

Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee Meeting 72

Meeting Record

26 February 2019

Teleconference

Note all meeting papers and record available on
the PZJA webpage: www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

DRAFT

Meeting participants

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Mr Ian Cartwright	Chair	Member of AFMA commission. Chair ARC, member of QLD expert panel.
Ms Selina Stoute	AFMA Representative	No conflict declared.
Ms. Lisa Cocking	Executive Officer (AFMA)	No conflict declared.
Sam Miller	Queensland member	No conflict declared.
Allison Runck	TSRA member	Nil.
Dr Natasha Stacey	Scientific Member	Researcher at Charles Darwin University. On FRDC NT Research Advisory Forum. No Torres Strait related projects.
Dr Roland Pitcher	Scientific Member	Fisheries Scientist, CSIRO. No current conflicts of interest as no Torres Strait related projects. Some CSIRO projects are held by researchers in same office.
Dr Dirk Welsford	Scientific Member	Research scientist at AAD in Department of Environment and energy. Sub-Antarctic resource assessment group. No conflict declared.
Dr Stephen Newman	Scientific Member	Principal Fisheries Scientist - Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.
Mr Rocky Stephen	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member	Kemer Kemer Meriam member. Member of TSIRC for Ugar. President of Kos and Abob Ugar fishers association. Finfish working group member and Finfish RAG member.
Mr Frank Loban	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member	TRL licence holder.
Mr Gavin Mosby	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member	Traditional inhabitant member for Masig. Traditional fisher for BDM, TRL and Finfish.

Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Nick Boucher	TSRA observer	Nil.

Apologies

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Mr Jerry Stephen	TSRA fisheries portfolio member	Nil.

1 Meeting Administration

1.1 *Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners/Chair's Opening Remarks/Meeting attendance/Declaration of Interests/Apologies*

The Chair opened the meeting at 1345pm Australian Eastern Daylight Savings time and welcomed the TSSAC members and observers to the meeting.

The committee discussed declarations of interest from members, and noted it was somewhat difficult to manage this within a teleconference. Members acknowledged there were no new conflicts of interest to be considered, and the only potential conflict within the agenda would be with Roland Pitcher and the CSIRO project proposals. Dr Pitcher acknowledged he is not involved with any of those projects himself, even though they are CSIRO projects. The committee agreed that he should be included in discussions regarding all projects, and if any perceived conflicts arise when discussing funding, they would be dealt with at the time.

TSSAC meeting 72 decision record

That the TSSAC **NOTED** the total AFMA budget available for the 2019-20 financial year of \$411,000.

The TSSAC **NOTED** with appreciation that the TSRA are providing funding outside of AFMA funding for the beche de mer stock survey, subject to the project being supported by the TSSAC.

That the TSSAC **NOTED** proposed budgets associated with each pre-proposal which, in total, exceed the 2019-20 budget.

That the TSSAC **REVIEWED** the research pre-proposals and recommended that all EOIs, with the exception of finfish harvest strategy MSE project, be progressed to full proposal. A range of comments on the pre-proposals were provided by the TSSAC, which are to be addressed in the full proposals.

2 Review and adoption of agenda

The committee agreed to the following additions to the agenda:

- An update from the AFMA research manager on the FRDC project looking at non-commercial catches of fish around Australia.

- A review of the assessment criteria and ranking methods to use for the full proposal assessments.

3 Update on FRDC project “Improving data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander marine resource use to inform decision-making”

The AFMA research manager provided an update on the project – “*Improving data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander marine resource use to inform decision-making*”, given its relevance to the project scope looking at non-commercial catches in the Torres Strait.

A teleconference with the project team and stakeholders was held on 6 February 2019 to discuss the project. The project investigators noted the importance of the project to all jurisdictions, but indicated that they are still trying to get support from Victoria.

A meeting is planned for April/ May with all jurisdictions and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives from each jurisdiction. The project was also discussed at the National Fisheries Ministers meeting last week.

The project team are developing an engagement strategy but waiting on ideas from each jurisdiction about this before finalising a draft for consideration by stakeholders. The biggest risk to the project is obtaining engagement and support from all jurisdictions, including traditional owners, and some uncertainty around whether they will be able to get this.

The project is due for completion in December 2019.

4 2019-20 research pre-proposals

The committee noted the AFMA budget for the TSSAC for 2019-20 is \$411,000, and the combined project budgets proposed within the pre-proposals far exceed this amount. Even with TSRA funding to assist with some projects, it will not be possible to fund all pre-proposals, although it was noted that there was some opportunity to seek reduced scopes and budget of some projects.

The committee noted that the AFMA Research Committee has the same difficulties with estimating project budgets when developing scopes. The committee discussed the possibility that the scopes, as provided to researchers were not clear enough, leading to researchers exceeding the scopes (and budgets) intended. Many researchers did not contact the EO or fisheries managers as suggested. If they had done so, this would have reduced the risk of overshooting the intended project scopes. It was agreed that future scopes should be clearer and researchers more strongly directed to work with fisheries managers and the executive officer to get better alignment between research calls and responding proposals. The committee discussed whether it would be possible and appropriate to get estimates from a researcher when putting together scopes or whether this would be considered providing an unfair advantage to these researchers. A scientific member also noted that it can be difficult to estimate costs for a project before they actually spend time costing and drafting a whole proposal. Meaning even if an estimate was made by a scientist, it may still be well off the final figure once they draft a whole proposal.

Researchers also discussed the difficulties of writing these scopes over the Christmas period. The EO noted that generally the scopes would be sent out a month earlier but the TSSAC meeting intended for November 2018 had to be deferred until December last year.

The committee agreed the scopes should be made clearer in future and greater encouragement given to researchers to more closely collaborate with the TSSAC EO, AFMA fisheries managers or TSSAC scientific members.

ACTION: TSSAC Executive Officer and Chair to ensure scopes are as clear and specific as possible in future rounds, and that applicants be strongly encouraged to work with the TSSAC EO, AFMA fisheries managers or TSSAC scientific members when formulating proposals.

The committee also acknowledged the difficulties with the size of the budget and the fact that the TRL project takes most of the budget every year, leaving little for research on other fisheries. AFMA are wanting to discuss cost recovery within this fishery given the value of the catch, however there is currently no cost recovery policy for the fishery. TVH fishers have indicated they would be happy to contribute to research but no progress has been made to date. Industry contributions towards TRL research would help free up funds for research on other fisheries, given the limitations imposed by the current \$411 000 budget, and the remoteness and complexity of Torres Strait fisheries. The AFMA research manager suggested an approach to the Australian Research Council to see whether they may provide funding for any of the research projects being discussed. The committee also noted that the costs of research increase each year in accordance with CPI, however there has been a decrease in the budget from \$510 000 in 2014/15 to the current level.

ACTION: AFMA to provide a summary paper on the prospects for, and progress with, cost recovery for appropriate Torres Strait fisheries.

ACTION: TSSAC chair to write letter to AFMA regarding an appeal for additional research funding, noting past levels, increased research costs and decreases in the budget.

Tropical Rock Lobster surveys

The TSSAC noted the comments received from the TRLRAG, WG and TSSAC relating to the projects, including questions relating to the increased budget and a request for more budget detail in the full proposal. The committee discussed the three-year time period requested for the contract, given the TRL harvest strategy may come in and require changes to the projects. They agreed the three years should be contracted if the project is supported, because the milestones or time period can be changed at any time under the contracts. There is a risk the harvest strategy wouldn't happen in the three-year period in which case there would be a need to go through the process to extend the project or seek a new project which would be more complex. Under the harvest strategy the costs of TRL surveys have been estimated to reduce to around \$240,000 or \$250,000. The committee agreed that the

major comments received from members on the pre-proposals should be included as feedback in the letters. These included:

- A more detailed budget breakdown against the different components of the project and milestones for each year. e.g. data analysis, survey, stock assessment versus empirical harvest control rule, ancillary activities (e.g. development of a tiered Harvest Strategy, RAG Data Sub-Group, stakeholder workshops). Also provide a more detailed description of survey costs, in particular diver costs.
- Confirm the number of sites to be included in the survey.
- Ask what could be changed in the project to bring the budget back to \$290 000.
- Ask about the information workshops facilitated by CSIRO in past years, working on enhancing Traditional Inhabitant fishers' scientific knowledge, and whether these are included in the budget or not.
- Provide more detail and examples of how they will manage traditional knowledge, respect traditional culture and work with communities, rather than just referring to past experience in this area.

The committee also discussed the possibility of various options that may reduce costs in the long term, including potentially partnering with the boat license holders to have in-kind supply of vessels for the survey.

Complimenting the surveys with industry-led surveys or traditional fisher data. Any proposals around this initiative would need to be explored by the RAG and likely occur in future years. It was acknowledged that researchers and AFMA have sought multiple cost reduction alternatives previously, but none had been workable. AFMA agreed that this issue should be progressed by AFMA following the meeting, rather than researchers.

ACTION: AFMA to consider whether industry may be able to provide in kind supply of boats for the surveys.

ACTION: AFMA to consider whether industry-led surveys or traditional fisher data could be used to compliment the fishery independent surveys.

Scoping for Spanish mackerel stock assessment – Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee.

The main discussion point regarding the stock assessment project was the synergies with the biological data inputs project. Noting that the current stock assessment is primarily driven by CPUE, the committee was uncertain as to the benefit of updating the current stock assessment without the inclusion of additional information on other indicators of stock status such as catch at length, sex ratio and catch at age. Having this data would provide a more robust stock assessment result. The committee agreed to seek further advice from the FFRAG as to whether the stock assessment should wait until the additional biological data is available.

The committee agreed a full proposal should still be sought from the applicant, however the letter should note the potential issues with the delivery of the related biological data collection project and that additional advice was being sought from FFRAG. The committee also noted that the proposal discussed biological data, however did not specify where that data would come from and if it was included in the project budget. This would also need to be clarified in the full proposal.

The committee noted that this project is very important to the traditional sector, as they want to ensure the stock is not declining, and to ensure that traditional fishers are able to catch the maximum sustainable yield of fish. It was agreed that the researcher/ TSSAC could look for other funding options given the importance of the project and the inability to provide funding through the TSSAC budget.

Enhancing biological data inputs to Torres Strait Spanish mackerel stock assessment

The committee agreed that the budget for this project has come out well above that estimated by the TSSAC, and the project has also vastly overshot the intended scope. This may have been a result of inadequate detail in the scope about the level of collection being sought.

Noting the comments above regarding the alignment of this project and the Spanish mackerel stock assessment, the committee agreed that the TSSAC should seek a full proposal with a greatly reduced budget of around \$30 000, noting additional funding may be able to be sourced following the meeting. They also recommended that the following be addressed in the full proposal:

- Specify how many otoliths they can collect and analyse within this budget.
- Consider supply chains, community freezers, and wholesalers in Cairns to find options for more cost effective supply of samples and 'in kind' shipping of samples within existing product movement.
- Note that the key deliverable desired from the project is to obtain age and length data; extensive consultation and reporting should not be included and was not envisaged under the project scope.
- Note that the TSSAC is seeking additional advice on this project from the FFRAG in mid-March, and will provide any useful details to the applicant after the meeting.

Torres Strait Sea Cucumber Stock Status Survey

The TSSAC discussed the project budget, noting the TSRA are still willing to contribute funding as the survey is a high priority project, with reports of key species being at low abundance on the fishing grounds. It is a higher cost than they initially budgeted so they will need further budget breakdowns to understand how the costs are related to the different surveys. TSRA would like the project to occur as soon as possible, and requested further information regarding the suggested survey times, and other timing options to allow the project to happen more quickly.

The committee noted that the researcher had not mentioned the existing seabed data discussed in the scope, and it would like further information on that in the full proposal. There is also a need to be realistic about the costs of the deepwater surveys. If they are not costed in the current budget, it could be a significant addition to existing costs.

The committee agreed that the project should go to full proposal with the following requests:

- Provide a more detailed budget breakdown, including separate costings associated with the eastern survey, the sandfish survey, and clarity over the initial deepwater white teatfish survey work that was outlined in the pre-proposal. Breakdowns should also include details of operational costs and the cost of salaries and travel;
- TSSAC members have advised there are previous CSIRO seabed surveys in the Torres Strait that include holothurians, potentially including deepwater blackfish. The full proposal should clarify if project investigators would be able to analyse these data and assess their usefulness in contributing to knowledge of wider deep-water species distributions and abundances for this project, including the associated budget. This can be done alongside initial white teatfish surveys;
- Clarify the reasons for the suggested survey times, and whether there are options, and what these are. In particular, options that may allow the project to happen more quickly.

Management Strategy Evaluation for the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery

The TSSAC discussed the prawn MSE proposal, noting there were no additional comments to the ones submitted by researcher members. These were to elaborate on the data management procedures that will be used and to clarify the details of what will be included in the final report (e.g. will the report provide a list of possible season dates and the effect on CPUE). The committee also noted that even though this project was a lower priority than many others, the budget (\$2,500) was so small that it should be able to be included regardless.

Management Strategy Evaluation for Torres Strait Finfish Harvest Strategy

The committee noted the importance of testing the finfish harvest strategy at some point, however there is a need to find methodology that would be more cost effective and thus more in alignment with the value of the fishery. Given other current research priorities, the committee agreed that this project should be postponed until the harvest strategy has been developed. At this time, a new project scope can be developed, seeking a more cost effective mechanism of assessment.

Measuring non-commercial fishing (indigenous subsistence fishing and recreational fishing) in the Torres Strait in order to improve fisheries management and promote sustainable livelihoods

The TSSAC discussed the need for this project to have a strong focus on the lessons learned from the finfish traditional take project, which could not be completed due to logistical challenges. There were some concerns that there may be a repeat of the same mistakes resulting in another unsuccessful project. The Committee also noted the pre-proposal did not fully address the scope, seemingly targeting finfish on a small number of communities and not non-commercial take more generally across the Torres Strait. One scientific member raised concerns regarding the lack of in kind contribution, and no gender balance with the investigators. The Committee noted that several projects have no in kind contribution, and there is no requirement for gender balance of investigators on projects. The committee agreed that given the potential risks with the project's success, it may be useful to fund it in two phases. Phase one, developing a process for data collection of non-commercial catches for all regions of the Torres Strait for Mackerel, Coral Trout and Tropical Rock Lobster. Following stage 1, the TSSAC will consider whether the methodology proposed is robust, and worth piloting through stage two.

The committee agreed the project should move to full proposal, however suggested the following points be addressed (in addition to the phasing discussed above):

- Clarify the species they will be addressing in the full proposal (i.e. the TSSACs intention was for this project to look at non-commercial catch of Spanish mackerel, coral trout, and TRL only).
- Inclusion of more information on development of a data management plan in phase 1.
- Provide links to other data sources/existing projects relating to the non-commercial fishing of Mackerel, Coral Trout and TRL.
- Accepted subsistence survey methods normally focus on assessment covering a 12-month period to estimate annual and seasonal variations. The proposal should outline how the proposed survey method would allow for such variations.
- Consider if and how the project could address recreational catches, noting the budget is limited. It is possible this would need to occur in another project later on.

There was also discussion around possible ways to enhance social science input into the project. Natasha Stacey agreed to put together some suggestions for the letter and send these to the executive officer out of session. The committee also acknowledged it would be useful for the researchers to work closely with the scientific members of the TSSAC to ensure the full proposal meets our intended mark.

Climate variability and change relevant to key fisheries resources in the Torres Strait

The committee discussed the large discrepancy in the predicted budget and that suggested by the researchers. The project appears to be overshooting the intended scope by including the scoping of building individual fishery climate change models in the future, and by the inclusion of community consultation seeking Torres Strait community views on what they think may be effecting climate change. This is a useful step, which would be needed in future projects where the outputs of this project can be used for fishery specific climate change modelling. However, this work is not required for this project.

The committee agreed that the project should go to full proposal. Dr Pitcher agreed to work with the researchers to better clarify the intention of the project and what is needed for the full proposal to avoid a recurrence of 'scope creep'

The committee discussed the possibility of reaching out to other researchers for proposals, however agreed that it would be better to contact the existing project teams asking for new proposals with a reduced scope and budget.

TRL Peer Review

The committee noted that the TRL survey and stock assessment peer review project was still being progressed and wouldn't be ready for this funding round. The RAG are working on the terms of reference, however, they have not been finalised.

Discussions about project funding priorities

The committee spent some time discussing the priorities and assessing how the committee could fund the maximum number of projects but still achieve the intended outcomes, by reviewing and reducing budgets and tasks.

The committee agreed that TRL continues to be the highest priority as it brings the greatest income to the traditional sector. They also discussed the possibility of industry providing in-kind vessels for use during the surveys, however there are risks around this. This is something AFMA can look into as an option.

The committee also noted that the non-commercial take and climate change projects were important across all fisheries, however one traditional inhabitant member felt the finfish biological data and was more important, given their view of the significance of the ongoing reductions in TAC due to uncertainty in the fishery and ensuring the fishery is sustainable and they can fully utilise. . Consequently, the committee agreed that full proposals should be sought for all projects, except the finfish harvest strategy MSE. Further, three projects (the TRL surveys, finfish biologicals and climate change) have suggested budget reductions. The climate change and finfish biologicals projects had overshoot the intended scopes, and TRL project takes up most of the TSSAC budget, so the committee agreed we should try to keep the budget down. Some of the other projects have also asked for budget clarifications, which it was hoped will lead to reduced budgets.

Details regarding the suggest budgets can be can be found in [Attachment 1](#). The last two columns of Attachment 1 indicate the budgets the TSSAC have agreed to put forward to the researchers for full proposals.

ACTION: TSSAC executive officer to write letters to researchers seeking full proposals and detailing the changes required.

5 Other Business

The TSSAC agreed to amend the ranking system for the selection criteria for the full proposals from numbering to a three category ranking of “does not meet”, “meets” or “exceeds”. The number system is very subjective and hard to summarise and assess. Trialling the new system will still allow the committee to consider the important criteria, and simply whether they have been addressed or not.

ACTION: TSSAC executive officer to send around new assessment proposal form with the full proposals during assessment time.

Action number	Action item	Responsible person
72.1	TSSAC Executive Officer and Chair to ensure scopes are as clear and specific as possible in future rounds, and that applicants be strongly encouraged to work with the TSSAC EO, AFMA fisheries managers or TSSAC scientific members when formulating proposals.	TSSAC EO and Chair
72.2	AFMA to provide a summary paper on the prospects for, and progress with, cost recovery for appropriate Torres Strait fisheries.	AFMA

72.3	TSSAC chair to write letter to AFMA regarding an appeal for additional research funding, noting past levels, increased research costs and decreases in the budget.	
72.4	AFMA to consider whether traditional inhabitant boat licence holders may be able to provide in kind supply of boats for the TRL surveys.	AFMA
72.5	AFMA to consider whether industry-led surveys or traditional fisher data could be used to compliment the fishery independent TRL surveys.	AFMA
72.6	TSSAC executive officer to write letters to researchers seeking full proposals and detailing the changes required.	TSSAC EO
72.7	TSSAC executive officer to send around new assessment proposal form with the full proposals during assessment time.	TSSAC EO