

Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group Meeting 34

Final Meeting Record

6 July 2023

Hybrid Videoconference/Thursday
Island

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



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Contents

Contents.....	2
Meeting participants	3
Members.....	3
Observers	4
1 Preliminaries	4
1.1 Welcome and apologies	4
1.2 Adoption of agenda	5
1.3 Declaration of interests	5
2 Updates from members	5
Industry and scientific members	5
Government agencies	6
Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority.....	6
Native Title	7
3 TRL Fishery Research Priorities	7
4 Other Business	8

Meeting participants

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Ian Knuckey*	Chair	In addition to the declaration of interests provided at Attachment A , the Chair also declared that he has been commissioned to design a fishery independent survey for the Commonwealth Coral Sea Sea Cucumber Fishery.
Andrew Penney*	Scientific member	<p>Director of Pisces Australis Pty Ltd, an Australian registered marine/coastal research and management consultancy based in Canberra - interests in any opportunities in this regard.</p> <p>Currently Principal Investigator on FRDC Projects Nos 2017-180: Design and implementation of an Australian National Bycatch Report: Phase 1 – Scoping; and 2019-036: Implementation of dynamic reference points and harvest strategies to account for environmentally-driven changes in productivity in Australian fisheries, potentially red leg banana prawns or TRL.</p> <p>Independent scientific member on the AFMA Southeast RAG, the Tropical Rock Lobster RAG and the Small Pelagic Fishery RAG. Member of the AFMA ERA Technical Working Group.</p> <p>No shareholding and hold no positions relating to any other companies, including any fishing companies or industry associations.</p>
Éva Plagányi*	Scientific member	<p>Lead scientist for PZJA funded TRL research projects conducted by CSIRO. Contribute to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including currently Shared science and Indigenous knowledge to support fisheries capacity building in Torres Strait. No other interests in the fishery.</p> <p>Independent scientific member of HCRAG and NPFRAG.</p>
Les Pitt [#]	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Kemer Kemer Meriam	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kemer Kemer Meriam, TIB licence holder and runs an independent freezer facility on Erub Island. Board member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries.
Charles David	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kulkalgal	Apology
Patrick Mooka [#]	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda Maluligal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda Maluligal. TIB licence holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries representative.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jermaine Reuben [#]	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Maluligal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Maluligal. TIB licence holder, GBK employee.
Thomas Fujii [#]	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalgal. Queensland East Coast TRL and TIB license holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Brett Arlidge	Industry Member	Apology
Ken McKenzie [#]	Industry Member	TVH license and quota holder. Queensland East Coast TRL license and quota holder.
Damian Miley	TSRA Member	Apology
Nicholas Richards [#]	Acting TSRA Member	TSRA Fisheries Project Manager, TSRA holds multiple TVH TRL fishing license on behalf of Torres Strait Communities but does not benefit from them. no personal pecuniary interest.
Jenny Keys	QDAF Member	Apology
Emma Freeman [#]	AFMA Member	Nil.
Elissa Mastroianni [#]	Executive Officer	Nil.

*Attended online via MS Teams

[#]Attended in person at TSRA

Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Joseph Posu [*]	PNG National Fisheries Authority	Works in the Fisheries Management Unit responsible for managing the prawn and lobster fisheries in the Western Province
Bonny Koke [*]	PNG National Fisheries Authority	Works in the Fisheries Management Unit responsible for managing the prawn and lobster fisheries in the Western Province
Brooke D'Alberotto [*]	ABARES	Nil

*Attended online via MS Teams

1 Preliminaries

1.1 Welcome and apologies

- The 34th meeting of the Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (the RAG) was opened in prayer at 9:08am on Tuesday 13 December 2022. The Chair welcomed participants and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the various lands on which members were participating from and paid respect to the elders past, present and emerging.
- Attendees at the RAG meeting are detailed in the meeting participant tables at the start of this meeting record. The following apologies were received:
 - Charles David, Kulkalgal Traditional Inhabitant member
 - Jenny Keys, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) member
 - Brett Arlidge. Industry member
 - Damian Miley, TSRA member. Nicholas Richards attended as acting TSRA member.

1.2 Adoption of agenda

3. The RAG considered draft agenda which was circulated to members on 28 June 2023.
4. The draft agenda was adopted by the RAG and is provided at **Attachment B**.

1.3 Declaration of interests

5. The Chair advised members and observers, that as provided in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1), all members of the RAG must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest in the Torres Strait TRL Fishery at the commencement of the meeting. Where it is determined that a direct conflict of interest exists, the Working Group may allow the member to continue to participate in the discussions relating to the matter but may also determine that, having made their contribution to the discussions, the member should retire from the meeting for the remainder of the discussions on that issue.
6. The Chair requested that members update the record of declarations. These are detailed in the meeting participant tables at the start of this meeting record.
7. The Chair noted the value in having the experience, knowledge and opinions of all members present during discussions. However, the Chair also noted the conflict for scientific members associated with determining research priorities under Agenda Item 3.
8. Scientific members were asked to leave the meeting. The Chair then proposed that the RAG agree for all members to participate in discussions across all agenda items, but ask that scientific members leave the meeting during the final research prioritisation.
9. There were no objections to the Chair's proposed approach. The scientific members returned to the meeting.

2 Updates from members

Industry and scientific members

10. The RAG noted verbal updates provided by industry members on the trends and observations in the TRL fishery during the 2022-23 season so far, in particular:
 - a) Operating costs, particularly fuel prices, remain high across the fishery and market prices have been low. Fuel prices have restricted fishers ability to access grounds. These factors continue to put economic pressure on the fishery, and fewer operators are fishing due to this reduced profitability.
 - b) Freight and transport logistics continue to be a challenge for the fishery.
 - c) Observations indicate there are not as many small lobsters as would be expected this time of year. The number of lobsters is average at best.
 - d) New and increasing sand incursions have also been observed across the Torres Strait.
11. The RAG noted verbal updates provided by scientific members, in particular:
 - a) The morphometric sampling project is well underway. This will provide further information on growth rates, which may be related to the reports of sand incursions and lobster food availability. CSIRO will provide an update at the December RAG meeting.
 - b) The 12th International Conference on Lobster Biology is being held in Western Australia in October, with Scientific Member Eva Plaganyi and Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda Maluligal Patrick Mooka presenting. The RAG congratulated these members on the opportunity to present at the conference.

- c) The annual pre-season survey is scheduled for 2-16 November.
- d) The CSIRO project on building resilience in supply chains is ongoing with a workshop still planned to be held in the Torres Strait.
- e) A project on dynamic reference points, which used TRL as a case study, is close to complete. Results indicate that although there is large variability in abundance in the TRL fishery due to environmental factors, there has been no clear shift towards overall higher or lower abundance. However, with the influence of climate change in the future good years are likely to be better and bad years likely to be worse.

Government agencies

12. An update from the AFMA member was provided which covered:

- a) Year on year catch comparison for the month of June indicate this season is tracking similarly to the past two years, with below average catches across the fishery overall.
- b) The PZJA will meet in person on Thursday island later in July. Discussions will include the TRL TIB quota allocation process. AFMA, TSRA and QDAF have developed Terms of Reference for a consultant to identify an appropriate framework for this process, which will be considered by the PZJA. AFMA and TSRA welcomed further discussion and feedback from members on this issue out of session.
- c) Preparation is underway for the upcoming Torres Strait Treaty Bilateral meetings between Australia and PNG which will held in PNG this year.
- d) The Bureau of Meteorology have provided advice that heatwave conditions are likely in the coming months, and advised government and industry may need to prepare for hotter than average temperatures.

13. The RAG also noted the following update provided by the TSRA member:

- a) A project on climate change impacts and mitigation with CSIRO has been included in the 2023-24 budget and is now progressing through the TSRA procurement process.
- b) The WAPIL (Fishing for our Future) project continues to progress. With a redesign completed TSRA are looking to have a project plan and budget developed implemented in September. The project continues to aim to improve fishing capacity and safety, access to finance and gear, cold storage and infrastructure.

Action Item 1.

TRLRAG EO to provide graphs and data for June year on year catches, and links to sea surface temperature maps.

Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority

14. The RAG noted the following updates from the PNG National Fisheries Authority representative:

- a) There has been some change in the PNG industry operating environment, with one company undergoing a restructure
- b) NFA are also preparing for the Torres Strait Treaty Bilateral meetings.
- c) NFA continue to try and improve logbook data collection and data sharing with Australia.
- d) The MSC accreditation process for the PNG TRL fishery is ongoing, as is the TRL fishery review which is in its final stages.

- e) Similar market, pricing and export problems to those in Australia are also being experienced in the PNG TRL fishery.
- 15. The Chair noted that unfavourable market factors are also present in the southern rock lobster fishery, as well as the Torres Strait and PNG TRL fisheries, indicating widespread price and logistical issues beyond just the Torres Strait.

Native Title

- 16. The RAG noted that there is a standing invitation extended to Malu Lamar to attend the RAG, but it was not taken up for this meeting and no written update was provided.

3 TRL Fishery Research Priorities

- 17. The RAG discussed the research priorities and need identified or discussed at previous TRLRAG and TRLWG meetings to provide advice on the research priorities for the 2024/25 – 2029/30 five-year period.
- 18. The RAG noted there are several projects already underway or scheduled for funding which will address some of the identified research priorities. Although these will not require funding consideration by the TSSAC the RAG agreed it would be good to have these included in the research plan. These include:
 - a) TSRA's WAPIL project which will contribute to **understanding fisher behaviour**
 - b) CSIRO's *Modelling climate change impacts on key fisheries resources in the Torres Strait to co-develop adaptation and mitigation strategies*, which is the final stages of funding confirmation through TSRA's procurement process which will contribute to **understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies**.
- 19. The RAG agreed that the significance of climate change across all Torres Strait fisheries, including TRL, warrants having it listed as its own priority. It was suggested it be separated out from understanding connectivity and placed as a higher priority.
- 20. The RAG recommended that:
 - a) The highest 'essential' priority for the fishery remains the need to undertake **fishery independent surveys, stock assessment, harvest control and Recommended Biological Catch (RBC)** work.
 - a) Undertaking an update to the 2007 **Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)** for the TRL Fishery remains an essential priority. Assessment by CSIRO this financial year is dependent on prioritisation against other high priority fisheries. Funding can be sourced from the AFMA TRL Fishery budget (~\$20,400).
 - b) **Improvement of data collection** (to be pursued by the TRL RAG data sub-group) remains an essential priority.
 - c) **Impact and mitigation of climate change effects in Torres Strait fisheries** should be an essential priority, noting the CSIRO project on this will benefit all Torres Strait fisheries, including TRL.
 - d) **Understanding fisher behaviour**, including capturing information on the impacts of COVID-19 on things like effort levels, spatial effort distribution and economically driven changes in behaviour in the fishery, remain essential priorities.
 - e) **Understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies** can now be prioritised as desirable rather than essential, as climate change has been separately identified as a priority and is higher than understanding connectivity implications between jurisdictions.
 - f) As per previous RAG advice **understanding changes to fishing power** remains desirable.

g) As per previous RAG advice the **science peer review** remains desirable.

21. An industry member suggested checking presence of tar spots during morphometric sampling. The RAG agreed that how this, and other suggestions, could fit into current sampling and survey projects could be discussed in greater detail out of session.

Action Item 2.

TRLRAG EO to update the research priorities table and 2023/25 – 2029/30 TRL Research Plan and provide to members and the TSSAC EO.

4 Other Business

22. The RAG discussed the possibility of higher than average water temperatures which are forecast for the coming summer at the start of the next season. Impacts on the fishery could include impacts on spawning and higher mortality with stocking or holding of lobsters. This will be important to discuss at the December meeting.
23. The Chair highlighted that with catches and economic factors looking similar as previous years the RAG may face similar challenges in applying the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR) when setting an RBC for the next season.
24. The independent scientist reiterated an earlier suggestion that the eHCR be amended to use the TAC as the default. Another scientific member informed the RAG this was being looked into, and although the answer may not simply be to use the TAC, they hope to have more information to present and discuss in December.
25. PNG NFA reiterated they remain supportive of further research on TRL in PNG waters, including the possibility of extending the survey. The RAG noted there are some difficulties in practically achieving this, such as costs and the logistics of dual jurisdiction permits and operations.
26. The 34th TRLRAG meeting was closed at 1146 on Thursday the 6th of July 2023.

Declaration of interests

Dr Ian Knuckey – October 2022

Ian Knuckey positions:

Director –	Fishwell Consulting Pty Ltd
Director –	Olrac Australia (Electronic logbooks)
Chair –	Northern Prawn Fishery Resource Assessment Group
Chair –	Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group
Chair –	Victorian Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Assessment Group
Chair – Group	Victorian Central Zone Abalone Fisheries Resource Advisory
Chair – Committee	Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery MAC Research Scientific
Scientific Member –	Northern Prawn Management Advisory Committee
Scientific Member – Committee	Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery Management Advisory
Scientific Member –	Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group
Scientific Member –	SESSF Resource Assessment Group
Councillor –	Victorian Marine and Coastal Council
Member –	The Geelong Agri Collective

Fishwell current projects:

DAWE Project	Multi-sector fisheries capacity building
AFMA 2022-	Annual monitoring, reporting and assessment of SPF marine mammal interactions, including effectiveness of mitigation measures
AFMA 2020-0807	Bass Strait Scallop Fishery Survey – 2020-22
AFMA project	Design sea cucumber fishery-independent survey for Coral Sea
FRDC 2019-027	Improving and promoting fish-trawl selectivity in the SESSF and GABTS
FRDC 2018-021	Development and evaluation of SESSF multi-species harvest strategies
Traffic Project	Shark Product Traceability
Sea Cucumber Ass.	Design and implementation of various sea cucumber dive surveys.
Australia Bay	Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Developmental Fin Fish Trawl Fishery
Expert Witness	Gladstone Harbour development impacts

**TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP 34
(TRLRAG 34)**

Thursday 6 July 2023 | 9am – 11am

Video Conference

DRAFT AGENDA

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair will welcome members and observers to the 34th meeting of the RAG.

1.2 Adoption of agenda

The RAG will be invited to adopt the draft agenda.

1.3 Declaration of interests

Members and observers will be invited to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest and determine whether a member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.

2 UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

Industry, scientific and government agency members and observers will be invited to provide verbal updates on matters concerning the TRL Fishery.

3 TRL FISHERY RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The RAG will discuss and provide advice on research priorities for the 2024/25 – 2029/30 five-year period.

4 OTHER BUSINESS

The RAG will be invited to raise any other matters for consideration.

The Chair must approve the attendance of all observers at the meeting. Individuals wishing to join the meeting as an observer must contact the Executive Officer – Elissa Mastroianni (elissa.mastroianni@afma.gov.au)