



Australian Government  
Australian Fisheries Management Authority

## **17<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group**

**12 October 2020, tele/video  
conference**

### **Final Meeting Record**

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

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

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# 1 Preliminaries

## 1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies

1. Anthony Salam opened the meeting in prayer around 10:10am.
2. The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting via teleconference. The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the various members were located and paid respect to Elders past, present and future.
3. Attendees at the Working Group are detailed in **Table 1** below. The positions for Traditional Inhabitant Members for Maluialgal and Kulkalgal are currently vacant.
4. There is a standing meeting invitation to a representative from the Papua New Guinea (PNG) National Fisheries Authority.
5. Apologies received are detailed in the **Table 2** below.

**Table 1. List of attendees at the meeting of HCWG members**

Members	
Anne Clarke	Chair
Tim Skewes	Scientific member
Michael Passi	Traditional Inhabitant member, Kemer Kemer Meriam
Maluwap Nona	Traditional Inhabitant member, Gudumalulgal
Anthony Salam	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalagal
Selina Stoute	Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) member
Keith Brightman	A/g Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) member
Steven Purcell	Scientific Member
Samantha Miller	Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
Executive Officer	
Danait Ghebrezgabhier	HCWG Executive Officer, AFMA
Observers	
Maluwap Nona	Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC
Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA Officer

**Table 2. List of apologies for the meeting of HCWG members.**

Apologies	
Anthony Salam	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalagal
Mark Andersen	TSRA member

## 1.2 Adoption of agenda

6. The Working Group adopted the draft Agenda with the addition of a discussion item under *Agenda item 3 – Research Priorities* on establishing a resource assessment group (RAG) for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer (BDM) Fishery in 2021.
7. The Executive Officer (EO) advised Members of the intention to record the meeting proceedings for the purpose of developing the minutes. No members objected to this process.

## 1.3 Declarations of interest

8. The Chair advised members and observers to update their declared interests outlined in the register provided in the agenda paper. Declared interests are detailed in **Table 3** below. Working Group members agreed to address any additional conflicts of interest should they arise throughout the discussion of agenda items.

**Table 3. Declared interests from each attendee**

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
<b>Members</b>		
Anne Clarke (video conference)	Chair	Previously contracted with Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland and Torres Strait No pecuniary interests or otherwise.
Tim Skewes (video conference)	Scientific Member	CSIRO/Independent Consultant. Current co-investigator on TSSAC project 'measuring non-commercial fishing in the Torres Strait'. Current co-investigator on TSRA funded project 'Stock survey of Torres Strait Beche-de-mer species'. Previous principal scientist for Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) project to develop a harvest strategy for the TSBDMF. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Steve Purcell (video conference)	Scientific Member	Has interest in invertebrate fishery research has previously worked in the assessment of sea cucumber fisheries in the Pacific and New Caledonia, and on restocking/sea-ranching research. Specialist in sea cucumber ecology and fisheries. Will be involved in a sea cucumber population survey in New Caledonia to inform the CITES Appendix II listing of black and white teatfish.
Michael Passi (teleconference)	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kemer Kemer Meriam	TIB licence holder and full time BDM operator.
Maluwap Nona (teleconference)	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Gudumalulgal	TIB licence holder and full time BDM operator. Chairperson of Malu Lamar;

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
		Director of MDW Fisheries Association on Mer; Traditional Inhabitant Member on TSSAC. Applicant on the Torres Strait Sea Claim Part B with other representatives.
Anthony Salam (teleconference)	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalagal	TIB licence holder
Selina Stoute(video conference)	AFMA Member	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Samantha Miller (video conference)	QDAF Member	Employed by Queensland Government and working in the Management and Reform Section, managing the East Coast Sea Cucumber and other harvest fisheries in Queensland. No pecuniary interests or otherwise.
Danait Ghebrezgabhier (video conference)	Executive Officer, AFMA	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
<b>Casual Observers</b>		
Keith Brightman (video conference)	TSRA officer	Employed by TSRA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Quinten Hirakawa (video conference)	TSRA officer	Employed by TSRA and TIB licence holder with a BDM endorsement.

9. The AFMA Member thanked all members for their availability to meet and discuss research priorities despite the challenges of teleconference meetings.

## 1.4 Out of session correspondence

10. All out of session correspondence on Working Group matters since the meeting of HCWG members on 7 August 2020 was taken as read and not explicitly discussed. The EO advised members that the application for the reassessment of the Wildlife Trade Approval (WTO) for the BDM Fishery was submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE). A copy of the submission was circulated to the Working Group on 9 October and updates on the progress of the assessment will be provided as they becomes available.

## 2 Working Group Updates

### 2.1 Industry member update

The Working Group noted updates provided by industry members on matters relating to the BDM Fishery.

The Traditional Inhabitant member for Kemer Kemer Meriam advised the Working Group that, although he has been able to dispatch some product, fishing operations have been slow in the last two months due to bad weather. Although not ideal, this has provided fishers with a break and fishing grounds an opportunity for grounds to re-stock.

The Traditional Inhabitant member for Gudumalulgal provided an industry perspective on the need for consistency on compliance activities that are carried out across all Torres Strait Fisheries and the need to inform all BDM operators about the transparency and accountability on data collection across the industry. The member also queried when the review of the current prohibition on the

use of Hookah gear to fish is likely to be discussed, including terms and conditions on how it will happen. Lastly the member expressed preference for the HCWG to resume face-to-face meetings for members located in the Torres Strait to address the communication challenges of tele/video conference meetings and make it easier to participate in discussions more effectively.

The TI member for Kaiwalagal advised that he is supportive of the recently released Management Plan. The member further provided feedback from other fishers in support of the proposed arrangements relating to the re-opening of black teatfish in April 2021 with a 20 tonne TAC, noting that the review of the hookah ban is yet to be resolved. A black teatfish reopening in April is ideal as it coincides with the opening of the crayfish season as well.

## 2.2 Scientific member updates

The Working Group noted updates provided by Scientific members on matters relating to the BDM Fishery.

Scientific member Tim Skewes advised the working group that:

- he is working with the project team on finalising the stock survey report.
- he will also be participating in the upcoming surveillance milestone of the sea cucumber fishery in Western Australia leading up to its first year anniversary of being Marine Stewardship Council certified. It is primarily a sandfish and redfish fishery.
- the Northern Territory is current undertaking an ecological risk assessment (ERA) for their sea cucumber fishery which will be worth keeping an eye on.

The scientific member Steven Purcell advised the Working Group that:

- he will be involved in a sea cucumber population survey in New Caledonia to inform the CITES Appendix II listing of black and white teatfish and is hopeful that there will be lessons learnt that can be shared between both counties given the similarities in teatfish populations.
- he gave a seminar hosted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and would be happy to share the link with the Working Group if there is interest.

**ACTION** – Scientific member Steven Purcell to share with the Working Group the link to his seminar to the FAO.

## 2.3 Government agency updates

### 2.3.1 AFMA

The AFMA member informed the Working Group that, following on from the PZJA's decision regarding black teatfish, AFMA is working with Malu Lamar and Traditional Inhabitant members on the HCWG to undertake outer island visits from 26 October onwards. The purpose of the visits is to explain the mandatory daily reporting arrangements for landed catch, to encourage voluntary logbook reporting and discuss the fin fish sampling project. The visits will also provide Malu Lamar the opportunity to discuss with industry any cultural law arrangements that they may want to implement during the trial reopening of black teatfish. AFMA is grateful for the TI members for Gudumalulgal, Kemer Kemer Meriam and Kaiwalagal for their willingness to assist and lead the industry discussions.

TI member for Gudumalulgal advised that Malu Lamar is fully supportive of AFMA's work in progressing this and thanked AFMA. The member further reiterated the importance of allowing all BDM operators the opportunity to play their part in the management of the fishery.

### 2.3.2 TSRA

The acting TSRA member informed the Working Group that the TSRA has been focused on encouraging daily reporting and is willing to continue to assist with that process from time to time as required by AFMA. The TSRA has also been very focussed on organising the upcoming Fisheries Summit and will be able to contribute more post the Summit.

### 2.3.3 QDAF

The QDAF member updated the Working Group on the key developments below relating to fisheries, with a more comprehensive written summary to be circulated after the meeting:

- Fisheries regulations have been streamlined
- A draft Harvest Strategy Policy has been developed for fisheries in the Coral Sea including sea cucumber, lobster and aquarium fisheries.
- The WTO accreditation for the East coast sea cucumber Fishery was approved on 28 September for one year following significant negotiations with DAWE around the conditions which prescribe tight milestones for the design and delivery of fishery independent surveys. The surveys will be fully cost recovered from industry given the Department's limited capacity and the CITES Appendix II listing requirement for the assessment of black and white teatfish stocks to be informed by fishery independent data.
- The draft Development Fishing Policy is available if the Working Group is interested.

**ACTION** – the QDAF member to share a written summary of key fisheries updates for Queensland.

### 2.3.4 Malu Lamar

The Malu Lamar Chair updated the Working Group on Malu Lamar's duty of care to provide support in the best interest of the industry and ensure that the resources remain sustainable and are available for the benefit of all Torres Strait Islanders. Malu Lamar is also keen to educate participants in other fisheries on the Native Title arrangements that apply to all nations throughout the Torres Strait and maintain the balance between common and customary laws through various avenues including the upcoming outer island visits.

## 3 Research priorities

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In considering the research priorities for Hand collectable Fisheries, the Working Group initially considered the proposal to establish a resource assessment group (RAG) for Hand Collectable Fisheries in the Torres Strait with a focus on the BDM Fishery.

### **Advice on establishing a RAG for BDM (and other hand collectable fisheries)**

The AFMA member sought the HCWG's advice on establishing a RAG in 2021 for the BDM and other hand collectable fisheries, consistent with what is already in place for the Tropical Rock Lobster and Finfish Fisheries. The fishery has seen an increase in effort and catch reporting in recent years and significant changes in management arrangements with the implementation of the Fish Receiver System and BDM Harvest Strategy, a recent scientific stock survey, the CITES Appendix II listing of black and white teatfish and pursuit to reopen the black teatfish fishery. Given these significant developments, a RAG will play a very important role in advising on the status of BDM stocks reviewing data collection programs as they develop, advising on and reviewing data analysis and other factors impacting on the fishery and the environment that it operates in.

The RAG would consist of members with scientific and industry expertise and focus solely on the scientific aspects of the BDM Fishery while the Working Group will continue to consider management arrangements for the BDM Fishery. The RAG would provide impartial scientific advice to the PZJA and the Working Group as well as support industry's expectation that BDM fishery is grown sustainably in line with the BDM Harvest Strategy and given the increased data and assessment requirements as a result of the CITES listing of black and white teatfish.

Working Group members expressed their full support for the establishment of a RAG in 2021 for the BDM Fishery and acknowledged that it will play an important role in supporting and progressing the science in the fishery and provide a two way sharing of knowledge between scientists and industry. Mr Nona, in his capacity as the Malu Lamar Chair also expressed full support for the establishment of a RAG in 2021 for the BDM Fishery.

The Scientific member Tim Skewes noted that no other jurisdiction has a dedicated RAG for its sea cucumber fishery and establishing one for the Torres Strait may provide a blueprint for adopting this approach more widely.

The Scientific member Steven Purcell observed that the data available for the BDM Fishery is currently heavily weighted to biological data and a RAG would need to have broader considerations that include economic and social factors of the fishery. The AFMA member confirmed that the terms of reference for RAGs provide broader remit beyond just biological data and are outlined in the PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No.1 which will be circulated to the Working Group for their comment.

**ACTION** – EO to circulate the terms of reference for RAGs outlined in the PZJA FMP1 to the Working Group for comment.

### **Research priorities**

The Working Group noted the update on the outcomes of the last TSSAC research funding cycle and discussed the future research needs for the BDM Fishery. The working Group also noted that the project to develop conversion ratios for curryfish, an essential research priority identified in the last research funding round, has been withdrawn from the 2020-21 funding round as CSIRO's work plan and priorities were re-directed to other projects due to COVID-19. The project team has further advised that they are currently not in a position to resume the project in 2021-22 as they are facing a number of obstacles due to COVID-19 and staff caps within CSIRO that have limited its ability to acquire additional resources to undertake the project. In discussing research priorities for the BDM Fishery, the Working Group might consider what needs to be addressed immediately (in 2020-21) and what could be held off for the newly established RAG to consider in 2021.

To assist the Working Group with its consideration, the scientific member Tim Skewes outlined the draft recommendations from the BDM stock survey report on future research gaps, needs and opportunities for the ongoing development of the BDM fishery as follows:

- Information is still required on the stock status of Sandfish at Warrior Reef (last surveyed in 2011) and of deep water sea cucumber species (deepwater redfish/blackfish/surf redfish) which may be best obtained through dedicated surveys.
- Further investigation of deep water populations in parts of the Torres Strait to build on the outcomes of the underwater camera survey undertaken in the last survey.
- Developing conversion ratios for species that are becoming more commercially important such as curryfish.
- Analysis of additional catch data collected during the trial reopening of black teatfish and.

- Broader, industry assisted, catch sampling to collect additional data for input into the Harvest Strategy, such as fine scale effort data noting confidentiality considerations of individual fishing operations.
- Collecting social and economic information to better understand the key drivers and supply chains in the fishery, support fishers and inform the management of the fishery.
- There is interest in pursuing sea cucumber aquaculture ventures in the Torres Strait, such as the reseeded potential that is currently being investigated at Ugar, and this may require additional funding. There is currently a project underway to look at the financial and biological feasibility of sea ranching at Ugar and there is also a potential to extend this investigation to Warrior Reef. Similar work is also happening internationally in PNG and Madagascar.
- Potential exists to update and evaluate the existing Management Strategy Evaluation model for sea cucumber fisheries to support future testing and developing future iterations of BDM HS.
- Quantifying the potential impacts of climate change on BDM Fishery and evaluating alternative adaptation options, preferably through an integrated ecosystem modelling approach.

The Working Group noted the following as it discussed the research needs for the BDM Fishery:

- **Development of curryfish conversion ratios** - the sampling to support the development of conversion ratios for curryfish could be undertaken elsewhere (in the GBR or New Caledonia). However, since the original intention of the project was to engage industry fishers in the sampling process it was considered this could be delayed until the fishers were engaged without sustainability concerns for the species given there are default proxies in place. In the meantime, the Working Group noted that there is existing research in this area undertaken by the scientific member Steven Purcell that could be considered, if not done so already.
- **Exploring sea ranching/re seeding opportunities** - the Scientific member Steven Purcell advised the Working Group that such a project would need to be further developed. In his experience such ventures can be expensive to undertake with uncertain outcomes. The member further outlined that the social aspects of such ventures, particularly with respect to access arrangements and animal husbandry, would need to be considered carefully. The Working Group noted that Queensland regulates sea ranching/aquaculture operations while AFMA would take carriage of permitting for the harvest of juveniles and restocking activities.

The QDAF member further reiterated that any aquaculture undertaking would be regulated by the Queensland Government and assessed according to the relevant policy, including environmental assessment process to manage impacts and containment arrangements. The member advised that aquaculture operations tend to be very challenging and the business plan for the proposed activity would need to address those.

- **Outstanding stock survey of Sandfish at Warrior Reef** - the TI member for Kaiwalagal queried whether the survey will resume given the Malu Lamar Chair's advice at HCWG16 that there may be a way to re-engage the Traditional Owners that opposed the survey. The TI member for Kemer Kemer Meriam also reiterated the need to resolve the misunderstandings with Traditional Owners on Tudu and lama to be able to undertake future surveys as Sandfish is an important stock to those fishers. The scientific member Tim Skewes agreed that it will be important to engage TOs on the discussion regarding future surveys as well as PNG given the virgin sandfish stock is located there. The survey itself would be relatively efficient and cost effective compared to east Torres Strait due to the small area size and shallow grounds.

The Malu Lamar Chair advised the Working Group that Malu Lamar put a stop to the survey that was planned for Warrior Reef following a complaint from TOs on Tudu. Malu Lamar

understands the importance of the stock survey, especially given the positive outcome of the eastern component of the recent surveys for reopening black teatfish. Malu Lamar will convey the benefit of undertaking the survey to Tudu and will take the lead and encourage the TOs from that region that they need to pursue this as a matter of priority.

- **Socio economic priorities** - The Scientific member Steven Purcell observed that the current information for the BDM Fishery is heavily weighted towards biological data and proposed that the socioeconomic priorities for the fishery should be better articulated and further developed through dedicated regular surveys on socio-economic component of the fishery. Such surveys can be undertaken on a 3-5 year cycle and would complement existing biological information by providing additional information on local ecological knowledge on species, the development of the fishery and fishing behaviour over time and information on greenhouse gas emissions to inform climate change impacts. This approach can also be extended to other Torres Strait Fisheries.

The AFMA member expressed support for pursuing a formalised socioeconomic data collection and analysis program for the BDM Fishery to complement the biological data in the fishery, noting that to be effective and successful such an initiative would need to be co-designed and co-developing with industry. As such, this priority could benefit from additional consideration by the RAG once established in 2021. In the meantime the Working Group members could start considering out of session the benefit of collecting some socio-economic data as part of the proposed black teatfish trial reopening (including appropriate survey design) and work towards engaging industry on their willingness to participate in a more structured way. AFMA will follow up with the Scientific member Steven Purcell on designing survey templates from previous studies that may be adapted for the BDM Fishery.

**ACTION** - AFMA to follow up with the Scientific member Steven Purcell on designing survey templates for the BDM Fishery to collect socio-economic data during black teatfish reopening.

The Working Group acknowledged that the management of the trial reopening will be a significant undertaking and it is important that AFMA continues to encourage and support catch reporting by industry as part of the process.

The AFMA member emphasised that AFMA will encourage operators to take up voluntary logbook reporting, including providing assistance on completing logbooks and also confirmed that there will be a targeted compliance and monitoring program during the opening. The TI member for Gudumalulgal reiterated that customary law will also play a role in this process as operators need to abide by them and this will be reinforced during the industry visits.

Mr Nona, in his capacity as Malu Lamar Chair further reiterated Malu Lamar's support of any research priorities that are beneficial for the BDM Fishery.

*The TSRA member left meeting at 12:20pm to attend another meeting.*

### **Recommendation of research priorities for the BDM Fishery for the 2021-22 TSSAC research funding round**

Having regard for members advice on the various research priorities discussed above, the Working Group recommended that:

- The highest research and data needs for the BDM Fishery are the analysis of new catch data collected during the trial reopening of black teatfish to inform future openings and any follow up work from the stock survey. The exact scope of this work will be more evident once the stock survey project is finalised and the trial black teatfish reopening has

concluded and as such this does not require a dedicated research project to be identified at this point.

- Following the establishment of the RAG in 2021 (which is fully supported), it will engage industry upfront to refine identified research priorities for the BDM Fishery and seek funding in the following TSSAC research round. This will also provide time to talk to industry, including TOs on Tudu about progressing future Sandfish stock surveys.
- It is important that research in the BDM Fishery is informed through a two-way exchange of knowledge between industry and researchers and this is anticipated to be achieved through the RAG.

## 4 Date and venue for next meeting

11. The Working Group noted the tentative date for the next meeting of the HCWG during the week beginning 5 April 2021 as proposed at the last meeting, The format of the meeting will depend on the timing around the black teatfish reopening and the COVID-19 situation at the time.

12. TI member for Kaiwalagal said a closing prayer.

13. Chair closed meeting at 12:40pm.

## Summary of Actions Arising from HCWG17

#	Action item	Responsibility
Action item 1	Scientific member Steven Purcell to share with the Working Group the link to his seminar to the FAO.	Scientific member Steven Purcell
Action item 2	The QDAF member to share a written summary of key fisheries updates for Queensland.	Scientific member Steven Purcell
Action item 3	EO to circulate the terms of reference for RAGs outlined in the PZJA FMP1 to the Working Group for comment.	HCWG EO
Action item 4	AFMA to follow up with the Scientific member Steven Purcell on designing survey templates for the BDM Fishery to collect socio-economic data during BT reopening.	HCWG EO/ Scientific member Steven Purcell

## Attachment A – Adopted Agenda

### 17th MEETING OF THE PZJA TORRES STRAIT HAND COLLECTABLES WORKING GROUP

12 October 2020: 10 am – 12 pm

Teleconference

### DRAFT AGENDA

#### AGENDA ITEM 1 PRELIMINARIES

- 1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies
- 1.2 Adoption of agenda
- 1.3 Declarations of interest
- 1.4 Out of session correspondence

#### AGENDA ITEM 2 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

- 2.1 Industry members
- 2.2 Scientific members
- 2.3 Government Agencies
  - 2.3.1 Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) – Management
  - 2.3.2 Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)
  - 2.3.3 Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF)
- 2.4 Native Title
- 2.5 Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority

#### AGENDA ITEM 3 RESEARCH PRIORITIES

**Expected Outcome:** The Working Group will discuss and provide advice on management priorities for Torres Strait Hand Collectable Fisheries.

#### AGENDA ITEM 4 OTHER BUSINESS

- 4.1 Other Business
- 4.2 Date and venue for next meeting – week of 5 April 2021 (proposed)

#### CLOSE OF MEETING