

Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee Meeting 74

DRAFT Meeting Record

25 November 2019

Teleconference

Note all meeting papers and records are available
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Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Meeting participants

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Mr Ian Cartwright	Chair	Fisheries consultant. Member of QLD sustainable fisheries expert panel.
Ms Selina Stoute	AFMA Representative	Manager Torres Strait Fisheries, AFMA. Staff member who is a co-investigator on two current projects.
Ms. Lisa Cocking	Executive Officer (AFMA)	No conflict declared.
Dr Roland Pitcher	Scientific Member	Fisheries Scientist, CSIRO. No current conflicts of interest as not a part of any Torres Strait related projects. Some CSIRO staff are carrying out current TSSAC projects in same office. Assisting with the BDM stock survey in some capacity but is not a PI or CI. No conflict declared.
Dr Dirk Welsford	Scientific Member	Research scientist at AAD in Department of Environment. Sub-Antarctic resource assessment group. Working on AFMA southern Indian ocean project (AFMA funded). Also elected the chair of scientific committee of CAMLR. No conflict declared.
Dr Steve Newman	Scientific Member	Fisheries Scientist at Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (WA). Science and Resource Assessment Group. No conflict declared.
Ms Natasha Stacey	Scientific Member	Researcher at Charles Darwin University. On FRDC NT Research Advisory Forum. No Torres Strait related projects. No conflict declared.
Ms Allison Runck	TSRA Member	Project manager fisheries, TSRA. Co-investigator of Spanish mackerel biologicals project. TSRA hold licences for the traditional inhabitant sector. No conflict declared.
Mr Rocky Stephen	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member	Kemer Kemer Meriam member. TSIRC Councillor for Ugar. President of Kos and Abob Ugar fishers association. Finfish working group member and Finfish RAG member. Partnership in fisheries business. No conflict declared.
Mr Gavin Mosby	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member	TSPMAC traditional inhabitant member. TIB fisher. Masig fishers association member. No conflict declared.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Michelle Winning	QLD member	Fisheries QLD staff are working on the TSSAC funded project (enhancing biological data inputs to the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel stock assessment), however Michelle is not working directly on this project. No conflict declared.

TSSAC meeting 74 recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 74.1: The TSSAC **RECOMMENDED** that the Spanish mackerel biological data project be released through the call for research with the following amendments to the scope:

- Ask applicants to provide a budget for the collection of Spanish mackerel data, and the additional cost if coral trout data was also collected simultaneously.
- Ask the applicant to address the benefits of ongoing time series data for the stock assessment.

RECOMMENDATION 74.2: The TSSAC **RECOMMENDED** that the coral trout CPUE standardisation project be released through the call for research.

RECOMMENDATION 74.3: The TSSAC **RECOMMENDED** that the curryfish conversation ratio project be released through the call for research, subject to minor editorial amendments.

RECOMMENDATION 74.4: The TSSAC **RECOMMENDED** that the next face to face meeting be held in June 2020, to discuss strategic issues as well as the full proposals for research.

1 Meeting Administration

1.1 *Preliminaries - acknowledgement of Traditional Owners/Chair's opening remarks/meeting attendees/declaration of interests/apologies*

The Chair opened the meeting at 115pm Australian Eastern Standard Time and welcomed members. Mr Stephen offered an opening prayer.

The committee discussed declarations of interest from members and noted the following changes to the current declaration of interest table:

- Selina Stoute - one AFMA staff member she manages is a co-investigator on two TSSAC projects that are currently funded.

- Michelle Winning (QLD member) - Queensland Fisheries currently have a contract with AFMA undertaking a research project for “*enhancing biological data inputs to the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel stock assessment*”. She is not directly involved.
- Mr Stephen (traditional inhabitant member) – is assisting to improve community buy-on with the current Spanish mackerel biological data collection project. He received funding to attend one community meeting however isn’t receiving any other financial benefit from the project.
- Mr Welsford (scientific member) - currently working on an AFMA funded southern Indian Ocean project and has also been elected the chair of scientific committee of CAMLR. He doesn’t see any conflicts of interest with this meeting.

The TSSAC agreed there were no issues with conflicts of interest from members for this meeting agenda.

2 Research Priorities

The TSSAC discussed the research priorities for the 2020-21 season across all fisheries. The following main discussion points were raised:

- Around \$45,732 is available from AFMA for tactical research in 2020-21, and \$120,176 is available from AFMA in 2021-22 as \$356,268 and \$290,824 is already committed to ongoing research projects for these financial years.
- Although this is the usual amount of funding received from AFMA, if the TSSAC identify other priorities beyond funding that they think are important, these can still be put out for scope, noting additional funding may be available from AFMA, TSRA or FRDC.
- AFMA have identified three tactical research projects based on RAG and working group advice, as well as an ERA project which may require up to \$20 000 funding for a finfish ERA. The ERA is an AFMA commitment across all Commonwealth Fisheries and is a common requirement of Wildlife Trade Operation approval for fisheries (an approval needed to export). It is possible that the project (and associated funding) could be moved or delayed, based on TSSAC advice.
- The committee noted the ongoing large investment of research funds to the TRL fishery which uses around \$290 000 a year in funding and consequently substantially reduces the possible spend on other fisheries.
- They discussed the need to ensure we still have enough funding for other fishery projects, and noted advice from a Traditional Inhabitant member that the BDM and Finfish fisheries are particularly important to traditional inhabitants for both commercial and cultural reasons. Access to those fisheries are 100% owned by Traditional Inhabitants.
- The committee noted that ensuring funding for other fisheries doesn’t necessarily mean taking away funding from TRL, but increasing the pool of funding available for the Torres Strait as needed (from other agencies like FRDC). This happened in the current financial year, where several important

projects for the BDM (fisheries independent visual survey) and finfish fisheries (stock assessment and biologicals project) were funded thanks to additional funding from the TSRA.

- It was also noted that research funding for Torres Strait fisheries had declined in recent years. If the SAC is of the view that funding is inadequate to meet priority research need, then a strong case need to be made concerning the nature of those needs, and the likely benefits of additional research investment.

The committee went on to discuss the three project scopes which are recommended for the call for research.

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Spanish Mackerel Biological Sampling

- The committee noted that the ongoing collection of Spanish mackerel data could be useful for creating a time series for the stock assessment. This was considered a priority by the finfish RAG.
- The committee agreed however to seek further clarification on the rationale and therefore merit for investing further in the sampling program prior to reviewing the outcomes of the current project. Members noted that the proposal for the current project did not indicate the need for a time series.
- The QLD member noted that the estimated budget may be too small for the intended project outcomes. This is based on the expenditure in the current project. The committee noted that the estimated cost for the project was based on the current biologicals projects milestones that match the proposed outcomes of this project. This future project would not require as much time as the training etc has already been undertaken and relationships built.
- Scientific members considered that the project is good value for money, and anticipated the notional budget to be sufficient. Other states collect around 500 fish per management area to build length-age frequency relationship data, which this budget should cover.
- The committee noted that continuing the project in the 2020-21 financial year would likely result in overall cost savings as well as maintaining the community support and participation in the project which is essential for success.
- The committee discussed the potential economies of scale and savings that may be possible if the project was also to collect Coral Trout data. They agreed the scope should request budgets for Spanish Mackerel alone (the priority species) and if Coral Trout was also added.

RECOMMENDATION: The TSSAC recommended that the Spanish mackerel biological data project be released through the call for research with the following amendments to the scope:

- Ask applicants to provide a budget for Spanish mackerel alone, and if coral trout data was also collected.
- Ask the applicant to address the benefits of ongoing time series data for the stock assessment.

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Coral Trout Catch Per Unit Effort Standardisation

The TSSAC noted that the proposed CPUE standardisation is a relatively small body of work, and budget, and the standardisation is related to common variables such as spatial and temporal factors and gear variations.

The committee agreed to seek additional information on the standardisation methods from applicants including the areas identified for further refinement to support the SACs assessment of any proposal received against this scope.

RECOMMENDATION: The TSSAC recommended that the coral trout CPUE standardisation project be released through the call for research.

ACTION: Circulate draft stock assessment to TSSAC for information.

Determining weight conversion ratios for curryfish species *Stichopus herrmani* and *S. vastus*.

The committee noted that curryfish is an emerging target species in the BDM Fishery and the need to have conversion ratios clarified to replace current proxy factors. The committee noted some confusion around the wording in the scope “Total Allowable Catch (TAC) limits in the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery (BDM Fishery) are measured in wet weight gutted form.” The scope will be amended to clarify that catches against the TAC are monitored using wet weight gutted catches.

RECOMMENDATION 74.3: The TSSAC recommended that the curryfish conversation ratio project be released through the call for research, subject to minor editorial amendments.

The TSSAC noted that the four projects (three tactical and ERA) total around \$77,000, with around \$46,000 is currently available through AFMA funding. All projects were considered important, so the committee agreed all scopes should be released, noting we are unsure of the budgets that will be submitted with proposals, and we may be able to find additional funding for projects if all proposals are promising.

3 TSSAC work plan and meetings

The TSSAC noted that the TSSAC has 3 meetings a year, one to discuss research priorities (October/ November), one to discuss pre-proposals and stakeholder engagement plans (March), and the final to discuss full-proposals (May/June).

When a full budget is available, generally 2 face to face meetings have occurred for the first, and second or third meeting. However when a limited tactical call for research is occurring, often only 1 face to face meeting is held in interest of peoples time commitments and the high cost of face to face meetings.

The committee noted AFMA's recommendation to have only 1 face to face meeting in November, at which time the two scoping projects (climate change and non-commercial take project) will be complete and able to be discussed for future projects and funding. FRDC could be invited to this meeting to discuss funding opportunities and TSSAC work more broadly.

The committee agreed that, notwithstanding cost and as well as the time commitment by members, there would be value in a second face to face meeting in 2020, to held in June, to discuss more strategic research needs. This would ideally include FRDC attendance to the meeting so as it could gain a better understanding of the context of Torres Strait research and their opportunities for investment. Other strategic issues to discuss include assessing:

- the need to improve extension activities/methods to ensure outcomes are accessible to communities.
- options for seeking additional funding (e.g. FRDC).
- the current project evaluation process.
- The adequacy of current AFMA research funding, noting the need to clearly articulate needs, costs and benefits of any additional funding.

RECOMMENDATION 74.4: The TSSAC recommended that the next face to face meeting be held in June 2020, to discuss strategic issues as well as the full proposals for research.

The TSSAC chair closed the meeting at 250pm and a closing prayer was offered by Mr Stephen.