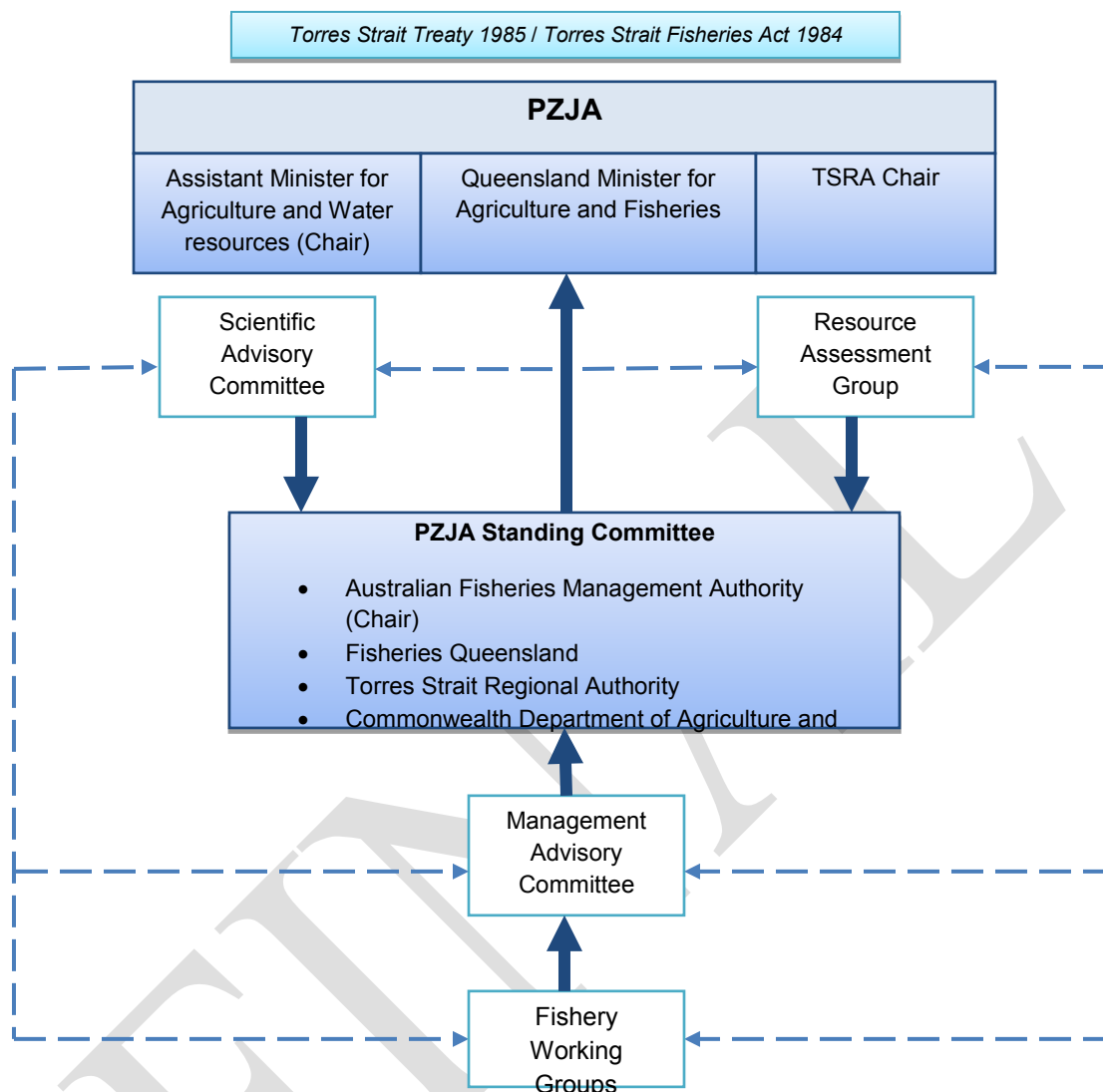
7 The PZJA at its meeting in April 1999 created the Finfish Working Group to advise on management of the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel and Reef Line Fisheries. AFMA, on behalf of the PZJA, conducts Native Title notification in accordance with the *Native Title Act 1993*. The role and responsibilities of the PZJA consultative forums are detailed in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No 1.

8 In addition, the PZJA agencies (AFMA, TSRA and QDAF) consult as widely as practicable to develop sound fisheries management arrangements. Stakeholders are invited to discuss issues relevant to the fishery at regular stakeholder meetings. This allows the PZJA to take into account any representations received outside of the consultative forums when making management decisions.

9 In its consideration of applications for sunset licenses, the TSRA utilizes a Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) comprised of community representatives. The FQMC provides advice to the TSRA Board on sunset license proposals, including community-related and cultural issues.

10 AFMA also consults with the Department of the Environment in regard to proposed management arrangements, including submission of the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013* for strategic assessment in 2012.





**Figure 2: Flow chart outlining the consultative structure of the PZJA.**

### ***Description of cross-jurisdictional management arrangements***

12 Australia and PNG entered into the Treaty in 1985. The Treaty is concerned with sovereignty and maritime boundaries in the area between the two countries, and the protection of the traditional way of life and livelihood of Traditional Inhabitants and of the marine environment. The Treaty also establishes the TSPZ in which each country exercises sovereign jurisdiction for swimming fish and sedentary species on the respective sides of the agreed jurisdiction lines. The lines are known as the Fisheries Jurisdiction Line and Seabed Jurisdiction Line (Figure 1).

13 The Commonwealth parliament passed the TSF Act to give effect to the fisheries provisions of the Treaty. The PZJA has regard to the rights and obligations conferred on Australia by the Treaty, in particular, the protection of the traditional way of life and livelihood of the Traditional Inhabitants, including their traditional fishing.



14 Australia and PNG hold annual fisheries bilateral discussions, to negotiate subsidiary conservation and management arrangements in the TSPZ fisheries. This includes agreeing to annual catch sharing arrangements in Article 22 fisheries in accordance with the Treaty (prawn, tropical rock lobster, Spanish mackerel, and pearl shell).

15 The TSSMF is currently under catch sharing arrangements with PNG as allowed under Articles 22 and 23 of the Treaty. These arrangements allow for 40 per cent of the total catch of Spanish mackerel from the Australian jurisdiction to be provided to PNG licensed vessels under the Treaty. uine

16 The Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery is not an Article 22 fishery and is, therefore, not managed in conjunction with PNG.

### ***Compliance with threat abatement and recovery plans and relevant domestic and international agreements***

Due to the TSFF being restricted to fishing with hand lines rigged with a single hook and the small scale of the fishery, all bycatch is returned to the water alive. An Ecological Risk Assessment has not been conducted to date due to the highly selective fishing methods utilised and the low level of exploitation resulting in very low levels of interaction with bycatch species, habitats or the environment. Given the continued low level of effort in the fishery and low Gross Value of Production, it is uncertain at this time when an ERA will be conducted. At this time there are no relevant threat abatement plans, recovery plans, or domestic and international agreements to comply with.

## **Research and Monitoring**

### ***Results of any research completed relevant to the fishery, including how results will be incorporated into management of the fishery***

The primary research underpinning TSFF management arrangements is the stock assessment carried out by Begg et al. (2006). Below is an update on more recent fishery research.

#### ***Smart Phone technology for remote data collection in Torres Strait traditional inhabitant finfish fisheries (Haartman and French, UTAS)***

Catch reporting is voluntary for the TIB sector, therefore, reliable catch data from TIB fishers in the finfish fishery is difficult to obtain and verify for accuracy, and is often incomplete. By developing smartphone technology, the project sought to improve the quality of fishery data collected and the level of uptake and participation by the TIB sector. The project demonstrated the utility of smartphone technology in allowing TIB fishers to provide real time catch data with accurate spatial and species data. The project demonstrated a potential for greater uptake by TIB fishers to report catch and improve the quality of data collected, while increasing fisher awareness of the benefits of data collection. The project trialled and successfully demonstrated a proof of concept. AFMA is in dialogue with the researchers regarding whether the outcomes can be adopted more widely in the future, which is uncertain at this time.

#### ***Defining the Status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing (Tobin, JCU)***

This project involves undertaking a review of the 2006 Spanish mackerel stock assessment with more robust data and updated analytical methods to provide for greater certainty in stock status. The project also aims to explore locations and periods where Spanish



mackerel is most vulnerable to capture. Acoustic monitoring is being deployed to define movement and aggregating characteristics of Spanish mackerel within the fishing grounds. These measures will allow for greater certainty in future management of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel stock, and the updating of the current notional TAC applied to the fishery. The logbook-based analysis and the first of two years of acoustic monitoring have been completed as of February 2016.

*Monitoring the traditional take of finfish species in the TSPZ (Skewes, CSIRO)*

This project aims to estimate the traditional catch of Torres Strait Island communities, to provide greater certainty of exploitation of commercially targeted finfish stocks, and further inform management decisions that promote sustainable harvests for the commercial and traditional fishing sectors. The project will also review the current monitoring and data collection processes and context, characterise current and future data needs, and define future scenarios for long-term sustainable fishery management in conjunction with key stakeholders, including consultation with Torres Strait communities. The project also aims to involve and train Torres Strait Islanders to carry out monitoring during the program and into the future. The project is scheduled for delivery in mid-2017.

***Description of monitoring programs used to gather information on the fishery (such as observer programs, long term monitoring programs etc) and results of these***

The majority of catch in the TSFF is taken by holders of sunset licences leased through the TSRA. A condition of these licences is mandatory catch reporting using the *Torres Strait Finfish Daily Fishing Log – TSF01*, which is submitted to AFMA. AFMA provides catch data to the TSRA in response to formal requests, in support of its leasing arrangements which have licence specific quotas. Under the TSF Act, catch reporting by TIB fishers is not mandatory, but effort is considered to be low in this sector.

***Results of any collaborative research undertaken for the fishery***

AFMA will keep the Department of the Environment informed of potential collaborative research.

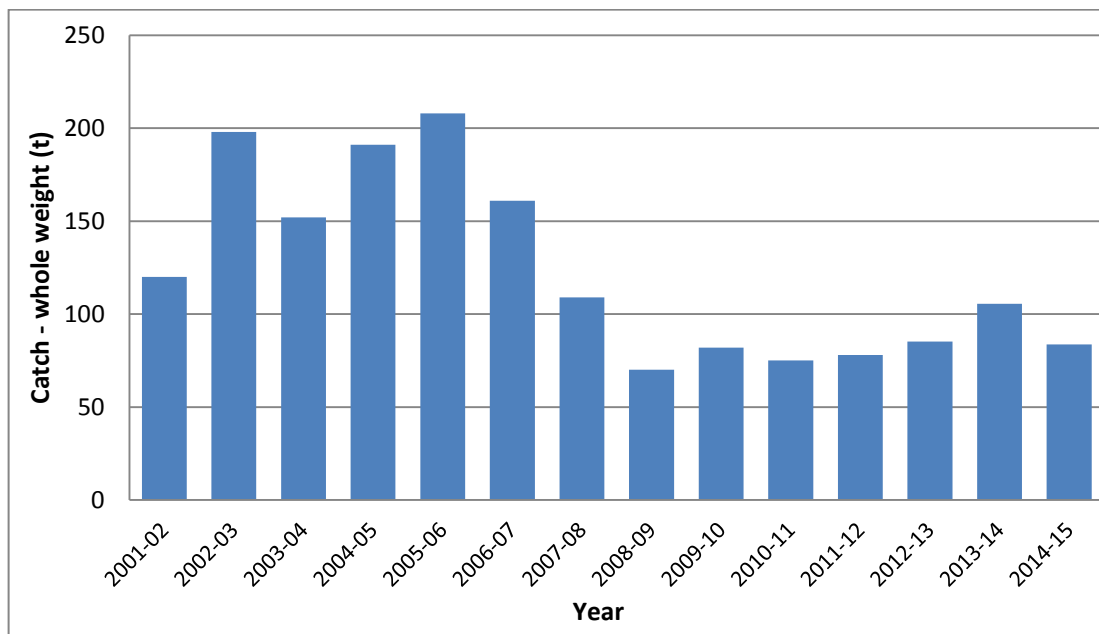


## Catch data

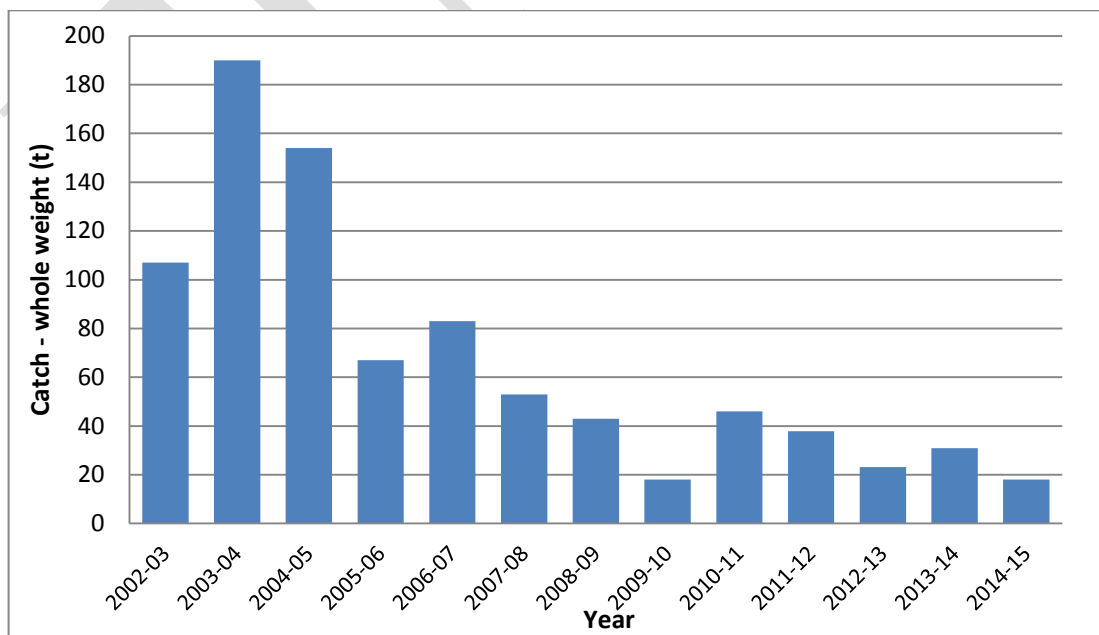
### **Total catch of target species (including retained and discarded catch)**

The total catches of target species for 2014-15 were:

Spanish mackerel ( <i>Scomberomorus commerson</i> )	83.7t
Coral trout ( <i>Plectropomus</i> sp.)	18t



**Figure 3:** Catches of Spanish mackerel as reported through the *Torres Strait Finfish Daily Fishing Log – TSF01* and the docket book database.



**Figure 4:** Catches of coral trout as reported through the *Torres Strait Finfish Daily Fishing Log – TSF01* and the docket book database.



## **Total catch of target species taken in other fisheries**

There is no catch of target species in other fisheries.

### ***Catch of by-product species (reported by species)***

The total catches of by-product species for 2013-14 were:

Red emperor ( <i>Lutjanus sebae</i> )	160kg
Barramundi cod ( <i>Cromileptes altivelis</i> )	786kg
Mixed reef fish	1011kg

### ***Total catch of bycatch species (reported by species if possible)***

Due to the TSFF being restricted to fishing with hand lines rigged with a single hook and the small scale of the fishery, all bycatch is returned to the water alive. Observation of fishing practices in Torres Strait indicates that between 40 and 45 per cent of total catch are released (Williams et al. 2007). Survival rates for released reef fish are considered to be high, ranging from between 40 and 100 per cent depending on species (<http://frdc.com.au/research/final-reports/Pages/2003-019-DLD.aspx>)

There are 8 no take species within the fishery which are:

- potato cod (*Epinephelus tukula*)
- Queensland grouper (*E. laneolatus*)
- Chinaman fish (*Symphorus nematophorus*)
- paddletail (*Lutjanus gibbus*)
- humphead Maori wrasse (*Cheilinus undulatus*)
- grey nurse shark (*Carcharias taurus*)
- hammerhead shark (*Sphyrna lewini*)
- tiger shark (*Galeocerdo cuvier*).

### ***Harvest by each sector (commercial, recreational, indigenous and illegal)***

The reported harvest for the commercial sector in 2013-14 was 105.4 tonnes of Spanish mackerel and 30.9 tonnes of coral trout. These figures are likely to be underestimated as reporting in the TIB sector is voluntary.

The level of harvest within the recreational and traditional fishing sectors is unknown.

There was no illegal harvest reported in 2014-15.

### ***Effort data including information on any trends***

Effort in the TVH sector in 2013-14 increased to 523 operation days recorded with catch of mackerel compared to 370 days in 2012-13. With over 1000 days recorded in 1999, effort is still low compared to historical fishery activity. Effort in the Reef Line sector was similarly very low with 112 operation days recorded with catch of coral trout. The low level of effort is due to the small number of active boats in the TVH sector following the introduction of leasing in 2008.

Current effort data is limited to that provided in the *Torres Strait Finfish Daily Fishing Log – TSF01* and very low levels of *Torres Strait Seafood Buyers & Processors Docket Book – TDB01* sheets returned to AFMA. Under current legislation it is not mandatory for the TIB sector to provide catch and effort details and the docket books kept by buyers are voluntary



only. The number of TIB entries in the Spanish mackerel fishery remained steady with 135 in 2012-13 and 136 in 2013-14. The number of TIB Reef Line entries increased from 122 entries in 2012-13 to 132 entries in 2013-14.

### ***Spatial issues/trends***

Commercial harvest in the TSRLF is mainly from the north eastern area of the Torres Strait. This is partly due to a closure to TSRLF fishing in the western Torres Strait, but also due to the presence of suitable reef habitat in the eastern areas. There are clear differences in the distribution of harvest between the commercial TIB and TVH sectors. TVH catches are distributed over a wider area of the fishery but predominately around the north eastern Torres Strait area. Traditional Inhabitant catch is concentrated on reefs near the islands of Masig (Yorke), Mer (Murray), Erub (Darnley) and Ugar (Stephens) (Williams et al. 2007).

Spanish mackerel catch from the TVH sector predominately comes from the far northern area of Bramble Cay and Black Rock. The TIB sector catch tends to be concentrated around Erub Island, although smaller quantities are also recorded from Mer, Masig and Ugar (Begg et al. 2006). A 10nm closure around Erub, Mer, Ugar and Masig is in place for TVH fishers leasing sunset licences via leasing conditions, but this is not expected to have significantly changed fishing patterns.

## **Status of target stock**

### ***Resource concerns***

The TSFF is not considered subject to resource concerns. In its most recent report, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), taking into consideration the latest surveys along with the current catch levels of Spanish mackerel and coral trout, classified the fishery as not being subject to overfishing, and not overfished (Patterson *et al.* 2015). Both fisheries have been classified by ABARES as not subject to overfishing and not overfished since 2006, and prior to this biomass was considered uncertain due to a lack of data.

Fisheries activity significantly reduced following the introduction of leased sunset licences in the fishery. Under the Finfish Management Plan, the PZJA may change to a quota management system if necessary and/or limit the number of licence entries in the fishery.

Foreign illegal fishing is not considered a risk for the TSFF due to the low level of interest by foreign fishers in finfish. AFMA Foreign Compliance officers have not found any finfish on commercial foreign fishing vessels in Australian waters to date. Traditional PNG inhabitants target finfish for subsistence means only.

Despite this, AFMA has sought to reduce foreign compliance risks for all Torres Strait fisheries by increasing response coverage by approximately 80 per cent since September 2007. AFMA compliance capabilities include daily Coastwatch flights (one to three flights per day) and there is a permanent Torres Strait response vessel stationed in the region. AFMA officers also participate in scheduled patrols with the Royal Australian Navy.

### ***Results of any stock assessments***

A stock assessment conducted in 2006 considered the Spanish mackerel stock fully exploited, despite catch being relatively stable over several decades (Begg et al. 2006). The 2006 stock assessment estimated stocks to be between 26 and 67 per cent of unfished biomass. However, the buyout of the non-Traditional Inhabitant sector in 2007-08 resulted in a catch decrease to such an extent that the fishery has not since been considered overfished or subject to overfishing.



A stock assessment of the target species in the TSRLF has not been completed, though Williams et al. (2007) completed a management strategy evaluation (MSE) of the fishery. The outcomes indicated that the current arrangements, and all other management strategies evaluated, were predicted to maintain coral trout stocks above 40 per cent available virgin biomass. The size limits applied to relevant commercial species in this fishery have been chosen to allow at least 50 per cent of the stock to reach maturity and spawn at least once before capture. In 2004, a biomass estimate indicated a biomass above 60 per cent virgin biomass. Coral trout catches in recent years have been well below the lowest catch level simulation in the 2007 MSE, which estimated stocks would increase to more than 80 per cent of virgin biomass within 20 years. However, the buyout of the non-Traditional Inhabitant sector in 2007-08 resulted in a catch decrease to such an extent that the fishery has not since been considered overfished or subject to overfishing.

### ***Results of any stock recovery strategies (if applicable)***

As the fishery is not considered overfished, stock recovery strategies are not applicable.

## **Interactions with protected species**

### ***Frequency and nature of interactions***

AFMA requires interactions with Threatened, Endangered or Protected (TEP) species to be recorded in logbooks. There have been no interactions with TEP species reported in this fishery to date.

### ***Management action taken to reduce interactions and results of such action***

Not applicable

## **Impacts of the fishery on the ecosystem in which it operates**

### ***Results of any Ecological Risk Assessments***

The nature of the gear used in the TSFF suggests that the Reef Line and Spanish mackerel fisheries would have minimal impact on the benthos. An Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) has not been conducted to date due to the highly selective fishing methods used, and the low level of exploitation resulting in very low levels of interaction with bycatch species, habitats or the environment. Given the continued low level of effort in the fishery and low GVP it is uncertain at this time when an ERA will be conducted. Given the small scale of the fishery and the methods used, the expectation is that the fishery has a minimal impact on ecologically related, associated or dependant species.

### ***Nature of impacts on the ecosystem***

Although an ERA has not been conducted for the fishery it could be envisaged that impacts on the ecosystem would be restricted to:

- concerns about exploitation levels of target species;
- bycatch and by-product species interactions

### ***Management action taken to reduce impacts and results of such action***

As there has not been an ERA conducted for this fishery to date, there have been no formal management actions taken. The *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013* allows for the implementation of quota and restricted entry to the fisheries should it be determined necessary by the PZJA. The PZJA is evaluating research proposals to develop a Harvest Strategy in 2016, through the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee call for



research process. This process is ongoing.

FINAL



## Progress against recommendations and conditions from Department of Environment's previous accreditation of the fishery

### *Description of progress in implementing each recommendation and condition*

Recommendation	Explanation of progress
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b></p> <p>The Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement strategies to improve estimates of all fishery-related removals from the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</p>	<p>AFMA continues to collect catch information through the <i>Torres Strait Finfish Daily Fishing Log – TSF01</i> and the docket book system.</p> <p>AFMA continues to promote catch reporting with industry across all fisheries. The importance of catch reporting is discussed in all consultative forums and community consultations.</p> <p>Despite low levels of effort in the fishery and subsequent low levels of risk, AFMA is continually looking for ways to improve catch reporting. AFMA is exploring the introduction of fish receiver licenses, and mandatory catch reporting in all sectors. A project is currently underway to quantify traditional take of finfish species.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b></p> <p>The Protected Zone Joint Authority to develop and implement reference points and relevant management responses, including timeframes for management responses, for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</p>	<p>The <i>Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013</i> provides the basis of current management responses in the TSFF. In November 2015, the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee invited expressions of interest in the development of a Harvest Strategy for the TSFF. The intention is that a Harvest Strategy should be developed for implementation in late 2017.</p> <p>The current TAC is 135 tonnes in the Reef Line fishery, and 187 tonnes in the Spanish mackerel fishery.</p>
Condition	Explanation of progress
<p><b>1: Operation of the fishery will be carried out in accordance with the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013 in force under the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i>.</b></p>	<p>Condition adhered to. Refer to section 1 'Description of the Fishery'.</p>
<p><b>2: The Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment of any intended amendments to the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery's management arrangements that may affect the assessment of the TSFF against the criteria on which EPBC Act decisions are based.</b></p>	<p>There have been no amendments to the management regime for the TSFF since the last Strategic Assessment report.</p>
<p><b>3: The PZJA to produce and present reports to the Department of the</b></p>	<p>This submission, as requested by the Department of the Environment, adheres to the Guidelines as the</p>



<b>Environment as per Appendix B of the 'Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries – 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition'.</b>	'Standard' level of information required for assessment outlined under 'Option 1'. This report contains all the information required for assessment as described within Appendix B of the Guidelines.
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***How the measures implemented to address the recommendations and/or conditions have improved management of the fishery***

Measures to implement the Department of Environment's recommendations have improved management of the fishery by encouraging stakeholder participation and data available for management of the fishery, and the development of a Harvest Strategy for the fishery to inform future management action.

## **List of References**

- Begg, GA, Chen, CCM, O'Neill, MF & Rose, DB 2006. Stock assessment of the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel fishery, technical report no. 66, CRC Reef Research Centre, Townsville.
- Busilacchi, S 2008. The subsistence coral reef fishfishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment, PhD thesis, James Cook University.
- Williams, AJ, Begg, GA, Little, LR, Currey, LM, Ballagh, AC & Murchie, CD 2007. Evaluation of the eastern Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery, Fishing and Fisheries Research Centre, technical report 1, James Cook University, Townsville.
- Woodhams, J, Viera, S and Stobutzki, I (eds) 2014. Fishery status reports 2013-14, Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences – Department of Agriculture, Canberra.





Ref: 002068366

Senator the Hon Anne Ruston  
Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator

I am writing to you as Delegate of the Minister for the Environment and Energy in relation to the reassessment of seven Commonwealth-managed fisheries under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

In early 2017, the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) applied for export approvals for the Commonwealth Coral Sea, Commonwealth North West Slope and Western Deepwater Trawl, Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer, Torres Strait Finfish, Torres Strait Prawn, Torres Strait Trochus, and Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster fisheries under the EPBC Act.

These applications have now been assessed and I have agreed to declare five fisheries (Commonwealth Coral Sea, Commonwealth North West Slope and Western Deepwater Trawl, Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer, Torres Strait Finfish and Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster fisheries) as approved wildlife trade operations under section 303FN (Part 13A) of the EPBC Act for three years, until 18 December 2020. These approvals are subject to conditions agreed by officials from both departments as areas requiring ongoing attention (Attachment 1).

Based on current management arrangements, I have also agreed to exempt the Torres Strait Prawn and Torres Strait Trochus Fisheries from requiring EPBC Act export permits for nine years, until 9 October 2026. Should fishing effort reach any of the trigger limits in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Harvest Strategy 2011, or recommence in the Torres Strait Trochus Fishery, the Department will consider reassessing these fisheries.

The list of exempt native specimens has been amended to allow export of product from these seven fisheries for the duration that the respective approvals are in place. Please note that any person whose interests are affected by this decision may make an application to the Department for the reasons for the decision, and may apply to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to have this decision reviewed. I have enclosed further information on these processes at Attachment 2.

The Department of the Environment and Energy requires AFMA to report annually on each of the seven fisheries, as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.

I wish to acknowledge the strong engagement and collaboration of AFMA officials in completing these assessments.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'IK' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Ilse Kiessling  
Delegate of the Minister for the Environment and Energy  
20 December 2017



**Conditions on the approved wildlife trade operation declaration for the  
Commonwealth Coral Sea, North West Slope and Western Deepwater Trawl fisheries,  
and the Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer, Finfish, and Tropical Rock Lobster fisheries –  
December 2017**

**Commonwealth Coral Sea Fishery**

1. Operation of the Coral Sea Fishery will be carried out in accordance with management arrangements in force under the Commonwealth *Fisheries Management Act 1991*, Fisheries Management Regulations 1992 and relevant Commonwealth fisheries policies.
2. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Coral Sea Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* decisions are made.
3. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.
4. AFMA to limit the take of species listed under the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), from the area of the Coral Sea Fishery to no more than:
  - a. 40 tonnes of any mixture of species belonging to the family Acroporidae per year (1 July – 30 June).
  - b. 50 individual humphead Maori wrasse (*Cheilinus undulates*) per year (1 July – 30 June).
5. AFMA to:
  - a. review the species composition and spatial extent of all coral harvest when 20 tonnes of coral has been harvested.
  - b. ensure that a disproportionate amount of coral species are not taken from a single reef.
6. AFMA to evaluate, document and seek to mitigate any risks posed by the Coral Sea Fishery to CITES-listed species. For coral species this will be undertaken at the reef-level, while for humphead Maori wrasse this will be undertaken at the sub-reef level.
7. AFMA to report the following to the CITES Scientific Authority of Australia, as part of the annual reporting referred to in Condition 3:
  - a. the harvested weight and locations of harvest for each coral species
  - b. the number of individual humphead Maori wrasse, their sex, lengths and locations of harvest
  - c. any assessments, management changes or findings relevant to the management of CITES listed species in the Coral Sea Fishery.
8. AFMA to complete the following for all sectors of the Coral Sea Fishery:
  - a. review and revise the ecological risk assessments
  - b. develop and implement ecological risk management strategies
  - c. review and revise the Bycatch and Discarding Workplan.

### **Commonwealth North West Slope Trawl and Western Deepwater Trawl Fisheries**

1. Operation of the Western Deepwater Trawl and North West Slope Trawl fisheries will be carried out in accordance with management arrangements in force under the Commonwealth *Fisheries Management Act 1991*, Fisheries Management Regulations 1992 and relevant Commonwealth fisheries policies.
2. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Western Deepwater Trawl and North West Slope Trawl fisheries management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* decisions are made.
3. The Australian Fisheries Management Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.
4. AFMA to ensure ecological risk assessments and associated management strategies are reviewed, updated and implemented.
5. AFMA to ensure:
  - a. that the harvest strategy for the North West Slope and Western Deepwater Trawl fisheries contains triggers and/or limits which are specific, measurable, time bound, and capable of managing the ecological effects of fishing.
  - b. that the fisheries' performance under harvest strategy triggers and limits is monitored; and triggered management actions are undertaken within specified timeframes.

Harvest strategy performance should be reported as part of the requirements specified in Condition 3 above.

### **Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer Fishery**

1. Operation of the Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer Fishery will be carried out in accordance with the management regime in force under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.
2. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Torres Strait Bêche-de-mer Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* decisions are made.
3. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.
4. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement a strategy to manage the risks of overfishing and localised depletion for all species harvested in the fishery. This may include data collection and analysis protocols to manage risks, triggers and/or limits for managing harvest, and should also account for all sources of stock mortality, including commercial, recreational, Traditional and illegal harvest.
5. Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to complete an ecological risk assessment and implement an ecological risk mitigation strategy to ensure all environmental and ecological risks are appropriately managed.
6. Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to continue to pursue the changes necessary to facilitate reporting of interactions with species listed in Part 13 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999*.

### **Torres Strait Finfish Fishery**

1. Operation of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery will be carried out in accordance with management arrangements in force under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.
2. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* decisions are made.
3. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.
4. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement strategies to improve data collection, and monitoring and management of catch in all sectors of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery by 2019.
5. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to complete an ecological risk assessment for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
6. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to improve estimates of stock abundance and harvest potential for all target species in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
7. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to develop and implement reference points and relevant management triggers, including timeframes for management responses, for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.

### **Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery**

1. Operation of the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery will be carried out in accordance with management arrangements in force under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.
2. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to inform the Department of the Environment and Energy of any intended material changes to the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery management arrangements that may affect the assessment against which *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* decisions are made.
3. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to produce and present reports to the Department of the Environment and Energy annually as per Appendix B of the *Guidelines for the Ecologically Sustainable Management of Fisheries - 2nd Edition*.
4. The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement a strategy to manage the risks of overfishing and localised depletion in the fishery.

This may include data collection and analysis protocols to manage risks, triggers and/or limits for managing harvest, and should also account for all sources of stock mortality, including commercial, recreational, Traditional and illegal harvest.





**Attachment 2**

**Notification of Reviewable Decisions and Rights of Review<sup>1</sup>**

There is a right of review to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in relation to certain decisions made by the Minister or the Minister's delegate under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

Section 303GJ of the EPBC Act provides that applications may be made to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for the review of the following decisions of the Minister:

(1) Subject to subsection (2), an application may be made to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for review of a decision:

- (a) to issue or refuse a permit; or
- (b) to specify, vary or revoke a condition of a permit; or
- (c) to impose a further condition of a permit; or
- (d) to transfer or refuse to transfer a permit; or
- (e) to suspend or cancel a permit; or
- (f) to issue or refuse a certificate under subsection 303CC(5); or
- (g) of the Secretary under a determination in force under section 303EU; or
- (h) to make or refuse a declaration under section 303FN, 303FO or 303FP; or
- (i) to vary or revoke a declaration under section 303FN, 303FO or 303FP.

(2) Subsection (1) does not apply to a decision made personally by the Minister (but the subsection does apply to a decision made by a delegate of the Minister).

If you are dissatisfied with a decision of a type listed above you may:

- by notice, provided in writing, request that the Minister or the Minister's delegate give you a statement in writing setting out the reasons for the decision; and
- apply to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) for independent merits review of the decision. Application for review of a decision must be made to the AAT within 28 days after the day on which you have received the reviewable decision. However an extension of time for lodging an application may be granted by the AAT under certain circumstances. Please visit the AAT's website at <http://www.aat.gov.au/> or telephone 1300 366 700 for further information. The role of the AAT is to provide a review mechanism that is fair, just, economical, informal and quick.

**Applications & Costs**

Applications to the AAT are made by lodging an Application Form (Form 1). This can be found on the AAT's website <http://www.aat.gov.au/>.

There are no strict timelines in which the AAT must review the decision, however the first Conference between the parties will usually be held within 6-10 weeks of the Application

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975* Code of Practice for Notification of Reviewable Decisions and Rights of Review

being lodged. The time frame for review of certain decisions can be expedited in some circumstances.

The cost of lodging an application for review is \$884 (GST inclusive) (current as of 1 July 2016).

You may be eligible to pay a reduced fee of \$100.00 if:

- you are receiving legal aid for your application;
- you hold a health care card, a Commonwealth seniors health card or any other card issued by the Department of Social Services or the Department of Veteran's Affairs that entitles the holder to Commonwealth health concessions;
- you are in prison or lawfully detained in a public institution;
- you are under 18 years of age; or
- you are receiving youth allowance, Austudy or ABSTUDY.

You may also be eligible for a reduced fee if you can demonstrate to the AAT that paying the full fee would cause you financial hardship. Further information can be found on the AAT's website.

## Contact Details

Further information or enquiries relating to the decision should be directed to:

The Director  
Wildlife Trade Assessments Section  
Department of the Environment and Energy  
GPO Box 787  
Canberra ACT 2601  
Telephone: +61 (0) 2 6274 1917  
Email: [sustainablefisheries@environment.gov.au](mailto:sustainablefisheries@environment.gov.au)

Alternatively you may contact the AAT at their Principal Registry or the Deputy Registrar, Administrative Appeals Tribunal in your Capital City or Territory.

Administrative Appeals Tribunal  
Street address: Level 6, 83 Clarence Street, Sydney  
Mailing address: GPO Box 9955, Sydney, NSW 2001  
T: 1800 228 333 and (02) 9276 5000  
F: (02) 9276 5599  
E: [generalreviews@aat.gov.au](mailto:generalreviews@aat.gov.au)  
W: <http://www.aat.gov.au>

## Freedom of Information Request

You may make an application under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act) to access documents. Further information can be found at <http://www.environment.gov.au/foi/index.html>. Please contact the Freedom of Information Contact Officer at [foi@environment.gov.au](mailto:foi@environment.gov.au) for more information.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT</b> <b>Fish receiver system update</b>	<b>Agenda Item 2.3</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** the update provided regarding the implementation of a Torres Strait fish receiver system (FRS), in particular:
  - a. the FRS became mandatory for all Torres Strait Fisheries, excluding the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery, on 1 December 2017;
  - b. AFMA have received good catch and effort information through the FRS to date. This data is more comprehensive and timely than that received under the previous voluntary arrangements and will be used to support better decision making about how fisheries are managed, including setting and monitoring total allowable catches;
  - c. over the coming 12 months, further community visits will be conducted with Torres Strait Island and Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) communities, to provide ongoing support and education and receive feedback on how the FRS is functioning.

## KEY ISSUES

2. The following table provides a summary of licences and activities undertaken to date (1 March 2018).

Number of fish receiver licences granted	66
Number of fish receivers that have received fish and submitted CDRs	18
Kilograms of Finfish reported through FRS	7,150 kg (all species combined)
Kilograms of Tropical Rock Lobster reported through FRS	56,673 kg
Kilograms of Beche-de-mer reported through FRS	7,508 kg (all species combined)

3. In general the response to the FRS has been very positive with fish receivers providing accurate data in a timely manner. A significant proportion of this data is coming from the TIB licence sector, a sector which has historically had poor data returns.
4. The FRS is still in the early stages of implementation. AFMA is providing ongoing education and support to fishers and fish receivers as well as targeting compliance activities to ensure all parties understand and are meeting their responsibilities under the FRS:
  - a. fish receivers are completing and submitting catch disposal records correctly;
  - b. fish receivers are only receiving from licensed fishers;
  - c. fishers have a valid licence;
  - d. fishers are having their catch weighed by a fish receiver at the first point of landing.
5. AFMA will also be conducting further community visits over the coming 12 months, to continue this education and support and receive feedback on how the FRS is functioning.

6. AFMA is also working to develop reports on the catch taken in each Torres Strait fishery that can be made publically available on a regular basis (e.g. monthly). The reports will provide industry and other stakeholders with an indication as to how a season is performing and where catch may be approaching TACs. AFMA will ensure that any disclosure of catch or effort data is only done so in accordance with AFMA's Information Disclosure policy. This includes not releasing catch or effort data prior to the end of a fishing season where the data represents less than five vessels. The policy can be accessed on AFMA's website at <http://www.afma.gov.au/about/fisheries-management-policies/>

*Fisher and fish receiver responsibilities*

7. Fishers and fish receivers have a number of responsibilities under the FRS – the table below provides a summary of these.

<b>Fish Receivers</b>	<b>Fishers</b>
Fish receivers are only permitted to receive fish from licenced fishers	Fishers must have their commercial catch weighed by a licenced fish receiver when it is first landed. Catch is landed when it is brought ashore or unloaded to a Carrier Class B or C boat. This does not include the catch you keep in cages or traps at sea (e.g. live Kaiaar in sea cages)
Fish receivers must weigh (and if required, count) the fish and complete a Catch Disposal Record as soon as they receive the fish. The Catch Disposal Record must be completed as per the instructions	Fishers must provide their name, fishing licence number and boat symbol to the fish receiver and sign the section of the Catch Disposal Record which shows this information
Fisher receivers may request information about the fishers fishing area and method. This is voluntary, but is very important information for managing Torres Strait Fisheries sustainably	Fishers may provide information about their fishing area and method. This is voluntary, but is very important information for managing Torres Strait Fisheries sustainably
Fish receivers can only receive fish at the premises (or boats if you are receiving on a Carrier Class B or C licenced boat) nominated on their licence	
Fish receivers must give the pink copy of the Catch Disposal Record to the fisher	
Fish receivers must place the white copy of the Catch Disposal Record in the mail to AFMA (using the prepaid envelopes provided) within 3 business days of receiving the fish	
Fish receivers must retain the green copy of the Catch Disposal Record for five years	
Fish receivers must nominate an agent using the RA form if they wish to have a person other than themselves complete the Catch Disposal Record on their behalf	

Fish receivers must display a copy of their licence in public view at each of the premises identified on the licence	
Fish receivers should contact AFMA for a replacement Catch Disposal Record book prior to the completion of the existing book	

8. A copy of the catch disposal record is provided at **Attachment A** for reference.

## **BACKGROUND**

9. In March 2017, the PZJA agreed to replace the current voluntary Torres Strait Seafood Buyers and Processors Docket Book system with a mandatory FRS for all Torres Strait Fisheries, excluding Torres Strait Prawn Fishery, by 1 December 2017.
10. Accurate reporting and catch monitoring against TACs and individual catch allocations is not only important to ensure the sustainability of fisheries but also to maintain general compliance and integrity of management arrangements. The latter is very important for maintaining the value and security of fishing entitlements.
11. In relation to Torres Strait fisheries, effective catch monitoring through the FRS will support:
  - a. the effectiveness of a quota management system in the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery;
  - b. guiding expansion in the Bêche-de-mer and Finfish Fisheries;
  - c. rebuilding Black Teatfish stocks. Competition for the resource is increasing however the TAC is likely to remain small (15 tonnes) in the short to medium term or until such time new information is gathered to justify an increase in harvest levels; and
  - d. ensuring the integrity of the finfish leasing arrangements which are based on individual catch allocations.
12. Consultation on the introduction of the FRS was conducted through the PZJA RAGS, MACs and Working Groups, native title representative bodies, letters to all stakeholders and visits to all Torres Strait Island and Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) communities.



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Fisheries**  
**Management Authority**

**Torres Strait**  
**PZJA**  
Protected Zone  
Joint Authority

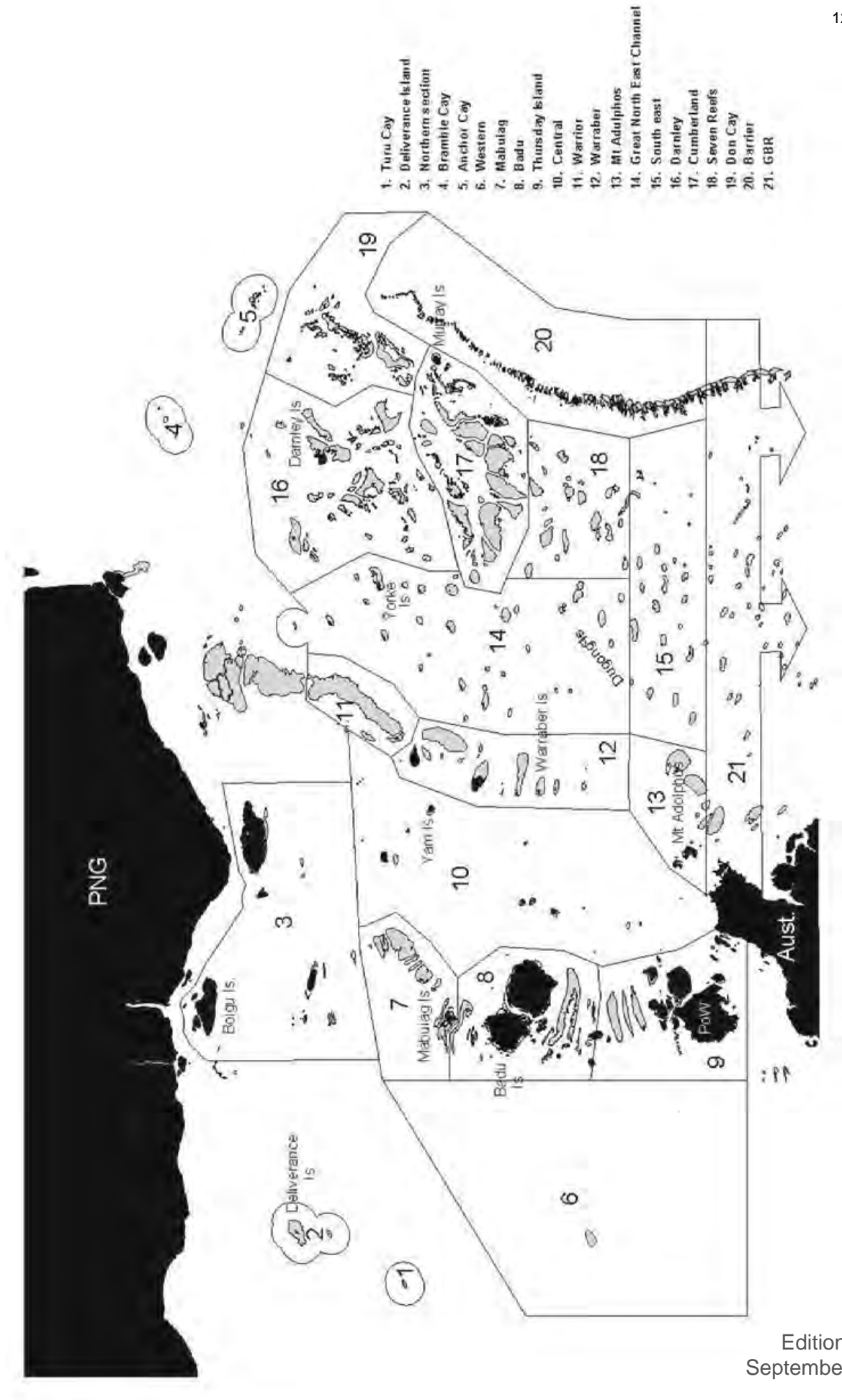
**TORRES STRAIT FISHERIES**  
**CATCH DISPOSAL**  
**RECORD**

**TDB02**



Business Name

AREAS FOR TORRES STRAIT CATCH DISPOSAL RECORD



Use area where most catch was taken

# Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Record TDB02

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### About this Catch Disposal Record

- This TDB02 Catch Disposal Record is designed to record verified landed information about fish catches it does not replace any requirement for fishers to complete daily catch and effort logbooks.
- Information supplied on this Catch Disposal Record will be used for fisheries management purposes. AFMA may release data on specific returns in connection with the investigation and prosecution of offences against the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* and associated legislation or under a court order.
- All fields **must** be completed in part A of the form, fields in part B are not mandatory .

### Who must complete this Catch Disposal Record?

- The licensed Torres Strait Fish Receiver (the Receiver) or their Registered Authorised Agent must complete the Catch Disposal Record.
  - a Registered Authorised Agent is a person who has been nominated by the licensed Torres Strait Fish Receiver to complete the TDB02 on their behalf. The Receiver must complete and lodge with AFMA the appropriate nomination form. **Note:** *all further references in this Catch Disposal Record to Receiver/s should be taken to also be a reference to a Registered Authorised Agent as prescribed by AFMA’s Registered Authorised Agent Nomination process.*
  - the fish receiver (or agent) signing the CDR form must be a different person to fisher signing the fishing licence details
- The Receiver must accurately determine the weight of the fish and complete the Catch Disposal Record for every consignment of fish received.

### When must this Catch Disposal Record be completed?

- This Catch Disposal Record must be completed by the Receiver immediately upon receipt of the fish and before the fish are placed with any other fish that are not part of the consignment.
- Retaining the Catch Disposal Record – the Receiver must retain this Catch Disposal Record. Once completed the Receiver must keep this book for a minimum period of five years and make it available to any authorised officer on request

### Where and how must the forms be submitted?

- **White copy** – the Receiver must forward the white original copy to AFMA within 3 calendar days of the fish being received. Where the premises at which the fish were received was a boat, the Receiver must forward the white original copy to AFMA within 3 business days of that boat returning to port.
- **Pink Copy** – the holder of the Torres Strait commercial fishing licence (the Fisher) who is disposing of the fish retains the pink copy .
- **Green copy** – must remain in this book and be held by the Receiver.

**Note:** As each page of this Catch Disposal Record is numbered, any spoiled or incorrectly completed forms must be clearly marked ‘cancelled’ and returned to AFMA.

If you have any queries about completing this Catch Disposal Record please contact AFMA Direct on 1300 723 621.

**FAILURE TO SUPPLY AN ACCURATE AND FULLY COMPLETED CATCH DISPOSAL RECORD FOR ALL FISH RECEIVED IS A BREACH OF THE LICENCE CONDITIONS OF YOUR FISH RECEIVER LICENCE. BREACH OF ANY LICENCE CONDITION(S) IS AN OFFENCE UNDER THE TORRES STRAIT FISHERIES ACT 1984 AND PENALTIES APPLY.**

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR FISH RECEIVERS

You **must** provide details for **PART A** for each consignment of fish as follows

**• Has a TDB02 been completed for this fish by another Receiver? No Not Sure**

- If you know another receiver has completed a TDB02 for this consignment of fish then you do not need to complete a TDB02.
- If you know another TDB02 has not been completed then circle NO and continue completing this form as required.
- If you don't know if another form has been completed then circle Not Sure and continue completing this form as required.

**• Fishing Licence Holder Name** – enter the name of the person who holds the licence that is nominated to the boat from which the fish were caught. Enter their name as it appears on the fishing licence

**• Fishing Licence Number** – enter the fishing licence number of the fishing licence that is nominated to the boat from which the fish were caught. Enter the number as it appears on their fishing licence

**• Fisher Type** – circle one of the three options provided (TIB, TVH, or Sunset).

**• Boat Symbol** - enter the boat symbol that appears on the fishing licence nominated to the boat from which the fish were caught.

**• Fisher/or Agent Name** - enter the name of the person signing as the fisher/or agent

**• Signature of Fisher/ or Agent** – Where fish are received directly from a fisher or their agent, the fishing licence holder (or agent) must sign the CDR form to verify their licence details.

**• Date** – Enter the date Fisher signed.

**• Fish Receiver** – enter the name of the Fish Receiver name as it appears on your Fish Receiver Licence.

**• Fish Receiver Licence Number** – enter your Fish Receiver Licence number.

**• Fish Receiver Address** – enter the address of the premise the fish were received

**• Species** – species codes are shown on the cardboard page divider in this logbook. Enter either the species code or name of each species in the consignment.

**• Processing Code** – processing codes are shown on the cardboard page divider in this logbook. Where processing has occurred please indicate the nature of the processing (e.g. gutted and blanched, dried, headed and gutted, etc.).

**• Weight (kg)** – Weight must be determined by accurate scales

- Where the fish have not been processed in any way, enter the accurate weight in kilograms of all the whole fish received of each individual species.
- Where the fish have been processed prior to receiving, record the accurate processed weight in kilograms of all the fish received of each individual species.
- Where only part of the catch of a species is processed, record the processed and unprocessed components of the species on separate rows.
- Do not record processed and unprocessed forms in the same row.

**• Fish Number** – Enter the number of fish for records of live Fin Fish only.

**• Signature of Receiver** – The Receiver or their Registered Authorised Agent must sign this part to certify accurate completion of the Catch Disposal Record.

**• Printed name** of Receiver – enter the name of the Receiver or Registered Authorised Agent who signed this form.

**• Date** – Enter the date on which this form was completed.

The following information **may** also be completed in **PART B**. These fields are not mandatory

**• Number of Fishers** – enter the number of fishers who participated in the fishing trip for which the Catch Disposal Record relates.

**• Number of Days** – enter the duration of the fishing trip for which the Catch Disposal Record relates.

**• Area Fished** – enter the area where the fish were taken using the map shown at the start of this logbook. Enter more than one area if the fishing trip for which the Catch Disposal Record relates if applicable.

**• Start Date** – enter the start date of the fishing trip for which the Catch Disposal Record relates.

**• End Date** – enter the end date of the fishing trip for which the Catch Disposal Record relates.

**• Logbook Type** – record the logbook type that was completed. For example catches of tropical rock lobster may have been recorded in their Tropical Rock Lobster Daily Fishing Log TRL04.

**• Logbook Number and Page Number this catch relates to** – Record detail if this catch has also been entered into a daily fishing logbook. Please enter N/ (Not applicable) if this catch has not previously been entered in a daily fishing logbook.

**• Fishing Method** – tick (✓) the fishing method used to take the fish for the fishing trip for which the Catch Disposal Record relates. Tick (✓) more than one fishing method if applicable.

If you have any queries about completing this Catch Disposal Record please contact AFMA Direct on 1300 723 621.

CDR No.	38	Page No.	34
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Has a TDB02 been completed for this fish by another Receiver? (Circle one) **NO** NOT SURE

Fisher Details					
Fishing Licence Holder Name	Geoff Trout		Fishing Licence Number	3579	
Fisher Type (Circle One)	TIB	TVH	Sunset	Boat Symbol	FTVW
Signature of Fisher /or agent:	Geoff Trout		Printed name of Fisher /or agent and Date:	Geoff Trout 9 / 08 / 2017	

Fish Receiver Name	Island Seafoods	Fish Receiver Licence Number	2468
Fish Receiver Address	Lot 987 Thursday Island QLD 4875		

Species (see code list)	Processing Code (see code list)	Weight (kg)	Fish Number (live finfish only)
SNM	W	200	
SNM	GG	45	
TCG	L		72
TOTAL		245	72

Signature of Receiver /or Agent: I certify that the information provided on this form is a true and accurate record.	<i>Bob Smith</i>	Printed Name of Receiver and Date:	<b>Bob Smith</b>  <b>9 / 08 / 2017</b>
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Fishing Effort and Area					
Number of Fishers	2		Number of Days	3	
Area Fished	16		Start and End Dates	8/8/17 to 9/8/17	
Has the catch been recorded on a daily fishing logbook? (Circle one) <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">Yes</span> No					
Logbook Type	TSF01		Logbook Number(s)	234	Page Number(s) 34, 35, 36
Fishing Method (tick the fishing methods used)					
Hookah (MDH)		Handline (LHL)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Drop Line (LDL)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Free Dive (MDF)		Rod and Reel (LRR)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	
Lamp Fishing (MLF)		Troll (LTL)	<input type="checkbox"/>	(Specify)	

# Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Record TDB02

**PART A MANDATORY**

## PART B VOLUNTARY

CDR No.		Page No.	
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# Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Record TDB02

Has a TDB02 been completed for this fish by another receiver? (Circle one) 

NO	NOT SURE
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**PART A MANDATORY**

Fisher Details					
Fishing Licence Holder Name				Fishing Licence Number	
Fisher Type (Circle One)	TIB	TVH	Sunset	Boat Symbol	
Signature of Fisher /or agent:				Printed name of Fisher /or agent and Date:	/ /

Receiver Details			
Fish Receiver Name		Fish Receiver Licence Number	
Fish Receiver Address			

[illegible]

Signature of Receiver /or Agent: I certify that the information provided on this form is a true and accurate record.	Printed Name of Receiver and Date:	/ /
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## PART B VOLUNTARY

Fishing Effort and Area										
Number of Fishers				Number of Days						
Area Fished				Start and End Dates						
Has the catch been recorded on a daily fishing logbook? (Circle one)      Yes      No										
Logbook Type				Logbook Number(s)				Page Number(s)		
<b>Fishing Method</b> (tick the fishing methods used)										
Hookah (MDH)				Handline (LHL)				Drop Line (LDL)		
Free Dive (MDF)				Rod and Reel (LRR)				Other		
Lamp Fishing (MLF)				Troll (LTL)						
(Specify)										

# Please remember

The pages in this book are self carbonating, place this flap under the original copy and the two duplicate pages to prevent writing transferring to the next set of forms.

## SPECIES CODES:

• Tropical Rock Lobster	TRL	• Spanish Mackerel	SNM
• Mud crab	CRM	• School Mackerel	MAO
• Trochus	TCH	• Spotted Mackerel	MAL
• Pearl shell	PSH	• Grey/Broad Barred Mackerel	MAG
• Curry Fish	CUC	• Salmon Mackerel	MSH
• Black Teat Fish	CUB	• Coral Trout (All species)	TCG
• Sand Fish	CUS	• Cod	COD
• White Teat Fish	CUW	• Barramundi Cod	COB
• Surf Red Fish	CUR	• Red Emperor	RDE
• Prickly Red Fish	CUP	• Spangled Emperor	SPE
• Blackfish Sea Cucumber	CUK	• Other Emperors	RSE
• Elephant Trunk Fish	CUE	• Maori Wrasse	MAW
• Lolly Fish	CUL	• Stripey Bass	SSB
• Green Fish	CUG		

## PROCESSING CODES:

<i>TRL and Crustaceans</i>		<i>Beche de mer (BDM)</i>	
• Tail	T	• Salted	S
• Whole	W	• Salted and Chilled	SC
• Live	L	• Chilled	C
		• Boiled and Frozen	BF
		• Salted and Frozen	SF
<i>Finfish:</i>		• Boiled and Salted	BS
• Fillets	F	• Frozen and Green	FG
• Whole	W	• Boiled and Chilled	BC
• Head and Guttred	HG		
• Gilled and Guttred	GG		
• Live	L	<i>Molluscs</i>	
		• Whole	W
		• Shell Only	SH
		• Meat Only	MT

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT</b> <b>Legislative amendments update</b>	<b>Agenda Item 2.4</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** the status of proposed amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act) and *Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985* (the Regulations), which govern how fisheries are managed in the Torres Strait.

## BACKGROUND

*What are the proposed amendments?*

2. Following PZJA approval, AFMA is progressing amendments to the Act and Regulations. The proposed amendments are administrative in nature and will provide improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of fisheries administration in the Torres Strait.
3. The proposed amendments will provide:
  - a. the ability to require catch reporting across all licence holders;
  - b. the ability to provide electronic licensing and monitoring to licence holders;
  - c. the ability to delegate the powers to grant and vary scientific and development permits;
  - d. the ability to simplify the renewal of fishing licences;
  - e. the ability to delegate powers to contracted service providers;
  - f. for the simplification of the disclosure of fisheries information; and
  - g. the ability to issue Fisheries Infringement Notices.
4. A number of additional amendments are also being considered for inclusion and will go to the PZJA shortly for approval before being progressed any further. These include:
  - a. the ability for a single licence to be issued for primary and tender packages;
  - b. the ability for all licences to be granted for up to five years; and
  - c. the ability for a licence to be issued without a nominated boat.

Further details on the proposed amendments will be provided as this project progresses.

5. Of particular relevance to the Working Group is for the amendment to provide for catch reporting across all licence holders will allow for the implementation of mandatory daily logbook reporting by TIB licence holders. This will provide for improved data on which to base management advice and decisions.

*When will stakeholders be consulted?*

6. AFMA will work closely with the TSRA and Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries in progressing the proposed amendments. Opportunities to provide comment on the proposed amendments will also be provided to fishers, their communities and the general public as the amendments are progressed. This will be done so through direct communication with fishers, public notices as well as through the PZJA RAGs, MACs and Working Groups. Further details on when these opportunities will be publicised once determined.

*How long will the amendments take?*

7. AFMA now has dedicated resources to be able to progress this important piece of work. However, the amendment process is a lengthy and complex one, and is expected to take a number of years (please refer to the below table).

<b>Regulation amendments</b>	<b>Indicative Timeline</b>	<b>Act amendments</b>	<b>Indicative Timeline</b>
Submit proposed amendments to the PZJA then Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries for approval	Completed	Submit proposed amendments to the PZJA then Prime Minister and/or Cabinet for approval	June 2018
Prepare bid for drafting resources	Completed	Prepare bid for drafting resources	June 2018
Prepare drafting instructions in consultation with relevant government agencies	Now-June 2018	Prepare drafting instructions in consultation with relevant government agencies	Now-December 2018
If required, prepare regulation impact statement and conduct public consultation	Now-June 2018	If required, prepare regulation impact statement and conduct public consultation	Now-December 2018
Amending regulations prepared by Office of Parliamentary Counsel	August-December 2018	Bill prepared by Office of Parliamentary Counsel	January-April 2019
Conduct public consultation on exposure draft of amending regulations	January-March 2019	Conduct public consultation on exposure draft of Bill	May-July 2019
Office of Parliamentary Counsel to prepare any changes to amending regulations identified as a result of public consultation	April 2019	Office of Parliamentary Counsel to prepare any changes to amending regulations identified as a result of public consultation	August 2019
Prepare associated legislation documents (Executive Council minute, explanatory memorandum, explanatory statement, statement of compatibility with human rights etc)	April 2019	Prepare associated legislation documents (explanatory memorandum, statement of compatibility with human rights, second reading speech etc)	August 2019
Submit legislative package to the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries for approval	May 2019	Submit legislative package to the Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries for approval	September 2019

Submit legislative package to Federal Executive Council (ExCo)	June 2019	Give notice to the Clerk of the House, who will arrange for the Bill to be listed on the Notice Paper	TBA
Governor General to make the amending regulations	June 2019	Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries to present Bill to the House of Representatives for debate and agreement	TBA
Register amending regulations on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments (FRLI), at which point they will come into force	June 2019	Bill presented to the Senate for debate and agreement	TBA
Table regulations in both houses of Parliament for a disallowance period of 15 sitting days	June 2019	Once the Bill has been agreed by both Houses in identical form, present Bill to the Governor-General for royal assent	TBA
Notify stakeholders of making of amending regulations	June 2019	Register Act on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments (FRLI)	TBA
Implement new provisions of amending regulations	June 2019 onwards	Notify stakeholders of making of the Act	TBA
		Implement new provisions of the Act	TBA

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>FISHERY UPDATES</b> <b>Native Title update</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 2.5</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** any updates on native title matters from members, including the representative from Malu Lamar (TSI) Corporation RNTBC (Malu Lamar).

## KEY ISSUES

2. On 7 August 2013 the High Court of Australia confirmed coexisting native title rights, including commercial fishing, in the claimed area (covering most of the Torres Strait Protected Zone). This decision gives judicial authority for Traditional Owners to access and take the resources of the sea for all purposes. Native titles rights in relation to commercial fishing must be exercisable in accordance with the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.
3. Traditional Owners and native title representative bodies have an important role in the management of Torres Strait fisheries. It is important therefore that the Working Group keep informed on any relevant native title issues arising.
4. From discussions at other PZJA consultative forum meetings it has been agreed for a standing Native Title Updates agenda item to be included in future PZJA Working Group meetings.
5. At its 12-13 July 2016 meeting the FWG noted a request by industry member Mr Maluwap Nona that Malu Lamar Body Corporate be invited to provide an update to the working group. AFMA has extended an invitation to Malu Lamar to attend the March 2017 meeting as an observer and is investigating longer term arrangements in consultation with PZJA agencies.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>FISHERY UPDATES</b> <b>Torres Strait fisheries strategic issues including economic trends</b>	<b>Agenda Item 2.6</b> <b>For discussion and advice</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group:

1. **NOTE** any updates provided by working group members on economic trends; and
2. **DISCUSS** and provide **ADVICE** on key strategic issues affecting the fishery.

## KEY ISSUES

1. It is important that the Working Group develops a common understanding of any relevant matters within adjacent jurisdictions and what issues if any, are having the greatest impact on industry and the management of the fishery. Such understanding will ensure proceedings of the Working Group are strategically focused and may more effectively address each issue.
2. Working group members are asked to provide any updates on trends and opportunities in global markets, processing and value adding. Industry is also asked to contribute advice on economic and market trends where possible. Research members are asked to contribute advice on any broader strategic research projects or issues that may be of interest to the Torres Strait in future.
3. Updates provided by members and observers on fishery performance, trends, activities and issues occurring in the Torres Strait finfish and relevant fisheries at the last two FWG meetings is provided in the Background section.

## BACKGROUND – past updates

### 4. *FWG meeting 16-17 March 2017*

- Industry is eager for more Traditional Owners to enter the Finfish Fishery.
- Meriam fishers have been successfully increasing their effort with recent finfish catches around 500kg per day being taken by five to six dories. This catch is being frozen for the local market and also being sent to Cairns via barge.
- More representation from active fishers is needed on the working groups to ensure on-water fishing practices and business development issues were understood. It was also noted that this would broaden the on-water knowledge base of how data is used for fishery management purposes and could facilitate uptake of logbooks. An active fisher from Mer (e.g. Alan Passi), should be invited to the next FWG meeting as an observer for this purpose.
- A new finfish business is being established at Poruma.
- Local restaurants are seeking locally caught Spanish mackerel but are finding supply difficult.

- The Ugar industry association is working to develop a five year business plan following on from its success with its bech de mer. The plan will assist the association to become commercially independent. The association is advocating for a similar joint business plan to be developed among the eastern communities. This association is seeking to have this done prior to making investments in things such as freezers to ensure smart/viable investments are made.
- The FWG noted the following update from the QDAF member:
- QDAF reported that coral trout caught southwards of Bowen attract a price premium of \$5 to \$10 per kilogram due to a market preference for fish with a strong red colouration.
- QDAF member advised that some east coast operators were currently tied up due to not being able to acquire coral trout quota.

The FWG noted an update on the FRDC funded project on scoping the development of Barramundi, jewfish and crab fisheries in the top-western waters of the Torres Strait by Andrew Tobin, the Principle Investigator for the project.

- Mr Tobin advised that the project has four elements:
- A desktop scoping study. Collate past research findings etc.
- Field surveys to understand local stock abundance and whether it could support a local fishery. Aim to commence field work after Easter.
- A stop-go review to determine if there is enough industry interest and stock available to justify proceeding with the study.
- An evaluation of infrastructure, skills and business needs to support an active fishery.
- The FWG noted the PZJA will likely require advice from the FWG to evaluate any proposal to develop and/or expand new fisheries to ensure they are sustainable. The FWG encourage early engagement with the FWG to ensure any future proposals may be considered in a timely manner.
- Dr Tobin also noted that a PZJA scientific permit will be required to undertake the field activities.
- Speaking on behalf of Malu Lamar, the representative requested that the PBCs in the relevant communities be engaged as soon as possible and that the terms and conditions of the work for this project be clearly agreed.

## **5. FWG meeting 12-13 July 2016**

- Queensland East Coast finfish fisheries (ECF):
  - fishers are experiencing good catches of coral trout and came close to reaching the TAC in the 2015-16 season (96% caught). As a result there is a high demand for coral trout quota which is now fully utilised;
  - in recent years species other than coral trout ('other species') have gone from being byproduct to now being specifically targeted by fishers as a result of high market demand. There is potential for similar trends to occur in the Torres Strait and it is important that good information (e.g. stock status and catch data) is available before further expansion occurs across these species and potential new areas. Some of these finfish species may be more vulnerable to overfishing;
  - Spanish mackerel catches in the ECF were poor in 2015-16 (300t caught equating to 51% of the TAC. Average catch to TAC ratio is 73%. Lowest catch recorded was 226t in 2007/08), with catch rates declining in recent years to the point where frozen product is not available (i.e. not enough mackerel are being caught to warrant freezing of product as the small amount of catch is going straight to market as fresh product);
  - with the interest in coral trout quota exceeding demand, more intense and targeted fishing for other species and a deteriorating Spanish mackerel fishery

in the ECF, it is likely there will be increasing interest in Torres Strait finfish quota (Spanish mackerel, coral trout and other reef line species). The Torres Strait fishery (including Spanish mackerel at Bramble Cay) are considered to be in good condition;

- anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a recent increase in the incidence of fin rot in live coral trout product. The cause is still to be determined, however it has been suggested it may be due to additional environmental stresses on the fish following the recent climatic conditions that resulted in the large-scale coral bleaching event off the far northern Queensland coast. QDAF are testing some samples.
- Torres Strait finfish update from industry;
    - there is renewed interest in targeting live trout in Torres Strait, as shown during the FQMC's recent assessment of expressions of interest to lease finfish quota in 2016-17. Two operators are planning to trial live;
    - there are signs that interest in the fishery from the TIB sector is growing;
    - Ugar fishers are currently focused on the Beche-de-mer Fishery as the local freezer is not operational. The freezer is required to support finfish operations;
    - noting possible resourcing constraints, community based strategies should be examined to improve the efficiency of compliance;
    - there is ongoing need to balance the benefits of leasing quota to non-indigenous operators while still providing fishing industry development and employment opportunities for locals (in line with the COAGs commitment to closing the gap in indigenous disadvantage). The TIB sector needs to be supported to participate directly in the fishery.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>TORRES STRAIT FINFISH RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP REPORT</b> <b>Report from 9-10 November 2017 Meeting</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 3.0</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group **NOTE** an update from the initial Finfish RAG meeting held on 9-10 November 2017.

## KEY ISSUES

1. The newly formed Finfish RAG met for the first time on 9-10 November 2017 in Brisbane. Meeting record is at **Attachment A**.
2. The RAG meeting:
  - Had a strong focus on identifying actions to meet data needs in the fishery in both the short and medium term. These issues that were compiled to be addressed include:
  - Catch and effort reporting data issues
  - Biological data issues
  - Stock structure
  - Coral trout catch and effort data including life status.
  - Verifying catches reported against Catch Disposal Record data from the Fish Receiver System.
  - Examining how spatially representative the available data is.
3. The RAG identified the key fishery research priority is acquiring ageing data to support the Spanish mackerel and coral trout stock assessments.
4. The RAG provided Recommended Biological Catch advice for Spanish mackerel and coral trout (presented to the Working Group at Agenda Items 4.1 and 4.2).
5. The RAG provided input to harvest strategy project team members present and noted presentations from the project:
  - a. An overview of the project from Trevor Hutton, project leader, CSIRO, including
  - b. George Leigh from QDAF provided the RAG with an overview of the Queensland east coast coral trout stock assessment. The RAG gave consideration to how the assessment methodology could be adapted to assess the Torres Strait stock and provided input into issues for consideration.
  - c. An overview of the current Spanish mackerel stock assessment. The RAG provided input into the initial phase of the Spanish mackerel harvest strategy development.

## BACKGROUND

6. At its July 2016 meeting, the Finfish Working Group agreed to the formation of a sub-group tasked with a technical focus, initially to progress the Spanish mackerel stock assessment update but also to consider a number of other issues such as;
  - Disproportionate effort in Bramble Cay
  - Local factors – unexpected factors (e.g. environmental and/or climate change related effects)
  - Changes in the accessible area of the fishery (closures)
  - Estimates of TIB, Traditional, Recreational sector catches
  - Logbook data quality
  - Stock structure
  - Catch rate objectives (effort & catch)
7. This Technical Scientific Working Group met in November 2016 to progress the updated Spanish mackerel assessment and also met out of session in April 2017 to provide further advice to the PZJA on the risks of harvesting more than a specified RBC.
8. This group was formalised through an application process and was ratified as the Torres Strait Finfish Resource Assessment Group (Finfish RAG) in July 2017 and has primarily been tasked with assisting the project team with progressing the harvest strategy development.
9. Membership of the Finfish RAG is outlined below in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** Membership of Finfish Resource Assessment Group

Name	Organisation
David Brewer – RAG Chairperson	Independent chair
Selina Stoute – AFMA member	AFMA
Tom Roberts – QDAF member	QDAF
John Ramsay – TSRA member	TSRA
Rocky Stephen – industry member	Kos and Abob Fisheries, Ugar
Kenny Bedford – industry member	Erub Fisheries Management Association
Tony Vass – industry member	
Michael O'Neill – scientific member	QDAF
Ashley Williams – scientific member	ABARES, JCU

**List of Attachments**

**Attachment A** – Record of 9-10 November 2017 PZJA Finfish RAG Meeting.

# Torres Strait Finfish Resource Assessment Group

Meeting Number 1

Final Meeting Record

9-10 November 2017 – Brisbane

Note all meeting papers and records are available on  
the PZJA webpage:

[www.pzja.gov.au](http://www.pzja.gov.au)



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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## Meeting Participants

**Table 1. Attendance and declarations of interest – Finfish RAG Members.**

Name	Organisation	Declaration of interest
David Brewer – RAG Chairperson	Independent chair	Runs a fisheries consultancy which has no Torres Strait interests.
Selina Stoute – AFMA member	AFMA	Nil.
Tom Roberts – QDAF member	QDAF	Nil.
John Ramsay – TSRA member	TSRA	No pecuniary interests. TSRA manages sunset leasing and holds fishery access rights in trust.
Rocky Stephen – industry member	Kos and Abob Fisheries, Ugar	Councillor on Ugar, President of Kos and Abob Fishers Association. Eastern cluster representative on the PZJA Finfish Working Group. Does not hold a TIB licence.
Kenny Bedford – industry member	Erub Fisheries Management Association	TIB licence holder. President - Erub Fisheries Management Association
Tony Vass – industry member		No financial interests in the Torres Strait. Does not own or operate a licence in Torres Strait.
Michael O'Neill – scientific member	QDAF	Principal scientist for TSSAC recommended project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. Member of PZJA Finfish Working Group.
Ashley Williams – scientific member	ABARES, JCU	Involved in previous TS research, is an author on the ABARES Fishery Status Reports.

## Meeting observers and declarations of interests volunteered

Maluwap Nona (Day one only)	Malu Lamar	Chairperson Malu Lamar. TIB licence holder. Currently making investments in mackerel fishing.
Andrew Tobin (Day two only)	JCU	No declaration made.
Ian Liviko	PNG-NFA	No declaration made.

Yen Loban	TSRA	Chairperson of the Finfish Quota Management Committee. TIB licence holder.
Mariana Nahas	TSRA	Nil.
Trevor Hutton	CSIRO	CSIRO receives research funding. Principal investigator for TSSAC recommended project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
George Leigh (Day 2 only)	QDAF	No declaration made.
Matthew Holden (Day 2 only)	UQ CARM	No declaration made.

## Action items

Number	Action
1.	<b>FRAG 1, Action 1, Agenda item 2.2:</b> Ashley Williams to advise the RAG on how beach price is determined in ABARES Fishery Status Reports. Whether by phone survey direct with Torres Strait buyers or fishers or whether this information is inferred from other sources.
2.	<b>FRAG 1, Action 2, Agenda item 3.2:</b> Harvest strategy project team to provide a short paper advising the RAG on work that would be required to support Management Strategy Evaluation following the Harvest Strategy development.
3.	<b>Finfish RAG 1, Action 3, Agenda item 5.1:</b> AFMA to liaise with the harvest strategy project team to investigate the coral trout catch data that underlies a) the apparent decline in biomass from 1980 to 2003 and b) the catch series that underlies the reference period 2001-2005, noting some of these data may be housed by QDAF.
4.	<b>Finfish RAG, Action 4, Agenda item 6:</b> Harvest Strategy project team to contact Roland Pitcher to enquire as to what Torres Strait habitat mapping data is available.
5.	<b>Finfish RAG, Action 5, Agenda item 6:</b> AFMA to liaise with the 2007 reef-line sector MSE project team to determine what coral trout catch data series were used in the MSE.
6.	<b>Finfish RAG, Action 6, Agenda item 6:</b> Harvest Strategy project team to advise the RAG and Finfish Working Group on the outcomes of the east coast coral trout assessment in 2018.
7.	<b>Finfish RAG, Action 7, Agenda item 6:</b> Michael O'Neill to provide the Finfish RAG with revised figures e) and f) from Figure 20 of the stock assessment report with the same scale to illustrate how a B60 long term average equilibrium point provides greater catch rates.

## Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

### 1.1. Welcome and meeting preliminaries

The inaugural meeting of the PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Resource Assessment Group (FRAG) was opened in prayer by Cr. Rocky Stephen at 8:45 am.

RAG Chairperson, David Brewer, acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which the meeting was held. Noting that it was the inaugural meeting, the Chairperson provided a presentation on the roles of the RAG, terms of reference and conflicts of interest management

procedures.

The Chairperson advised that the RAG would provide advice on items such as Recommended Biological Catches to the Finfish Working Group and to the PZJA.

The agenda was adopted and it was agreed that advice on the western line closure issue would be added under other business if time permitted.

It was noted that Andrew Tobin would attend day two of the meeting to discuss the barramundi, crab and jewfish scoping study research proposal.

## 1.2. Declarations of interests

The RAG noted the requirement to declare all interests, perceived or real. Each member declared their interest in the fishery as documented in Table 1. In line with the AFMA standard for declaring conflicts of interest in Commonwealth MACs and RAGs to best protect the integrity of advice, members were sequentially asked to leave the room to allow the remaining RAG members to freely comment on their declared interests.

Industry members left the room. The RAG considered their declared interests in the fishery. The RAG noted that while industry members did have interests they had valuable input and their advice was required. The RAG agreed that all industry members could freely provide advice at all agenda items. Industry members re-joined the RAG meeting.

Science members left the room. The RAG considered their declared interests. Noting these interests and the valuable input the members would provide the meeting the RAG agreed that science members could freely provide advice at all agenda items. Science members re-joined the RAG meeting.

## Agenda Item 2 – RAG Updates

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### 2.1 Industry member updates

The RAG noted updates provided by members on strategic issues that may be affecting the adjacent Queensland east coast and the Torres Strait finfish stocks.

#### ***Queensland east coast finfish strategic issues***

##### *Vessel monitoring systems*

- It was noted that the Queensland Vessel Monitoring System project was now in a trial stage with units fitted to both primary vessels in a number of fisheries (as per the Torres Strait) but also to dories – unlike in the Torres Strait. QDAF advised that they are waiting for trial data to come in for review in 2018.

##### *East coast coral trout and reef-line species*

- It was advised that the east coast coral trout TAC was nearly entirely now caught (96 per cent of 917 t) and that no over-catch was allowed under management regulations.
- 2017 catch rates appear to have been good despite a 2016 cyclone.
- A theory was reported whereby a cyclone may trigger a drop in water temperature which impacts the coral trout metabolic rates which in turn affects their availability as they will not take baits as readily. It was noted that fish are seen to be present after a cyclone but their availability seems to be affected.
- QDAF advised that east coast coral trout assessment is planned to be updated every five years and was due to be updated in 2018 (stock status and reference points are to be examined).
- It was noted that east coast stock assessment team was reviewing the options for monitoring for coral trout to support the assessment and TAC setting. The project team are comparing the costs and benefits of fishery independent line fishing surveys (to support the age structured assessment model) and are comparing this to port sampling or crew based fishery dependent data. It was noted that Australian Institute of Marine Science survey data

(underwater diver abundance surveys) had been powerful and useful data for the east coast coral trout assessment.

#### *East coast red throat emperor*

- It was advised that catches of red throat emperor and other reef line species remain low with most fishers focusing on live coral trout with some red throat emperor taken as by-product.
- 2018 will see an updated east coast Red Throat Emperor assessment which will be the first update to the assessment in about a decade.

#### *East coast Spanish mackerel*

- It was reported that around 50 per cent of the east coast Spanish mackerel TAC was taken during the last season with this seasons catches appearing to be good (up 31 per cent for the season to date; around 20 per cent of the TAC had normally been filled by this time in previous seasons).
- Finfish RAG will be updated on the outcomes of the east coast Spanish mackerel assessment which is being updated in 2018. It was advised that the new east coast VMS data will likely have a huge benefit in boosting the usefulness of the assessments spatial data (particularly the time spent searching for fish) can be used by assessment scientists for analysis.
- It was noted that the east coast Finfish Harvest Strategy includes decision-rules based on a CPUE model for the commercial sector only and does not apply to recreational sector. Under the Sustainable Fisheries Strategy Queensland will move to have explicit account for catches taken from all sectors under the harvest strategy.

#### *Torres Strait strategic issues for industry*

- Kos and Abob Fisheries on Ugar Island are preparing a business plan to guide development of their business over the next few years, especially for when the Ugar freezer is upgraded. The intent of this plan is to ensure that the freezer can run as a viable, commercial business.
- An industry member advised that there is a strong need for TACs to be set at levels that provide enough product to support business.
- Erub Island has seen a spike in finfish catches over the past few weeks before the meeting due to improved weather.
- With good prices and demand for product there is reportedly some interest among the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector in entering the finfish fishery but this would be dependent on infrastructure to support this.
- Both Erub and Mer communities would likely have some recorded data of recent finfish commercial catches.
- More fishers on Mer Island were taking coral trout with good prices being offered from buyers.
- Mer Island women were also engaging in finfish fishing with their partners to boost their household incomes.
- Malu Lamar advised that fishers in the TIB sector need to have a firm understanding of what the TAC is for their sector. The representative advised that the next few seasons would likely result in an increased take from the TIB sector as fishers move across from the beche-de-mer fishery to target finfish. Suggested that young TIB fishers such as Mr Allan Passi from the Mer Community be invited to the Finfish RAG to help increase understanding of fisheries science among the sector and facilitate community understanding.
- TIB sector fishers have an increased understanding of the value of logbooks and good data for management of their fishery.

Meeting observer, TSRA board member Yen Loban, noted that it was of high importance that the TIB sector supplies catch data to AFMA to support decision making and to ensure that the balance is understood between non-traditional inhabitant and TIB sector catches.

## 2.2 Management update – 2016/17 season summary

The Finfish RAG noted the tabled update on the fisheries performance, summarising the previous fishing season and recent trends in catch and effort.

The RAG noted the following points:

- It was noted that while \$12 per kilo was quoted as the average ABARES 2016 season price for mackerel, a factor of \$9.20 x 1.61 was generally used to get fillet price. The RAG sought clarification from ABARES on how beach price figures were obtained for reporting purposes – whether these were surveyed or inferred from east coast statistics.

**FFRAG 1, Action 1, Agenda item 2.2:** Ashley Williams to advise the RAG on how beach price is determined in ABARES Status Reports. Whether by phone survey direct with Torres Strait buyers or fishers or whether this information is inferred from other sources.

- Industry advised of increasing trend for sending whole fish (rather than fillets) to buyers e.g. Sydney Fish Market at a price of around \$20 per kilo. The ratio now is 60 whole to 40 per cent fillets whereas it used to be only 40 per cent whole fish.
- Industry members advised that the current season has seen the price being offered by buyers for frozen fillets reach a record high of \$17/kg for fillets on some islands.
- Industry member advised that Erub Island had a local market for mackerel belly flaps which were sold locally for \$10/kg.
- Science member suggested that a look at catch rates will help note whether the drop in catches is an issue
- QDAF member cautioned interpreting the apparent decline in coral trout catch in Torres Strait reef-line sector from 2015 to 2016 seasons. The RAG noted that this was likely due to change in operators with one access package not being fished for most of season. It was noted that due to the small number of fishers in the sector, changes from only one or two fishers would really impact the entire sectors performance i.e. one or two inexperienced operators entering for one season could decrease the raw catch per unit effort data of the whole fleet.

## Agenda Item 3 – Data needs and research priorities

### 3.1 Short to medium-term data improvements

The RAG noted that the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Harvest Strategy will provide a management framework and will guide and prioritise research and data needs in future. To support the development of the strategy it was noted that improved data such as catch rate information will likely be required from both sunset and traditional inhabitant boat sectors, as factors such as whether catch rates are being maintained would likely be an indicator which tracks the performance of the fishery over time.

RAG provided advice on a range of data issues and data needs identified by researchers and management as areas for improvement (**Table 2**) while the strategy was in development.

The RAG agreed for the table of data issues to be maintained as a live document over future RAG meetings to support these issues being actioned and was to be circulated out of session for input from members and observers.

**Table 2.** Short to medium-term Torres Strait Finfish Fishery data issues identified for improvement in previous research reports and meetings (current as of December 2017)

SM: Spanish mackerel, CT: coral trout.

Previous issues/ data needs identified	Action to address / comment
<b>Reporting and data issues</b>	
Catch and effort data needs to improve utility for assessments (SM and CT).	Review TSF01 daily fishing logbook to make sure it is best capturing data for assessment and management. Carry out industry workshop to review logbook/ discuss filling out logbook and raise awareness with fishers about the need for accurate CPUE data and accurate spatial data – including the importance of recording zero-catches. Verify catch disposal record data against logbooks to understand variance between fishers.  Consider how VMS data might be analysed for stock assessment purposes.
Need to capture important data of zero-catches	
Spatial data issues with sunset logbooks – limited utility in past Spanish mackerel assessments.	
Need to capture TIB sector effort data – CDRs capture catch data but limited effort data.	Raise awareness among TIB finfish fishers about the need for accurate fishery data.
Need to reliably capture island freezer data	Ensure operational island freezers are filling out CDRs and awareness raising on value of accurate data for assessments and Harvest Strategy development.
Need monitoring for take from non-commercial sectors	Subsistence take project in progress. RAG advice is that recreational and charter catches are likely to be minimal.
<b>Biological data issues</b>	
Need to improve biological data inputs to stock assessment models due to age of most recent samples. Need to validate assumptions such as: age at maturity, age at length, length frequency.	Develop design of a sampling program alongside the Harvest Strategy project. Once designed evaluate how it might be delivered; e.g. through industry based sample collection, or an at-sea program funded through research channels. Investigate collection of samples to validate assumptions in the short term.
<b>Stock structure</b>	
Need to understand the relatedness within the Torres Strait SM and CT stocks to test the single-stock theory. Also important to understand connectedness to other adjacent stocks.	Previous acoustic monitoring carried out to examine SM exchange with Bramble Cay with limited findings. Genetic sampling could be carried out though this would likely be an involved project which would need to attract appropriate funding.
<b>Assessment issues (SM)</b>	
Need to understand how the SM assessment deals with most of the data coming from the Bramble Cay breeding aggregation of fish.	Next assessment update is to investigate.
Need to investigate the sudden peak of catches in the mid 2000's prior to the buyout and whether any of these catch data were 'paper' fish and the reported harvest level accurate.	Industry workshop and work on characterising the data, examining which boats entered the fishery and assess the accuracy of the available catch data from this time.
Ensure TIB sector changes such as experienced fishers leaving the fishery, freezers closing down, have been reflected in the assessment -	Data characterisation and industry workshop.
Ensure the impacts and benefits of the 2008 implementation of the 10 nm closures are understood and captured in the model (SM)	Next SM assessment update is to investigate. Industry workshop can record the impacts of the closures on reef-line sector marks (initial feedback is that this mainly impacted the SM sector)
<b>Fish vulnerability (mainly SM issue)</b>	
Improve understanding of fisher behaviour and how this varies across the fleet – including	Industry workshop to help stock assessment scientists and management characterise fishing practices.

variation in gear setup, targeting practices, daily fishing effort.	
Investigate SM 'domed' vulnerability where large fish are assumed to be less available to capture.	Next SM assessment update is to investigate.

The following additional points were discussed on data issues from the compiled table:

### ***Catch and effort data issues***

- More accurate fishing effort data is required to improve the assessment from the mackerel sector, particularly accurate effort (hours fished per day) per tender. A need exists for an understanding of how many hours are fished per tender and variability between operations.
- A measure of effort is required for the TIB sector. At present only total catch data (tonnage) is reported.
- Investigation is required on how changes in the TIB sector were accounted for in the data-set and model given when some long-term fishers left the fishery and when some island freezers ceased trading.
- There is a need for awareness raising with all finfish fishers on the importance of data to support fisheries management and stock assessments. It is important to talk about why data and CPUE time series matter for management and assessment purposes.
- There is a need to characterise the differences in targeting practices among fishers.
- There is strong support from industry for a staggered approach to engaging the TIB sector in data collection noting that if too much data is sought in a short period of time the overall quality of reporting might decrease. The following stages were suggested:
  - Stage 1 (now): Initial focus on the fish receiver system (filling out catch disposal records at point of landing) to understand total catches
  - Stage 2: Determine the best way to acquire effort data; then
  - Stage 3: Determine the best way to acquire biological data.

### ***Biological data issues***

- RAG noted that in future biological data needs for assessment purposes would be informed from the harvest strategy project team.
- RAG noted the age of available biological data for the Spanish mackerel stock assessment which was last collected in the early to mid-2000's (Table 1.3, pp 11 of Begg *et al.* 2006 below).
- A need was identified to validate the biological parameters of the Spanish mackerel age-structured population model, ideally at agreed intervals to ensure the assumptions are correct over time.
- There is a need for monitoring to understand the age structure of the stocks as this factor is linked to vulnerability which is one of the key assumptions of the model.
- Consideration was given to using fish frames retained by industry for biological sampling. It was noted that ageing data from otoliths collected from fish frames were very powerful data but would require an appropriate program with the right structure and stratification (e.g. random sampling from catch, whole-of-fishery representation, different size classes of fish, males and females etc.).

**Table 1.3.** Number of Spanish mackerel aged and measured in the DPI&F LTMP (2000-2002) and AFMA voluntary fisher logbooks (2004).

Year	Number aged			Sep	Number measured		
	Oct	Nov	Total		Oct	Nov	Total
2000	795	97	892		802	98	900
2001	874		874		909		909
2002	602		602		612		612
2004				721	662	406	1789
2005 <sup>1</sup>	710		710		719		719
Total	2981	97	3078	721	3704	504	4929

<sup>1</sup>Data collected in 2005 as part of the CRC Torres Strait project were not included in the assessment.

### **Coral trout catch and effort data**

- In running a coral trout assessment, it will be important to understand the percentage splits of catches between the four Torres Strait coral trout species given that they have different distributions across the fishery:
  1. Common (*Plectropomus leopardus*),
  2. Islander (*P. maculatus*) also called bar-cheeked trout,
  3. Leopard (*P. areolatus*) also called passionfruit trout,
  4. Bluespot (*P. laevis*);
- Daily Fishing Logbooks (TSF01) record total kilograms of coral trout and fishers are required to supply an estimated percentage breakdown of the four species in the logbook at the supplied prompts (as per the list point above).
- Buyers had a higher demand for trout species (or phenotypes) with red colouration for the whole-fish market and that species with darker colouration, such as passionfruit trout (also reported as 'leopard trout' - *P. areolatus*) were more frequently filleted rather than sold whole.
- It was noted that the current logbook does not have the capacity to record catch and effort per tender for the reef-line sector (mackerel sector is able to report per tender) and instead lumped all the catch per day under the primary vessel. This misses recording valuable effort data which may vary per dory.
- It was also noted that the logbook had no capacity to record where each tender was fishing, noting that they may travel some distance from the primary vessel.

### **Catch verification**

- Following the implementation of catch disposal records (CDRs, to be implemented on 1 December 2017) verification of catches can be carried out in 2018 to compare the accuracy of logbooks to CDR catch data.

### **Spatial representativeness of data**

- Consideration was given to the completeness of available spatial data, noting that it had not been fully utilised in past Spanish mackerel assessments for a number of reasons.
- The RAG requested some analysis on how well spatial and other catch and effort data are being filled out by fishers noting that it is important for managers to understand the completeness of records.
- RAG also stressed the need for fishers to fill out and understand the value of zero catches - which are equally as important as catch data for assessment purposes.
- It will be important to conduct research in future to examine where the 'sources' and 'sinks' for the Torres Strait stocks are, noting spatial analyses done on Queensland east coast Spanish mackerel stocks had identified two distinct sources for the mackerel stock offshore from Cairns.

### ***Domed vulnerability***

- The domed-shaped selectivity issue identified during the Spanish mackerel assessment will be tested under the harvest strategy.

## **3.2 Research priorities**

Finfish RAG noted that available research funding was almost fully allocated for the next two financial years. It was noted that the current investment for Torres Strait finfish research was supporting the Harvest Strategy.

The RAG noted suggested research priorities identified by Finfish Working Group and the Scientific Technical Working Group (as per the agenda paper).

The Finfish RAG identified that the **key research priority in the short term was acquiring ageing data to support the assessments for Spanish mackerel and coral trout**. This research would involve taking frames, extraction of otoliths, sending the otoliths to ageing services, having ageing performed and those data being provided to assessment scientists for input into the analyses. It was noted that consideration would need to be given to the stratification and number of samples to be collected and that this could be discussed out of session with RAG technical members.

Points discussed:

- AFMA member advised the RAG of the current proposal to use a small amount of expected underspend money to update the existing estimates of mortality and provide advice on future improvements (note this was discussed further by the RAG at Agenda Item 5.2 and was not supported by the RAG).
- RAG noted that Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) would be required before a harvest strategy could be implemented. It was noted that the MSE testing was outside the funded scope of the present Harvest Strategy Project. RAG requested the harvest strategy project team to provide advice to the RAG on work that would be required to support MSE testing to support the work-plan.

**Finfish RAG 1, Action 2, Agenda item 3.2:** Harvest strategy project team to provide a short paper advising the RAG on work that would be required to support Management Strategy Evaluation following the Harvest Strategy development.

- An industry member suggested that any underspend of research funds would be best used to address some of the identified data issues (Agenda Item 3.1). It was noted that some of the data issues would be progressed through the harvest strategy project.
- Broad support was given for the need to understand stock structure in the Torres Strait and consideration was given to how this would be addressed through the Harvest Strategy. The RAG considered that while genetic analyses would be an appropriate method to address this, it would likely be an expensive exercise. It was noted that increasing our understanding of relatedness to adjacent stocks e.g. north Queensland stocks may shift the assessment boundaries and the associated TAC setting areas e.g. if Queensland fish were part of the Torres Strait stock or vice versa.

## **Agenda Item 4 – Research project updates**

### **4.1 Traditional take project update**

RAG noted the prepared update on the project aiming to improve estimates of finfish catches taken for subsistence purposes. The RAG noted that the project team had progressed the work as far as possible to date, noting that consideration has been given to several options for additional resources from TSRA that might have been made available to support the project.

The RAG agreed to support the continuation of the project with the revised scope. To support the continuation and delivery of the project the RAG supplied the following advice:

- Progressing the project needs community leaders to identify bodies/people that are willing to take responsibility for data collection and be a 'champion' for the issue.
- Ideally these 'champions' and community monitors should be identified before the project continues to help drive the issue.
- The project has value in advising future programs and raising awareness particularly given future expansion in the TIB sector, noting a proportion of commercial catch is retained for subsistence purposes.

The RAG provided the following advice to support the project course of action over next few months:

- TSRA to confirm what additional resources might be available to support the project. To provide support, TSRA will require a statement of work from the project team which would be required for consideration.
- TSRA to write to industry associations to advise that the monitoring work could fall within the administrative funding grants.
- TSRA to assess if rangers could be utilised.

#### **The RAG discussed the following points:**

- It was noted that the planned outcome of the project was to provide a cost effective method to provide ongoing data on traditional take.
- AFMA advised that management requires periodic validation of the available estimates; understanding whether they are still valid or if they have changed to support evidence based decision making.
- TSRA advised that it is important to consider the costs and benefits; noting costs, time effort involved in improving the estimate which represents a small proportion of commercial catches.
- Industry members suggested that following future development, communities could take ownership of a subsistence take monitoring plan as per turtle and dugong management plans. Communities are apparently interested in sustainability and data collection including the use of daily fishing logbooks.
- Noting their role in the successful community uptake of the turtle and dugong management plans, some consideration and support was given to the capacity of the ranger program being tasked with this responsibility.
- It was noted that Mypathways can only be engaged in such a program if they are the host employer with CSIRO as principle investigator directing operations in this case. A different organisation such as Erub Fisheries Management Association or Kos and Abob Fisheries could be able to do so as a supervisor.
- Some islands have active fishing industry associations – these could feasibly be provided with financial administrative support to help drive subsistence monitoring. It was noted that TSRA offer grant funding to cover up to 20 hours per week in a community administrative officer role. The RAG noted that this could be an avenue to assist.

## **4.2 Scoping study for barramundi, black jewfish and crab in top-western Torres Strait communities**

RAG observer Dr Andrew Tobin advised the RAG of the background of the project as per the agenda paper. The RAG were asked to provide initial advice on the project methodology and the likely outcomes of the project.

TSRA advised that the project is a feasibility study at this early stage and one of the drivers for this project was community interest in re-developing their fisheries which could potentially boost

employment in the cluster. It was advised by Mr Tobin that unlike jewfish, barramundi could not feasibly be fished commercially using line fishing methods. TSRA and FRDC are funding the feasibility study.

Points discussed:

- It was noted that the feasibility study is proposing to use currently prohibited fishing method – mesh gillnets. Gillnetting was banned by the PZJA in 2005 over concerns over bycatch including dugongs although the PZJA noted at the time that the ban was not intended to prohibit industry development in the Top Westerns should communities wish to do so. It was suggested that this could potentially be addressed through regulating fisher behaviour such as enforcing net attendance rules. It was noted that the trial fishing would collect data on all impacts, including any protected species capture.
- Barramundi is likely a shared stock with PNG. The PNG-NFA invited participant advised that PNG-NFA can provide catch data from western province factories buying barramundi flesh and swim bladders.
- RAG provided support for a strong data collection program alongside any developing fishery.
- RAG advised that if this research goes ahead, strong communication and consultation relating to bycatch will be required.

## Agenda Item 5 – Advice for management

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### 5.1 Recommended biological catches for upcoming seasons

The Finfish RAG recommended:

- A 125 t RBC for Spanish mackerel for the 2018/19 season, recognising:
  - the most recent 2016 assessment update provided an RBC for Spanish mackerel of 125 t with a B60 target reference point;
  - no new evidence existed to warrant a different approach; and
  - that a further update would be performed on this assessment in 2018 as part of the harvest strategy development.
- That the coral trout nominal TAC of 134.9 t remain unchanged for the 2018/19 season, recognising:
  - the age of available data;
  - a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and
  - the need to look at historical catch data (1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.

AFMA advised that original intention of the agenda item was to get RAG advice on Recommended Biological Catches (RBCs) for the next three upcoming seasons. Following discussion with the harvest strategy project team, and new information provided, it was advised that management was only seeking advice from the RAG on the upcoming season given the likelihood that Spanish mackerel and coral trout stock assessments would be updated/performed as part of the harvest strategy project in 2018.

The AFMA member clarified for members that a Recommended Biological Catch is also known as total kill or maximum harvest. This RBC is to cover take from the commercial and also other sources of mortality outside of the fishery such as subsistence take. It was advised that a B60 target reference point (above the Biomass of Maximum Sustainable Yield) was being used as an interim target to ensure healthy population biomass and catch rates in order to achieve and balance sustainability, economic, social and cultural objectives.

It was noted that the focus of the RAG was on the science to support RBCs. An RBC sets a total harvest (or total kill) for the stock and is used in setting a Total Allowable Catch (TAC) which

covers catches from the commercial sectors. In setting a TAC, other known sources of mortality, such as recreational or subsistence take are deducted from the RBC. It was noted that working groups were tasked with providing advice on TACs.

### ***Spanish mackerel RBC for the 2018/19 season***

The RAG recommended a 125 t RBC for the 2018/19 season noting the following points:

- the most recent 2016 assessment update provided an RBC for Spanish mackerel of 125 t with a B60 target reference point;
- no new evidence existed to warrant a different approach; and
- that a further update would be performed on this assessment in 2018 as part of the harvest strategy development.

### ***Work-plan for 2018 to support assessments***

In updating the Spanish mackerel stock assessment and performing an initial coral trout stock assessment the following work will be carried out during 2018:

- Three additional Spanish mackerel stock assessment runs will be carried out together with the 2016 assessment runs, noting that analysis 4 which was deliberately inflated for contrast may be dropped. Revisiting the model with additional runs will attempt to address issues identified such as:
  - sensitivity analyses to examine how the model might perform with domed vulnerability;
  - hyperstability issue; and,
  - examination of CPUE data using indicator vessels.
- These additional Spanish mackerel model runs will feed into the design and testing of harvest strategy frameworks to understand how they will operate. RAG advice will be sought on performance metrics such as targets, limits and operational objectives which will be presented for discussion and feedback.
- Sunset boats which have frequent catch records throughout the available time series are to be investigated as potential indicator vessels and compared to the whole data set.

### ***Subsistence take in the Spanish mackerel model***

The RAG noted that for Spanish mackerel the last assessment yielded an RBC of 125 t. It was queried how subsistence catches were accounted for in the model and the B60 target reference point – whether it was methodologically correct to remove the subsistence catch amount if it was accounted for in the B60 target. Science members advised the RAG of how subsistence catches were dealt with in the assessment, RBC and TAC:

- A target level for the stock is set e.g. the B60 target reference point which provides for the stock to be maintained at a level that can sustainably support both commercial and traditional fishing.
- Setting the target at B60 doesn't account for the actual harvest, instead it is the target level that can support that harvest.
- After the objectives are set for the model it is run which outputs an RBC which yields a long term equilibrium harvest (called an 'optimisation') which is a calculation of the long term average catch which will maintain or move the stock towards the target.
- To keep the catches at the target level of harvest a TAC is set for the commercial sectors after the harvest from other sources, such as subsistence catches, are deducted from the RBC.

### ***Future expansion of TIB sector catches***

- Industry members advised that should the TIB sector expand its effort and catches in future with the rollout of the TSRA infrastructure funding and business plans, it was important to ensure that an appropriate allocation of the TAC is available to cover the catches and aspirations of this sector.

- Stronger data will be available in 2018 season from the implementation of mandatory catch disposal records which will aid mid-season understanding of TIB sector catches.

### ***Split TAC for Bramble Cay***

Consideration was given to whether Bramble Cay – the site of a breeding aggregation which accounted for the majority of Spanish mackerel catch and effort per season - warranted management as a separate unit with a split TAC for this area of waters.

RAG noted it is important management issue and provided the following advice:

- It is important for management to understand and research stock structure noting that the mackerel are likely have a continuous distribution across the Torres Strait and is likely to have a fluid stock structure.
- It is important to analyse the fishing effort on Bramble Cay since the buyout and the implementation of the 10 nm closures noting that the fishery has likely changed.
- It was considered that the driver for capping catches at Bramble Cay was more likely an issue of economics for the fishers accessing catch there rather than a sustainability issue i.e. targeting fish at this location would likely become unprofitable before damage to the stock occurred.
- Noting that an industry meeting is planned for 2018 the RAG suggests that further discussion occurs with sunset licence holders to provide background information to support consideration of the issue.

### ***Coral trout RBC for 2018/19 season***

- The RAG noted that, unlike Spanish mackerel, the nominal coral trout TAC of 134.9t has been under caught in recent seasons which provides a buffer while the harvest strategy and assessment are under development.
- AFMA advised on the outcomes of the last Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) work (*Evaluation of the eastern Torres Strait reef-line fishery*, Williams et. al 2007) noting the outcomes of which were still the main evidence used for decision making. The RAG noted that given the age of the MSE work the utility of the outcomes was beginning to decrease.
- Catch projections from MSE were based on effort data which was converted into catch meaning that the model only tracked effort NOT catch.
- Investigation is required into the 2001 to 2005 reference period used for setting the coral trout nominal TAC. This period does not appear to be stable in terms of catches plus two investment warnings were issued during this time. It was noted that these data may be housed in QDAF logbooks and the harvest strategy project team could submit a QDAF data request to query these data.
- RAG and harvest strategy project team need to see what the catch time series was during the apparent decline in predicted relative biomass from years 1980 to around 2003 (figure 6.38, pp. 103 from MSE work).
- Further understanding was required on the differences between the apparent CPUE and the stock abundance noting that trout could reportedly be abundant in an area with poor catch rates. The RAG flagged that there were likely issues with availability of trout to fishing gear and that other factors such as cyclones had been suggested on the east coast.
- The RAG recommended that the status quo for coral trout be maintained for the upcoming season noting:
  - the age of available data;
  - a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and
  - the need to look at historical catch data (1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in biomass.

**Finfish RAG 1, Action 3, Agenda item 5.1:** AFMA to liaise with the harvest strategy project team to investigate the coral trout catch series data that underlies a) the apparent decline in catches from 1980 to 2003 and b) the catch series that underlies the nominal TAC reference period 2001-2005, noting some of these data may be housed by QDAF.

### ***Other points discussed:***

- A previous James Cook University project had successfully boosted our understanding of TIB sector freezer data by visiting them and taking 1000s of photos of the available catch data pages from freezer ledgers. It was advised that this was a cost effective option.
- Noted that this TAC is not based on concerns over the biomass of the stock - last estimate of biomass puts the stock around 40 per cent of virgin biomass which is considered healthy. B40 which is healthy - instead the TAC will maintain good catch rates.
- Noted that clear communication needs to be made on process of RBC to TAC and to be clear about the target level.

## **5.2 Estimating catches taken outside of the commercial fishery**

The Finfish RAG provided the following advice on catches taken outside of the commercial fishery:

- Recreational sector catches are likely to be minimal based on available evidence from the QDAF surveys.
- Charter sector catches are likely to be minimal based on available evidence provided from QDAF catch data. The RAG noted that there is no evidence to suggest the number of charter boat operations/licences is increasing.
- RAG recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 tonnes to 10 tonnes.
- RAG considered that there was no requirement to provide a recommended subsistence take deduction from the coral trout TAC given the amount of available information and that an assessment would likely be conducted on the species in 2018.
- RAG did not recommend any work on improving the estimates of mortality at this time though some options were considered.

### ***Points discussed on recreation and charter estimates:***

The QDAF member reiterated previous advice provided to the Finfish Working Group (as per the tabled paper):

- Based on available QDAF catch data, Torres Strait charter sector catches appear to average at around one tonne per year for all species combined.
- Recreational survey –only two households were surveyed during the last phone survey. These data were unusable due to the small sample size and the large associated error.

The RAG noted that there is no evidence to suggest emerging trends from the status quo such as an increasing number of charter boat operations or licences.

The QDAF member advised that while QDAF was responsible for managing recreational fishing in the Torres Strait it was not considered a priority issue from a management perspective given the low population and the low number of recreational fishers in the Torres Strait.

The TSRA member advised that a new cadet position at TSRA could investigate the feasibility of a boat-ramp survey option for Torres Strait. The RAG noted that such a study could form the basis of a small academic project such as an honours project.

### ***Points discussed on subsistence estimates:***

RAG recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 tonnes to 10 tonnes based on the following points:

- Data underlying the estimate was ageing and was available from only three islands
- The number of TIB (commercial) sector fishing endorsements has increased since the Busilacchi study.
- Effort creep may have been occurring from the 1990s CSIRO studies to the Busilacchi study and may still be occurring.
- Torres Strait population has likely decreased since the Busilacchi study.

Points discussed:

- The RAG noted the age of the available estimate of subsistence from the 2008 Busilacchi study (*The subsistence coral reef fishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment*)<sup>1</sup> with data available from the mid 2000's.
- Other research studies had generally determined an increase of ~3 per cent per year to account for effort creep (i.e. increased fishing power associated with advances in fishing gear - sounders, motors, GPS).
- RAG considered that getting the estimate of subsistence take wrong could potentially lead to overshooting the RBC. It was identified that this was a risk for Spanish mackerel where the catches were close to the RBC.
- It was suggested that a large amount of Spanish mackerel from the central islands may be being retained for subsistence as there is no commercial market for it on those islands at present. Industry members advised that enough catch needs to be available to support growth in the TIB sector in the central islands should a market develop there in future.
- It was volunteered that less than 1 tonne (around 500kg) of mackerel might be taken per year as an estimate by the Ugar community for subsistence purposes.
- Census data indicates the population of the outer islands may have decreased over recent years meaning that the subsistence take could be decreasing over time.

### 5.3 Estimating Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector catches

The TSRA member and observers advised that the TSRA were of the view that the TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee should be deciding the estimate of TIB sector catches and they were not comfortable with the PZJA RAG providing advice on this issue but rather that discussions in this forum should be around the total commercial take.

AFMA advised that the RAG was tasked with determining the best estimates possible for PZJA decision making and TAC setting as per other fisheries.

Finfish RAG noted the implementation of the Fish Receiver System (mandatory catch disposal records from 1 December 2017) would assist in improving the understanding of catches from the commercial sector.

### 5.4 Update on work supporting expansion of take of other reef-line species

The RAG noted the prepared update and that RAG advice would be sought on this issue in future meetings.

The TSRA member advised that there was no interest among lease holders this season to target other reef-line species. In response to a RAG member query, TSRA advised that fishers applying for coral trout catch entitlements also had to apply for a percentage byproduct catch of other species i.e. one tonne of other species for every 10 t of coral trout.

## Agenda Item 6 – Finfish Harvest Strategy Project

The RAG noted three presentations from the finfish harvest strategy project team:

The RAG was joined at this agenda item by project team members George Leigh and Matthew Holden who were developing the coral trout stock assessment.

<sup>1</sup> [https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/11041/2/02Thesis\\_whole.pdf](https://researchonline.jcu.edu.au/11041/2/02Thesis_whole.pdf)

## Harvest Strategy Presentation, Part 1, Trevor Hutton CSIRO, project overview

Trevor Hutton, CSIRO, project lead presented an overview of the harvest strategy project:

- Objectives of harvest strategy development
- Harvest strategy components – parts of the framework
- Indicative work plan ahead of the project team and RAG.
- Data collation achieved to date on Spanish mackerel.

The RAG noted the following points:

- The RAG and the harvest strategy project team will need to work together on understanding sectoral catches (e.g. subsistence harvest estimates).
- Distinction must be made between stock indicators compared to testing against performance indicators (generally referred to as performance statistics or metrics).
- CSIRO has provided some research on what indicators can be used to gauge fishery activity when the fishery is performing well.
- RAG input will be required into providing feedback on the performance metrics of the strategy.
- Origins of target and limit reference points are from the Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy. It was noted that these points align with international fisheries best management practices.
- Consideration was given to how interim harvest control rules might work - whether limit reference points are required and whether harvest control rules that allow lower exploitation rates are appropriate (limit reference point isn't necessarily set at the point at which fishing ceases) noting that ideally a stock would not approach the limit reference points.
- Consideration will need to be given to how harvest control rules will function and what advice will be required from the RAG to support their development.
- Consideration will need to be given to the performance metrics e.g. defining what good and poor catch rates per boat might look like for Spanish mackerel or coral trout.
- The RAG noted the 2015 work conducted by Natalie Dowling on Guidelines for developing formal harvest strategies for data-poor species and fisheries. It was suggested that this research could be summarised and presented at the next meeting.
- A glossary will be developed to help clarify terms and improve RAG member understanding e.g.  $B_0$  should be called  $K$  (carrying capacity) or  $B_{100}$  (year zero).

## Harvest Strategy Presentation, Part 2, George Leigh UQ CARMS, Coral trout east coast assessment

George Leigh provided the RAG with an overview of the Queensland Great Barrier Reef coral trout stock assessment from 2014, with a focus on the lessons learned to date.

RAG noted the following points on the Queensland east coast coral trout assessment:

- East coast coral trout model is regionally split
- Catch rates are loosely correlated to abundance.
- Underwater visual surveys and habitat mapping were indispensable to the Queensland stock assessment
- Age and length data are very powerful data but still very expensive to collect.
- Torres Strait coral trout assessment may need some transfer of information from the Great Barrier Reef which has a wealth of data which may be useful for the Torres Strait.
- Reef bioregions including reef morphology have been mapped for the Great Barrier Reef but not for Torres Strait. Some information transfer on reef morphology and information (e.g. abundance such as number of fish per hectare per habitat types such as front reef slope, submerged reef, back reef slope) from far north GBR could be similar to the Torres Strait.
- GBRMPA GIS data may aid in inferring reef morphology in the Torres Strait model.
- A harvest strategy for coral trout is still being developed in Queensland with harvest control rules currently in place which rely on logbook catch rates. There is still a need to implement

monitoring (last data 2009) with a project currently in progress to develop monitoring. Noted that monitoring is very expensive.

- Different species were separated out in the east coast assessment – focus on common coral trout (*P. leopardus*). Consideration must be given to the four different species found in the Torres Strait given that they are likely to have different distributions and potentially different population biology.
- It was noted that if coral trout were theoretically fished down in an area their recovery time would be dependent on recruitment which can be variable. Low remaining numbers in an area would have the capacity to replenish a local area with strong recruitment and the correct environmental conditions.
- Catch rates can vary widely across an area noting industry reports that:
  - Coral trout may have the capacity for a sort of learned behaviour whereby fish become 'hook-shy' after a time and will not take baits.
  - dropping a fish on the retrieve can lead to a temporary drop in catch rates at that location - this report is also supported by studies where fishers re-entered closed reefs with good catch rates which was attributed to the 'naivety' factor where fish had not become hook-shy.
- It was noted that it may generally be harder to overfish coral trout compared to other species as economic factors – driven by catch rates - would likely come into play before ecological factors such as depleted biomass.

A coral trout CPUE time series can be confounded by the stocks distribution changing in association with complex ecology and environmental factors such as cyclones:

- Wave action and broken coral associated with cyclones are theorised to disturb baitfish which coral trout feed on.
- An associated drop in water temperature could be impacting trout metabolic rates – e.g. Cyclone Justin had a lot of associated upwelling of cooling water on the shallow reefs with an associated drop in catch rates. View bucketing showed fish were present but were not taking baits.
- An alternative theory is that trout fishers can generally only target down to 20m water depth as barotrauma occurs to trout fished from depths deeper than this. Trout reportedly may head to deeper water after cyclones as evidenced by more green coloured coral trout, normally found in shallower water, being captured in deeper water.

**Finfish RAG, Action 4, Agenda item 6:** Harvest Strategy project team to contact Roland Pitcher to enquire as to what Torres Strait habitat mapping data is available.

**Finfish RAG, Action 5, Agenda item 6:** AFMA to liaise with the 2007 Coral Trout MSE project team to determine what coral trout catch data were used in the MSE (Pre-2003 Torres Strait fishers were filling out east coast logbooks).

**Finfish RAG, Action 6, Agenda item 6:** Harvest Strategy project team to advise the RAG and Finfish WG on the outcomes of the east coast coral trout assessment in 2018.

### **Harvest Strategy Presentation Part 3, Michael O'Neill, QDAF: Presentation on Spanish mackerel assessment**

The RAG noted an overview of the current Spanish mackerel stock assessment and an update on some of the recent data (post-2014). The RAG provided the following advice on the initial phase of the Spanish mackerel harvest strategy development and 2018 assessment update:

1. Initial focus should be on improving effort data – a strong CPUE time series is required and collecting representative effort data was considered to be the highest priority. Management were encouraged to raise awareness among fishers about the need for accurate and complete catch and effort data.
2. Project team is to examine how renewed collection of age-data could benefit the assessment and harvest strategy. It was noted that it could take some time to acquire these

data as it was slower to collect and age. A pilot study (one or two weeks work) could feasibly address what benefits do these data have for Torres Strait management and how these data may affect the assessment.

Noting that the assessment relied heavily on CPUE data (with some older 2002 biological data), ideally the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery would aim to have at least one year of reliable monitoring data as a snapshot followed by a structured program at scheduled intervals. Consideration could be given to the development of such a program and it could likely be developed to be cost-effective and powerful. Work will need to be done on sample sizes required to ensure that samples were representative of the catches across the fishery.

The RAG recommended examination of the following aspects:

- Effect of vessel freezer/hold capacity on catch rate data. The assessment could potentially be reporting higher catch rates per day but the onboard freezer capacity stops fisherman earlier that day and operation days are lost waiting to unload catch to the barge at Yorke Island. The peak catch rates that are possible may not be reflected. Analysis is required on the scale of catch reporting by hour and ground truthing with fishers is required alongside the scheduled logbook review process.
- Examination of a sub-set of CPUE data from the fishing targeting the Bramble Cay breeding aggregation from August to December.
- Uniformity of reporting across the fleet, whether logbook data was being provided as 'standard entries' with the same effort data every day.
- How Torres Strait Vessel Monitoring System data could benefit the assessment by being made available to scientists; noting that an algorithm would need to be developed to convert Torres Strait VMS data to infer fishing effort. It was recommended that the RAG examines the outputs of the Queensland VMS dory trial and then consider the value of VMS for sunset sector dories in the Torres Strait in future.
- Check that fisher's gear setups have not changed over time to understand if gear selectivity is changing.

Additionally, an industry member advised that while primary vessels have VMS fitted there are concerns that the tenders may range more widely and may be entering the 10 nm closures which cannot be monitored. This was noted as a compliance issue that was to be addressed separately to the stock assessment advice.

The RAG noted that a comparison of the catch rates from the model, comparing BMSY to B60 target reference points (page 39 of the assessment, figure 20) was a clear example of how higher catch rates could be maintained with an appropriate target.

**Finfish RAG, Action 7, Agenda item 6:** Michael O'Neill to provide the Finfish RAG with revised figures e) and f) from Figure 20 of the stock assessment report with the same scale to illustrate how a B60 long term average equilibrium points provides greater catch rates.

RAG noted the need for management to balance the short term revenue from leasing the resource compared to the long term goals for the fishery and how this is incorporated into the harvest strategy e.g. when the TIB sector expands in future what catch rates will be available.

## Agenda Item 7 – Other business

### *Western line closure*

Given the limited amount of time available to consider this agenda item, the RAG noted the prepared information at agenda item 2.2. It was noted that the Finfish Working Group had previously provided advice in supporting the removal of the closure.

Preliminary consideration from the RAG was as follows:

- Management is not proposing to increase the TACs for coral trout. In line with this it was suggested that removing the closure might spread the current commercial fishing effort to a broader area.
- RAG noted previous considerations about coral trout catch rates and considered that economic impacts would likely come into effect (hook-shy fish leading to a drop in local catch rates) before ecological impacts might occur.
- Some consideration was given to how the western habitats may be shallower than eastern habitats but data would be required to assess this.
- More fishing operations and freezers may open in the western Torres Strait in line with the outcomes of the current TSRA infrastructure project meaning there may be a total increase in fishing effort with more fishers entering the sector.

RAG requested an opportunity to provide more consideration on this item at a future meeting.

### ***Acoustic monitoring***

The RAG noted a presentation at agenda item 4.2 from Andrew Tobin on the outcomes of recent research on acoustic monitoring for Spanish mackerel.

Industry member flagged that communities must be consulted about research projects that happen in waters surrounding their communities. A strong process for consultation needs to be agreed and followed. It was advised that the Ugar community has a strong verbal history about catches taken from their waters and concerns have been raised about how the catch data from research might be published. The Kos and Abob association has a standing offer to discuss their communities' needs with researchers.

### ***Barramundi-cod management objectives***

At agenda item 3.1 the Malu Lamar representative advised that barramundi-cod could provide value to the Torres Strait in future as part of expansion in the area of ecotourism with the providing aesthetic value for divers. Malu Lamar queried what RAG members knew about the status of barramundi-cod in the Torres Strait and whether the species might become less abundant in the Torres Strait over time.

The RAG noted:

- Barramundi-cod were a protected species in Queensland east coast fisheries and were not protected in the Torres Strait.
- AFMA advised that there is a process to nominate a species to become listed as a protected species through the Department of Environment.
- Barramundi-cod were listed as a protected species in Queensland due to their iconic nature, not due to concerns over stock status or sustainability.
- Torres Strait fishers could maintain this species as a premium product given it cannot be marketed from elsewhere.
- No assessment has been done on Torres Strait stocks.
- Logbook catch data from sunset fishers suggests that low numbers are captured by the reef-line sector.
- The RAG advised that a scoping exercise or a student-project could be performed to examine available data and report on basic figures such as length, weight over time, proportion of catches of mature versus immature fish which may help management develop some basic indicators.
- Consideration would need to be given to the management objectives for this species given the trade-offs between ecotourism values compared to the value from commercial catches.

## **Agenda Item 8 – Work plan, date and venue for next meeting**

The RAG noted that the next meeting was proposed to be held in March 2018, potentially on Thursday Island. It was also noted that the meeting would have a focus on the next milestone of the harvest strategy project and might be a joint RAG and Working Group meeting.

TSRA advised once again that the timeframe being proposed would not suit as any advice to support the Finfish Quota Management Committee needs to be in place by January.

The RAG chair thanked participants for a very productive first meeting. The meeting was closed at 3:45 PM, Friday 10<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES</b> <b>Spanish mackerel Total Allowable Catch</b> <b>recommendation for the 2018-19 fishing season</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 4.1</b> <b>For discussion and advice</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **discuss** and **provide advice** on the notional TAC for Spanish mackerel for the 2018-19 fishing season noting the Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FFRAG):
  - a) recommended a 125 t for the Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) for the 2018/19 season noting:
    - the most recent 2016 assessment update provided an RBC for Spanish mackerel of 125 t with a B60 target reference point;
    - no new evidence existed to warrant a different approach; and
    - that a further update would be performed on this assessment in 2018 as part of the harvest strategy development.
  - b) recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 tonnes to 10 tonnes based on the following:
    - data underlying the estimate was ageing and was available from only three islands;
    - the number of TIB (commercial) sector fishing endorsements has increased since the Busilacchi study;
    - effort creep may have been occurring from the 1990s CSIRO studies to the Busilacchi study and may still be occurring;
    - Torres Strait population has likely decreased since the Busilacchi study.
  - a) advised that based on the available evidence from QDAF recreational survey data and charter sector logbook data, both recreational and charter catches are likely to be minimal.
2. That the Working Group **NOTE** PZJA Standing Committee agreed that in the absence of new or updated information future catches should be managed in line with the RBC of 125t.
3. That the Working Group **NOTE** notwithstanding any further Working Group advice, the notional TAC is calculated to be 115t for the 2018-19 fishing season.

## KEY ISSUES

1. The FWG is being asked to provide advice on the notional TAC to be set to manage commercial catches for the 2018-19 fishing season beginning 1 July 2018.

2. At its July 2016 meeting the Working Group recommended that a Technical Scientific Working Group (TSWG) be convened to review the updated Spanish mackerel stock assessment performed by O'Neill & Tobin (2015) to allow for full consideration of inputs and outcomes.
3. Since this time a dedicated Finfish Resource Assessment Group has been formed to provide technical advice to the working group on matters such as Recommended Biological Catches.
4. The Finfish RAG met on 9-10 November 2017 and considered all available stock assessment and catch information for Spanish mackerel and the interim target reference point. The Finfish RAG:
  - b) recommended an 125 t Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) for the 2018/19 season noting the following:
    - the most recent 2016 assessment update provided an RBC for Spanish mackerel of 125 t with a B60 target reference point;
    - no new evidence existed to warrant a different approach; and
    - that a further update would be performed on this assessment in 2018 as part of the harvest strategy development.
  - c) recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 tonnes to 10 tonnes based on the following:
    - data underlying the estimate was ageing and was available from only three islands;
    - the number of TIB (commercial) sector fishing endorsements has increased since the Busilacchi study;
    - effort creep may have been occurring from the 1990s CSIRO studies to the Busilacchi study and may still be occurring;
    - Torres Strait population has likely decreased since the Busilacchi study.
  - d) advised that based on the available evidence from QDAF recreational survey data and charter sector logbook data, both recreational and charter catches are likely to be minimal.
5. In considering catch management arrangements for the 2017-18 fishing season, the PZJA Standing Committee agreed that in the absence of new or updated information future catches should be managed in line with the RBC of 125 t.
6. In line with an RBC of 125t and deducting best estimates of catches taken outside of Fishery as advised by the FFRAG the notional TAC for the 2018-19 fishing season is calculated to be 115 t (**Table 1**).

**Table 1** Spanish mackerel TAC calculation taking into account the TSWG advice and advice from the FWG and November 2017 RAG meeting.

Source of catches	Expected catch (t)	Comments
Subsistence catch (kai kai) by traditional inhabitants	10	Based on data from <i>Busilacchi 2013</i> this includes total of catch estimates for Mer, Masig and Erub Islands. The FWG agreed in July 2016 that the catch figures from the <i>Busilacchi 2008</i> research are the best estimates of traditional take of finfish. While originally reported by CSIRO as 12 t this was further refined to 5.155 t. The RAG recommended that an estimate of 10 t be used for decision making noting data was only from three islands, the number of TIB fishing endorsements has increased and effort creep may be occurring.
Recreational	Likely to be minimal.	RAG has advised based on the available evidence from QDAF recreational survey results recreational catches are likely to be minimal.
Charter	Likely to be minimal	Available QLD logbook records show Charter boat line catches are low. Logbook records for the period between 1995 and 2014 report a total of 19.58 tonnes of mixed species taken from Torres Strait waters.  RAG has advised based on the available evidence from QDAF logbook data from charter catches are likely to be minimal.
PNG catch sharing	0	PNG_NFA have declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2017/18.
<b>Total discounts</b>	<b>- 10</b>	
<b>RBC (125 t) – total for other catches (10 t)</b>	<b>115 t Recommended TAC</b>	

## BACKGROUND

- The 2006 stock assessment of Spanish mackerel (Begg *et al* 2006) has been updated by Michael O'Neill and Andrew Tobin as part of the project "*Defining the status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing.*" The assessment examined 11 additional years of logbook data (1989 to 2014).
- The stock assessment was presented to the TSWG at their 10 November 2016 meeting and the Finfish Working Group at their March 2017 meeting.
- The TSWG and Working Group accepted the updated assessment as the best available stock assessment for Spanish mackerel whilst also noting sources of uncertainty in the

assessment. The TSWG recognised that a level of uncertainty is expected in fishery stock assessments and that the current assessment should serve to guide future research and data priorities for the fishery.

10. The TSWG and RAG have identified a range of additional analyses, research and data collection/analysis priorities to improve the stock assessment. These recommendations should be considered when developing future research priorities.
11. A key recommendation of the report is for *“Management to adopt a precautionary approach to setting target levels of commercial harvest until further data of total catches and fish age structures are available”*.
12. The initial Spanish mackerel TAC set for the 2008-09 season was **187.7 tonnes**. The TAC was based on average annual commercial catches (TIB and Sunset sectors) between 2001-2005.
13. Following advice from the TSWG and Finfish Working Group in early 2017, the PZJA Standing Committee agreed to a maximum estimated Spanish mackerel commercial catch of **132 tonnes** (comprising proposed sunset leasing of 110 t and estimated TIB catches of 22 t) should be implemented for the 2017-18 fishing season on the basis that:
  - a) the stock biomass is estimated to be around  $B_{40}$  which is considered to be  $B_{MSY}$ ;
  - b) a step down approach in reducing the catch limit from the current notional 187.7 t to the Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) of 125 t will provide an adjustment period for industry and additional time to further refine estimates of all sources of fishing mortality and agreed estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector catches.
  - c) the total estimated maximum catch (137 t, inclusive of a revised subsistence catch estimates of 5t for surveyed parts of the fishery) in 2017-18 would be above the RBC of 125 t but less than 150 t (assessments indicate that for harvest over 150 t there is expected to be little building towards the recommended interim target reference point of  $B_{60}$ ).
14. The PZJA Standing Committee agreed that in the absence of new or updated information future catches should be managed in line with the RBC of 125t.

### **Stock status**

15. Spanish mackerel is currently classified as **not overfished** and **not subject to overfishing** (ABARES Fishery Status Reports 2017). This stock status determination is based on the estimate of stock biomass from the 2016 stock assessment of Spanish mackerel (O'Neill and Tobin, 2016) and that recent reported catches have been below the range of MSY estimates from the assessment.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES</b> <b>Coral Trout: Recommended Total Allowable Catch for the 2018-19 Season</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 4.2</b> <b>FOR ADVICE</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on the 2018-19 fishing season TAC for coral trout **NOTING** the Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FFRAG):
  - a) recommended that the coral trout nominal TAC of 134.9 t remain unchanged for the 2018-19 season recognising:
    - I. the age of available data,
    - II. a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and
    - III. the need to look at historical catch data (1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.
  - b) advised that based on the available evidence from QDAF recreational survey data and charter sector logbook data, both recreational and charter catches are likely to be minimal.
  - c) considered that there was no requirement at present to deduct coral trout subsistence catches given the amount of available information and that an assessment would likely be conducted on the species in 2018.

## KEY ISSUES

2. The notional TAC for coral trout is 134.9 t and has remained unchanged since it was first introduced in 2008. Reported catches have remained less than 50t for the last 10 years. The notional TAC was based on average catches between 2001 and 2005. There is no formal stock assessment for the fishery however a management strategy evaluation has been undertaken (Williams *et al* 2007).
3. At its meeting on 9-10 November 2017 the Finfish RAG recommended that the coral trout nominal TAC of 134.9 t remain unchanged for the 2018-19 season recognising:
  - a. the age of available data,
  - b. a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and
  - c. the need to look at historical catch data (1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.
4. The Finfish RAG advised that based on the available evidence from QDAF survey data, both recreational and charter catches are likely to be minimal. The RAG considered that there was no requirement at present to deduct coral trout subsistence catches given the amount of available information and that an assessment would likely be conducted on the species in 2018.

5. The Torres Strait coral trout stock will have its first ever stock assessment carried out in 2018 under the harvest strategy project. It is planned for a preliminary stock assessment to be presented to the Finfish RAG in August 2018 for their evaluation and feedback.

## BACKGROUND

6. A harvest strategy is being developed for the fishery which will guide sustainable harvests and management for both the Spanish mackerel and coral trout stocks. The harvest strategy will provide guidance the type of data and assessments needed to underpin advice on future TACs taking into account trade-offs between risk, catch and cost.
7. The Torres Strait Coral trout stock is classified as not overfished and not subject to overfishing (ABARES Fishery Status Reports 2017). In the absence of a formal stock assessment this stock status is evaluated against the results of the 2007 Management Strategy Evaluation work together with a comparison of 2015-16 catches to the historical catch record.
8. The management strategy evaluation undertaken (Williams *et al.* 2007) tested four constant-catch scenarios, ranging from 80-170t. All catch levels predicted biomass of at least 70 per cent of the assumed unfished levels by 2025.
9. The coral trout Torres Strait stock is considered as not overfished or subject to overfishing (ABARES 2017).
10. At its July 2016 meeting the FWG recommended that the coral trout TAC (134.9 tonnes) remain unchanged for both the 2016-17 and 2017-18 fishing seasons noting the following:
  - the TAC (134.9t) is based on average catches 2001-05. A stable period of catch;
  - although there is no stock assessment for coral trout, the Management Strategy Evaluation conducted (Williams *et al.* 2007) using four constant catch scenarios (80-170 t) predicted biomass of at least 70% of unfished by biomass by 2025;
  - proposed lease amount for 2016-17 is 74 tonnes (across four boats); and
  - industry feedback that catch rates on Islands are considered good.

The FWG identified the following issues for further consideration:

- significant decline in effort following buyout. What are the drivers?
    - historically, significant catches were taken within the 10 nm closure areas
    - possible localised depletion?
    - lack of effort - only one sunset licenced boat operating
  - local factors – unexpected factors (eg environmental)
  - moving to live coral trout - possible driver for changes in catch composition?
  - QLD east coast data – take into account trends.
  - estimates of TIB, Traditional and Recreational catches.
11. At its March 2017 meeting the FWG reaffirmed its recommendation from its meeting on 12-13 July 2016 that the coral trout TAC (134.9 t) remain unchanged for the 2017/18 season. The FWG noted that there was no new information to guide a different recommendation at this time. It was further noted that the harvest strategy to be developed will guide future assessments and TAC recommendations.
  12. The FWG noted that based on catches being significantly below the TAC (reported catches remaining around 20-40t) it was not deemed necessary to reconsider the TAC to discount estimates of other fishing mortality (e.g. subsistence take) at this time. The FWG however agreed that this should be undertaken when new information becomes available to review status of the stock and subsequent TACs.

13. The FWG noted the following advice from members:

- a Queensland east coast coral trout assessment is planned for 2018 and there is potential for the Torres Strait stock to be included in the assessment;
- feedback from boats fishing for live coral trout in the 2016/17 season to date had been favourable with good catch rates and survival rates;
- the status of live boats returning to the Torres Strait in upcoming seasons would be dependent on maintaining high catch rates and market dynamics across both the TS and east coast. A price premium paid is paid for red coloured fish which are found in southern Queensland

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES</b> <b>Other reef-line sector species update</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 4.3</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** current arrangements in place to manage the total take of 'other' reef line species under sunset licences and the process to review these arrangements in the future. Specifically these are:
  - a) catch limits for 'other' reef line species on sunset licences are to not exceed 30 tonnes.
  - b) further work to assess the potential to expand effort on other species be undertaken subject to having:
    - i. a detailed fishing proposal describing the nature of any proposed expansion;
    - ii. scientific advice on the conditions for any expansion in terms of species, location, catch levels, data collection requirements and any other matters required to mitigate risks to the stocks;
    - iii. where appropriate, management measures and policies be considered by the FWG; and
    - iv. funding available to support the required scientific advice.
2. That the FWG **NOTE** that consistent with the arrangements above, in the absence of a detail fishing proposal, AFMA's preference remains for management resources to be directed towards developing a harvest strategy for Spanish mackerel and coral trout.
3. That the FWG **NOTE** the total limit across sunset licence holders has varied according to annual leasing requests. The total catch limited applied for the 2016-17 and 2017-18 fishing seasons was 28.5 t and 7 t respectively.
4. That the FWG **NOTE** that catches of other reef-line species have been low in recent seasons (2016-17 4.4 t reported) and there is reportedly declining interest among industry to target these species.
5. That the FWG **NOTE** the enclosed catch summary for 'other' species as reported in logbooks (TSF01) by sunset licence holders.

## KEY ISSUES

6. At its meeting on 12-13 July 2016, the FWG considered the proposal for 28.5 tonnes of 'other' reef line species to be leased-out to sunset licence holders in the 2016-17 fishing season. The FWG recommended that subject to further consideration by the Technical Scientific Working Group (TSWG) of coral trout to by-product catch ratios when targeting coral trout and total take of 'other species' by other sectors –
 

*there should be no further increase above 30 tonnes until systems are in place to independently verify catches, a species-specific risk assessment has been undertaken and where applicable catch triggers and control rules have been agreed.*

7. At its meeting on 16-17 March 2017, the FWG noted that the scope of the harvest strategy project does not include other reef-line species though there may be capacity to commission work in parallel to this project should the need arise. In the immediate-term the FWG supported in-principle for any further work to assess the potential to expand effort on other species be undertaken subject to having:
  - a) a detailed fishing proposal describing the nature of any proposed expansion;
  - b) scientific advice on the conditions for any expansion in terms of species, location, catch levels, data collection requirements and any other matters required to mitigate risks to the stocks;
  - c) where appropriate, management measures and policies be considered by the FWG; and
  - d) funding available to support the required scientific advice.
8. TSRA advised at the FFRAG meeting in November 2017 that there was no interest among lease holders this season to target other reef-line species. TSRA further advised that fishers applying for coral trout catch entitlements also had to apply for a percentage byproduct catch of other species i.e. one tonne of other species for every 10 t of coral trout.
9. For the 2016-17 season a total of 28.5 t combined catch limit was applied to sunset licences. The 28.5t was distributed across three sunset licences while four sunset licences had a catch allowance zero tonnes for other species. For the current season (2017-18) the total combined limit was reduce to 7t in line with leasing requests. The 7 t was distributed across three sunset licence with the remaining four sunset licences having zero catch allowance granted for other species.
10. For those sunset licence without a catch allowance for other reef-line species, incidental catches are likely to be discarded and/or remain unreported.
11. A catch summary for 'other' species as reported in logbooks (TSF01) by sunset licence holders is enclosed (Table 1).

## BACKGROUND

12. Most fishers in the reef-line sector of the Finfish Fishery target coral trout. In 2016 however at least one operator expressed an interest to explore the commercial viability of targeting other species.
13. Since 2008 the TSRA has leased-out fishing licences with individual catch entitlements for coral trout and Spanish mackerel on behalf of traditional inhabitants. For the 2016/17 fishing season TSRA proposed to lease-out catch entitlements for unspecified reef species through contractual arrangements.
14. Not all licences were proposed to be granted a catch entitlement for 'other' reef fish species.
15. Historically there have been no limits on the take of 'other' reef fish species in the fishery. This approach was commensurate to the overall management risk associated with the low levels of effort and reported catch of all 'other' species combined (average 1.8 tonnes since 2008/09).
16. The FWG had previously recommended (February 2007) monitoring identified fish species (or species group) by monitoring total annual catch and setting trigger reference points for these species such that:
  - a) total annual catch (by species or species group) not be > highest recorded annual catch;

- b) the ratio of total annual catch of coral trout and other species (by species or species group) does not increase by >20% in any one year; and
  - c) the ratio of total annual catch of coral trout and other species (by species or species group) does not decrease by >20% in any one year.
17. The Working Group had not however developed recommended actions for responding to breaches of trigger reference points.
18. At its meeting on 12-13 July 2016, the Working Group noted the various fishing plans of operators seeking to take 28.5 tonnes in total of 'other' reef species i.e. not coral trout or Spanish mackerel. The proposed fishing plans as reported at the FWG include:
- the take of 'other' species as a byproduct (i.e. not targeted);
  - two operators plan to land live coral trout;
  - one operator plans to target deepwater 'other species' (20 tonnes) including:
    - emperor
    - job fish
    - flame snapper
    - nannygai
  - live fish to be unloaded in Cairns; and
    - one operator proposes to use two primary vessels (note same operation is required to have VMS under QDAF conditions).
19. The FWG identified the following measures that may support further expansion in effort to other species:
- 1) observer coverage – provides verification of logbooks and biological samples (length and age);
  - 2) port sampling – for biological samples;
  - 3) species triggers (possible vulnerable species) and/or area triggers (possible risk of localised depletion);
  - 4) consideration of iconic species, other values;
  - 5) VMS;
  - 6) Fish Receivers System; and
  - 7) possible requirement for minimum 'quota' holdings for 'other' species.
20. The FWG also identified that consideration should be given to the preliminary assessment of catches and catch ratio of coral trout to byproduct.
21. The FWG identified the following the risks and benefits associated with the proposed leasing of 28.5 tonnes of other species:

#### **Risks**

- Uncertainty around catch composition (i.e. risks to specific species) arising from incomplete and/or inaccurate catch and effort reporting.
- Current logbooks – not optimal for reporting a wider range of 'other' species.
- Discards (post capture deaths).
- Deepwater species are generally longer lived at ~ 30-40 years. NT and Gulf area assessment found species have low natural mortality therefore the sustainable harvest rate is likely to be low (taking a low percentage of the stock). Six species in aggregate are included in the in the Gulf limit of 450t:
  - crimson snapper (age at maturity 4-7yrs)
  - large mouth nannygai (9-12yrs)
  - red emperor (10-13yrs)

- goldband snapper (6-8yrs)
- mangrove jack (8-11yrs)
- golden snapper (10-13yr)

### **Benefits**

- Sustainable fishing industry development for traditional inhabitants
22. Supporting growth in the Finfish fishery is consistent with the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984 objective to manage commercial fisheries for optimum utilisation. Any proposed expansion however must be managed in a way that is sustainable and is underpinned by a program aimed at gathering sufficient information to allow the PZJA to assess whether fishing is sustainable. Such an approach provides certainty and transparency for stakeholder.
23. The FWG has recommended that catches allowances for sunset licences for other species be limited to 30t and a process for undertaking further work to assess the potential to expand effort on other species (Meeting March 2017).

## REPORTED CATCH DATA

24. Updated annual catch data for reef line species and the ratio of coral trout and 'other' reef fish species is provided in **Table 1**.

### *Post-buyback leasing data*

25. At the 12-13 July 2016 Finfish Working Group meeting data from 2008-09 season to present was presented by season.

26. The average byproduct reef-line catch per year is 2.8 t from 2008 to 2017. The average coral of trout catch 27.9 t.

27. Over the same period the average ratio of coral trout to other reef-line species has varied between 5 to 18 per cent.

**Table 1.** Seasonal catches of reef-line fishes 2003-04 season to 2007-08 season. Source TSF01 logbooks.

Species	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Barramundi cod	542	238	1086	745	429	756	646	1223	782
Red Emperor	223	70	398	202	125	160	207	256	457
Sea Bass	843	10	79				15	84	143
Spangled Emperor	197	68	244	29	35		8	45	56
Emperor	1968				18			4	
Rock cods	125	280	706	1017	480	932	575	1364	655
Trevally	1314					785	649	775	2377
Silver Trevally						172			
Venus Tuskfish		93	341	145	34	79			
Black Kingfish								11	
Jobfish			8					29	
Sea Bream Snapper								43	
Blue-toothed Tuskfish							1	30	
Australian Tusk								4	
Mangrove Jack								9	
Maori Sea Perch								6	
Parrotfishes								6	
Green Jobfish								5	
<b>Total (other species)</b>	<b>5212</b>	<b>759</b>	<b>2862</b>	<b>2138</b>	<b>1121</b>	<b>2884</b>	<b>2101</b>	<b>3894</b>	<b>4470</b>
<b>Coral trout</b>	<b>28873</b>	<b>10538</b>	<b>40264</b>	<b>34982</b>	<b>21731</b>	<b>30162</b>	<b>20529</b>	<b>38452</b>	<b>25700</b>
% of byproduct to coral trout	18	7	7	6	5	10	10	10	17

### Pre-buyback data

28. Data for the period prior to the buyback for which accurate logbook data exists (2003 to 2008 indicates that annual catches of byproduct reef species varied from 1.4 tonnes to 43.5 tonnes with an average yearly value of 20.5 tonnes.

29. The number of fishers reduced during this period from 21 fishers in 2003-4 season down to three fishers in 2007.

**Table 2.** Seasonal catches of reef-line fishes 2003-04 season to 2007-08 season. Source TSF01 logbooks.

Species	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	
Cod - unspecified	9669	5337	639			
Red Emperor	7694	5459	1608	705	163	
Shark other	3284	10602	2680			
Barramundi cod	4758	3659	1591	1177	580	
Mixed fish	4525	3795	200	2		
Sea Bass	4658	3435	656	325	50	
Spangled Emperor	3992	3033	831	364	248	
Emperor	3523	2378	64	214	21	
Rock cods	40	676	1141	1216	358	
Maori Wrasse	581	1861	135			
Grouper and Cod		2320	377			
Fork-tailed Catfish						
Trevally	428	464				
Silver Trevally		348		372		
Sea Perch	305					
Black Kingfish		123	100	94		
Jobfish		55			13	
Eastern Blue Groper	24					
Australian Tusk	3			12		
Bight Redfish	3					
Sweetlips	2					
<b>Byproduct total</b>	<b>43487</b>	<b>43543</b>	<b>10022</b>	<b>4481</b>	<b>1433</b>	Season av. 20.5 t
Coral trout	124772	102977	50379	50590	32467	Season av. 72.2 t
% of byproduct to coral trout	35	42	20	9	4	

<b>TORRES STRAIT FINFISH WORKING GROUP</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>RESEARCH</b> <b>Update – Research in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 5.1</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group **NOTE** updates on two research projects relative to the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery:

1. *Monitoring the traditional take of finfish in the TSPZ* led by CSIRO (P.I. Nicole Murphy)
2. *Scoping study of barramundi, black jewfish and mudcrab populations of the Top Western Torres Strait* led by P.I. Andrew Tobin (Tobinfish)

## KEY ISSUES

### Research project 1 *Monitoring the traditional take of finfish in the TSPZ*

1. The initial pilot phase of the project has been completed and the first milestone report has been submitted. The outcomes of this pilot phase were discussed at the March 2017 Working Group Meeting.
2. Initial pilot phase survey work on Erub Island returned mixed results and achieved a 'snapshot' single collection of survey data. An ongoing monitoring program on Erub is not yet underway.
3. The project steering committee met on 7 September 2017 to discuss the outcomes of this pilot phase. The Committee resolved to revise the project scope to focus on achieving
  - a. successful implementation of the data collection system; and
  - b. quality catch data in at least one community.
4. This was resolved so that in the absence of being able to generate a reliable estimate of traditional take, clear priority should be given to understanding how a longer term community-based monitoring program could work. The steering committee did however note that quality data from one or two communities may be of some use to extrapolate catches for the region.
5. AFMA has sought preliminary advice from the Finfish RAG at their inaugural November 2017 on the proposed changed of scope. The RAG noted that the project team had progressed the work as far as possible to date, noting that consideration has been given to several options for additional resources from TSRA that might have been made available to support the project.
6. The RAG agreed to support the continuation of the project with the revised scope. To support the continuation and delivery of the project the RAG supplied the following advice:
  - Progressing the project needs community leaders to identify bodies/people that are willing to take responsibility for data collection and be a 'champion' for the issue.
  - Ideally these 'champions' and community monitors should be identified before the project continues to help drive the issue.

- The project has value in advising future programs and raising awareness particularly given future expansion in the TIB sector, noting a proportion of commercial catch is retained for subsistence purposes.
7. The RAG provided the following advice to support the project course of action over next few months:
    - TSRA to confirm what additional resources might be available to support the project. To provide support, TSRA will require a statement of work from the project team which would be required for consideration.
    - TSRA to write to industry associations to advise that the monitoring work could fall within the administrative funding grants.
    - TSRA to assess if rangers could be utilised.
  8. In line with the RAG advice, the project team is preparing a statement of work for the TSRA to support consideration of possible additional resourcing options.

**Research project 2 *Scoping study of barramundi, black jewfish and mudcrab populations of the Top Western Torres Strait***

9. A scoping study has been funded by the TSRA through FRDC to determine if harvests from local fin fish and crab populations, combined with available fishing and business skills and knowledge, infrastructure, supply chain and marketing pathways can combine to support fishing related economic growth for the region.
10. Supporting research that may assist in developing new fishing opportunities for Traditional Inhabitants is consistent with the objectives of the *Torres Strait Act 1984*, in particular to manage commercial fisheries for optimum utilisation.
11. The FWG has previously noted the PZJA will likely require advice from the FWG to evaluate any proposal to develop and/or expand new fisheries to ensure they are sustainable. The FWG encourage early engagement with the FWG to ensure any future proposals may be considered in a timely manner.
12. To effectively support growth and development of fisheries for the barramundi, crab and jewfish, stakeholders will need to be engaged in the management process to consider key management issues including management measures to monitor catches and ensure the stocks remain sustainable, the role of barramundi for subsistence purposes. This consideration is important both to ensure businesses may make informed investment decisions and that risks to the stocks are managed effectively
13. At its November 2017 meeting the Finfish RAG were asked to give initial advice on the project methodology and the likely outcomes of the project. The RAG:
  - a. noted that the feasibility study is proposing to use currently prohibited fishing method – mesh gillnets. Gillnetting was banned by the PZJA in 2005 over concerns over bycatch including dugongs, although the PZJA noted at the time that the ban was not intended to prohibit industry development in the Top Westerns communities should they wish to do so. It was suggested that this could potentially be addressed through regulating fisher behaviour such as enforcing net attendance rules. It was noted that the trial fishing would collect data on all impacts, including any protected species capture.

- b. advised Barramundi is likely a shared stock with PNG. The PNG-NFA invited participant advised that PNG-NFA can provide catch data from western province factories buying barramundi flesh and swim bladders.
- c. provided support for a strong data collection program alongside any developing fishery.
- d. advised that if this research goes ahead, strong communication and consultation relating to bycatch will be required.

14. A scientific permit application to support the fieldwork component of the research is currently being considered.

### **Proposed survey**

15. The objectives of the study are to:

- a) complete a desktop scoping and current knowledge review of fisheries opportunities for mudcrab, barramundi and jewfish in top western Torres Straits;
- b) use field surveys to estimate local stock abundance and model commercial fishing feasibility at appropriate scales
- c) review current infrastructure, and available skills and capabilities to support the identified fishing business opportunities;
- d) Extend project results among communities and stakeholders and provide hands on business support and mentoring to prospective fishers in selected Torres Strait top western communities.

16. The project proposes to conduct seven day fishing surveys involving community fishers in Boigu, Saibai and Duan communities. The objectives of this field work are to provide estimates of local stock abundance, assess catch and effort rates, identify fishing grounds and model the feasibility for a commercial fishery in these communities.

17. Fishing is proposed to be conducted using crabs pots (an authorised method) and large mesh monofilament gillnets (three 100 metre length nets, 165 millimetre (6.5") mesh, 25 meshes depth) which are currently prohibited in the fishery. This gillnet setup is commonly used in targeted barramundi fisheries (for example the Northern Territory barramundi fishery).

18. Commercial fishing for reef-line finfish (like barramundi and jewfish) is also prohibited west of longitude 142° 31'49" (the western line closure). The Boigu community lies within this closure.

19. Due to timing constraints on field work in the study, it may be difficult to yield meaningful data on stock abundance. Further work may be required to develop a strategic data collection program together with risk-based management arrangements to best support the sustainable development of these fisheries.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2017</b>
<b>RESEARCH</b> <b>Research priorities</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 5.2</b> <b>FOR ADVICE</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on any changes to previously identified research priorities for the Fishery noting the next TSSAC public call for research funding application will be for projects starting 2019/20;
2. That the Working Group **NOTE** that the Finfish RAG did not support the proposed tactical research priority to improve estimates of fishing catches taken outside of the fishery at this time;
3. That the Working Group **NOTE** that the Finfish RAG identified that the key research priority in the short term was acquiring ageing data to support the assessments for Spanish mackerel and coral trout. This work will be further discussed at the next FFRAG meeting scheduled for 21-22 March 2018; and
4. That the Working Group **NOTE** that the Finfish Harvest Strategy currently in development will likely provide a key guide to future research priorities in the Fishery.

## KEY ISSUES

1. This is a standing item for the Working Group. Having agreed research priorities aims to achieve a more efficient management process.
2. Generally, the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) makes an annual public call for funding applications to conduct research to support fisheries management decisions. The call for research identifies research priorities to be addressed. AFMA seeks advice from the PZJA fishery consultative forums on fishery specific research priorities.
3. Due to existing funding commitments the next public call for research funding applications will be for projects starting 2019/20 (**Attachment A**).
4. There is an opportunity to fund small tactical research projects with AFMA's projected unspent research funds in 2018/19 (88k).
5. AFMA management had proposed funding a small tactical research project to improve our estimates of mortality taken outside of the commercial fishery (noting work in progress on refining subsistence take).

6. AFMA sought out of session advice from the FWG and RAG on AFMA's proposed tactical research proposal and any other possible priorities. Three members provided comment all of which supported the proposed project.
7. At its meeting in November 2017 the FFRAG however did not support further research investment on improving mortality estimates. The Finfish RAG identified that the key research priority in the short term was acquiring ageing data to support the assessments for Spanish mackerel and coral trout. This work will be further discussed at the next FFRAG meeting scheduled for 21-22 March 2018.
8. At its March 2017 meeting the Working Group noted the research priorities identified at the last meeting (July 2016, outlined below) and agreed to revisit the list alongside the development of the harvest strategy.
9. It is likely that the Finfish Harvest Strategy in development will provide a key guide to future research priorities in the fishery. The Working Group may elect to revisit discussion on this item until their February 2019 meeting when further progress on the harvest strategy development has occurred.

## **SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CONSIDERATION**

### ***July 2016 Finfish Working Group***

10. The 12-13 July 2016 meeting of the Finfish Working Group identified the following general research priorities:
  - a. Genetic studies on Spanish mackerel to test single stock theory – particularly if PNG and NE QLD catches increase. This potentially could be achieved by using fishery data, fisher participation and/or a PhD study;
  - b. Management Strategy Evaluation on harvest strategy options; and
  - c. In the event that the western closure line is removed, investigate the potential impact on TAC.
11. The 12-13 July 2016 meeting of the Finfish Working Group identified the following data needs:
  - a. Review logbook structure;
  - b. Monitoring of non-commercial take (note partly being addressed through current research project on the traditional take of finfish);
  - c. Improved rate of returns of freezer records for the TIB Sector; and
  - d. Age and length structure data (medium term – relates to Harvest Strategy work, phase 2).

### ***November 2016 Technical Scientific Working Group (now the RAG)***

12. At its 10 November 2016 meeting the Finfish Technical Scientific Working Group recommended the following data collection/analysis priorities to improve the Spanish mackerel stock assessment in the longer term. The FWG should have regard for these priorities:

- a. appropriate spatial genetic sampling to clarify the current single Torres Strait stock/population structure assumption (noting the single stock assumption is the most precautionary approach);
  - b. additional length frequency sampling to improve the spatial representativeness of biological data used in the model. This will assist in: a) assessing the fishing mortality and selectivity of the catch i.e. whether the catch size structure is representative of the underlying population age structure and b) validate fecundity at age assumptions;
  - c. further data analysis and consultation with stakeholders to investigate options for improving the accuracy of the TIB catch data series; and
  - d. AFMA and TSRA, in consultation with temporary licence holders, to work on characterising fishing gear selectivity and different fishing practices and identify options for improving the accuracy and level of information collected through logbooks (a pre-season workshop with temporary licence holders was recommended as a starting point).
13. Additionally the Scientific Technical Working Group identified the following two additional analyses be undertaken to improve the Spanish mackerel stock assessment including:
- e. sensitivity analyses to examine how the model might perform with 'domed vulnerability' where large fish are assumed to be less available to capture; and
  - f. examination of CPUE data using 'indicator' vessels with known fishing histories as a means to further validate the CPUE time series.

## **LIST OF ATTACHMENTS**

### **ATTACHMENT A – Table of budget commitments and availability**

Funding Years	Project code	Torres Strait Research	Project Budget	2016/17 FY Total Research (Budget \$410,716)	2017/18 FY Total (Budget \$410,716)	2018/19 FY Total (Budget \$410,716)	2019/20 FY Total (Budget \$410,716)	CURRENT NOTES
13/14 – 14/15 15/16	RR2012/0809	Smartphone - data collection (PI Haartmann) - <b>COMPLETED</b>	\$186,000.00	\$7,000				Extra
13/14 - 14/15	RR2013/0803	2014 TRL Stock Assessment and TAC (PI Plaganyi- Lloyd)	\$627,615.97 (13/14 & 14/15 FY) Additional \$336,881 - 15/16 FY	\$16,000				final payment ended up out of 16/17 FY
14/15- 15/16	RR2014/0823	Defining the aggregating and movement behaviour of Spanish Mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing – <b>Contract variation required</b>	\$245,590.00	\$40,853*				final report received June 2017
15/16 - 16/17	RR2016/0823	Bêche De Mer Fishery Harvest Strategy	\$52,710	\$37,224	\$15,486			\$21,184 paid May 17 \$16,040 paid June 17
16/17, 17/18, 18/19	RR2016/0822	TRL fishery surveys, stock assessment, HCR and RBC	\$759,855	\$239,030	\$243,348	\$277,476		\$119,515 paid Jan 17 \$59,758 paid March 17 \$59,757 paid May 17
16/17, 17/18	RR2016/0824	Finfish Fishery Harvest Strategy	\$200,961	\$32,580	\$123,662	\$44,719		\$32,580 paid June 17
16/17, 17/18	RR2017/0816	TRL environmental influences	\$49,292	\$21,332	\$27,960			\$21,332 paid June 17
		<b>Total costs of proposed projects per financial year</b>		<b>\$353,166</b>	<b>\$410,456</b>	<b>\$322,195</b>		
		<b>Remaining un allocated funding</b>		<b>\$57,550</b>	<b>\$260</b>	<b>\$88,521</b>		

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT</b> <b>Formalising total allowable catches for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 6.1</b> <b>FOR ADVICE</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on the formalisation of total allowable catches in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery in line with the objectives of the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013*.

## KEY ISSUES

1. The Working Group considered the formalisation of TACs for the Fishery at its meeting on 16-17 March 2017. The FWG considered regulatory and non-regulatory (by other agreements/arrangements) management options for limiting catches to the TAC and how any new measures may apply to the 2017/18 fishing season and beyond.
2. The FWG identified two options:
 

**Option 1** – status quo for the 2017/18 fishing season; catch limits only on sunset licences with proposed leasing (110t) then for the 2018/19 fishing season; implement the TAC across all licence holders and if necessary adjust leasing to further minimise the risk of over-catching. Under this option there is a risk that recommended TAC will be over-caught in 2017/18 (having regard for catch estimates and proposed sunset licence leasing). This option was supported by TIB representatives and the TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member.

**Option 2** – minimise the risk of over-catching for the 2017/18 fishing season by lowering the proposed lease amount.
3. It was noted that option two was a more precautionary approach while option one provided a phased introduction of the management change. The FWG agreed to seek advice from Scientific Technical Working Group on likely impacts on the stock from exceeding the Spanish mackerel RBC in 2017/18.
4. Since 2008, the Fishery has been principally managed through the notional TAC (an output control). With actual catches for Spanish mackerel now more likely to mirror the Recommended Biological Catch for the species, it is a high management priority to replace the notional TAC with an enforceable TAC.
5. Implementing an enforceable TAC is consistent with the objectives of the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013* (the Plan), conditions placed on the Fishery's Wildlife Trade Operation approval under the EPBC Act (**Agenda Item 2.2**) and effective management. Ensuring sustainability and providing management certainty is necessary for maximising the economic return that may be gained from the resource.
6. As discussed at the last FWG meeting under the Plan TACs may only be determined by the PZJA following the allocation of quota units (or units of fishing capacity). The plan of management allows for the allocation of quota units however this has not yet been undertaken.

7. In the interim, TACs may be implemented by way of licence condition. This approach is used in the Beche-de-mer Fishery. For the Finfish Fishery the TAC would be implemented through catch limits for individual sunset licences and a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.
8. AFMA proposes the following process to implement Finfish Fishery TACs through licence conditions;
  - a. AFMA to undertake formal native title notification in accordance with the *Native Title Act 1993*; and
  - b. AFMA to write to all licence holders advising them of AFMA's intention to vary licence conditions in the Fishery.
9. To allow time for the notifications to be undertaken and any objections to be raised, AFMA recommends that the licence condition variation be implemented for the 2019-20 fishing season (starting 1 July 2019).

## BACKGROUND

10. Actual catches comprise both reported (for example based on logbooks returns) and estimated catches (for example for the TIB sector).
11. At present regulation of catches to ensure sustainability is done only through permit conditions on sunset sector fishers through allocating a seasonal catch entitlement. The Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector has no regulation of catches in place.
12. A plan of management is in place for the Finfish Fishery. Under the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013 (the Plan) TACs may only be determined by the PZJA following the allocation of quota units (or units of fishing capacity). The plan of management allows for the allocation of quota units however this has not yet been undertaken.
13. In the interim, TACs may be implemented by way of licence condition.
14. The objectives of The Plan are as follows;

Objective 1: To acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of Traditional Inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing for finfish.

Objective 2: To ensure that harvest levels are at, or below, levels that maintain biologically viable stocks of target and non-target species.

Objective 3: To provide for the use and conservation of Torres Strait finfish resources in a way that minimises impact on the marine environment.

Objective 4: To optimise economic viability of the fishery.

Objective 5: To provide for optimal utilisation, cooperative management, and for catch sharing to occur with PNG.

15. Commonwealth and Torres Strait fisheries must be assessed under the *Environment and Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act). As part of this assessment process the Finfish Fishery was declared an approved Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO). The WTO approval allows export of products. The Finfish Fishery WTO approval re-assessed in 2017 and granted for an additional three years until 18 December 2020. A condition of the current WTO approval is:

*Operation of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery will be carried out in accordance with the arrangements in force under the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984.*

An additional condition of the WTO is:

*The Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority to implement strategies to improve data collection, and monitoring and management of catch in all sectors of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery by 2019.*

### **Working Group consideration – March 2017**

16. The Working Group considered the formalisation of TACs for the Fishery at its meeting on 16-17 March 2017.
17. The FWG noted advice that although a plan of management is in place for the Finfish Fishery, under the finfish management plan TACs may only be determined by the PZJA following the allocation of quota units (or units of fishing capacity). The plan of management allows for the allocation of quota units however this has not yet been undertaken. Until such time that an allocation occurs, TACs may be implemented by way of licence condition. The FWG noted that catch limits are currently only applied to sunset licences. TIB catches are not limited.
18. The FWG agreed that limiting catches to an agreed total allowable catch (TAC) is important for ensuring the sustainability of the fishery and achieving agreed management targets. The FWG further noted that with a reduced Spanish mackerel TAC for the 2017/18 fishing season, and depending on future growth in TIB sector catches, Spanish mackerel catches may approach (or possibly exceed) the RBC (or total recommended kill).
19. The TSRA advised that for as long as there is a leasing process (i.e. TIB sector not fishing the whole TAC) it is unlikely that a TAC would be exceeded as catches could be reduced by reducing the amount of tonnage being made available to sunset operators.
20. The FWG considered regulatory and non-regulatory (by other agreements/arrangements) management options for limiting catches to the TAC and noted the following comments and advice from some members:
  - a TAC could be difficult to enforce in the absence of improved catch reporting (for example will management be able to detect when the TAC is exceeded);
  - a level of overcatch may be sustainable when there is a higher target biomass reference point (i.e. having a target reference point of  $B_{60}$  rather than  $B_{MSY}$  or the Commonwealth default  $B_{MEY}$  target of  $B_{48}$ ) and given catch reductions since the buyout;
  - sufficient catch should be reserved for the TIB sector to allow sustainable expansion without risking an overcatch and impacting the stock. In the absence of reliable TIB catch data the TSRA advised that they rely on the expertise of the members of the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) to provide a best estimate of the TIB commercial catch. For 2017/18 season this was estimated by the FQMC at 15 tonnes;
  - measures should be introduced as a matter of priority to limit the risk of overcatching in any year; and
  - Research members advised that regular over-catching of the RBC would likely have negative impacts on the stock. These impacts can take a long time to remedy. It was also noted that if the stock was assessed as subject to overfishing by ABARES further downstream effects may occur such as future market access, branding of products etc.
  - TSRA advised, in their opinion, that the finfish leasing process is already an effective non-regulatory measure to constrain catches to below the TAC, as the amount made

available for leasing out each year is dependent on the TIB sector's catch and aspirations of the coming season.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT</b> <b>Western line closure</b>	<b>Agenda Item 6.2</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group **NOTE** progress to date on removing the western line closure and the plan of action to finalise this process.

## KEY ISSUES

1. The removal of the western line closure of the reef-line fishery has been a long standing item which has been supported in-principle by the Finfish Working Group. The key for progressing this matter to the PZJA for decision is undertaking adequate stakeholder consultation.
2. At its meeting on 12-13 July 2016, FWG industry members had varying views on whether or not sufficient consultation on removing the closure had occurred. Noting the need to undertake appropriate Native Notification, the FWG supported in-principle the removal of the western line closure.
3. In March 2017 the FWG recommended that the removal be contingent on further community consultation with the western communities and consideration of any sustainability risks. The FWG recommended that the aim of the consultation should be to determine how communities may/or may not like the resources to be managed to benefit both commercial and tourism industries.
4. Community based consultation is resource intensive (time-wise and financially). For this reason it has not been possible to convene further consultation against other priorities. AFMA and TSRA are working on possible options to cost-effectively undertake formal consultation.
5. One possible option is to undertake the following:
  - a. seek stakeholder comment at the proposed TSRA Fisheries Forum tentatively scheduled for May 2018;
  - b. invite public submissions and write to all Licence holders invite comment (e.g. written, video, verbal);
  - c. undertake native title notification in accordance with the *Native Title Act 1993*; and
  - d. seek advice from the FWG. FWG to consider outcomes of public consultation and any relevant advice from the FFRAG.
6. AFMA has sought preliminary advice from the Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FFRAG) on what inter-sessional work will likely be required to assess the likely stock impacts from removing the western line closure (RAG Meeting 1, 9-10 November 2017). The RAG will consider the matter again at its meeting at its 2018 meetings.

## BACKGROUND

7. Commercial harvest of reef fish is undertaken in the north eastern region of Torres Strait. Commercial fishing for reef fish west of 142°32'E is prohibited under the ***Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 8 - Torres Strait Finfish Fishery***.
8. The western line closure reflects a historical jurisdictional boundary that was rolled over into the Finfish Fishery management arrangements when the fishery came under a single jurisdiction under the PZJA. The closure only relates to the Reef Line sector of the fishery and not to the Spanish mackerel sector of the fishery.
9. At the Finfish Working Group meeting (20 March 2012), TSRA indicated that there was community interest in removing the western closure.
10. At its July 2016 meeting the Finfish Working Group noted members had varying views on whether or not sufficient consultation on removing the closure had occurred. A key development since initial consultation on this issue has been the Native Title Determination on the Regional Sea Claim, and it was noted that notification to the relevant Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate groups would be undertaken prior to the PZJA making a decision.
11. At its March 2017 meeting the Working Group noted progress since the last FWG meeting to remove the western line closure (as detailed in the agenda paper, work is ongoing to compile outcomes of previous consultation processes). An industry member advised that if the area of the western closure was to be reopened consideration should first be given to:
  - a. how much fishing the area could support noting that the fishing grounds are different from those in the east and concern that the area may not be able to support the number of licences in the fishery; and
  - b. the potential for alternative livelihoods or business opportunities for traditional owners such as ecotourism.
12. Other industry members were generally supportive of this proposal and advised that further community consultation should occur before the western area of the fishery was reopened, to gauge community aspirations on future usage.
13. Noting there are no existing agreements in place to guide resource sharing between sectors (fishing, tourism etc.) the FWG agreed for following action:
  - a. AFMA, TSRA and Malu Lamar to meet out-of-session to consider an appropriate process to canvass community aspirations and considerations for removing the western line closure.
14. AFMA convened a meeting with Malu Lamar and TSRA on 5 April 2017. The following was agreed:
  - Removal of the western line closure is to be contingent on further community consultation with the western communities and consideration of any sustainability risks. The aim of the consultation will be to determine how communities may/or may not like the resources to be managed to benefit both commercial and tourism industries;
  - TSRA will lead this consultation process (undertaking meetings / report findings etc). TSRA will undertake consultation opportunistically combining with other meetings (e.g. AFMA fish receiver meetings, top western projects);
  - AFMA will seek scientific advice (through the future Finfish RAG) on the possible impacts of removing the closure on stocks, noting advice that the fishing grounds/habitat may be different in the west compared to the eastern area. There is

concerned that the reefs are shallower and possibly more susceptible to localised depletion.

15. AFMA sought preliminary advice from the Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FFRAG) on what inter-sessional work will likely be required to assess the likely stock impacts from removing the western line closure (in-session meeting 1, 9-10 November 2017).
16. The FFRAG had limited amount of time available and RAG requested a further opportunity to consider the matter. The RAG did however provide the following preliminary observations:
  - Management is not proposing to increase the TACs for coral trout. In line with this it was suggested that removing the closure might spread the current commercial fishing effort to a broader area.
  - RAG noted previous considerations about coral trout catch rates and considered that economic impacts would likely come into effect (hook-shy fish leading to a drop in local catch rates) before ecological impacts might occur.
  - Some consideration was given to how the western habitats may be shallower than eastern habitats but data would be required to assess this.
  - More fishing operations and freezers may open in the western Torres Strait in line with the outcomes of the current TSRA infrastructure project meaning there may be a total increase in fishing effort with more fishers entering the sector.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>Finfish Fishery budget report for 2018/19</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 6.3</b> <b>FOR NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** AFMA's draft Finfish Fishery budget for 2018/19.

## KEY ISSUES

2. Each year, AFMA's annual operating budget is determined by the Australian Government. AFMA uses part of its budget to provide management services to the Protected Zone Joint Authority. AFMA's Torres Strait budget is apportioned across a range of activities and fisheries.
3. AFMA consults on its budget with all Commonwealth managed fisheries. Consultation with industry provides accountability and assists with driving management efficiency and priority setting. While Torres Strait fisheries management costs are not currently cost recovered, industry and management are likely to benefit in the same way from understanding and discussing AFMA's budgeting arrangements.
4. AFMA's DRAFT direct budget for the Finfish Fishery, excluding staff costs (direct costs only), is \$106,286.
5. The budget covers the convening of two Finfish Working Group meetings (one day meetings), two Finfish Resource Assessment Group meetings (two day meetings) and a one day industry workshop. The budget does not include any community visits.
6. Meeting costs for FFRAG and FFWG members who are Traditional Inhabitants is funded by the TSRA. These funds are administered by AFMA through a funding agreement between agencies. A new funding agreement is to be negotiated.
7. A detailed breakdown of the budget is provided in **Attachment A**.
8. In addition to the budgeted costs described above, AFMA has commissioned the CSIRO funding application to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.

## Attachments

**Attachment A** Draft AFMA 2018/19 budget for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.

## Draft Working Group budget structure for 2018/19 FY

FRTF	Member	Origin	Plane Fare	Accom	Transfers	TA	Venue Hire	Event Dinner (meals provided)	Member cost/meeting				
	Andy Bodsworth (CHAIR)	Canberra	1300	600	120	318			2338				
	Michael O'Neill	Brisbane	1000	600	120	318			2038				
	Dave Brewer	Brisbane	1000	600	120	318			2038				
	TVH Permanent observer - Tony Vass	Cairns	700	600	120	318			1738				
	AFMA Executive Officer	TI	0	0	0	0			0				
	AFMA staff EL	TI	0	0	0	0			0				
	<b>Total</b>		<b>4000</b>	<b>2400</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>1272</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>375</b>		<b>8827</b>	<b>8970</b>	<b>17797</b>	<b>35594</b>

## Draft RAG budget structure for 2018/19 FY

FRTF	Draft RAG budget structure for 2018/19 FY										
	Member	Origin	Plane Fare	Accom	Transfers	TA	Venue	Event Dinner	Member cost/meeting		
	Dave Brewer	Canberra	1300	900	120	477			2797		
	Michael O'Neill	Brisbane	1000	900	120	477			2497		
	Dave Brewer	Brisbane	1000	900	120	477			2497		
	TVH Permanent observer - Tony Vass	Cairns	700	900	120	477			2197		
	AFMA Executive Officer	TI	0	0	0	0			0		
	AFMA staff EL	TI	0	0	0	0			0		
	<b>Total</b>		<b>4000</b>	<b>3600</b>	<b>480</b>	<b>1908</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>375</b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>Sitting fees</b>
										<b>10663</b>	<b>18900</b>
											<b>Two meetings</b>
											<b>59126</b>

## Draft budget for industry meeting July 2018

FRTF	Origin	Accommodation			TA	Venue	Member cost/meeting	Total	Sitting fees	Total
		Plane Fare	(2 nights)	Transfers						
	AFMA EL - Selina	TI to Cairns	700	300	120	318		1438		
	AFMA EO - Andrew	TI to Cairns	700	300	120	318		1438		
	FRAG Sci. member - Michael O'Neill	Brisbane (Sunshine Coast)	500	300	120	318		1238		
	FRAG Sci. member - Rik Buckworth	Darwin to Cairns	750	300	120	318		1488		
	FRAG Sci. member - Ashley William	Canberra to Cairns	750	300	120	318		1488		
	FRAG Chairperson - Dave Brewer	Brisbane	500	300	120	318		1238		
	FRAG industry member - Tony Vass	Cairns	(NA)	(NA)	120	318		438		
	<b>Total</b>		<b>3900</b>	<b>1800</b>	<b>840</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>7066</b>	<b>4500</b>	<b>11566</b>

The draft budget also includes an additional \$3502 for printing management arrangement booklets and logbook reprinting.

**Please note that this draft budget does not include AFMA salaries and on-costs, and other AFMA operating costs, including overheads, research administration, logbook programs, data management, or licensing costs.**

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting No. 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT ISSUES</b> <b>Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector Catch estimates</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 6.4</b> <b>For discussion and advice</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** that subject to any additional advice from the Working Group AFMA will use the average catch reported in docket-books from 2003-2010 as an estimate for TIB sector Spanish mackerel catches. This estimate is needed to inform licencing decisions to allocate catch allowances to sunset licences for the 2018/19 fishing season noting the:
  - a) average is 22t for Spanish mackerel
  - b) period 2003-2010 is the reference period used in the updated Spanish mackerel stock assessment to infer TIB catches for years where catch reports were considered poor (O'Neill and Tobin 2016). Catch reporting was considered to be relatively complete and accurate during this reference period;
  - c) this approach was used by the PZJA Standing Committee as part of its consideration of the maximum acceptable commercial catch for Spanish mackerel for the 2017/18 (current) fishing season; and
  - d) more reliable catch reports for the TIB sector are expected under the new mandatory fish receiver system which commenced on 1 December 2017.
2. That the Working Group **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on any alternate estimates if available and/or a methodology for deriving best estimates of TIB sector catches for the 2018/19 fishing season.

## KEY ISSUES

1. In sustainably managing the fishery, AFMA requires an estimate of TIB sector catches to minimise the risk of catches exceeding agreed catch levels for the Fishery while TACs remain notional - that is, not enforced across all licences (refer to Agenda Item 6.1)
2. AFMA holds delegations under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act* 1984 (the Act). AFMA uses this delegation to exercise certain functions under the Act including to vary licence conditions to give effect to sunset leasing proposals provided annually by TSRA. Annual catch allowances for each sunset licence are prescribed in a licence condition. The decision of the AFMA delegate to vary the conditions of a licence is appealable in the Federal court.
3. In making the decision to authorise a level of take against each sunset licence the delegate must ensure the decision is consistent with the objectives of the Act. Therefore the delegate must have regard for the likely total catch for the Fishery as a whole to minimise the risk of catches for the Fishery exceeding the agreed notional TAC. TIB licences are not subject to any formal catch restrictions at this time.
4. There are a range of estimates of TIB commercial catch available from previous studies (**Table 1**) which have been previously considered by the FWG. Finfish RAG advice was also sought in November 2017 on the best available estimate and/or methodology for

deriving a best estimate of TIB Spanish mackerel and coral trout catches however a clear recommendation was not concluded.

5. Subject to any further advice from the Working Group, AFMA's preference is use the average catch reported in docket-books from 2003-2010 as an minimum estimate for TIB catches for Spanish mackerel for the 2018/19 fishing seasons noting the:
  - a) average is 22 t for Spanish mackerel;
  - b) period 2003-2010 is the reference period used the updated Spanish mackerel stock assessment to infer TIB sector catches for years where catch reports were considered poor (O'Neill and Tobin 2006). Catch reporting was considered to be relatively complete and accurate during this reference period;
  - c) this approach was used by the PZJA Standing Committee as part of its consideration of the maximum acceptable commercial catch for Spanish mackerel for the 2017/18 fishing season; and
  - d) more reliable catch reports for the TIB sector are expected under the new mandatory Fish Receiver system which commenced on 1 December 2017.
3. For fishing seasons beyond 2018/19 the new mandatory fish receiver system (FRS) together with enforceable TACs should offer greater capacity to ensure catches do not exceed recommended levels. Regular catch monitoring and public reporting of catches against the TAC can now be made through the FRS.
4. No estimate has yet been agreed for coral trout. Given the large difference between the leased amount and the available nominal TAC, total fishery harvests from both sectors remain well below the TAC meaning the risk to the stock is lower. PZJA consultative groups have noted that a coral trout stock assessment will be performed in 2018 which will enable further consideration of this issue.

## BACKGROUND

6. Since 2004, the TIB sector has been monitored through the voluntary Torres Strait Seafood Buyers and Processors Docket Book (TDB01) via buyers at the community and commercial freezer level.
7. In recent years, the reported catch in TDB01 docket books has become infrequent for the finfish fishery (**Figure 1**) with less than 1 tonne of catch being reported in both the 2014-15 and 2015-16 fishing seasons (**Figure 2**).
8. An increasing number of Traditional Inhabitant Boats are endorsed to fish in the Spanish mackerel or reef-line fisheries (**Table 2**).
9. There are a range of estimates of TIB commercial catch available from previous studies (**Table 1**) and industry advice is expected on likely trends in fishing effort noting a variety of factors that may have impacted TIB fishing effort overtime (e.g. management decisions (10nm closures), changes in market demand for product, the closure of island freezers, fishers leaving the fishery etc.).
10. Existing catch estimates are detailed below together with licencing information (**Table 2** below) and number of fishers reporting sales of product (Figure to provide some indication of the level of effort (latent or otherwise) in the fishery.

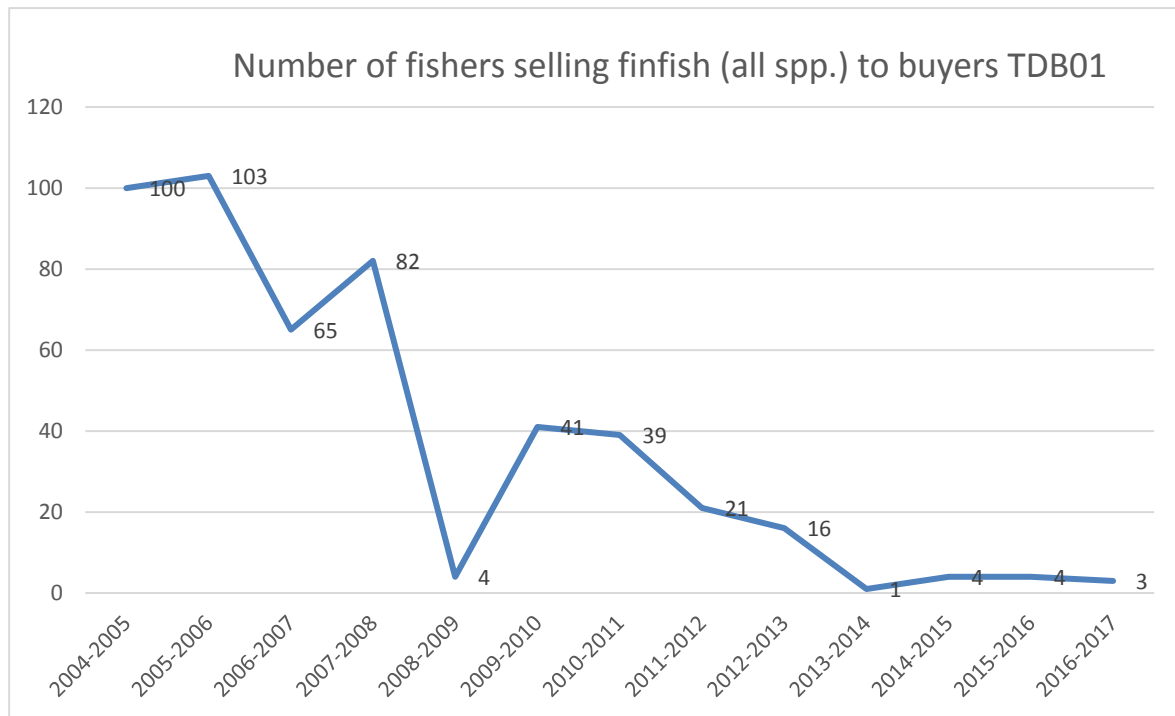
### ***Previous consideration by Finfish Working Group***

11. At its 16-17 March 2017 meeting the FWG noted catch estimates of TIB commercial sector reported from reports and journals ranging from 9 t to 22 t for Spanish mackerel as detailed in the agenda paper. The FWG also noted the FQMC agreed a reasonable estimate for TIB catches for the 2017/18 season to be 15 t or less (based on maximum reported catch of 10t since the 2008 buyout and adding 5 t).
12. The FWG discussed the accuracy and relevance of these estimates for predicting future TIB catches. One of the TIB representatives noted that 10 tonnes was the likely current catch level, although future improvements to infrastructure would likely increase annual catches to above 15 tonnes beyond the 2017/18 season. It was noted that changes have occurred in the fishery overtime (e.g. changed participation levels, buyout, 10 nm closures) which may influence total TIB catch. It was further noted however that in the absence of accurate catch estimates a precautionary approach should be taken.
13. The FWG noted that underestimating the total take either by adopting less precautionary estimates and/or under reporting, increases the risk that the RBC (or recommended total kill) will be exceeded. This can negatively impact the status of the stock and should be avoided.
14. The FWG encouraged all fishers to fill out logbooks to provide accurate information and reiterated its support for improving data collection systems, in particular implementing a mandatory fish receiver system.
15. In agreeing to a maximum estimated Spanish mackerel commercial catch for the 2017/18 season the PZJA Standing Committee used an estimate of 22 t for TIB sector catches. The PZJA Standing Committee noted that providing advice on catch estimates for all sector will be priorities for the RAG.
16. TIB catch estimates for coral trout have been specifically estimated having regard for the overall level of reported commercial catches by the sunset sector compared to the TAC.

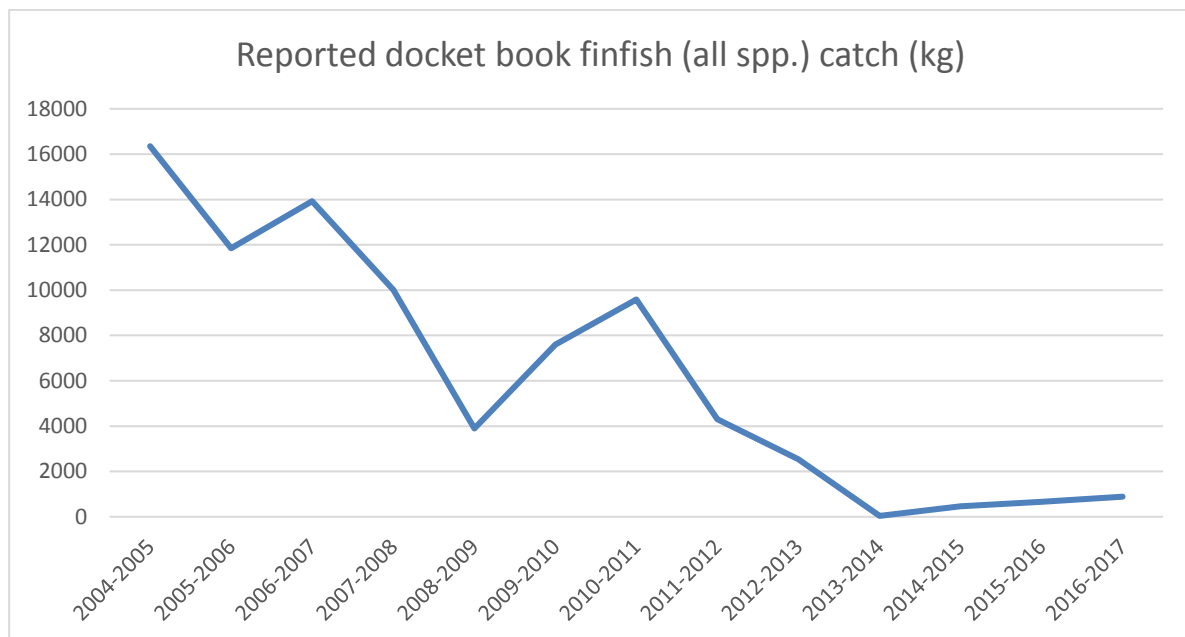
**Table 1. Summary of estimates of TIB commercial take**

<b>Study</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Time period</b>	<b>Estimate of TIB commercial take</b>
O'Neill & Tobin (2016)	Spanish mackerel stock assessment	2003-2010	<b>22 t</b> Spanish mackerel
Bussilachi, Williams, Russ and Begg (2012)	Creel surveys - island based	2004-2006	<b>9 t</b> Spanish mackerel <b>25 t</b> coral trout <b>20 t</b> other species.
Begg & Murchie (2004)	Review of catch records and island freezer data	1988-2003	<b>29 t</b> peak reef-line catch of all spp.(2002) <b>15 t</b> peak coral trout catch (Mer + Erub, 2002) <b>7.5 t</b> peak Spanish mackerel catch (Masig, 1999)

## REPORTED TIB COMMERCIAL CATCH



**Figure 1.** Reported catch in TDB01 docket-books from TIB fishers selling finfish (all species combined) to buyers by financial year.



**Figure 2.** Reported docket book catches (fishers selling to buyers) from TDB01 by financial year.

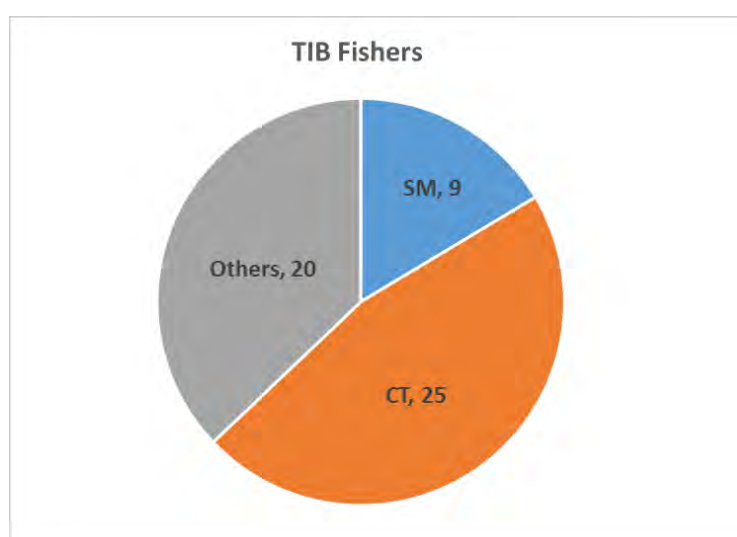
## STUDIES THAT PROVIDE ESTIMATES OF TIB COMMERCIAL CATCH

### O'Neill & Tobin (November 2016)

17. The most recent assessment for Spanish mackerel (O'Neill & Tobin – November 2016) reports that for the years 2003-2010 the docket (TIB) database corresponds to about **18.5 %** (SD =4.6%) on average **of the Spanish mackerel logbook** (TVH) tonnages per season.
18. The percentage was based on comparing the amount of catch recorded in TIB docket-books and compared what proportion this was of the TVH sector reported in logbooks.
19. This equates to an average of **22 t of Spanish mackerel per season** taken by the TIB sector.
20. This same assumed amount (18.5 %) is extrapolated for two other time periods in the assessment for which full docket data is not-available 1989-2002 and 2011-2014.

### Busilacchi, Williams, Russ and Begg (2012)

21. This creel study estimated that from 2004 to 2006 the TIB sector commercial catch for three islands (Mer, Erub, Masig) studied was 53.5 tonnes in total, **Figure 3**.
  - a. **9 tonnes - Spanish mackerel**
  - b. **25 tonnes - coral trout**
  - c. **20 tonnes - other species.**

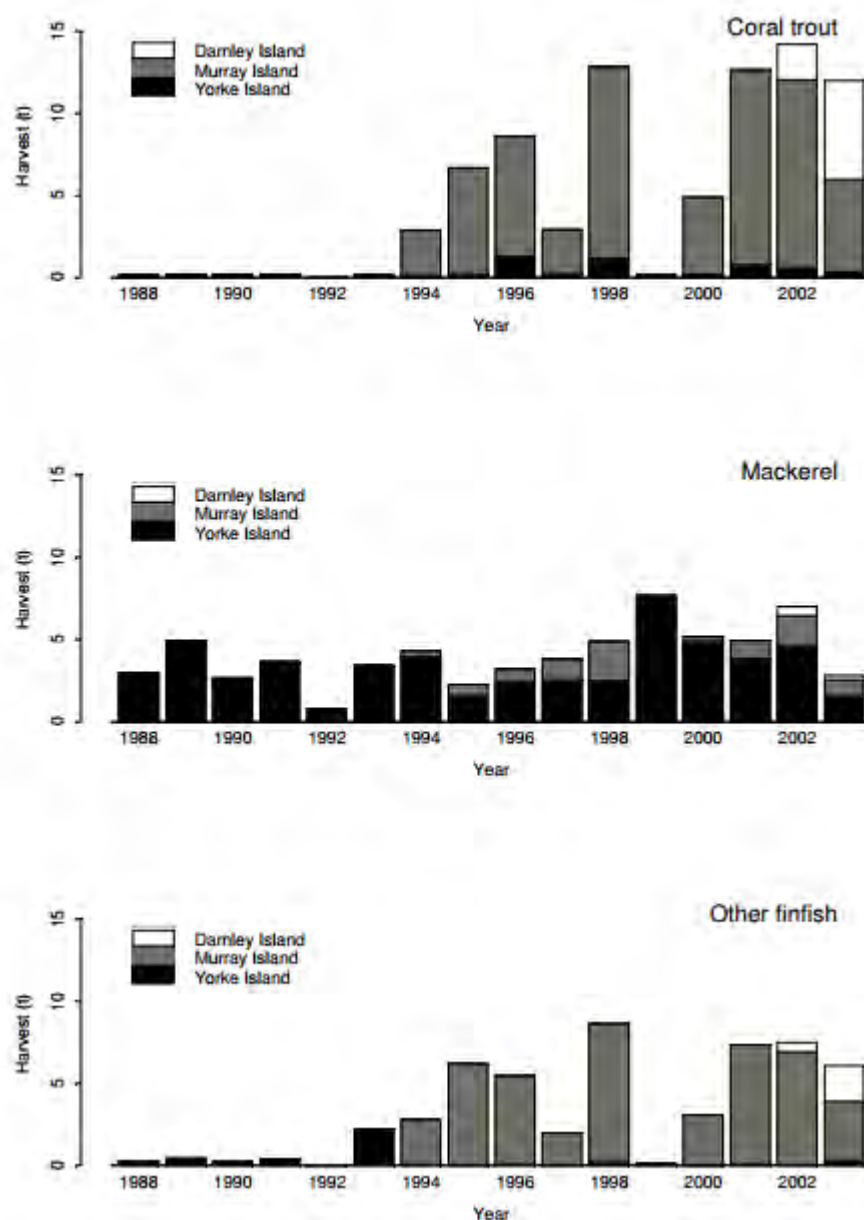


**Figure 3.** Chart of estimated TIB commercial catch for Mer, Masig and Erub from *Busilacchi et. al* (2012)

### Begg & Murchie (2004)

22. The CRC report "*Collation and review of islander commercial catch history (1988-2003) in the Eastern Torres Strait reef line fishery*, Begg & Murchie 2004" provides a summary of traditional catch records from community freezer and commercial catch records (**Figure 4**).
23. The peak reef-line catch of all species combined was 29 tonnes in 2002 from 111 individual fishers and 1064 days of effort.

24. Coral trout was the main species harvested from Mer and Erub Islands and peaked at around 15 tonnes during the studied data.
25. Spanish mackerel was the main species harvested from Masig Island and peaked at around 7.5 tonnes in 1999.
26. **Figure 4** (below) provides an overview of reported catches (total and broken down by island)



**Figure 4.** Total annual harvest (t) of Coral trout, Mackerel and Other finfish for Darnley (Erub), Murray (Mer) and Yorke (Masig) Islands. Overall heights of bars indicate the total annual reported harvest for the eastern Torres Strait (all three islands combined).

**Table 1.** Number of TIB license endorsements by fishing season (Source: ABARES Fishery Status Reports, \*AFMA PISCES Database and PZJA Public Licensing Register).

Season	# TIB licenses (endorsements)
2009-10	161 SM, 145 RL
2010-11	148 SM, 129 RL
2011-12	150 SM, 134 RL
2012-13	135 SM, 122 RL
2013-14	136 SM, 132 RL
2014-15	210 SM, 194 RL
2015-16	270 SM, 227 RL
2017-18	277 SM, 177 RL

## REFERENCES

Begg G.A., Murchie C.D. (2004). *Collation and review of Islander commercial catch history (1988-2003) in the eastern Torres Strait reef line fishery*. CRC Reef Research Centre Technical Report No. 57, CRC Reef Research Centre, Townsville.

Busilacchi, S., Williams, A.J., Russ, G.R., and Begg, G.A. (2012) *Complexity of applying minimum legal sizes (MLS) of retention in an indigenous coral reef fishery*. Fisheries Management and Ecology 19, 233–244.

O'Neill M. and Tobin A. – *Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Stock Assessment II, 2015 (Update of stock assessment I published in 2006)*. Torres Strait AFMA Project Number RR2014/0823 as accepted by the Finfish Scientific Technical Working Group 10 November 2016.

<b>PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</b>	<b>Meeting No. 2018.1</b> <b>20 March 2018</b>
<b>MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES and WORK PLANS</b>	<b>Agenda Item No. 7</b> <b>For discussion and advice</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group

1. **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on future management priorities for the fishery.
2. **NOTE** the scheduled meetings for the Finfish Working Group and also that of the Finfish Resource Assessment Group

## KEY ISSUES

1. This is a standing item for the working group. Having agreed management priorities (management issues to focus on) and a work plan aims to achieve a more efficient management process.
2. At its March 2017 meeting the Working Group noted the below list of management priorities identified at the July 2016 meeting and did not recommend any change.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) development of a harvest strategy;</li> <li>b) progressing issues identified under agenda items 5.2 (Spanish mackerel TAC) and 5.3 ('other' species) through the Technical Scientific Working Group; and</li> <li>c) improving fishery data (freezer data, possible length frequency and otolith data collection).</li> </ol>
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3. The Working Group however noted that climate change impacts and management responses to climate change should be considered for the work plan in the medium term.
4. Based on discussions convened in the meeting and / or advice from individual members the Working Group is asked to review the standing management priorities and provide advice on any changes.
5. Where necessary, the Working Group should aim to assign an order of priority to items and a desired timeline.
6. Importantly the Working Group will need to have regard for resourcing. AFMA's budget for finfish fisheries is tabled under Agenda Item 6.3 for information.
7. The Working Group are asked to note **Table 1** (below) which outlines a proposed scheduled PZJA finfish meetings for the remainder of this 2017-18 cycle and the next 2018-19 meeting cycle.

**Table 1.** Schedule of upcoming meetings and work planned to progress at each meeting

<b>Date</b>	<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Main Business</b>
20 March 2018	Finfish Working Group (2018.1)	TAC advice to PZJA for 2019-20 season. Formalising TACs
21-22 March 2018	Joint Finfish Working Group and Finfish RAG meeting (RAG 2)	RAG and WG: Progress harvest strategy project. RAG: Biological data collection to support assessments
2018-19 Fishing Season Starts 1 July 2018		
4 July 2018	Industry data meeting	Focus on data issues raised through assessments. Industry to provide advice to mgmt. and scientists on characterising fishing gear setup, uniformity of effort, spatial data, large size classed fish (dome shaped selectivity). Logbook review.
August 2018	Finfish RAG (RAG 3)	Progress harvest strategy project. RAG to consider preliminary assessments for coral trout and updated Spanish mackerel assessment. RAG to provide advice on proposed log changes.
October 2018	Finfish RAG (RAG 4)	RAG to consider any further updates performed and finalise assessments and provide RBC advice for 2019-20 season.
February/Mar 2019	Finfish Working Group	TAC advice to PZJA for 2019-20 season. Progress harvest strategy project.
June 2019	Joint Finfish Working Group and Finfish RAG	Presentation of harvest strategy options. Final part of the harvest strategy project.
2019-20 Fishing Season Starts 1 July 2019		