

Protected Zone Joint Authority
Torres Strait Finfish Working Group

DATE: Friday 15th March 2019
VENUE: Rydges Plaza Hotel, Cairns, Cnr. Grafton & Spence St.
MEETING TIME: 8:30 am – 5:00 pm

DRAFT AGENDA

1. Preliminaries

1.1 Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome

1.2 Adoption of agenda

1.3 Declarations of interests

1.4 Actions and record from last FWG meeting 20 March 2018

2. Working Group Updates

2.1 Industry updates

Industry members and invited participants are invited to provide a brief verbal update on activities and strategic issues relevant to the management of the fishery.

2.2 Government agencies updates

PZJA agencies are asked to provide a short update to the group on relevant changes to management arrangements and strategic issues.

2.3 Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority update

The working group is to note any relevant updates on native title matters relevant to the fishery.

2.4 Native title

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3. Advice on Total Allowable Catches

The working group are to note advice from Finfish Resource Assessment Group Meeting (FRAG 4, 13-14 March 2019) on recommended biological catches. Considering this advice, and any other relevant information, the working group is to provide advice to the PZJA on appropriate Spanish mackerel and coral trout total allowable catch limits for the 2019-20 season.

4. Western line closure advice

The working group is invited to note the proposed process for removing the reef-line western line closure for the 2019-20 season. The working group is asked to provide advice to the PZJA to support consideration of removing this closure.

5. Budget update

6. Other business

7. Next meeting and meeting close

The next FWG meeting is scheduled for 18-19 June 2019 on Thursday Island. The key agenda item for this meeting is presentation of the final draft harvest strategy framework for the fishery.

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

DRAFT

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
PRELIMINARIES Welcome and meeting preliminaries	Agenda Item No. 1.1 FOR NOTING

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group **NOTE:**

1. An opening prayer.
2. An acknowledgement of traditional owners.
3. The chairperson's welcome address; and
4. Apologies received from members unable to attend.

BACKGROUND

1. Apologies have been received from Tom Robert, QDAF and Hilda Mosby, Industry member for Kulkalgal.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
PRELIMINARIES Adoption of the Agenda	Agenda Item No. 1.2 For Adoption

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

BACKGROUND

1. A meeting announcement and proposed meeting outline was sent via email from AFMA to members on 8 February 2019.
2. A **draft agenda (APPENDIX A)** reflecting the proposed meeting outline was circulated to members and other participants for comments and suggested agenda items on 1 March 2019.

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- 1.3 Declarations of interests**
- 1.4 Actions and record from last FWG meeting 20 March 2018**

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PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
PRELIMINARIES Declarations of interests	Agenda Item No. 1.3 FOR ACTION

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group:

1. **DECLARE** all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait Finfish Fisheries at the commencement of the meeting;
2. **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;
3. **ABIDE** by decisions of the Working Group (WG) regarding the management of conflicts of interest; and
4. **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 from 20 March 2018
FWG Meeting**

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
John Ramsay (noting not presently in the role)	TSRA Member	TSRA fisheries program, TSRA holds finfish allocation and some TRL access rights on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. Involved with leasing access to finfish fishery to sunset sector fishers.
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.
Tenny Elisala	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. Ranger, TSRA.
Harry Nona	Industry Member	(new FWG member no interest registered).
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	President of Kos and Abob Fisheries Association, Ugar Community, Councillor for Ugar, member of Finfish RAG, TS Prawn MAC.
Hilda Mosby	Industry Member	(new FWG member no interest registered).
Frank Loban	Industry Member	(new FWG member no interest registered).
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.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
PRELIMINARIES Actions arising from the last Working Group meeting	Agenda Item No. 1.4 For Noting

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** the:
 - a. the progress of actions arising from the previous meeting held on 20 March 2018; and
 - b. final meeting record of the 20 March 2018 Working Group meeting.

KEY ISSUES

Meeting record

1. This record was circulated for comments on 26 April 2018. The period for comments was closed on 10 May 2018.
2. Suggested comments were received from TSRA, some of which were incorporated into the final report which was circulated to members on 9 August 2018. **Attachment A** outlines the changes made to amend the record.
3. The final meeting record for Finfish Working Group meeting of 20 March 2018 is provided at **Attachment B** together with the attached paper from TSRA on TIB sector catches (**Attachment C**).
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 20 March 2018 meeting record showing marked up changes based on member comments.

Attachment B - Finfish Working Group Meeting 20 March 2018 final meeting record

Attachment C – Finfish Working Group Meeting 20 March 2018 record attachment – TSRA paper on Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector reported catches.

Table 1: Progress against action items from FWG meeting 20 March 2018

Number	Action	Status
1.	FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1: AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.	In progress - To be organised for a future FWG meeting dependent on available time on agenda.
2.	FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1: AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.	Complete – A copy of the presentation and outcomes documents are available here: https://nesptropical.edu.au/index.php/round-2-projects/project-2-2-2/ and the link was circulated to FWG members via email on 08 March 2019.
3.	FWG 2018.1, Action 3, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF Finfish Working Group communique (6-7 March 2018) to the FWG for interest.	Complete – link emailed by AFMA to members on 20 March 2018 and recorded in meeting record.
4.	FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.	Complete – link emailed by AFMA to members on 20 March 2018 and recorded in meeting record.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2018.01

Meeting Record

20 March 2018

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

www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting Participants

Table 1. Working Group members and declarations of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM, co-investigator on FRDC and TSRA Top Western Fisheries Feasibility project led by A Tobin.
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	President of Kos and Abob Fisheries Association, Ugar Community. Councillor for Ugar, member of Torres Strait Finfish Resource Assessment Group, member of Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee, member of Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee.
Frank Fuid	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Andrew Trappett	Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
John Ramsey	TSRA Member	Fisheries Program Manager, TSRA holds finfish allocation and some TRL access rights on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. Involved with leasing access to finfish fishery to sunset sector fishers.
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.
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.

Table 2. Meeting observers and declarations of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jerry Stephen	TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio Member (Permanent Observer)	TIB licence holder. Traditional Owner, Ugar Island. Member, Fisheries Quota Management Committee Deputy chair TSRA
Joseph Posu	PNG NFA Officer	Nil
Kenny Bedford	Observer	TIB licence holder, was president of Erub Fisheries Management Association but has stepped down in early 2018 now working as an independent consultant. Recently delivered a Services and Infrastructure Audit report to TSRA board.
Allison Runck	TSRA	Nil
John Jones	AFMA	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.
Charlie CaddyKaddy	TSRA	TSRA, soon to be A/g program manager Fisheries, no declared interests. No TIB licence held.

Action items

Number	Action
1.	FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1: AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG to on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.
2.	FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1: AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.
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4.	FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	The FWG recommend a 2018/19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches.
2.	The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018/19 season noting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the age of available data underlying this TAC; a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and, the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.
3.	The Finfish Working Group supported the proposed approach of implementing formal and enforceable finfish TACs to be implemented in the 2019/20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.

Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

1.1. Opening Prayer, Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome, Apologies

The meeting was opened in prayer by Frank Faud at 0845 hrs. An acknowledgement of traditional owners of the land on which the meeting was held and elders of the community, past and present, was performed by TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member, Jerry Stephen.

The meeting Chair welcomed members and observers and noted that the Finfish Working Group (FWG) was well placed to help support the growth and development of the fishery and to build a platform to support collection of good data to support sustainable harvests.

FWG members Tenny Elisala, Elizah Wasaga and Maluwap Nona were noted as apologies.

John Ramsaey, TSRA member, attended from 0830 to 1230 hrs. Meeting observer Andrew Tobin attended from 1530 to 1715 hrs. Meeting observer John Jones from AFMA attended from 0900 to 1200 hrs.

1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The FWG adopted the agenda as circulated noting a paper was submitted by TSRA on 19 March 2018 on estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector catches (**Attachment A**). The FWG agreed to consider the paper at Agenda Item 6.4.

1.3. Declaration of Interests

The FWG noted the requirement for participants to declare all perceived or real interests in Torres Strait fisheries. Each attendee declared their interests as documented in Table 1 above. The FWG followed a process where each group of members with similar interests left the meeting to enable free discussion of the interests by the remaining FWG members. The FWG considered whether these interests would preclude members from providing advice on agenda items or whether an agreed treatment of these interests would be put into place at particular agenda items. Following this, groups of members were asked to re-join the meeting and the considerations were tabled.

Research member's interests

Research members with declared interests (Andy Bodsworth, David Brewer and Michael O'Neill) left the room. The FWG noted that these members may have a perceived or real interest in potentially receiving contracting for future research projects either directly or through their employers. The FWG agreed that these interests would need to be declared by the member at any discussion on future research and managed accordingly. Research members re-joined the meeting.

Sunset sector interests

The sunset sector representative, Mr Tony Vass, left the room noting his declared interest. The FWG agreed Mr Vass provides good advice and expertise to the FWG and PZJA and manages his interests well. The Chair suggested that it may be in the FWGs interest to have an active sunset sector fisher attend the FWG from time to time to get on-water advice from the fishery. The FWG considered that assistance could be given to Mr Vass's role in liaising with sunset sector fishers e.g. AFMA providing Mr Vass with information about licence holders, information sheets on the PZJA structure and process for advice and decision making. Mr Vass re-joined the meeting.

Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector interests

Members with declared direct commercial fishing interests in the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector left the meeting (Kenny Bedford, Jerry Stephen, Frank Faud). The FWG considered that industry members have a direct interest in the fishery and that fishers, or the communities they are from, may stand to benefit from certain advice provided to inform decision making. The FWG agreed that these interests must be declared at the relevant agenda times and that these interests could be managed. FWG noted that each member has a single TIB licence, and that these licences are spread across different communities. FWG recognised the very valuable expertise of TIB sector members and observers in the committee and that these members can encourage development and also provide advice from the FWG and PZJA back to communities. TIB sector representatives re-joined the meeting.

Leasing interests

The FWG noted TSRA advice that their board had met before the FWG meeting and had made a decision about the amount of catch to be leased to the sunset sector for the 2018/19 season.

TSRA Members with interests in this leasing process left the room (John [Ramsey Ramsay](#), Allison Runck, Charlie [Caddy Kaddy](#), Frank Faud, Jerry Stephen).

The FWG noted that TSRA [manage-administer](#) the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) which advises the TSRA Board on the amount to be leased out. This advice is based on community expertise with the FQMC being tasked with matching community needs with sustainable development of the fishery and providing economic benefits through revenue from leasing access to sunset sector fishers.

The FWG noted that the TSRA collect revenue from leasing licences to access the fishery which are held in trust on behalf of traditional inhabitants. It was noted that TSRA are a major contributor to the PZJA providing advice to support decision making through the TSRA chair. It was also noted that TSRA manage valuable initiatives such as grants to support [consultancy funding development projects](#).

FWG members queried why there was a parallel process in place through the TSRA FQMC outside of the PZJA advisory forums and whether it would be wise to seek industry views on the best process e.g. could one forum provide the advice to the PZJA. AFMA clarified the PZJA advisory group roles and processes:

- Finfish Resource Assessment Group has a technical focus and reports to the PZJA and FWG on stock assessments and provides Recommended Biological Catch advice.
- The FWG provides formal advice on Total Allowable Catches to the PZJA.
- Aside from these PZJA groups, the outcomes of the TSRA FQMC are provided by the TSRA Board to AFMA who, as licensing delegate, consider the leasing advice and put the catch entitlements into practice in the fishery through permit conditions.

The FWG Chair noted that both the RAG/FWG and FQMC were providing advice to the PZJA to support decision making through separate processes. It was advised that to be confident in making decisions the PZJA need to be sure that advice from both groups is provided based on the best available information. The Chair advised that there was a need to clarify roles and there is a clear opportunity for the FWG and FQMC to collaborate and share information. The Chair advised that the ANAO audit (agenda item 2.1) is likely to review the functions and roles of such groups and may help identify where room for increased efficiencies might exist.

Regarding the declared interests, the FWG Chair advised that to ensure the integrity of FWG advice, the group must benefit from and balance the expertise of TSRA with the declared direct interest in managing the sunset licence leasing process and development of fishery in a sustainable way. TSRA staff re-joined the meeting.

~~Sunset industry member Mr Tony Vass advised that sunset lease prices for access continue to rise and that he wished to meet with TSRA to pass on advice from sunset sector fishers about lease prices and affordability issues, and seek clarity on how lease prices were set. The FWG noted that this was not the direct scope of the WG as it was a commercial issue and encouraged Mr Vass to discuss this with TSRA.~~

1.4. Actions Arising

The Working Group noted the status of actions arising from the previous March 2017 meeting.

TSRA expressed disappointment that the meeting was not held prior to the current date noting there is a business requirement for the TSRA Board to consider Finfish Working Group recommendations at their annual March board meeting. TSRA suggested that in the case that finalised advice is not available in time for this meeting, Total Allowable Catch setting advice should be used to set the following seasons TAC. AFMA advised the FWG that the priority for management and the driver for the timing of advisory meetings was to focus on stock assessments and supporting the implementation of harvest strategies. AFMA advised that flexibility will be required over next few years while engaging with harvest strategy researchers and the timing of delivery of project milestones and stock assessment outcomes. AFMA advised that all steps would be taken to accommodate TSRA business requirements whilst also meeting AFMA's work schedules and priorities.

Agenda Item 2 – Management agencies updates

2.1. Management agencies updates

AFMA Foreign Compliance

The FWG noted the following points provided by the AFMA Foreign Compliance Operations team:

- Reports have been provided to Compliance of fishers interacting with protected species and / or mishandling bycatch. While it is not illegal to interact with a protected species, all interactions must be reported. Mishandling bycatch is an offence and can result in prosecution.
- Vessel Monitoring Systems (satellite trackers) have now been implemented in the Torres Strait. It was advised that most operators were adhering to requirement.
- It was advised that the mandatory Fish Receiver System (FRS), implemented 1 December 2017, was in the early stages and has been well received by the industry. It was however advised that some reporting issues were apparent and AFMA was working with new fish receivers to help them manage reporting received catch. It was advised that compliance with this arrangement is most important in protecting stocks through sustainable management and in helping the industry understand what harvests are been taken.
- It was advised that a number of apprehensions of foreign boats illegally fishing in the protected zone had occurred around Warrior Reef and also around the Saibai community. No finfish catches were found aboard these foreign vessels. It was advised that valuable support for these apprehensions had been provided from the Papua New Guinea National

Fisheries Authority. Noting that many stocks are shared between Australian and PNG it is important that the two countries collaborate on management and compliance.

- The FWG noted that from 1 July 2018, QDAF Domestic Compliance duties would be delegated to AFMA for on-water Torres Strait operations with QDAF continuing to provide mainland compliance activities such as inspecting finfish unloads and product moving through Cairns and other ports.

Regarding the issue of reported illegal netting in Top Western communities, the FWG was advised that:

- Illegal gillnetting is known to be occurring around Saibai with fishers setting 10 to 15 inch large mesh gillnets targeting turtle and/or dugong.
- The Mabaduan treaty village in PNG is reported to be under pressure from the Saibai council to reduce the number of visit days issued to treaty villagers to attend Saibai to only one day per week.
- At a recent meeting in the Treaty village of Mabaduan on the issue of illegal turtle and dugong netting, five large mesh nets were reportedly dragged out from under fisher's houses and were burnt in the village square.
- Compliance reminded FWG members that for fishers in the Australian area of the Protected Zone a maximum mesh size of 4" was permitted for gillnets and only for subsistence (kai-kai) fishing – not for commercial fishing.

It was noted that in the context of the top-western scoping study (agenda item 5.1) the Working Group and Finfish RAG should get advice from compliance to better inform consideration of introducing commercial gillnetting and what compliance support such as a monitoring program to support ongoing fishery data collection would be required.

Working Group members were encouraged to report back to their communities on the importance of compliance including the need to report on protected species interactions, report any signs of illegal fishing and to comply with the new fish receiver system.

Australian National Audit Office audit

It was noted that the Australian National Audit Office is conducting an audit of Australian Government agencies and management arrangements in the Torres Strait. The objective of the audit is to assess the effectiveness of co-ordination of the Australian Government in the Torres Strait. It was noted that auditors would be visiting the Torres Strait in April 2018.

Torres Strait Treaty - Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting Report

The Working Group noted the tabled paper provided an overview of the fisheries outcomes of the February 2018 Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting and Environment Management Committee Meeting held between Australia and Papua New Guinea. It was noted that:

- PNG and Australia declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements under the Treaty for the Spanish mackerel sector of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- That there is a threat of two invasive fish species (snakehead and climbing perch) entering into Australian habitats from PNG. It was noted that they could impact juvenile barramundi in brooding areas. PNG-NFA confirmed that snakehead fish are captured in PNG and sold in markets and are becoming an important species for subsistence. The FWG queried what arrangements were in place from PNG and Australian Governments to address quarantine and requested as an action for Biosecurity Australia to address the FWG about what how the threat was being addressed.
- Cane toads pose an invasive species threat for PNG as they are reported to be moving within Torres Strait.
- A presentation was provided at the Bilateral Meeting which outlined sediment outflow from the Ok Tedi mine (Fly River) and potential impacts of copper concentrations on the Torres Strait. Members requested a copy of the presentation if possible.

FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1: AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG to on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.

FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1: AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.

Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority update

The FWG noted the following points from PNG-NFA:

- There remains limited interest in commercial finfish fishing in Papua New Guinea.
- Most finfish catches in PNG are taken from artisanal fisheries with most commercially based fisheries targeting barramundi and jewfish.
- PNG has declined entering into catch sharing arrangements for the Torres Strait Protected Zone Spanish Mackerel stock for the 2018/19 season.

Torres Strait Regional Authority update

TSRA advised the following:

- A Torres Strait Fisheries Summit is planned for 15th to 17th May 2018 to be held on Horn Island. PZJA forum representatives are to be invited. Reappointments for PZJA forum membership are to be actioned at this summit.
- The first phase of the Community Management Framework project is complete. The next phase will identify what the most appropriate governance structure to support a single entity holding catch and access entitlements.
- A report on scoping the development of a baitfish industry in Torres Strait is complete and is to be sent to QDAF and AFMA. The report has suggested that a small scale fishery could be sustainable feasible for a small number of operators.
- A scoping study examining the development of crab, barramundi and black jewfish fisheries in Top Western communities was underway. Part of this project includes examining whether gillnet fishing should be introduced and a scientific permit was being sought to undertake a small number of gillnet surveys to help determine the feasibility of gillnetting as an efficient and sustainable method to target Barramundi in the top western region.
- A feasibility study on the cost benefit of direct export pathways and analysis for the branding opportunities for of Torres Strait seafood products has been is currently being undertaken completed and the project is reported to be progressing well.
- ~~A feasibility study had been completed on the economic viability of exporting seafood products directly from Torres Strait rather than from Cairns.~~

TSRA advised that the Finfish Quota Management Committee had met on 15-16 February 2018 and the TSRA board had met 14-16 March 2018 to consider the outcomes of this committees recommendations which were as follows:

Spanish mackerel

- 20 t of Spanish mackerel is to be reserved to cover TIB sector catches for the upcoming 2018/19 season and is not to be leased out to the sunset sector.
- The PZJA Finfish RAG recommendation of 10 t to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches of Spanish mackerel was considered.
- 95 t of Spanish mackerel was considered as being available to be leased based on a 125 t Recommended Biological Catch and deductions.

Coral trout

- 30 t of coral trout is to be reserved to cover TIB sector catches for the upcoming 2018/19 season and is not to be leased out to the sunset sector.
- 105 t coral trout was considered as being available to be leased. Following contracting, this amount will likely be less than 105 t. Some fishers may apply for extra catch mid-year if it is required.

Other reef-line species

- Other species leasing is to be capped at 30 t.

TSRA advised that there would likely be nine sunset sector boats entering the fishery next season (six boats with Spanish mackerel catch allowances, ~~six seven~~ boats with reef-line catch allowances). ~~Demand for access seems to be more like the 2016/17 season where 84 t of Spanish mackerel was leased.~~

2.2 Finfish Fishery Export Approval under the EPBC Act

The FWG noted the tabled paper and welcomed the news that a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) approval under the EPBC Act had been extended to the year 2020 which allows the fishery to export product. The Chair noted the importance of this approval, thanking AFMA for its work in preparing and lodging the necessary supporting sustainability reports. The FWG noted:

- The FWG will be tasked with tracking how the fishery is progressing against the conditions of the WTO approval outlined in the agenda paper.
- An Environmental Risk Assessment is planned to be conducted by AFMA for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery in 2019. It was noted that this is a condition of the WTO and is best practice for good fisheries management.
- QDAF member advised that WTO status had been revoked in some Queensland East Coast fisheries due to failing to meet attached WTO conditions, meaning that no export was allowed which had large impacts on industry. Noting that coral trout was being exported from the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery it was noted that it was important for the fishery to maintain a WTO approval.

2.3 Update on Fish Receiver System

The FWG noted the tabled paper updating the group on catches reported through the fish receiver system since 1 December 2017. The FWG noted the improved catch reporting coming from the TIB sector noting that around 3 tonnes had already been reported which was a huge increase over the small amounts voluntarily reported through docket books from previous seasons.

The FWG encouraged fishers to continue to fill out Part B of the Catch Disposal Record form, even though this section is voluntary, as this provides valuable effort data to complement raw catch figures.

2.4. Legislative amendments update

The FWG noted the tabled update from AFMA on amendments being made to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* noting that these amendments have a limited scope and are focussed on making immediate improvements to the efficiency of management. The FWG noted:

- The indicative project timeframe tabled in the prepared paper.
- That scientific and developmental permits have to go to the Minister for approval which is a lengthy process. Through amending the act it is intended that these permits are to be delegated to AFMA for their approval. It was noted that a policy is to be developed to support this delegation and maintain transparency.
- There is a strong need to keep transparency and communication happening as this process progresses.

2.5 Native Title Update

No native title updates were available as the Malu Lamar observer was an apology for the meeting.

2.6 Strategic overview and update including economic and market trends

The FWG welcomed updates from industry and other stakeholders on activities and strategic issues occurring in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery and also on issues from other relevant fisheries:

- It was considered that the outcomes of the TSRA infrastructure initiative would likely increase participation within the Ugar Community in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- Ugar community has been engaging with TSRA initiatives such as direct export of seafood product from Torres Strait.
- Available Sydney Fish Market price data shows strong market prices for Spanish mackerel with a clear spike in prices corresponding with Chinese New Year.
- Erub Community Freezer is intending to make its recent finfish catch data available to AFMA and the PZJA groups for consideration.
- The TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee has seen increased interest from the sunset sector in leasing access to the Torres Strait to catch coral trout.
- The FWG noted that recent seasons on the Queensland East Coast fishery have seen the Total Allowable Catch almost totally filled with lease prices reaching \$6/kg corresponding with peak demand to fill orders for Chinese New Year at the end of the season. It was noted that, based on harvest control rules in place, a likely 200 t increase to the East Coast trout quota in 2018 there may be a decrease in interest from fishers wanting to access the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery reef-line sector. The QDAF member offered to circulate the recent Queensland Finfish Working Group communique for the interest of the FWG.
<https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/fishery-working-groups/-coral-reef-fin-fish-fishery-working-group/communiques/communique-6-7-march>

FWG 2018.1, Action 3, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF Finfish Working Group communique (6-7 March 2018) to the FWG for interest.

- QDAF member advised that consultation is underway on proposed amendments to the *Queensland Fisheries Act* to implement changes including stronger compliance powers and penalties. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/changes-to-queenslands-fisheries-legislation>

FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.

- QDAF advised that workshops are being held in Queensland on social and economic indicators for East coast fisheries. These workshops are focused on what data can inform social or economic analyses and how can these data be collected and reported. The FWG noted that the findings from these workshops can help inform the development of Torres Strait harvest strategies.

Agenda Item 3 – Resource Assessment Group Meeting Report

The FWG welcomed a presentation from PZJA Finfish Resource Assessment Group (RAG) Chair Mr David Brewer, reporting on the first RAG meeting held on 9-10 November 2017. The FWG noted that the new Finfish RAG will:

- provide valuable additional scientific expertise,
- focus in the short term on supporting the Harvest Strategy development and stock assessments,
- have an agreed work plan to support stock assessments in 2018 (Spanish mackerel update, coral trout initial assessment),
- provide advice on Recommended Biological Catches and that RBC advice from the Nov 2017 meeting had been tabled for discussion at the present FWG meeting.

Agenda Item 4 – Recommending Total Allowable Catches for the 2018-19 Fishing Season

4.1. Spanish mackerel

TAC Recommendation:

The FWG recommend a 2018/19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches.

In making this recommendation the FWG noted the following RAG advice:

- a) The RAG 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) RAG recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 t to 10 t 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 up to the Busilacchi study, and may still be occurring;
- c) RAG 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.

Additionally, the FWG discussed the following points in making this recommendation:

- The PZJA Standing Committee agreed to step the TAC down from 187 t to 132 t for current 2017/18 season only and agreed for the fishery to be managed to the 125 t RBC for the 2018/19 season.
- FWG noted that no further updates to the stock assessment have occurred and that, aside from a revised subsistence take estimate, no further information has been put forward for decision making.
- Papua New Guinea have not elected to take up catch sharing arrangements for the 2018/19 season meaning the Torres Strait TAC can be fully utilised by Australian fishers.

Other points discussed:

- The FWG agreed to use the term “Subsistence (kai –kai)” when referring to catch taken for subsistence purposes to avoid confusion with the term ‘traditional take’ which was being confused with catch from the ‘Traditional Inhabitant Boat’ sector, which was a commercial sector.
- Regarding the estimate of subsistence take it was also noted that studies had identified some catch from Commercial TIB sector boats was retained for subsistence purposes.
- FWG noted that there was a clear need to separate discussions/advice regarding setting TACs (this agenda item) and discussions on how the TAC is apportioned to the two commercial sectors; leased to the Sunset sector or reserved for expansion of the TIB sector (agenda item 6.4).

4.2. Coral trout

TAC Recommendation:

The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018/19 season noting:

- the age of available data underlying this TAC;
- a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and
- the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.

Points noted:

- Nine boats are proposed to be entering the sunset sector in the 2018/19 season with ~~six~~ seven endorsed to fish the reef-line sector in the 2018/19 season.
- AFMA advised that there is interest among the TIB sector in fishing finfish with some new primary-tender operations entering the fishery targeting mackerel and coral trout. Science members advised that this increasing fishing effort, together with increased leasing to the sunset sector of coral trout (up to 105 t) might affect catch rates or profitability of these vessels. It was noted that the reported viable grounds for fishing common coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*, preferred for the live trade due to their strong red colouration) with good catch rates was limited to the South East area of the fishery.
- AFMA advised that as licensing delegate, consideration is given to likely catches against the level of the TAC and whether the TAC will a) be exceeded and b) whether it can be enforced.
- QDAF suggested that the FWG should gain an understanding of the performance of the East Coast trout fishery, including comparing catch rates to Torres Strait. It was noted that the far north sector of the East coast fishery yielded about 12 t of catch per month from an area larger than the Torres Strait. It was suggested that this could be actioned as part of the industry workshop scheduled for July 2018.
- The FWG welcomed advice from AFMA that catch reports will be made publically available and provided to both commercial fishing sectors and communities on catches from all species under the Fish Receiver System in line with the Information Disclosure Policy.

4.3. Other reef-line species

The FWG supported the continuation of existing management arrangements for other reef-line species caught by sunset licences noting this is a cost effective and sensible approach and that the Finfish RAG is well placed to progress this issue.

Points discussed:

- The FWG advises that risks to the stocks of other reef-line species remain low if harvest and interest in fishing these species remains low.
-
- The FWG noted the priorities for management of the fishery and supported the current arrangements in place that a) cap sunset sector leasing of catches for these species to 30 t in the short term and b) outline a work plan to support expansion above the cap should industry wish to do so.
- The FWG noted that further work to progress this issue would be driven by AFMA receiving a fishing plan from industry which would trigger dedicating management resources towards further expanding understanding and management of these species.
- It was considered that expanded targeting of other reef-line species will likely be a focus for management after the management of target species is bedded down through the harvest strategy.
- QDAF advised that in east coast fisheries some concern existed around the management of individual species within the large 900 t basket containing around 100 species. Consideration is being given to whether trigger points will be put in place for some of these species, particularly long lived, valuable species such as Nannygai. Given that some of these species are key recreational species, QDAF has a dedicated monitoring program in place which collects biological data for key other species (length frequency and ageing) through boat ramp surveys.

- The upcoming Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Environmental Risk Assessment process may offer some data to support the management of the other reef-line species basket.

Other points on Total Allowable Catch Setting for 2018/19 season

The FWG welcomed advice that:

- TSRA would put details of the sunset sector boats leasing catch on the TSRA website.
- The PZJA public register is available on the AFMA website with licence owner (TSRA) and lease details <http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/concession-holders-conditions/>.
- AFMA will write to all finfish fishery stakeholders outlining the 2018/19 seasons notional TACs, agreed estimates of mortality used in decision making and the amount available to be caught for both commercial sectors.

Agenda Item 5 – Research updates

5.1. Updates on Torres Strait Finfish Fishery research projects

Scoping study for finfish and crab fishery development in Top Western communities.

The FWG noted an update from project Principal Investigator Andrew Tobin and co-investigator Andy Bodsworth. The project team advised that discussion was underway with AFMA on the scientific permit application to support to the field work component of this scoping study. The project advised that aside from this issue the project was progressing well with the team intending to revisit communities after the monsoon season.

Subsistence (kai-kai) take project update (*Monitoring the traditional take of finfish in the Torres Strait Protected Zone*)

The FWG EO outlined progress to date on this CSIRO project as tabled in the agenda paper.

The FWG noted that the Finfish RAG had supported the revised project scope as proposed and discussed at their November 2017 meeting including considering the use of Torres Strait Rangers or MyPathways staff to assist the project collect data. It was noted that the project was currently forming a statement of work which was being provided to the TSRA as requested for their consideration as to whether resourcing and support could be provided.

The TSRA advised they are keen to get advice from the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee advice on the continuation of the project given the [limited outcomes of the project](#) ~~slippage in progress~~ to date.

AFMA suggested that the project steering committee convene again after the requested statement of work was supplied and considered by TSRA.

5.2. Research priorities

The FWG noted the prepared research priorities paper and that the available AFMA research budget is almost fully committed with no annual call for research being made. It was noted that the research budget is mainly focussed on developing harvest strategies. A small amount of remaining underspent funding is being considered by the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee as to how it can address tactical research needs. Consideration is being given to using these funds to update the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery stock assessment and adding additional funding to the beche-de-mer harvest strategy development.

It was noted that the Finfish RAG was asked to consider small tactical research projects focused on improving estimates of mortality outside of the commercial fishery (recreational, charter, subsistence kai-kai). The priority tactical research identified by the Finfish RAG was biological data collection including ageing and length frequency analysis to check model assumptions. AFMA advised that RAG advice on stratification, design and costs would be sought at their 21-22 March 2018 meeting.

Agenda Item 6 – Management

6.1 Formalising finfish total allowable catches

The FWG provided the following recommendation to the PZJA on formalising TACs:

The Finfish Working Group supported the proposed approach of implementing formal and enforceable finfish TACs to be implemented in the 2019/20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.

The FWG provided the following advice on formalising TACs:

- Formal TACs will be a key tool to support development and sustainability of the Finfish Fishery, providing certainty for industry and helping to attract investment.
- The outcomes of the Torres Strait infrastructure review and ongoing fishing business development initiatives will likely see changes in the fishery such as increased catches from the TIB sector; this was another driver for implementing formal TACs.
- While the FWG noted that there is a strong need to have a firm TAC in place with an enforceable limit it was also noted that some flexibility in sunset sector leasing may be required during implementation to cover TIB sector or subsistence (kai-kai) catches as further information is received.
- A priority ahead of the 2019/20 season is to continue to encourage and educate fishers on the importance of providing timely and accurate catch data during the transition to implementing a TAC.

Other points discussed:

- A standing item for the FWG will be considering and reporting on how the fishery is performing relative to the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013*. The FWG noted that the Plan requires an allocation of units to be performed prior to setting Total Allowable Catches. It was noted that this process may take some time and that the best interim option available is putting conditions in place on TIB sector and sunset sector fishing permits to regulate the Total Allowable Catch.
- Noting industry advice that a single TIB fishing operation fishing actively could trigger an increase in TIB sector catches, an example of flexible management arrangements to support implementation of formal TACs was put forward where staggered sunset contracts could be implemented with something like 80 per cent of the sunset sector portion leased out initially and, in the case that catches are fully subscribed for the TIB sector, the remaining 20 per cent might not be re-leased mid-season.

The FWG supported the proposed process put forward by AFMA:

- During the 2018-19 season AFMA is to write to, and work with, communities and stakeholders on facilitating and encouraging:
 - the need for continued reporting of timely and accurate data through CDRs, and
 - the plan to put enforceable TACs in place for 2019/20 season seeking comment,
- Native Title notification process is to be conducted for input.
- A paper is to be put to the PZJA for their consideration.

6.2 Western line closure removal

The FWG noted previous consideration on this issue from both the FWG and Finfish RAG with general agreement that the western line closure is an older jurisdictional boundary and serves no management purpose and support given for removing the closure.

It was noted that discussion has focussed on two points:

1. When the line is removed, what will the likely impacts on the fishery be given there may be different habitats and species in the western Torres Strait compared to the eastern grounds which are currently fished?
2. Community consultation on resource sharing; such as using the area of waters for commercial fishing versus other uses such as supporting ecotourism (raised at the March 2017 Finfish Working Group Meeting).

AFMA advised that the key issue which AFMA and TSRA are addressing is whether enough consultation has been done to date, noting that it has been a longstanding issue with a lot of previous consideration. AFMA advised of a proposal to action final consultation and capture stakeholder views through the TSRA Fisheries Summit scheduled for May 2018. These stakeholder views are to be presented to the PZJA for their decision on removing the closure. Industry members agreed with the proposed process and advised that the views of Prescribed Body Corporates, active fishers and community elders must be presented to the PZJA.

6.3 Draft AFMA Finfish Fishery budget 2018/19

The FWG noted the draft AFMA 2018/19 Finfish Fishery budget noting that it is based on convening two FWG meetings (2 x one day meetings), two Finfish RAG meetings (2 x two day meetings) and a one day industry meeting. Members suggested that future presentations of Finfish Fishery budget would ideally show all components including funding from TSRA which facilitates the attendance of Traditional Inhabitant representatives.

6.4 Estimates of traditional inhabitant boat sector catches

The FWG noted that to ensure stocks are sustainably managed an understanding of all sources of mortality on the stocks is required to make sure that total catches for the fishery are not being exceeded. To support PZJA decision making, advice is being sought from the PZJA Finfish RAG and FWG on estimates of mortality including TIB sector commercial catches.

The FWG noted this issue had previously been tabled with a range of available estimates presented to both the Finfish RAG (November 2017 meeting) and FWG (March 2017 meeting). It was noted that a single figure had not been agreed at these meetings with recent catch reports for the TIB sector being unreliable due to the poor return rates of the TIB sector voluntary docket books in recent seasons (docket books are now-defunct and have been replaced with mandatory catch disposal records as part of the fish receiver system).

For the 2017/18 season Spanish mackerel TAC, the PZJA Standing Committee met in March 2017 and used a figure of 22 t as the best available estimate for commercial catches from the TIB sector based on the 2003-2010 reference period of the most recent stock assessment (O'Neill 2016). During this period, catch data from docket books were considered to have been voluntarily completed to a reasonable standard by industry. Based on this the Standing Committee agreed to a step-down in the notional TAC of 132 t for the 2017/18 season, based on the 110 t leased to the sunset sector plus a 22 t estimate of commercial catches from the TIB sector.

The Finfish RAG was asked to provide advice on the 22 t estimate of TIB sector catch at their November 2017 meeting. No advice to the PZJA was provided from the RAG following TSRA advice tabled at the meeting that providing advice on TIB sector catches was considered to be outside the scope of PZJA forums. Instead, the TSRA Board relies on advice from the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC), which includes representatives from the four eastern communities fishing finfish, to inform the board on leasing to the sunset sector. This recommendation is then forwarded to AFMA for consideration as licensing delegate and is put into regulation through sunset sector permit conditions.

The FWG noted ~~a TSRA paper~~ [the methodology and recommendations of the TSRA FQMC for allocating catch to the Traditional Inhabitant Boat \(TIB\) sector in the 2018-19 season, submitted to the group which outlined consideration and outcomes from the 2018 FQMC meeting.](#) The FWG noted that the FQMC considers advice from their members on catch, effort, likely increases in

effort and provides precautionary recommendations to the board in lieu of accurate recent catch data.

The FWG noted that the FQMC ~~considered estimates advised of allocations~~ for TIB sector catches for 2018/19 of 20 t for Spanish mackerel and 30 t for coral trout.

Points discussed:

- The FWG noted that this FQMC ~~estimate-allocation~~ for TIB Spanish mackerel varied by 2 t from the 22 t assumed by the stock assessment over a previous historical period. used by the PZJA for their decision-making.
- It was noted that the FQMC figure was based on committee advice on recent catches, effort and interest in increasing the TIB sector effort with the benefit of the TIB sector having primacy-priority in these considerations. TSRA advised that the FQMC and TSRA Board did not consider the 22 t estimate from O'Neill 2016 as this advice was not considered to be relevant to the current levels of fishing activity.
- The FWG noted that the 22 t estimate was from an older time period (2003-2010) compared to the more recent FQMC considerations and that change has been occurring in the fishery in recent times with community freezers closing and key fishers leaving the industry. Conversely, the FWG noted that the risk profile in the fishery has changed with the Spanish mackerel catches being almost fully subscribed relative to the Recommended Biological Catch (or total kill) although lower than historical levels of total catch. TSRA advised that the FQMC ~~was happy to provide advice to~~ increase the TIB sector estimate from 10 t (as used in recent seasons) to 20 t to reflect expected increased activity in communities in the 2018-19 season. in order to account for likely increases in the sector should additional infrastructure such as freezers come on line.
- The FWG noted member advice that all figures presented from research papers should also report associated error margins, noting that the 22 t of the O'Neill report (2016) did have a standard deviation of around 9 t.
- The FWG advised that there is a firm need for evidence based decision making for TAC setting and the associated consideration of estimates of mortality such as commercial catches. Any deviation from previous advice needs to be supported with a clear rationale, including the nature of any data underpinning such advice; otherwise the integrity of the process could be called into question.
- The TSRA Member raised the disparity between the Spanish mackerel catches in Attachment A to Agenda Item 2.1 and the 22 t figure used by the stock assessment. QDAF advised that this disparity will be investigated.
- The FWG encouraged the TSRA Board and FQMC to utilise the PZJA Finfish RAG which has been formed to provide technical analysis and can also bring in community advice.
- TSRA advised that the fishery is 100 per cent owned by traditional inhabitants. Any concerns of the licensing delegate for ensuring sustainable catches should also take into account that since sunset leasing has occurred there has not been a year when the recommended biological catch has been considered to have been exceeded, and the leasing of licences has proved to be an effective non-regulatory method for limiting catches in the fishery.
- The Chair suggested that the Australian National Audit Office audit beginning April 2018 may help to provide an independent perspective of these issues and provide guidance to the PZJA on the best process for policy support to decision making.
- It was noted that at this early stage catch data from the Fish Receiver System was shaping up well and will help inform future allotment of catches to the two commercial catches.

Finfish working group advice:

The FWG noted that the PZJA Standing Committee considered~~was using~~ used a figure of 22 t in the 2017-18 season as the best available estimate of TIB sector catch.

The FWG also noted the paper provided by TSRA which outlined the methodology and allocation decisions made by the FQMC and TSRA Board recommended 20 t be allocated for TIB SM allocation and 30 t CT allocation in the 2018-19 season. es and that in considering how much to

~~lease to the sunset sector the FQMC had recommended a lower figure of 20 t based on member advice.~~

The FWG noted that ideally there would be an aligned process between both PZJA forums (Finfish RAG/Working Group) and the TSRA FQMC with these groups working collaboratively in order to provide the PZJA with the best advice possible and providing stakeholders with a transparent decision making process. -TSRA member disagreed with this assessment, noting that the roles of each of the forums was clear. The TSRA member advised that PZJA has no role or decision in allocating catches between commercial sectors or licence holders. The FQMC is a community process for maximising the benefits of the catch entitlements owned by traditional inhabitants.

Agenda Item 7 – Future management priorities and work plans

The FWG noted scheduled work plans for both the Finfish RAG and FWG, noting that two Finfish RAG meetings were scheduled for the third and fourth quarters of 2018 to progress the harvest strategy and examine two stock assessments (Spanish mackerel update and initial coral trout assessment).

TSRA queried the timing of the next FWG meeting relevant to ~~the~~ the season ending in June and that there is likely adequate time to convene a RAG and WG to provide advice for the next season. It would also align with the FQMC process ~~scheduled for March~~ that occurs in February each year 2019. AFMA advised that all reasonable steps would be taken to accommodate TSRA business requirements.

It was considered that an extra teleconference (or videoconference through AFMA's Blue jeans system) could be convened to focus on considering and endorsing RAG Recommended Biological Catch advice from analysis of assessments. Noting that this had been attempted before, with mixed results and poor feedback from stakeholders, it was agreed that a trial run of this arrangement would need to occur to ensure that all members could hear correctly and fully participate in the virtual meeting. It was suggested that as a test run of the system, AFMA could invite Quarantine Australia to present to the FWG on invasive fish species (Action item from the present FWG meeting) as a 30 minute video conference meeting.

The FWG gave some consideration that if the next FWG meeting was scheduled for Q1 2019, as suggested, this would be advantageous as 12 months of Catch Disposal Record data could be considered at this point.

Agenda Item 8 – Other business

The TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member advised that he would like to request becoming a full member on the Finfish Working Group rather than a permanent observer.

Agenda Item 9 – Date and venue for next meeting

As per Agenda Item 7, the next meeting was noted to be either an out-of-session videoconference focused on TAC advice in the fourth quarter of 2018 or a full face-to-face meeting in the first quarter of 2019.

The FWG Chair closed the meeting by thanking participants for their hard work in bedding down working group processes such as declaring and managing interests, noting that this process will become more streamlined over time. The Chair encouraged all Traditional Inhabitant representatives to take the outcomes of the meeting back to their community and stress the need for timely and accurate catch reporting and voluntary compliance with the fish receiver system.

The meeting was closed in prayer at 1715 hrs by Councillor Frank Faud.

List of Attachments

Attachment A: TSRA Paper, 19 March 2018, Estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector Catches

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2018.01

Meeting Record

20 March 2018

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

www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting Participants

Table 1. Working Group members and declarations of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM, co-investigator on FRDC and TSRA Top Western Fisheries Feasibility project led by A Tobin.
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	President of Kos and Abob Fisheries Association, Ugar Community. Councillor for Ugar, member of Torres Strait Finfish Resource Assessment Group, member of Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee, member of Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee.
Frank Fuid	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Andrew Trappett	Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
John Ramsey	TSRA Member	Fisheries Program Manager, TSRA holds finfish allocation and some TRL access rights on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. Involved with leasing access to finfish fishery to sunset sector fishers.
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.
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.

Table 2. Meeting observers and declarations of interests

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jerry Stephen	TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio Member (Permanent Observer)	TIB licence holder. Traditional Owner, Ugar Island. Member, Fisheries Quota Management Committee Deputy chair TSRA
Joseph Posu	PNG NFA Officer	Nil
Kenny Bedford	Observer	TIB licence holder, was president of Erub Fisheries Management Association but has stepped down in early 2018 now working as an independent consultant. Recently delivered a Services and Infrastructure Audit report to TSRA board.
Allison Runck	TSRA	Nil
John Jones	AFMA	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.
Charlie Kaddy	TSRA	TSRA, soon to be A/g program manager Fisheries, no declared interests. No TIB licence held.

Action items

Number	Action
1.	FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1: AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG to on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.
2.	FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1: AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.
3.	FWG 2018.1, Action 3, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF Finfish Working Group communique (6-7 March 2018) to the FWG for interest.
4.	FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	The FWG recommend a 2018/19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches.
2.	The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018/19 season noting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the age of available data underlying this TAC; a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and, the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.
3.	The Finfish Working Group supported the proposed approach of implementing formal and enforceable finfish TACs to be implemented in the 2019/20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.

Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

1.1. Opening Prayer, Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome, Apologies

The meeting was opened in prayer by Frank Faud at 0845 hrs. An acknowledgement of traditional owners of the land on which the meeting was held and elders of the community, past and present, was performed by TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member, Jerry Stephen.

The meeting Chair welcomed members and observers and noted that the Finfish Working Group (FWG) was well placed to help support the growth and development of the fishery and to build a platform to support collection of good data to support sustainable harvests.

FWG members Tenny Elisala, Elizah Wasaga and Maluwap Nona were noted as apologies.

John Ramsay, TSRA member, attended from 0830 to 1230 hrs. Meeting observer Andrew Tobin attended from 1530 to 1715 hrs. Meeting observer John Jones from AFMA attended from 0900 to 1200 hrs.

1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The FWG adopted the agenda as circulated noting a paper was submitted by TSRA on 19 March 2018 on estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector catches (**Attachment A**). The FWG agreed to consider the paper at Agenda Item 6.4.

1.3. Declaration of Interests

The FWG noted the requirement for participants to declare all perceived or real interests in Torres Strait fisheries. Each attendee declared their interests as documented in Table 1 above. The FWG followed a process where each group of members with similar interests left the meeting to enable free discussion of the interests by the remaining FWG members. The FWG considered whether these interests would preclude members from providing advice on agenda items or whether an agreed treatment of these interests would be put into place at particular agenda items. Following this, groups of members were asked to re-join the meeting and the considerations were tabled.

Research member's interests

Research members with declared interests (Andy Bodsworth, David Brewer and Michael O'Neill) left the room. The FWG noted that these members may have a perceived or real interest in potentially receiving contracting for future research projects either directly or through their employers. The FWG agreed that these interests would need to be declared by the member at any discussion on future research and managed accordingly. Research members re-joined the meeting.

Sunset sector interests

The sunset sector representative, Mr Tony Vass, left the room noting his declared interest. The FWG agreed Mr Vass provides good advice and expertise to the FWG and PZJA and manages his interests well. The Chair suggested that it may be in the FWGs interest to have an active sunset sector fisher attend the FWG from time to time to get on-water advice from the fishery. The FWG considered that assistance could be given to Mr Vass's role in liaising with sunset sector fishers e.g. AFMA providing Mr Vass with information about licence holders, information sheets on the PZJA structure and process for advice and decision making. Mr Vass re-joined the meeting.

Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector interests

Members with declared direct commercial fishing interests in the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector left the meeting (Kenny Bedford, Jerry Stephen, Frank Faud). The FWG considered that industry members have a direct interest in the fishery and that fishers, or the communities they are from, may stand to benefit from certain advice provided to inform decision making. The FWG agreed that these interests must be declared at the relevant agenda times and that these interests could be managed. FWG noted that each member has a single TIB licence, and that these licences are spread across different communities. FWG recognised the very valuable expertise of TIB sector members and observers in the committee and that these members can encourage development and also provide advice from the FWG and PZJA back to communities. TIB sector representatives re-joined the meeting.

Leasing interests

The FWG noted TSRA advice that their board had met before the FWG meeting and had made a decision about the amount of catch to be leased to the sunset sector for the 2018/19 season.

TSRA Members with interests in this leasing process left the room (John Ramsay, Allison Runck, Charlie Kaddy, Frank Faud, Jerry Stephen).

The FWG noted that TSRA administer the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) which advises the TSRA Board on the amount to be leased out. This advice is based on community expertise with the FQMC being tasked with matching community needs with sustainable development of the fishery and providing economic benefits through revenue from leasing access to sunset sector fishers.

The FWG noted that the TSRA collect revenue from leasing licences to access the fishery which are held in trust on behalf of traditional inhabitants. It was noted that TSRA are a major contributor to the PZJA providing advice to support decision making through the TSRA chair. It was also noted that TSRA manage valuable initiatives such as grants to support development projects.

FWG members queried why there was a parallel process in place through the TSRA FQMC outside of the PZJA advisory forums and whether it would be wise to seek industry views on the best process e.g. could one forum provide the advice to the PZJA. AFMA clarified the PZJA advisory group roles and processes:

- Finfish Resource Assessment Group has a technical focus and reports to the PZJA and FWG on stock assessments and provides Recommended Biological Catch advice.
- The FWG provides formal advice on Total Allowable Catches to the PZJA.
- Aside from these PZJA groups, the outcomes of the TSRA FQMC are provided by the TSRA Board to AFMA who, as licensing delegate, consider the leasing advice and put the catch entitlements into practice in the fishery through permit conditions.

The FWG Chair noted that both the RAG/FWG and FQMC were providing advice to the PZJA to support decision making through separate processes. It was advised that to be confident in making decisions the PZJA need to be sure that advice from both groups is provided based on the best available information. The Chair advised that there was a need to clarify roles and there is a clear opportunity for the FWG and FQMC to collaborate and share information. The Chair advised that the ANAO audit (agenda item 2.1) is likely to review the functions and roles of such groups and may help identify where room for increased efficiencies might exist.

Regarding the declared interests, the FWG Chair advised that to ensure the integrity of FWG advice, the group must benefit from and balance the expertise of TSRA with the declared direct interest in managing the sunset licence leasing process and development of fishery in a sustainable way. TSRA staff re-joined the meeting.

1.4. Actions Arising

The Working Group noted the status of actions arising from the previous March 2017 meeting.

TSRA expressed disappointment that the meeting was not held prior to the current date noting there is a business requirement for the TSRA Board to consider Finfish Working Group recommendations at their annual March board meeting. TSRA suggested that in the case that finalised advice is not available in time for this meeting, Total Allowable Catch setting advice should be used to set the following seasons TAC. AFMA advised the FWG that the priority for management and the driver for the timing of advisory meetings was to focus on stock assessments and supporting the implementation of harvest strategies. AFMA advised that flexibility will be required over next few years while engaging with harvest strategy researchers and the timing of delivery of project milestones and stock assessment outcomes. AFMA advised that all steps would be taken to accommodate TSRA business requirements whilst also meeting AFMA's work schedules and priorities.

Agenda Item 2 – Management agencies updates

2.1. Management agencies updates

AFMA Foreign Compliance

The FWG noted the following points provided by the AFMA Foreign Compliance Operations team:

- Reports have been provided to Compliance of fishers interacting with protected species and / or mishandling bycatch. While it is not illegal to interact with a protected species, all interactions must be reported. Mishandling bycatch is an offence and can result in prosecution.
- Vessel Monitoring Systems (satellite trackers) have now been implemented in the Torres Strait. It was advised that most operators were adhering to requirement.
- It was advised that the mandatory Fish Receiver System (FRS), implemented 1 December 2017, was in the early stages and has been well received by the industry. It was however advised that some reporting issues were apparent and AFMA was working with new fish receivers to help them manage reporting received catch. It was advised that compliance with this arrangement is most important in protecting stocks through sustainable management and in helping the industry understand what harvests are been taken.
- It was advised that a number of apprehensions of foreign boats illegally fishing in the protected zone had occurred around Warrior Reef and also around the Saibai community. No finfish catches were found aboard these foreign vessels. It was advised that valuable support for these apprehensions had been provided from the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority. Noting that many stocks are shared between Australian and PNG it is important that the two countries collaborate on management and compliance.
- The FWG noted that from 1 July 2018, QDAF Domestic Compliance duties would be delegated to AFMA for on-water Torres Strait operations with QDAF continuing to provide

mainland compliance activities such as inspecting finfish unloads and product moving through Cairns and other ports.

Regarding the issue of reported illegal netting in Top Western communities, the FWG was advised that:

- Illegal gillnetting is known to be occurring around Saibai with fishers setting 10 to 15 inch large mesh gillnets targeting turtle and/or dugong.
- The Mabaduan treaty village in PNG is reported to be under pressure from the Saibai council to reduce the number of visit days issued to treaty villagers to attend Saibai to only one day per week.
- At a recent meeting in the Treaty village of Mabaduan on the issue of illegal turtle and dugong netting, five large mesh nets were reportedly dragged out from under fisher's houses and were burnt in the village square.
- Compliance reminded FWG members that for fishers in the Australian area of the Protected Zone a maximum mesh size of 4" was permitted for gillnets and only for subsistence (kai-kai) fishing – not for commercial fishing.

It was noted that in the context of the top-western scoping study (agenda item 5.1) the Working Group and Finfish RAG should get advice from compliance to better inform consideration of introducing commercial gillnetting and what compliance support such as a monitoring program to support ongoing fishery data collection would be required.

Working Group members were encouraged to report back to their communities on the importance of compliance including the need to report on protected species interactions, report any signs of illegal fishing and to comply with the new fish receiver system.

Australian National Audit Office audit

It was noted that the Australian National Audit Office is conducting an audit of Australian Government agencies and management arrangements in the Torres Strait. The objective of the audit is to assess the effectiveness of co-ordination of the Australian Government in the Torres Strait. It was noted that auditors would be visiting the Torres Strait in April 2018.

Torres Strait Treaty - Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting Report

The Working Group noted the tabled paper provided an overview of the fisheries outcomes of the February 2018 Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting and Environment Management Committee Meeting held between Australia and Papua New Guinea. It was noted that:

- PNG and Australia declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements under the Treaty for the Spanish mackerel sector of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- That there is a threat of two invasive fish species (snakehead and climbing perch) entering into Australian habitats from PNG. It was noted that they could impact juvenile barramundi in brooding areas. PNG-NFA confirmed that snakehead fish are captured in PNG and sold in markets and are becoming an important species for subsistence. The FWG queried what arrangements were in place from PNG and Australian Governments to address quarantine and requested as an action for Biosecurity Australia to address the FWG about what how the threat was being addressed.
- Cane toads pose an invasive species threat for PNG as they are reported to be moving within Torres Strait.
- A presentation was provided at the Bilateral Meeting which outlined sediment outflow from the Ok Tedi mine (Fly River) and potential impacts of copper concentrations on the Torres Strait. Members requested a copy of the presentation if possible.

FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1: AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG to on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.

FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1: AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.

Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority update

The FWG noted the following points from PNG-NFA:

- There remains limited interest in commercial finfish fishing in Papua New Guinea.
- Most finfish catches in PNG are taken from artisanal fisheries with most commercially based fisheries targeting barramundi and jewfish.
- PNG has declined entering into catch sharing arrangements for the Torres Strait Protected Zone Spanish Mackerel stock for the 2018/19 season.

Torres Strait Regional Authority update

TSRA advised the following:

- A Torres Strait Fisheries Summit is planned for 15th to 17th May 2018 to be held on Horn Island. PZJA forum representatives are to be invited. Reappointments for PZJA forum membership are to be actioned at this summit.
- The first phase of the Community Management Framework project is complete. The next phase will identify what the most appropriate governance structure to support a single entity holding catch and access entitlements.
- A report on scoping the development of a baitfish industry in Torres Strait is complete and is to be sent to QDAF and AFMA. The report has suggested that a small scale fishery could be feasible for a small number of operators.
- A scoping study examining the development of crab, barramundi and black jewfish fisheries in Top Western communities was underway. Part of this project includes examining whether gillnet fishing should be introduced and a scientific permit was being sought to undertake a small number of gillnet surveys to help determine the feasibility of gillnetting as an efficient and sustainable method to target Barramundi in the top western region.
- A feasibility study on the cost benefit of direct export pathways and the branding opportunities for Torres Strait seafood products is currently being undertaken completed and the project is reported to be progressing well.

TSRA advised that the Finfish Quota Management Committee had met on 15-16 February 2018 and the TSRA board had met 14-16 March 2018 to consider the outcomes of this committees recommendations which were as follows:

Spanish mackerel

- 20 t of Spanish mackerel is to be reserved to cover TIB sector catches for the upcoming 2018/19 season and is not to be leased out to the sunset sector.
- The PZJA Finfish RAG recommendation of 10 t to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches of Spanish mackerel was considered.
- 95 t of Spanish mackerel was considered as being available to be leased based on a 125 t Recommended Biological Catch and deductions.

Coral trout

- 30 t of coral trout is to be reserved to cover TIB sector catches for the upcoming 2018/19 season and is not to be leased out to the sunset sector.
- 105 t coral trout was considered as being available to be leased. Following contracting, this amount will likely be less than 105 t. Some fishers may apply for extra catch mid-year if it is required.

Other reef-line species

- Other species leasing is to be capped at 30 t.

TSRA advised that there would likely be nine sunset sector boats entering the fishery next season (six boats with Spanish mackerel catch allowances, seven boats with reef-line catch allowances).

2.2 Finfish Fishery Export Approval under the EPBC Act

The FWG noted the tabled paper and welcomed the news that a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) approval under the EPBC Act had been extended to the year 2020 which allows the fishery to export product. The Chair noted the importance of this approval, thanking AFMA for its work in preparing and lodging the necessary supporting sustainability reports. The FWG noted:

- The FWG will be tasked with tracking how the fishery is progressing against the conditions of the WTO approval outlined in the agenda paper.
- An Environmental Risk Assessment is planned to be conducted by AFMA for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery in 2019. It was noted that this is a condition of the WTO and is best practice for good fisheries management.
- QDAF member advised that WTO status had been revoked in some Queensland East Coast fisheries due to failing to meet attached WTO conditions, meaning that no export was allowed which had large impacts on industry. Noting that coral trout was being exported from the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery it was noted that it was important for the fishery to maintain a WTO approval.

2.3 Update on Fish Receiver System

The FWG noted the tabled paper updating the group on catches reported through the fish receiver system since 1 December 2017. The FWG noted the improved catch reporting coming from the TIB sector noting that around 3 tonnes had already been reported which was a huge increase over the small amounts voluntarily reported through docket books from previous seasons.

The FWG encouraged fishers to continue to fill out Part B of the Catch Disposal Record form, even though this section is voluntary, as this provides valuable effort data to complement raw catch figures.

2.4. Legislative amendments update

The FWG noted the tabled update from AFMA on amendments being made to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* noting that these amendments have a limited scope and are focussed on making immediate improvements to the efficiency of management. The FWG noted:

- The indicative project timeframe tabled in the prepared paper.
- That scientific and developmental permits have to go to the Minister for approval which is a lengthy process. Through amending the act it is intended that these permits are to be delegated to AFMA for their approval. It was noted that a policy is to be developed to support this delegation and maintain transparency.
- There is a strong need to keep transparency and communication happening as this process progresses.

2.5 Native Title Update

No native title updates were available as the Malu Lamar observer was an apology for the meeting.

2.6 Strategic overview and update including economic and market trends

The FWG welcomed updates from industry and other stakeholders on activities and strategic issues occurring in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery and also on issues from other relevant fisheries:

- It was considered that the outcomes of the TSRA infrastructure initiative would likely increase participation within the Ugar Community in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- Ugar community has been engaging with TSRA initiatives such as direct export of seafood product from Torres Strait.
- Available Sydney Fish Market price data shows strong market prices for Spanish mackerel with a clear spike in prices corresponding with Chinese New Year.

- Erub Community Freezer is intending to make its recent finfish catch data available to AFMA and the PZJA groups for consideration.
- The TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee has seen increased interest from the sunset sector in leasing access to the Torres Strait to catch coral trout.
- The FWG noted that recent seasons on the Queensland East Coast fishery have seen the Total Allowable Catch almost totally filled with lease prices reaching \$6/kg corresponding with peak demand to fill orders for Chinese New Year at the end of the season. It was noted that, based on harvest control rules in place, a likely 200 t increase to the East Coast trout quota in 2018 there may be a decrease in interest from fishers wanting to access the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery reef-line sector. The QDAF member offered to circulate the recent Queensland Finfish Working Group communique for the interest of the FWG.
<https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/fishery-working-groups/-coral-reef-fin-fish-fishery-working-group/communiques/communique-6-7-march>

FWG 2018.1, Action 3, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF Finfish Working Group communique (6-7 March 2018) to the FWG for interest.

- QDAF member advised that consultation is underway on proposed amendments to the *Queensland Fisheries Act* to implement changes including stronger compliance powers and penalties. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/changes-to-queenslands-fisheries-legislation>

FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6: AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.

- QDAF advised that workshops are being held in Queensland on social and economic indicators for East coast fisheries. These workshops are focused on what data can inform social or economic analyses and how can these data be collected and reported. The FWG noted that the findings from these workshops can help inform the development of Torres Strait harvest strategies.

Agenda Item 3 – Resource Assessment Group Meeting Report

The FWG welcomed a presentation from PZJA Finfish Resource Assessment Group (RAG) Chair Mr David Brewer, reporting on the first RAG meeting held on 9-10 November 2017. The FWG noted that the new Finfish RAG will:

- provide valuable additional scientific expertise,
- focus in the short term on supporting the Harvest Strategy development and stock assessments,
- have an agreed work plan to support stock assessments in 2018 (Spanish mackerel update, coral trout initial assessment),
- provide advice on Recommended Biological Catches and that RBC advice from the Nov 2017 meeting had been tabled for discussion at the present FWG meeting.

Agenda Item 4 – Recommending Total Allowable Catches for the 2018-19 Fishing Season

4.1. Spanish mackerel

TAC Recommendation:

The FWG recommend a 2018/19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches.

In making this recommendation the FWG noted the following RAG advice:

- a) The RAG 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) RAG recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 t to 10 t 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 up to the Busilacchi study, and may still be occurring;
- c) RAG 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.

Additionally, the FWG discussed the following points in making this recommendation:

- The PZJA Standing Committee agreed to step the TAC down from 187 t to 132 t for current 2017/18 season only and agreed for the fishery to be managed to the 125 t RBC for the 2018/19 season.
- FWG noted that no further updates to the stock assessment have occurred and that, aside from a revised subsistence take estimate, no further information has been put forward for decision making.
- Papua New Guinea have not elected to take up catch sharing arrangements for the 2018/19 season meaning the Torres Strait TAC can be fully utilised by Australian fishers.

Other points discussed:

- The FWG agreed to use the term “Subsistence (kai –kai)” when referring to catch taken for subsistence purposes to avoid confusion with the term ‘traditional take’ which was being confused with catch from the ‘Traditional Inhabitant Boat’ sector, which was a commercial sector.
- Regarding the estimate of subsistence take it was also noted that studies had identified some catch from Commercial TIB sector boats was retained for subsistence purposes.
- FWG noted that there was a clear need to separate discussions/advice regarding setting TACs (this agenda item) and discussions on how the TAC is apportioned to the two commercial sectors; with catch either leased to the Sunset sector or reserved for expansion of the TIB sector (agenda item 6.4).

4.2. Coral trout

TAC Recommendation:

The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018/19 season noting:

- **the age of available data underlying this TAC;**
- **a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and**
- **the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980’s) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.**

Points noted:

- Nine boats are proposed to be entering the sunset sector in the 2018/19 season with seven endorsed to fish the reef-line sector in the 2018/19 season.
- AFMA advised that there is interest among the TIB sector in fishing finfish with some new primary-tender operations entering the fishery targeting mackerel and coral trout. Science members advised that this increasing fishing effort, together with increased leasing to the sunset sector of coral trout (up to 105 t) might affect catch rates or profitability of these vessels. It was noted that the reported viable grounds for fishing common coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*, preferred for the live trade due to their strong red colouration) with good catch rates was limited to the South East area of the fishery.
- AFMA advised that as licensing delegate, consideration is given to likely catches against the level of the TAC and whether the TAC will a) be exceeded and b) whether it can be enforced.
- QDAF suggested that the FWG should gain an understanding of the performance of the East Coast trout fishery, including comparing catch rates to Torres Strait. It was noted that the far north sector of the East coast fishery yielded about 12 t of catch per month from an area larger than the Torres Strait. It was suggested that this could be actioned as part of the industry workshop scheduled for July 2018.
- The FWG welcomed advice from AFMA that catch reports will be made publically available and provided to both commercial fishing sectors and communities on catches from all species under the Fish Receiver System in line with AFMA's Information Disclosure Policy.

4.3. Other reef-line species

The FWG supported the continuation of existing management arrangements for other reef-line species caught by sunset licences noting this is a cost effective and sensible approach and that the Finfish RAG is well placed to progress this issue.

Points discussed:

- The FWG advises that risks to the stocks of other reef-line species remain low if harvest and interest in fishing these species remains low.
- The FWG noted the priorities for management of the fishery and supported the current arrangements in place that a) cap sunset sector leasing of catches for these species to 30 t in the short term and b) outline a work plan to support expansion above the cap should industry wish to do so.
- The FWG noted that further work to progress this issue would be driven by AFMA receiving a fishing plan from industry which would trigger dedicating management resources towards further expanding understanding and management of these species.
- It was considered that expanded targeting of other reef-line species will likely be a focus for management after the management of target species is bedded down through the harvest strategy.
- QDAF advised that in east coast fisheries some concern existed around the management of individual species within the large 900 t basket containing around 100 species. Consideration is being given to whether trigger points will be put in place for some of these species, particularly long lived, valuable species such as Nannygai. Given that some of these species are key recreational species, QDAF has a dedicated monitoring program in place which collects biological data for key other species (length frequency and ageing) through boat ramp surveys.
- The upcoming Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Environmental Risk Assessment process may offer some data to support the management of the other reef-line species basket.

Other points on Total Allowable Catch Setting for 2018/19 season

The FWG welcomed advice that:

- TSRA would put details of the sunset sector boats leasing catch on the TSRA website.

- The PZJA public register is available on the AFMA website with licence owner (TSRA) and lease details <http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/concession-holders-conditions/> .
- AFMA will write to all finfish fishery stakeholders outlining the 2018/19 seasons notional TACs, agreed estimates of mortality used in decision making and the amount available to be caught for both commercial sectors.

Agenda Item 5 – Research updates

5.1. Updates on Torres Strait Finfish Fishery research projects

Scoping study for finfish and crab fishery development in Top Western communities.

The FWG noted an update from project Principal Investigator Andrew Tobin and co-investigator Andy Bodsworth. The project team advised that discussion was underway with AFMA on the scientific permit application to support to the field work component of this scoping study. The project advised that aside from this issue the project was progressing well with the team intending to revisit communities after the monsoon season.

Subsistence (kai-kai) take project update (*Monitoring the traditional take of finfish in the Torres Strait Protected Zone*)

The FWG EO outlined progress to date on this CSIRO project as tabled in the agenda paper.

The FWG noted that the Finfish RAG had supported the revised project scope as proposed and discussed at their November 2017 meeting including considering the use of Torres Strait Rangers or MyPathways staff to assist the project collect data. It was noted that the project was currently forming a statement of work which was being provided to the TSRA as requested for their consideration as to whether resourcing and support could be provided.

The TSRA advised they are keen to get advice from the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee advice on the continuation of the project given the limited outcomes of the project to date.

AFMA suggested that the project steering committee convene again after the requested statement of work was supplied and considered by TSRA.

5.2. Research priorities

The FWG noted the prepared research priorities paper and that the available AFMA research budget is almost fully committed with no annual call for research being made. It was noted that the research budget is mainly focussed on developing harvest strategies. A small amount of remaining underspent funding is being considered by the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee as to how it can address tactical research needs. Consideration is being given to using these funds to update the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery stock assessment and adding additional funding to the beche-de-mer harvest strategy development.

It was noted that the Finfish RAG was asked to consider small tactical research projects focused on improving estimates of mortality outside of the commercial fishery (recreational, charter, subsistence kai-kai). The priority tactical research identified by the Finfish RAG was biological data collection including ageing and length frequency analysis to check model assumptions. AFMA advised that RAG advice on stratification, design and costs would be sought at their 21-22 March 2018 meeting.

Agenda Item 6 – Management

6.1 Formalising finfish total allowable catches

The FWG provided the following recommendation to the PZJA on formalising TACs:

The Finfish Working Group supported the proposed approach of implementing formal and enforceable finfish TACs to be implemented in the 2019/20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.

The FWG provided the following advice on formalising TACs:

- Formal TACs will be a key tool to support development and sustainability of the Finfish Fishery, providing certainty for industry and helping to attract investment.
- The outcomes of the Torres Strait infrastructure review and ongoing fishing business development initiatives will likely see changes in the fishery such as increased catches from the TIB sector; this was another driver for implementing formal TACs.
- While the FWG noted that there is a strong need to have a firm TAC in place with an enforceable limit it was also noted that some flexibility in sunset sector leasing may be required during implementation to cover TIB sector or subsistence (kai-kai) catches as further information is received.
- A priority ahead of the 2019/20 season is to continue to encourage and educate fishers on the importance of providing timely and accurate catch data during the transition to implementing a TAC.

Other points discussed:

- A standing item for the FWG will be considering and reporting on how the fishery is performing relative to the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013*. The FWG noted that the Plan requires an allocation of units to be performed prior to setting Total Allowable Catches. It was noted that this process may take some time and that the best interim option available is putting conditions in place on TIB sector and sunset sector fishing permits to regulate the Total Allowable Catch.
- Noting industry advice that a single TIB fishing operation fishing actively could trigger an increase in TIB sector catches, an example of flexible management arrangements to support implementation of formal TACs was put forward where staggered sunset contracts could be implemented with something like 80 per cent of the sunset sector portion leased out initially and, in the case that catches are fully subscribed for the TIB sector, the remaining 20 per cent might not be re-leased mid-season.

The FWG supported the proposed process put forward by AFMA:

- During the 2018-19 season AFMA is to write to, and work with, communities and stakeholders on facilitating and encouraging:
 - the need for continued reporting of timely and accurate data through CDRs, and
 - the plan to put enforceable TACs in place for 2019/20 season seeking comment,
- Native Title notification process is to be conducted for input.
- A paper is to be put to the PZJA for their consideration.

6.2 Western line closure removal

The FWG noted previous consideration on this issue from both the FWG and Finfish RAG with general agreement that the western line closure is an older jurisdictional boundary and serves no management purpose and support given for removing the closure.

It was noted that discussion has focussed on two points:

1. When the line is removed, what will the likely impacts on the fishery be given there may be different habitats and species in the western Torres Strait compared to the eastern grounds which are currently fished?

2. Community consultation on resource sharing; such as using the area of waters for commercial fishing versus other uses such as supporting ecotourism (raised at the March 2017 Finfish Working Group Meeting).

AFMA advised that the key issue which AFMA and TSRA are addressing is whether enough consultation has been done to date, noting that it has been a longstanding issue with a lot of previous consideration. AFMA advised of a proposal to action final consultation and capture stakeholder views through the TSRA Fisheries Summit scheduled for May 2018. These stakeholder views are to be presented to the PZJA for their decision on removing the closure. Industry members agreed with the proposed process and advised that the views of Prescribed Body Corporates, active fishers and community elders must be presented to the PZJA.

6.3 Draft AFMA Finfish Fishery budget 2018/19

The FWG noted the draft AFMA 2018/19 Finfish Fishery budget noting that it is based on convening two FWG meetings (2 x one day meetings), two Finfish RAG meetings (2 x two day meetings) and a one day industry meeting. Members suggested that future presentations of Finfish Fishery budget would ideally show all components including funding from TSRA which facilitates the attendance of Traditional Inhabitant representatives.

6.4 Estimates of traditional inhabitant boat sector catches

The FWG noted that to ensure stocks are sustainably managed an understanding of all sources of mortality on the stocks is required to make sure that total catches for the fishery are not being exceeded. To support PZJA decision making, advice is being sought from the PZJA Finfish RAG and FWG on estimates of mortality including TIB sector commercial catches.

The FWG noted this issue had previously been tabled with a range of available estimates presented to both the Finfish RAG (November 2017 meeting) and FWG (March 2017 meeting). It was noted that a single figure had not been agreed at these meetings with recent catch reports for the TIB sector being unreliable due to the poor return rates of the TIB sector voluntary docket books in recent seasons (docket books are now-defunct and have been replaced with mandatory catch disposal records as part of the fish receiver system).

For the 2017/18 season Spanish mackerel TAC, the PZJA Standing Committee met in March 2017 and used a figure of 22 t as the best available estimate for commercial catches from the TIB sector based on the 2003-2010 reference period of the most recent stock assessment (O'Neill 2016). During this period, catch data from docket books were considered to have been voluntarily completed to a reasonable standard by industry. Based on this the Standing Committee agreed to a step-down in the notional TAC of 132 t for the 2017/18 season based on the 110 t leased to the sunset sector plus a 22 t estimate of commercial catches from the TIB sector.

The Finfish RAG was asked to provide advice on the 22 t estimate of TIB sector catch at their November 2017 meeting. No advice to the PZJA was provided from the RAG following TSRA advice tabled at the meeting that providing advice on TIB sector catches was considered to be outside the scope of PZJA forums. Instead, the TSRA Board relies on advice from the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC), which includes representatives from the four eastern communities fishing finfish, to inform the board on leasing an amount to the sunset sector. This recommendation is then forwarded to AFMA for consideration as licensing delegate and is put into regulation through sunset sector permit conditions. The FWG noted the methodology and recommendations of the TSRA FQMC for allocating catch to the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector in the 2018-19 season. The FWG noted that the FQMC considers advice from their members on catch, effort, likely increases in effort and provides precautionary recommendations to the board in lieu of accurate recent catch data.

The FWG noted that the FQMC advised of allotment of catches to the TIB sector for 2018/19 of 20 t for Spanish mackerel and 30 t for coral trout.

Points discussed:

- The FWG noted that this FQMC allotment for TIB Spanish mackerel varied by 2 t from the 22 t assumed by the stock assessment over a previous historical period.

- It was noted that the FQMC figure was based on committee advice on recent catches, effort and interest in increasing the TIB sector effort with the benefit of the TIB sector having priority in these considerations. TSRA advised that the FQMC and TSRA Board did not consider the 22 t estimate from O'Neill 2016 as this advice was not considered to be relevant to the current levels of fishing activity.
- The FWG noted that the 22 t estimate was from an older time period (2003-2010) compared to the more recent FQMC considerations and that change has been occurring in the fishery in recent times with community freezers closing and key fishers leaving the industry. Conversely, the FWG noted that the risk profile in the fishery has changed with the Spanish mackerel catches being almost fully subscribed relative to the Recommended Biological Catch (or total kill) although lower than historical levels of total catch. TSRA advised that the FQMC provided advice to increase the TIB sector estimate from 10 t (as used in recent seasons) to 20 t to reflect expected increased activity in communities in the 2018-19 season.
- The FWG noted member advice that all figures presented from research papers should also report associated error margins, noting that the 22 t of the O'Neill report (2016) did have a standard deviation of around 9 t.
- The FWG advised that there is a firm need for evidence based decision making for TAC setting and the associated consideration of estimates of mortality such as commercial catches. Any deviation from previous advice needs to be supported with a clear rationale, including the nature of any data underpinning such advice; otherwise the integrity of the process could be called into question.
- The TSRA Member raised the disparity between the Spanish mackerel catches in Attachment A to Agenda Item 2.1 and the 22 t figure used by the stock assessment. QDAF advised that this disparity will be investigated.
- The FWG encouraged the TSRA Board and FQMC to utilise the PZJA Finfish RAG which has been formed to provide technical analysis and can also bring in community advice.
- TSRA advised that the fishery is 100 per cent owned by traditional inhabitants. Any concerns of the licensing delegate for ensuring sustainable catches should also take into account that since sunset leasing has occurred there has not been a year when the recommended biological catch has been considered to have been exceeded, and the leasing of licences has proved to be an effective non-regulatory method for limiting catches in the fishery.
- The Chair suggested that the Australian National Audit Office audit beginning April 2018 may help to provide an independent perspective of these issues and provide guidance to the PZJA on the best process for policy support to decision making.
- It was noted that at this early stage catch data from the Fish Receiver System was progressing well and will help inform future allotment of catches to the two commercial sectors.

Finfish working group advice:

The FWG noted that the PZJA Standing Committee considered a figure of 22 t in the 2017-18 season as the best available estimate of TIB sector catch.

The FWG also noted the paper provided by TSRA which outlined the methodology and decisions made by the FQMC and TSRA Board which recommended 20 t of Spanish Mackerel and 30 t of coral trout be allotted to the TIB sector for the 2018-19 season.

The FWG noted that ideally there would be an aligned process between both PZJA forums (Finfish RAG/Working Group) and the TSRA FQMC with these groups working collaboratively in order to provide the PZJA with the best advice possible and providing stakeholders with a transparent decision making process. TSRA member disagreed with this assessment, noting that the roles of each of the forums was clear. The TSRA member advised that PZJA has no role or decision in allocating catches between commercial sectors or licence holders. The FQMC is a community process for maximising the benefits of the catch entitlements owned by traditional inhabitants.

Agenda Item 7 – Future management priorities and work plans

The FWG noted scheduled work plans for both the Finfish RAG and FWG, noting that two Finfish RAG meetings were scheduled for the third and fourth quarters of 2018 to progress the harvest strategy and examine two stock assessments (Spanish mackerel update and initial coral trout assessment).

TSRA queried the timing of the next FWG meeting relevant to the season ending in June and that there is likely adequate time to convene a RAG and WG to provide advice for the next season. It would also align with the FQMC process that occurs in February each year. AFMA advised that all reasonable steps would be taken to accommodate TSRA business requirements.

It was considered that an extra teleconference (or videoconference through AFMA's Blue jeans system) could be convened to focus on considering and endorsing RAG Recommended Biological Catch advice from analysis of assessments. Noting that this had been attempted before, with mixed results and poor feedback from stakeholders, it was agreed that a trial run of this arrangement would need to occur to ensure that all members could hear correctly and fully participate in the virtual meeting. It was suggested that as a test run of the system, AFMA could invite Quarantine Australia to present to the FWG on invasive fish species (Action item from the present FWG meeting) as a 30 minute video conference meeting.

The FWG gave some consideration that if the next FWG meeting was scheduled for Q1 2019, as suggested, this would be advantageous as 12 months of Catch Disposal Record data could be considered at this point.

Agenda Item 8 – Other business

The TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member advised that he would like to request becoming a full member on the Finfish Working Group rather than a permanent observer.

Agenda Item 9 – Date and venue for next meeting

As per Agenda Item 7, the next meeting was noted to be either an out-of-session videoconference focused on TAC advice in the fourth quarter of 2018 or a full face-to-face meeting in the first quarter of 2019.

The FWG Chair closed the meeting by thanking participants for their hard work in bedding down working group processes such as declaring and managing interests, noting that this process will become more streamlined over time. The Chair encouraged all Traditional Inhabitant representatives to take the outcomes of the meeting back to their community and stress the need for timely and accurate catch reporting and voluntary compliance with the fish receiver system.

The meeting was closed in prayer at 1715 hrs by Councillor Frank Faud.

List of Attachments

Attachment A: TSRA Paper, 19 March 2018, Estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector Catches

Finfish Working Group

20 March 2018, Thursday Island

Agenda Item 6.4: Estimating TIB catches – Finfish Quota Management Committee

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the FWG:

- **NOTE** the methodology and recommendations of the TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) for allocating catch to the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector in the 2018-19 season.
- **AGREE** to an estimate of 20 tonnes of Spanish mackerel and 30 tonnes of coral trout catches for TIB sector in the 2018-19 fishing season.

BACKGROUND

The FQMC provides advice to the TSRA Board on the leasing of finfish catch allocations. It is a community process for allocating the catch in the fishery which is 100 per cent owned by Torres Strait Islanders.

The membership of the FQMC is the TSRA Board Member and a community fisher representative for the four main finfish communities (Erub, Masig, Mer and Ugar). The Committee also includes an independent chair appointed by the TSRA Board.

As per its Terms of Reference, the FQMC makes a determination of the required catch to be allocated for TIB fishers, prior to any consideration of Expressions of Interest for leasing catch entitlements in the fishery. The FQMC incorporates advice from members on current fishing effort and likely future changes to fishing effort in their communities. Due to current low levels of catch information in the fishery FQMC makes estimates of TIB catches that are precautionary and considers potential expansion in TIB effort.

ISSUE

- A summary of known recent catch information is provided each year to the FQMC to assist their discussion of current levels of fishing activity below to help inform the setting of catches for the TIB sector in the 2018-19 fishing season. A summary of the information provided at its 2018 meeting is provided in Attachment A.
- For the 2018-19 season the FQMC considered the current fishing effort occurring in the four main finfish communities for Spanish mackerel and coral trout. They noted there had been some increase in activity since previous years, particularly for coral trout at Mer and Spanish mackerel and coral trout at Erub. Finfish activity at Ugar and Masig remains low, primarily due to the absence of available freezers for catch.
- FQMC agreed a precautionary estimate for TIB catches in the 2018-19 fishing season to be 20 tonnes of Spanish mackerel and 30 tonnes of coral trout.

Attachment

- A. **Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector recent finfish catch data provided to the FQMC.**

AGENDA 6.4 - TSRA Paper – Estimated TIB catches - Attachment A

Catch data in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery

- Sunset licence holders in the fishery must report their catch to AFMA through compulsory logbook returns. Catch reporting by the traditional inhabitant (TIB) sector through the logbook system is voluntary. As such the catch data for this sector is an incomplete representation of the total traditional inhabitant sector catch.
- In December 2017, it became compulsory for both the TIB sector and sunset licence holders to complete catch documentation at the end of each fishing trip under the Fish Receiver System (FRS system).
- **Table 1** provides the catch history for Spanish mackerel and coral trout since 2007 (when the fishery became 100 per cent owned by Torres Strait Inhabitants). Up until 2015, reporting of catch was done on an annual basis (by calendar year).
- **Table 2, Figure 1 and Figure 2** provides catch data by fishing season since 2013-14.

Table 1: Catch of finfish in the Torres Strait finfish fishery in whole weight/year/sector

Season	Coral Trout / sector		Spanish Mackerel / sector	
	Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)	Non-Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)	Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)	Non-Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)
2007	17.6	41.8	4.8	90.0
2008	8.8	23.4	5.3	83.3
2009	6.1	22.8	1.7	99.0
2010	4.9	31.3	10.9	78.0
2011	0.5	43.0	0.0	74.7
2012	1.9	37.8	2.3	78.0
2013	0.0	37.1	0.08	136.9
2014	3.2	9.0	0.74	62.2

Table 2. Total catch of finfish in the Torres Strait finfish fishery whole weight/season

Season	Coral Trout		Spanish Mackerel		Other reef line fish	
	Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)	Total Catch (t)	Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)	Total Catch (t)	Traditional Inhabitant Fishers (t)	Total Catch (t)
2013-14	3.01	30.9	0.329	105.4		
2014-15	0.25	21	0.601	83.9		2.1
2015-16	0.035	38.4	0.285	86.9		3.9
2016-17	1.8	25.7	No catches reported	93.2	0.17	2.07

AGENDA 6.4 - TSRA Paper – Estimated TIB catches - Attachment A

Figure 1. Total Catch and TIB catch in the Spanish Mackerel Fishery

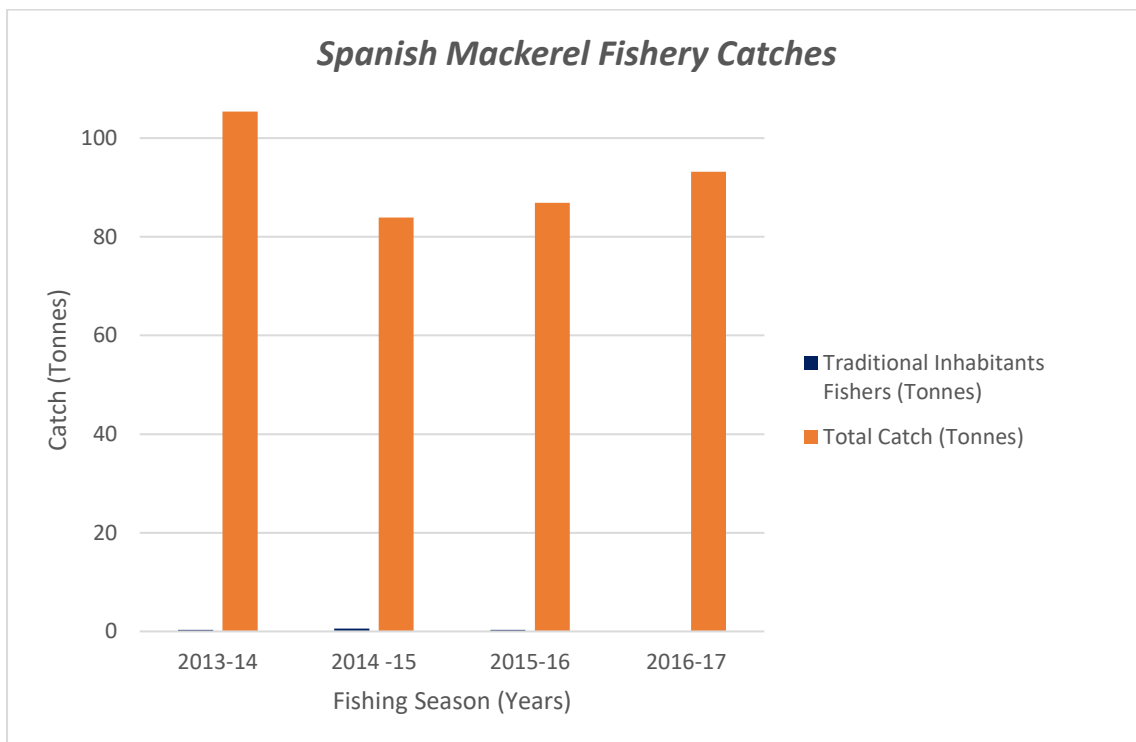
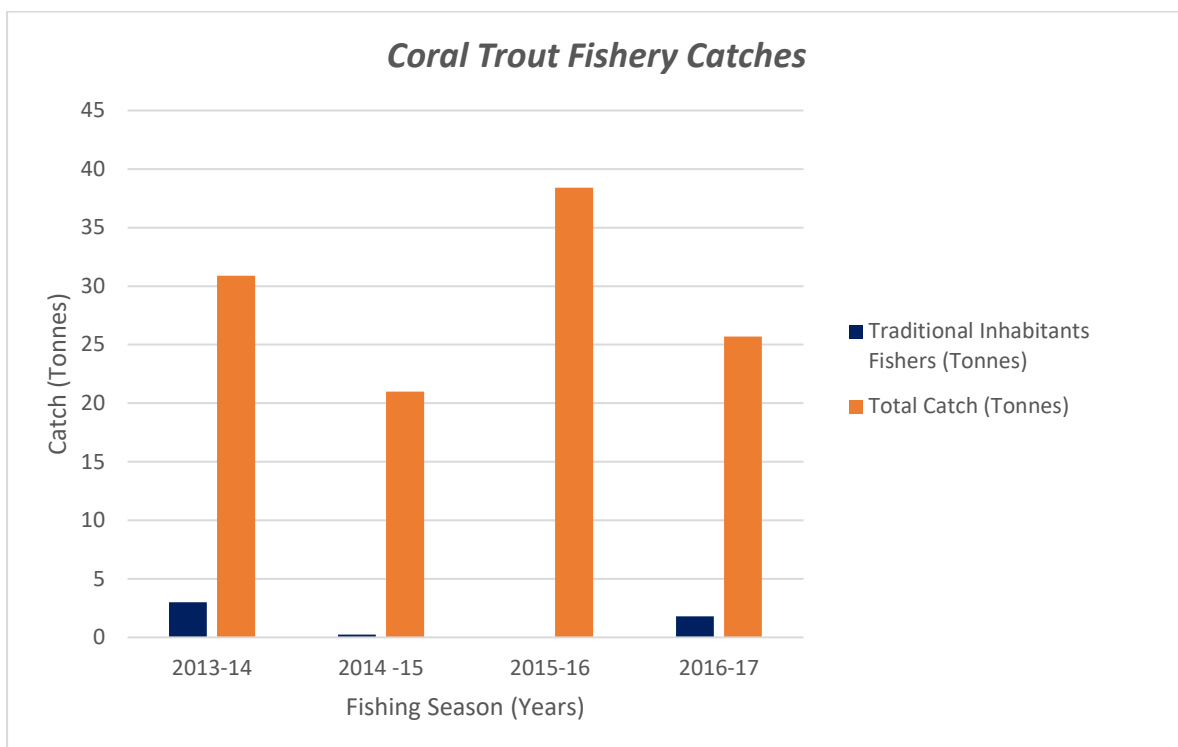


Figure 2. Total Catch and TIB catch in the Coral Trout Fishery



Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector recent finfish catch data**2016/17 season TIB Sector**

Data source: voluntary TSF01 logbooks, voluntary TDB01 Docket books.

- Spanish mackerel: no catches reported
- Coral trout: 1.811 t reported
- Other reef-line species: 0.172 t reported

2017/18 season TIB sector (catch data available to date)

Note – Season still in progress.

Data sources: voluntary TSF01 Daily Fishing Logbooks, voluntary TDB01 Docketbooks and compulsory TDB02 Catch Disposal Records*.

- Spanish mackerel: 0.723 t**
- Coral trout: 0.821 t**
- Other reef-line species: CONFIDENTIAL – Less than five boats

* The Fish Receiver System (TDB02 Catch Disposal Records) was implemented in the Finfish Fishery on 1 December 2017. It is a compulsory system, however in its early stages of implementation the catch data reported may still not represent the actual total catch.

** These reported amounts are only for December and a small amount of January data. At time of the meeting of FQMC not all January data had been entered and verified.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
FISHERY UPDATES Industry updates and strategic issues	Agenda Item 2.1 For discussion and advice

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group:

1. **NOTE** any updates provided by working group industry members on the fishery; 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 from recent FWG meetings is provided in the Background section.

BACKGROUND – past updates

4. *FWG meeting 20 March 2018*

The FWG welcomed updates from industry and other stakeholders on activities and strategic issues occurring in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery and also on issues from other relevant fisheries:

- It was considered that the outcomes of the TSRA infrastructure initiative would likely increase participation within the Ugar Community in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- Ugar community has been engaging with TSRA initiatives such as direct export of seafood product from Torres Strait.
- Available Sydney Fish Market price data shows strong market prices for Spanish mackerel with a clear spike in prices corresponding with Chinese New Year.
- Erub Community Freezer is intending to make its recent finfish catch data available to AFMA and the PZJA groups for consideration.
- The TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee has seen increased interest from the sunset sector in leasing access to the Torres Strait to catch coral trout.
- The FWG noted that recent seasons on the Queensland East Coast fishery have seen the Total Allowable Catch almost totally filled with lease prices reaching \$6/kg corresponding with peak demand to fill orders for Chinese New Year at the end of the season. It was noted that, based on harvest control rules in place, a likely 200 t increase to the East Coast trout quota in 2018 there may be a decrease in interest

from fishers wanting to access the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery reef-line sector. The QDAF member offered to circulate the recent Queensland Finfish Working Group communique for the interest of the FWG. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/fishery-working-groups/-coral-reef-fin-fish-fishery-working-group/communiques/communique-6-7-march>

- QDAF member advised that consultation is underway on proposed amendments to the *Queensland Fisheries Act* to implement changes including stronger compliance powers and penalties. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/changes-to-queenslands-fisheries-legislation>
- QDAF advised that workshops are being held in Queensland on social and economic indicators for East coast fisheries. These workshops are focused on what data can inform social or economic analyses and how can these data be collected and reported. The FWG noted that the findings from these workshops can help inform the development of Torres Strait harvest strategies.

5. **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.

6. *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.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
WORKING GROUP UPDATES AFMA Update	Agenda Item No. 2.2 FOR NOTING

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the RAG:

1. **NOTE** the update from AFMA; and
2. **NOTE** verbal updates from TSRA and QDAF.

AFMA UPDATE

Summary of catches

1. Reported fishing activity in both the Spanish mackerel and reef line sectors of the fishery has been relatively stable since the 2008 buyout and commencement of the leasing arrangements. Both coral trout and Spanish mackerel stocks are classified as not overfished or subject to overfishing. Fishery status reports are available here:
<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/fisheries/fishery-status/>
2. Since 2008-09 catches of Spanish mackerel have generally been around 70-100 tonnes (**Attachment A**). 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
 - **73.8** tonnes in 2017-18
3. Annual catches of coral trout have been below 50 t for the last 10 seasons (**Attachment A**). Recent catches have been:
 - **21** tonnes in 2014-15
 - **38.4** tonnes in 2015-16.
 - **25.7** tonnes in 2016-17
 - **27.3** tonnes in 2017-18
4. Seasonal catches of other reef-line species (e.g. barramundi cod, red emperor) have been below five tonnes in recent seasons, 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
 - **2.2** tonnes in 2017-18

Management arrangements 2018-19 season

8. AFMA has not introduced any significant changes to management arrangements for this fishing season. The structure of permit conditions on sunset permits was changed to allow subheadings to be used along with standard wording for permit conditions across multiple licence types (e.g. area of operation, observer requirements, landing catch).
9. As per measures introduced during the 2017-18 season Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS or satellite tracking) are mandatory on all fishing boats conducting commercial fishing in the Torres Strait Protected Zone using a primary boat and/or operating with a Carrier Boat License (Class A, B, or C). Vessels operating for freight shipping are exempt from installing VMS. Exemptions may also be provided for carrier vessels that are six (6) meters or less in length.
10. VMS is required on all primary vessels operating under a sunset permit in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. It is not mandatory for dories operating individually or in association with a primary vessel to have VMS fitted (although this is the case on the Queensland East Coast).
11. As of 4 March 2019, 209 boats are licenced to fish in the Finfish Fishery under Traditional Inhabitant Boat fishing licences. 138 boats are dual endorsed for Mackerel and reef-line sectors, 24 boats are only endorsed to fish reef-line and 47 boats are only endorsed to fish in the mackerel sector.
12. Seven vessels have been leased access to the Finfish Fishery under sunset permits as detailed in **Table 1**. The public register of all Torres Strait fishing licences is located here: <https://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/concession-holders-conditions>
13. Total available commercial catches for 2018/19 season are at **Table 2** noting that these are notional, fishers working under a sunset permit are bound to a strict catch limit enforced via permit conditions.

Table 1. Packages leased to sunset sector permit holders for 2018-19 season.

Package	Mackerel leased (t)	Coral trout leased (t)	Other species leased (t)	Number of tenders licenced.
A	17	0	0	0
B	40	5	3	3
C	1	5	1	6
D	1	25	1	4
E	20	0	0	3
F	5	1	1	3
G	5	12	3	2
Total	89	48	9	21

Table 2. Summary of available commercial catch by species group.

Species	Recommended Biological Catch	Total Allowable Commercial Catch	Amount available for TIB fishers within RBC.	Amount leased to sunset permit holders.
Spanish mackerel	125 t	115 t (10t deduction from RBC to account for subsistence take)	26 t	89 t
Coral trout	134.9 t	134.9 t	86.9 t	48 t
Other reef-line species	N/A	30 t (PZJA cap on expansion)	N/A does not apply to TIB	9 t

Formalising Finfish Total Allowable Catches

14. At its 20 March 2018 meeting the Finfish Working Group supported, subject to undertaking formal Native Title Notification and writing to all licence holders, the implementation of formal and enforceable finfish TACs in the 2019-20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.
15. AFMA has not progressed this matter as intended due to resources being redirected to the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery. AFMA will resume work on this matter this year and proposes that it be considered by Working Group at its next meeting.

Torres Strait Finfish Management Plan 2013

16. As discussed at the Finfish Working Group meeting in March 2018, it is proposed that a standing item for the FWG will be considering and reporting on how the fishery is performing relative to the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013*. As above AFMA proposes that this be considered at the next Working Group meeting. In addition to considering the performance of against current criteria in the plan AFMA proposes also to review the plan to ensure there are no impediments to allocating quota under the plan noting an Traditional Inhabitant entity may be establish in the future to hold fishing entitlements.

Research proposals for the 2019-20 financial year

17. The Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) made a public a call for research applications to address research priorities identified for potential funding in 2019-20. Two of the identified priorities were:
- Enhancing biological data inputs to the Spanish mackerel stock assessment; and
 - Spanish mackerel stock assessment.
18. The RAG and Working Group were asked to provide comment on the pre-proposals out-of-session. A total of six members provided comment to TSSAC.
19. The TSSAC considered all pre-proposals together with RAG and Working Group advice at their teleconference meeting on 27 February 2019. TSSAC consider pre-proposals against specific

criteria focusing on the research feasibility, relevance, attractiveness and Torres Strait Islander engagement.

20. TSSAC discussed the importance of biological data inputs for the Spanish mackerel stock assessment and noted that having ongoing stock assessment work for Spanish mackerel was a key research priority identified by the FRAG and FWG.
21. Due to the limited TSSAC budget and high number of priorities for research the TSSAC is seeking advice from both the applicants and the RAG on:
 - c. the feasibility of a much more constrained project to enhance biological data inputs; and
 - d. the benefits to fisheries management in undertaking a further Spanish mackerel stock assessment in the absence of any new biological data.

Implementation of the Fish Receiver System (FRS)

22. In the first half of 2019, AFMA will again visit all communities across the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area (NPA), to provide ongoing support and education and receive feedback on how the FRS is functioning. AFMA will aim to have a PZJA forum Traditional Inhabitant member accompany the visits.
23. AFMA is also preparing to provide public monthly catch updates for all Torres Strait Fisheries, via the AFMA and PZJA websites, to assist industry in monitoring catch against TACs.

Industry Liaison Visit to AFMA Canberra Office

24. On Wednesday 14 November 2018, AFMA Officers hosted PZJA Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group Member, Mr Mark David, at their Canberra head office. The trip included Mr David meeting with AFMA CEO Dr James Findlay as well as meeting with many different AFMA teams and functions including compliance, vessel monitoring, bycatch & discards, scientific observers and licensing, Mr David was also able to visit the Maritime Border Command facility where all border surveillance assets for Australia are co-ordinated. AFMA is looking to opportunistically extend these liaison visits to Canberra as developmental opportunities for other PZJA representatives subject to the availability of funding.

Membership of PZJA consultative forums

25. At the 2018 Torres Strait Fisheries Summit held on 30 August 2018, nominations were sought for Traditional Inhabitant members on PZJA consultative forums. Taking these nominations into consideration, Traditional Inhabitant members have been appointed for a three year term commencing 1 January 2019 and ending 31 December 2021.
26. The TSRA has convened a workshop with all newly appointed members to provide information about the consultative forums and the roles and responsibilities of members. Ongoing capacity training for members will also be made available by the TSRA.
27. The appointment terms of other members on PZJA consultative forums, excluding the Finfish RAG, expire on 28 February 2019. AFMA will seek to have these members' appointments extended until later in 2019, to allow time for a new appointment process to be completed. All members on PZJA consultative forums, and the general public, will be advised of this process once details have been finalised.

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) performance audit

28. The ANAO is currently undertaking a performance audit of the coordination arrangements of Australian Government agencies operating in the Torres Strait. The audit will examine whether Australian Government agencies operating in the Torres Strait have appropriate governance arrangements to support the coordination of their activities; and the coordination arrangements are effective in supporting Australian Government activities in the Torres Strait.
29. The audit was open for contribution until 30 September 2018 with a report due to be tabled in June 2019. Australian Government agencies subject to the audit include AFMA, the Department

of Agriculture and Water Resources, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Home Affairs and the TSRA.

30. Further information on the audit can be accessed on the ANAO website at: <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/coordination-arrangements-australian-government-entities-operating-torres-strait>

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
WORKING GROUP UPDATES Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority Update	Agenda Item No. 2.3 FOR NOTING

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** any updates from the PNG National Fisheries Authority (PNG-NFA).

BACKGROUND

1. PNG-NFA are invited participants on all PZJA advisory groups and advice on any developments in management, research and compliance in adjacent PNG waters are welcomed by the PZJA Finfish Working Group.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
WORKING GROUP UPDATES Native Title Update	Agenda Item No. 2.4 FOR NOTING

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** any updates on Native Title matters from members, including representatives of Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC (Malu Lamar).

BACKGROUND

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 Title 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 managing Torres Strait fisheries. It is important therefore that the RAG keep informed on any relevant Native Title issues arising.
4. AFMA has extended an invitation to Malu Lamar to attend this meeting as an observer and is investigating longer term arrangements for representation in consultation with PZJA agencies.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCHES Total Allowable Catch recommendations for the 2019-20 fishing season	Agenda Item No. 3 For discussion and advice

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Working Group:

1. **NOTE** that the Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FRAG) will review updated stock assessments for Spanish mackerel and coral trout at their 13-14 March 2019 meeting (FRAG 4) and that this advice is to be presented to the Finfish Working Group.
2. **PROVIDE ADVICE** on Recommended Biological Catches for 2019-20 and estimates of catches outside of the commercial fishery for FWG consideration; and
3. **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on an appropriate notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel and Coral trout stocks for the 2019-20 fishing season.

KEY ISSUES

1. The FWG is being asked to provide advice on the notional TAC to be set for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery to manage commercial catches for the 2019-20 fishing season beginning 1 July 2019.
2. The role of the Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FRAG), which first met in November 2017, is to provide scientific advice to the working group and PZJA on matters such as sustainable catch limits. The FRAG is to meet on 13-14 March 2019 (FRAG 4) to consider all available stock assessment and catch information for Spanish mackerel and coral trout.
3. Under the AFMA funded project "*Harvest Strategies for Torres Strait Finfish Fishery*" stock assessments are being performed for both Spanish mackerel and coral trout. These assessments are to be considered at FRAG 4 with the RAG providing a recommendation on the sustainable level of catch (termed the Recommended Biological Catch - RBC) and presented to the FWG for consideration.
4. Best practice in setting a TAC is to subtract other known sources of mortality from the RBC to account for all harvest coming from the same stock. These other sources of mortality might be discards, subsistence (kai-kai) take, recreational or charter sector catches for which real data may be available or estimates may be agreed to support decision making (example calculations from the 2018-19 season TAC setting advice is at **Attachment A**). FWG are asked to review estimates of other sources of mortality supplied by the FRAG.

SPANISH MACKEREL

Spanish mackerel TAC advice for 2018-19 season

5. The Finfish RAG met on 9-10 November 2017 (FRAG 1) and considered all available stock assessment and catch information for Spanish mackerel against the interim target reference point. The Finfish RAG:
 - a) 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.
 - 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.
 - c) 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.
6. The FWG met on 20 March 2018 and considered the FRAG advice tabled above. The FWG recommend a 2018-19 season notional TAC for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a RBC of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches. The FWG discussed the following points in making this recommendation:
 - a. The PZJA Standing Committee agreed to step the TAC down from 187 t to 132 t for the 2017-18 season only and agreed for the fishery to be managed to the 125 t RBC for the 2018-19 season.
 - b. FWG noted that no further updates to the stock assessment have occurred and that, aside from a revised subsistence take estimate, no further information has been put forward for decision making.
 - c. Papua New Guinea have not elected to take up catch sharing arrangements for the 2018-19 season meaning the Torres Strait TAC can be fully utilised by Australian fishers.

Spanish mackerel stock assessments

7. The original 2006 stock assessment of Spanish mackerel by Begg *et al* (2006) was updated in 2016 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).

8. The stock assessment was presented to the Scientific Technical Working Group (formed as a FWG sub-committee to examine the mackerel assessment) at their 10 November 2016 meeting and the Finfish Working Group at their 16-17 March 2017 meeting.
9. The STWG and FWG accepted the updated assessment as the best available stock assessment for Spanish mackerel whilst also noting sources of uncertainty in the assessment. The STWG 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. 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”*.

CORAL TROUT

Coral trout TAC advice for 2018-19 season

10. The Finfish Working Group met on 20 March 2018 and considered FRAG advice from their 9-10 November 2017 meeting to support recommending a TAC for the 2018-19 season.
11. The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018-19 season noting:
 - a. the age of available data underlying this TAC;
 - b. a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and
 - c. the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.

Coral trout stock assessments

12. In the absence of a formal stock assessment, the status of the coral trout stock has been evaluated against the results of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) work (Williams *et al.* 2007, 2011). In this MSE work four constant catch scenarios of 80, 110, 140 and 170 tonnes were tested which all achieved a biomass for the fishery of at least 60 per cent of virgin total biomass by 2025.
13. The biomass in 2004 was estimated to be more than 60 per cent of unfished levels (Williams *et al.* 2011, 2007).
14. Commercial catch in recent years has been below historical catch levels and well below the lowest catch level simulated in the MSE (80 t per year).
15. The results of the 80 t catch simulation indicated that the stock would increase to more than 80 per cent of the unfished biomass within 20 years at that catch level (Williams *et al.* 2007, 2011 **Figure 1** below).
16. Although based on older data, this MSE work represents the best available evidence for decision making on stock status and has supported the 134.9 t notional TAC for coral trout which has been maintained. The MSE suggests that catches up to 170 t would support a healthy biomass with building occurring.

BACKGROUND

Previous Spanish mackerel catch limits

17. 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.
18. Following advice from the STWG and Finfish Working Group in early 2017, the PZJA Standing Committee agreed that 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}).
19. The PZJA and STWG considered advice on the likely impacts of exceeding the RBC for the 2017-18 fishing season Dr O'Neill provided an example risk profile illustrating the future projected probability of falling below B_{40} (the estimated current biomass) over the next four years for five different harvest levels (**Figure 1** below)
20. 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.
21. The FWG met on 20 March 2018 and recommend a 2018-19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches. This 115 t notional TAC is in place for the present 2018-19 season.

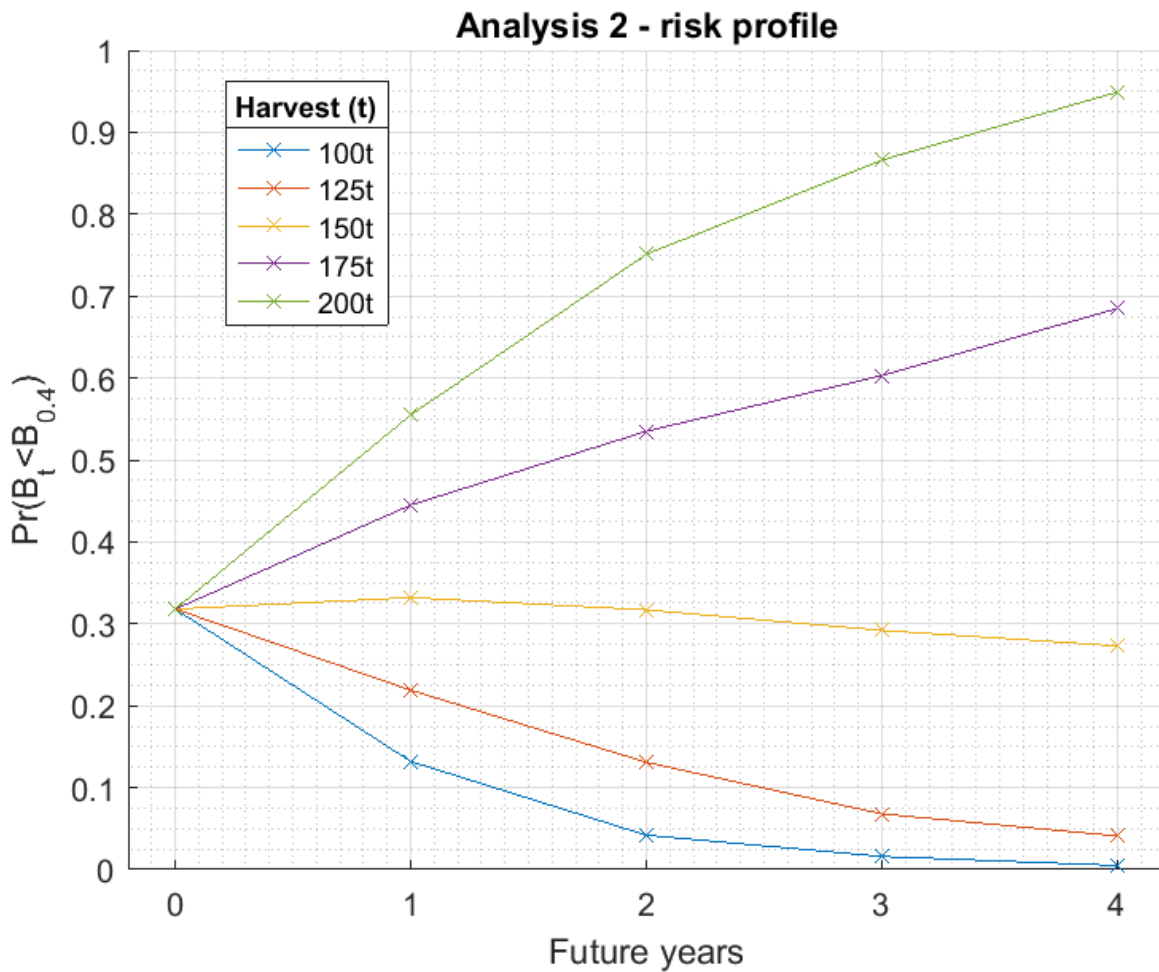


Figure 1. An example risk profile illustrating the future projected probability of exceeding the reference point (B_{40}) (where biomass B_t in future years t falls below 40% of virgin unfished levels of biomass) over the next four years for five different harvest levels 100 to 200 t. The figure vertical y-axis indicates probability (or percentage if x 100). The figure was generated from Analysis 2 MCMC simulations.

Previous coral trout catch limits

22. The FWG has considered the coral trout notional TAC in recent fishing seasons (2017-18 and 2018-19) and recommended that the coral trout TAC (134.9 t) remain unchanged.
23. In considering its advice for the 2017-18 fishing season, the FWG noted that there was no new information to guide a different recommendation at the time. It was further noted that the harvest strategy to be developed will guide future assessments and TAC recommendations.
24. At its 9-10 November 2017 meeting (FRAG 1) the RAG recommended to roll over the 134.9 t notional TAC for the present 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.

25. At its 20 March 2018 meeting the FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018-19 season noting RAG advice.

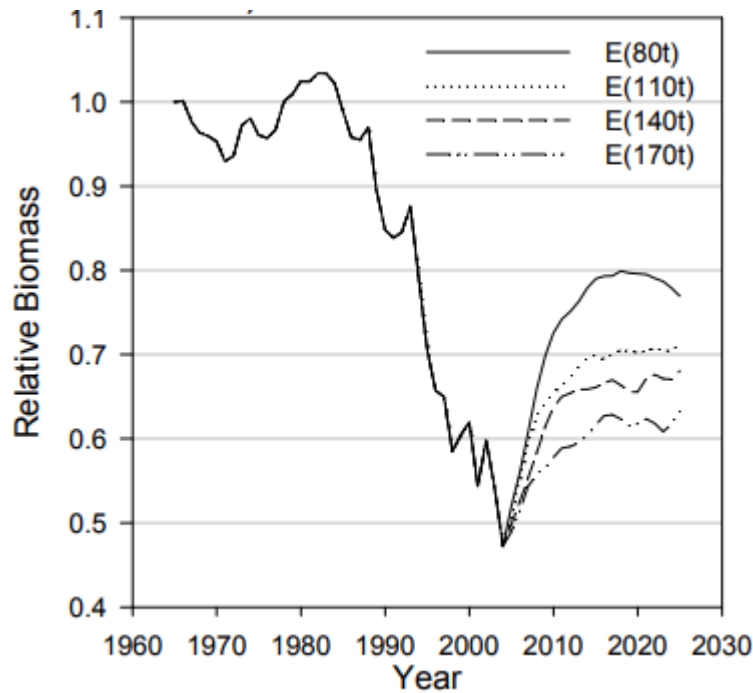


Figure 1: Trajectory of total biomass relative to virgin biomass averaged over ten simulations for four effort levels corresponding to TACs of 80, 110, 140 and 170 tonnes (Source: *Evaluation of the eastern Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery*, Fishing & Fisheries Technical Report, Williams et al. 2007).

Stock status

26. Spanish mackerel is currently classified as **not overfished** and **not subject to overfishing** (ABARES Fishery Status Reports 2018). 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.
27. Coral trout is currently classified as **not overfished** and **not subject to overfishing** (ABARES Fishery Status Reports 2018). This stock status determination is based on Management strategy evaluation testing which suggests that current catches are well below the level likely to lead to biomass declines. Most recent biomass estimate indicated a biomass above 0.6 B_0 .

Attachment A – Example TAC setting calculation based on available advice

Table 1 Example Spanish mackerel 2018-19 season TAC calculation taking into account the TSWG advice and advice from the FWG and 9-10 November 2017 FRAG 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 advised that 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 declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements for 2018-19.
Total discounts	- 10	
RBC (125 t) – total for other catches (10 t)	115 t Recommended TAC	

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
WESTERN LINE CLOSURE	Agenda Item No. 4 FOR ADVICE

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Finfish Working Group:

1. **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE** any additional **ADVICE** on likely management impacts from removing the western line closure; and
2. **DISCUSS** and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on AFMA's proposed consultation process on the option to remove the western line closure.

KEY ISSUES

1. Commercial harvest of reef-line finfish species in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery is generally undertaken in the north eastern region of Torres Strait Protected Zone. Commercial fishing for reef-line finfish species west of 142°32'E is prohibited under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 8 - Torres Strait Finfish Fishery*. This is referred to as the 'western line closure' (**Figure 1** below).
2. The closure only relates to the reef-line sector of the Fishery (mainly targeting coral trout and other coral reef finfish species) and not to the Spanish mackerel sector.
3. 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.
4. At the 20 March 2018 Finfish Working Group (FWG) meeting the FWG noted previous consideration on this issue from both the FWG and FRAG with general agreement that the western line closure is an old jurisdictional boundary and serves no management purpose and support given for removing the closure.
5. There are two issues for consideration prior to AFMA seeking a PZJA decision:
 - a. ensuring adequate stakeholder consultation has occurred; and
 - b. likely stock impacts.
6. AFMA is seeking advice from the Finfish RAG at its meeting on 13-14 March on the possible impacts of removing the closure on stocks, noting previous industry advice that the fishing grounds/habitat may be different in the west compared to the eastern area. Concern was raised by FWG members and observers that the reefs are shallower and possibly more susceptible to localised depletion. Finfish RAG advice will be tabled in the meeting.
7. Subject to advice from the Working Group and Finfish RAG AFMA proposes to seek agreement from the PZJA to consult formally with stakeholders on the removal of the Western line closure. Native title notification under the *Native title Act 1993*. The proposed public consultation process would be to invite stakeholders to make submissions (written or by phone) to AFMA on the proposal. Finfish Working Group advice would then be sought on any public submission before final consideration by the PZJA.

BACKGROUND

8. The removal of the western closure of the reef-line sector (**Figure 1**) has been a long standing item which has been supported in-principle by the FWG.
9. 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.
10. At the 20 March 2012 meeting of the FWG meeting, TSRA indicated that there was community interest in removing the western closure.
11. At its 12-13 July 2016 meeting the FWG 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.
12. At its 16-17 March 2017 meeting the FWG noted progress since the last meeting to remove the western line closure. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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 concern that the reefs are shallower and possibly more susceptible to localised depletion.
16. AFMA sought preliminary technical advice from the Finfish Resource Assessment Group on what inter-session work will likely be required to assess the likely stock impacts from

removing the western line closure (FRAG 1, 9-10 November 2017). The FRAG had a limited amount of time available and FRAG requested a further opportunity to consider the matter. The FRAG 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.

17. At the 20 March 2018 meeting the FWG noted previous consideration on this issue from both the FWG and FRAG with general agreement that the western line closure is an old jurisdictional boundary and serves no management purpose and support given for removing the closure. It was noted that discussion has focussed on two points:

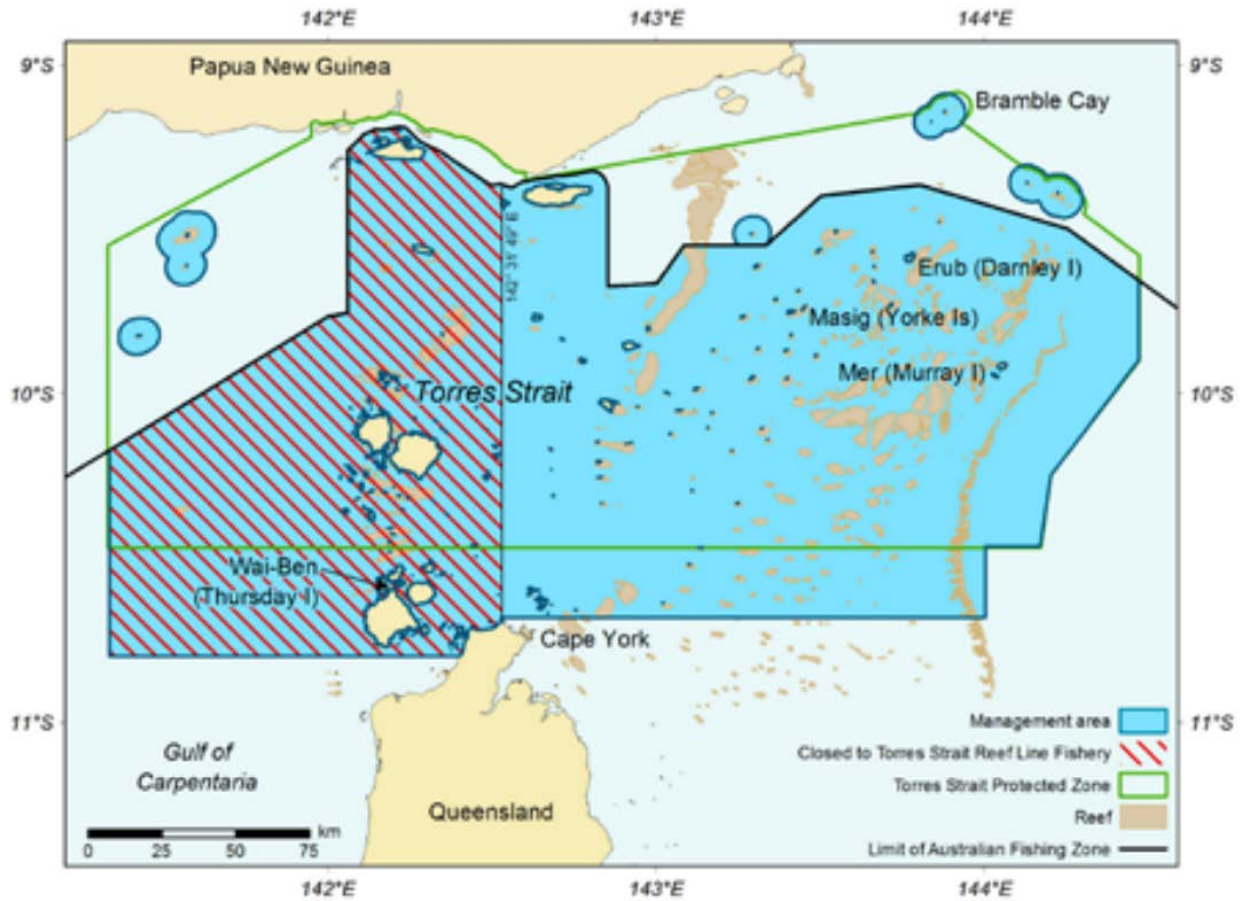
1. When the line is removed, what will the likely impacts on the fishery be given there may be different habitats and species in the western Torres Strait compared to the eastern grounds which are currently fished?
2. Community consultation on resource sharing; such as using the area of waters for commercial fishing versus other uses such as supporting ecotourism (raised at the March 2017 Finfish Working Group Meeting).

18. AFMA advised that the key issue which AFMA and TSRA are addressing is whether enough consultation has been done to date, noting that it has been a longstanding issue with a lot of previous consideration. AFMA advised of a proposal to action final consultation and capture stakeholder views through the TSRA Fisheries Summit scheduled for May 2018. These stakeholder views were to be presented to the PZJA for their decision on removing the closure. Industry members agreed with the proposed process and advised that the views of Prescribed Body Corporates, active fishers and community elders must be presented to the PZJA.

19. AFMA sought additional views from the FRAG at their 19-20 November 2018 meeting (FRAG 3) but due to available time the discussion had to be deferred.

20. Following provision of FRAG and FWG advice at the present March 2019 meetings, AFMA is proposing to write to fishery stakeholders (PBCs, fishers, community elders) seeking their views ahead of putting a case to the PZJA consideration ahead of final public comment.

Figure 1. Map of the Western Line Closure.



PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
Finfish Fishery budget report for 2019-20	Agenda Item No. 5 FOR NOTING

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **NOTE** AFMA's draft Finfish Fishery budget for 2019-20

KEY ISSUES

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. AFMA's DRAFT 2019-20 direct budget for the Finfish Fishery, excluding staff costs (direct costs only), is \$147,855.
4. The budget covers the convening of two Finfish Working Group meetings (one day meetings) and two Finfish Resource Assessment Group meetings (two day meetings) The budget does not include any community visits.
5. The budget does not cover any costs for foreign or domestic compliance.
6. Meeting costs for FRAG and FWG members who are Traditional Inhabitants are funded and administered by the TSRA.
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 2019-20 budget for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.

Draft Finfish RAG budget structure for 2019-20 FY for two FRAG meetings

Member	Plane Fare	Accomodation	Taxi/ferry/parking	TA (3 days)	Meeting Dinner	Venue Hire	1 x 2 day meeting total
FRAG Chair	1,200	900	178	483	395	600	3,756
Scientific Member	1,300	900	178	483			2,861
Scientific Member	1,200	900	178	483			2,761
Scientific Member	1,200	900	178	483			2,761
Industry member (TVH)	800	900	178	483			2,361
AFMA staff	-	-	-	-			-
AFMA staff	-	-	-	-			-
	5,700.00	4,500.00	890.00	2,415.00			395.00
Total for two meetings							\$29,000

Draft Working Group budget structure for 2019-20 FY – Meeting 1

Member	Origin	Plane Fare	Accomodation	Taxi/ferry/parking	TA (3 days)	Meeting Dinner	Venue Hire	1 x 2 day meeting total
Finfish Working Group Chair	Brisbane	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 178.00	\$ 483.00	\$ 395.00	\$ 600.00	\$ 3,756.00
Scientific Member	Brisbane	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 178.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,761.00
Scientific Member	Brisbane (ex. Nambour)	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 178.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,761.00
Industry member (TVH)	Cairns	\$ 800.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 178.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,361.00
AFMA staff	TI	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -			\$ -
AFMA staff	TI	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -			\$ -
Invited industry participant	Mer	\$ 1,320.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 58.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,761.00
Invited industry participant	Ugar	\$ 6,500.00	\$ 900.00	\$ -	\$ 483.00			\$ 7,883.00
Invited industry participant	Masig	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 58.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,641.00
Invited industry participant	Poruma	\$ 1,100.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 58.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,541.00
Invited industry participant	Erub	\$ 1,300.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 58.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,741.00
Malu Lamar Rep	TBA*	\$ 1,200.00	\$ 900.00	\$ 59.00	\$ 483.00			\$ 2,642.00
	FRTF	\$ 17,020.00	\$ 9,000.00	\$ 1,003.00	\$ 4,830.00	\$ 395.00	\$ 600.00	\$ 32,848.00

Draft Working Group budget structure for 2019-20 FY – Meeting 2

Member	Origin	Plane Fare	Accomodation	Taxi/ferry/parking	TA	Meeting Dinner	Venue Hire	1 x 2-day meeting total
FWG Chair	Brisbane	1200	900	178	483	395.00	600.00	3,756.00
Scientific Member	Brisbane	1200	900	178	483			2,761.00
Scientific Member	Brisbane	1200	900	178	483			2,761.00
industry TVH	Cairns	800	900	178	483			2,361.00
AFMA staff	TI	-	-	-	-			-
AFMA staff	TI	-	-	-	-			-
Malu Lamar Rep	TBA* (based on average Eastern Island base)	1,200	900	59	483			2,642.00
		\$						
	FRTF	4,400.00	\$ 3,600.00	\$ 712.00	\$ 1,932.00	395.00	600.00	14,281.00

Working Group consultants budget structure for 2019-20 FY

Member position	Daily rate	Administration fee (15%)	Sitting fee days claimable per two day meeting (inc. travel/prep time)	1 x 2-day meeting total	Total for two 2 day meetings
Chairperson	762		4	3,048.00	6,096.00
Scientific	572		3	1,716.00	3,432.00
Scientific	572		3	1,716.00	3,432.00
Industry	Nil claimed			-	-
Malu Lamar Rep	420	126	2	966.00	1,932.00
			Total	7,446.00	14,892.00

Finfish RAG consultants budget structure for 2019-20 FY

Member position	Daily rate	Administration fee (15%)	Sitting fee days claimable per two day meeting (inc. travel/prep time)	1 x 2-day meeting total	2 x 2 day meeting total
Chairperson	1,800		4	7,200.00	14,400.00
Scientific	1,500		3	4,500.00	9,000.00
Scientific	1,500		3	4,500.00	9,000.00
Scientific	1,500		3	4,500.00	
Industry	N/A		N/A	-	-
Malu Lamar Rep	420.00	126.00	2	966.00	1,932.00
			Total	\$ 21,666.00	43,332.00

The draft budget also includes an additional \$13501 for printing management arrangement booklets, logbook reprinting and legal advice on drafting.

2019-20 FY Draft budget summary

Activity	Cost
RAG and WG sitting fees	58224
RAG and WG meetings	76129
Admin	13502
Total Direct Costs	
<u>147855</u>	

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.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
OTHER BUSINESS	Agenda Item No. 6 FOR NOTING

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Working Group **NOMINATE** any additional items of business for the meeting.

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group	15 March 2019
NEXT MEETING and MEETING CLOSE	Agenda Item 7 For DISCUSSION and ADVICE

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **DISCUSS** and **ADVISE** on a date for the next meeting noting the proposal is a two day meeting on Thursday Island for 18-19 June 2019 with key business being the presentation of the final draft harvest strategy framework.
2. If time permits the Working Group are asked to **AGREE** to the wording of a short message for stakeholders on the key outcomes of the present meeting.
3. The RAG are to **NOTE** closing remarks from the chairperson and a closing prayer.