

Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group Meeting 17

FINAL Meeting Record

12 December 2024

Thursday Island

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



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting participants

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interests
John Glaister	Chair	Member of Parks North, Chair of the Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC).
Laura Blamey	Scientific Member	Employed by CSIRO. Contributes to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including the 'Modelling climate change impacts on fisheries in Torres Strait' project (project lead). No other interests in the fishery.
Sevaly Sen	Independent Fisheries Economist	Nil pecuniary interests in Torres Strait fisheries. Conducts various FRDC research projects relevant to AFMA fisheries; Advisor to Sydney Fish Market; AFMA Commissioner; member on the New South Wales Rock Lobster Harvest Strategy Working Group.
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	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kulkalgal, TSRA Fisheries Advisory Committee and Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Patrick Mooka	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda maluigal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda maluigal. Zenadth Kes Fisheries representative. TSRA Board member.
Thomas Fujii	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalagal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalagal. Queensland East Coast TRL and TIB license holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Mark Dean	Industry Member	TVH operator
Trent Butcher	Industry Member	TVH licence holder
Peter Frazis	Industry Member	Employee of MG Kailis Pty Ltd. MG Kailis Pty Ltd is a holder of 5 TVH license. Seafood buyer from Torres Strait, QLD, and PNG TRL fisheries.
Steven Harris	AFMA Member	Nil.
Jenny Keys	QDAF Member	Nil.

Name	Position	Declaration of interests
Damian Miley	TSRA Member	TSRA Program Manager Fisheries. TSRA hold TRL licences on behalf of Torres Strait Islanders.
Georgia Langdon	Executive Officer	Nil.

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
Yen Loban	TSRA Board Member and TSRA Portfolio Member for Fisheries	TSRA Board member and TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member. Chair of Zenadth Kes Fisheries
Ian Knuckey	TRLRAG Chair	Full declaration of interests provided at Attachment A .
Brooke D'Alberto	ABARES	Nil.
Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA	TSRA employee, TIB license holder with a TRL endorsement.
Maluwap Nona	TIB fisher	Not declared
James Ahmat	Former TIB fisher	Not declared
Daniel Corrie	AFMA	Nil interests.
Graham Hirakawa	TIB fisher	Not declared
Daniel Takai	ZK Fisheries	CEO of Zenadth Kes Fisheries.
Eva Plagányi	CSIRO	TRLRAG & HCRAG scientific member. Employed by CSIRO and leads the Torres Strait research portfolio, including the project lead of the TRL research. No other interests in the fishery.

1 Preliminaries

Welcome and apologies

1. The 17th meeting of the Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group (TRLWG 17) was held on Thursday Island on Thursday 12 December 2024 and opened in prayer at 9am. The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the Kaurareg People and paid respect to Elders past, present and emerging.
2. Attendees at the Working Group meeting are detailed in participants tables above. An apology was received from Traditional Inhabitant member for Maluygal, Jermaine Reuben.

Declarations of interest

3. The Chair advised members and observers of their PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1) conflict of interest obligations and requested that members update the record of declarations. These are detailed in the meeting participant tables at the start of this record.
4. All industry members and observers left the meeting temporarily while remaining members discussed their declared conflicts and subsequent involvement in the WG discussions. It was agreed that all industry members could participate in the discussions of the meeting and final TAC advice.
5. Scientific and economic members and observers then left the meeting temporarily while remaining members discussed their declared conflicts and subsequent involvement in the WG discussions. They agreed that scientific and economic members and observers could participate in all discussions and recommendations for this meeting.

Adoption of agenda

6. The draft agenda was adopted without change (**Attachment B**).

Actions arising

7. AFMA provided an overview on the status of actions arising from previous meetings (refer to Agenda paper 1), in particular:
 - a) The traditional inhabitant member for Kulkalgal sought further clarification on Action Items 3 and 6 relating to Torres Strait Islander participation on the Queensland Cape York Special Fisheries Working Group meetings and expressed frustration that process of the action items is moving too slow.

2 Updates from members

8. The WG noted verbal updates provided by traditional inhabitant members, industry members and observers regarding the performance of the Torres Strait TRL Fishery during the 2023-24 fishing season and the start of the 2024-25 season, in particular:
 - a) There had been little activity in the Kulkalgal region due to the lag effects of COVID-19, high cost of operations and maintenance for the TIB sector. Although some support had been received through the TSRA WAPIL project, the industry has still

been struggling. It is expected that the 204-25 catch for TIB will be similar to previous seasons because there is no infrastructure to support the industry.

- b) An industry member explained that 2024 was the poorest season in the history of the Fishery as all sectors of the supply chain had been under immense stress. The five-year trade ban of Australia into China had been exacerbated by the additional *Panulirus ornatus* global ban which caused a series of markets to collapse. Pricing in 2024 peaked on 4 February one week before Chinese New Year and then fell consistently for three weeks afterwards, not improving until mid-September. Some fishers have left the industry after 30 years. It is estimated that MG Kailis purchased around 80 percent of all TIB catch in 2024.
- c) The outlook for 2025 was indicating a good abundance of lobsters. Markets had been average in December 2024 however Australian lobster is still not likely to be allowed in to China. The Chinese economy has not been strong which has flow on effects across the entire global lobster market.
- d) Discussions are ongoing at all levels of government in relation to the Australian lobster ban, with significant input from CSIRO and the private sector through the Australian Lobster Working Group.
- e) The frozen market prices were down around \$10/kg and sea freight costs have increased up to \$4/kg. This is also impacting other frozen Australian markets like prawns and slipper lobster.
- f) Cost continues to be a big factor in fishing for the fishers in Guda maluylgal region. There had been some effort early on in 2023-24 after which it dropped off for the similar reasons mentioned above.

9. Scientific and economic members and observers provided the following brief updates:

- a) CSIRO had been involved in discussions with the Australian Lobster Working Group by providing scientific information to support that the TRL fishery is well managed. This has included submitting scientific articles to counter some information in published literature stating that *P. ornatus* is endangered. This is not the case for Australian stocks.
- b) Scientific member for TRL RAG and WG observer also advised the WG members of CSIROs position to withdraw from scientific research in the TRL Fishery. Reasons included reduced capacity for undertaking remote field work, staff departures and removal of equipment that have not been replaced, further impacted by broader financial constraints. CSIRO will continue to have an ongoing commitment to research in the Torres Strait and to address issues related to climate change, the ecosystem and broader genetics work. CSIRO are very proud of their long involvement in fisheries research and the impact it has had in supporting sustainable management of the TRL Fishery.
- c) Some of the TRL, Torres Strait and more broadly Northern Australia Climate Change work has been presented at the recent Australian Marine Sciences Association (AMSA) conference in September and at the Australian Society for Fish Biology in Newcastle in November.

- d) As part of the Torres Strait Climate Change project, the two data moorings that were deployed in the region for 12 months in total were changed over after 6 months in November. Both moorings were successfully retrieved and replaced, with both expected to be removed at the end of May/start of June 2025. The second meeting of the project steering committee is meeting tomorrow (Friday 13 December).
 - e) The Economics member noted that generally, the Australian seafood industry is under a lot of economic pressure from external drivers which is causing people to leave the industry.
10. The AFMA member noted that the latest Australian Bureau of Agricultural Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) Fishery Status Reports (2024) had been released, and the status of TRL remained not subject to overfishing and not overfished. AFMA had also commenced some work to review FMP1.
 11. AFMA's Senior Manager for the National Compliance Strategy also provided an update per **Attachment 2b** of the meeting papers. AFMA acknowledged that a key driver for extra funding and resources was to address increase IUU activity right across the top of northern Australia, not just the Torres Strait region.
 12. Members suggested that the extra funding should be targeted along the border with PNG, noting that at present, available assets and funding is being used to target Warrior Reef and Western Torres Strait. AFMA encouraged members to provide their views about the best timings and mechanism to incorporate that into planning.
 13. An industry member agreed it would be useful to come together as industry to provide advice. He believed the level of IUU fishing is encroaching further and has personally noticed an increase, particularly at night time. He raised concerns about how Warrior Reef could sustain that level of activity, across the whole ecosystem, not just the TRL fishery.
 14. The TSRA member advised that TSRA through their Land and Sea Management Unit are progressing the crown of thorns starfish eradication project in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) reef health work. The TSRA had board agreed to a multi-million-dollar project with the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) and AIMS to expand the TS Cots work to compliment the GBR.
 15. TSRA had also recently engaged a consultant to engage with communities about the allocation of quota units to the traditional inhabitant sector of the TRL Fishery. After a two-month consultative period, a draft report is to be considered alongside the policy, legal, financial and social implications by PZJA Agency heads, and ultimately the PZJA. The suggested model indicates an entity would be the trustee of the quota, with a separate commercial trading arm.
 16. Zenadth Kes Fisheries CEO and observer to the WG noted that the formation of ZKF is an entity designed specifically for that purpose. Traditional inhabitant member for Kulkalgal also acknowledged that Malu Lamar RNTBC has also made claim to be the rightful entity to hold those assets.

3 Catch and Effort Analyses for the 2023-24 fishing season

17. This agenda item was for noting only and was not presented.

4 Overview of TRLRAG 38 outcomes and advice

18. The WG considered an overview of the TRLRAG 38 discussions on revising the empirical harvest control rule and its relevant data inputs (refer to TRLRAG 38 meeting record for further detail).

Revising the eHCR

19. Traditional inhabitant members unanimously expressed a firm preference for the Seahorse Rule, consistent with their previous position in support of the 'ad-hoc rule', expressed from TRLRAG 37 and during pre-RAG briefing meetings.
20. TVH industry members, Ken McKenzie and Brett Arlidge reaffirmed their initial preference for the Dolphin Rule but indicated that they would also accept the Turtle Rule. However, noting there wasn't a significant difference between the turtle and the Seahorse Rule, they supported the Seahorse Rule in order to reach consensus.
21. The independent scientific member Andrew Penney did not express a preference but reaffirmed that each of the rules are scientifically robust. Similarly, the CSIRO scientific member Eva Plagányi did not express a preference and supported either of the options.
22. The TSRA acknowledged their priority was ensuring a sound process, that traditional inhabitant members concerns were heard and expressed a preference for the Seahorse Rule in support of the traditional inhabitant members.
23. The QDAF member did not express a preference but supports the view of the traditional inhabitant members.
24. The AFMA member commended the group on arriving on a recommendation that aligns with the Harvest Strategy.
25. The National Fisheries Authority representative also expressed a preference for the Seahorse Rule, noting that it provides more certainty of what future catches may be and did not go to as low levels as the Dolphin Rule.
26. As such, the RAG members reached consensus¹ and the RAG agreed to recommend the application of the Seahorse Rule to derive a recommended biological catch for the 2024-25 fishing season and beyond. They noted that a separate process would be undertaken to formally adopt the recommended revisions to the eHCR and any other Harvest Strategy revisions by the PZJA, including broader consultation with the TRL Working Group.

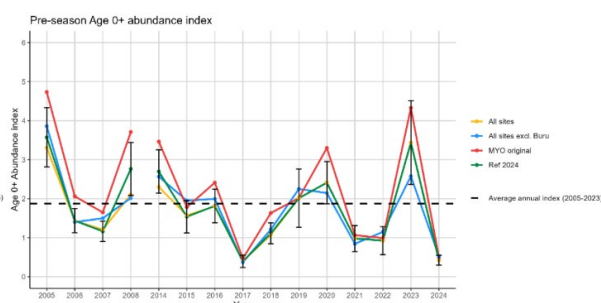
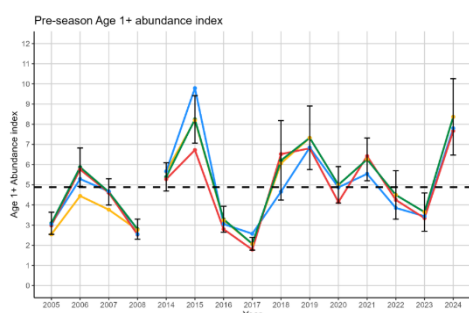
¹ The day following the TRLRAG 38 meeting and subsequent RBC recommendation, RAG members received an email from TVH industry member Brett Arlidge formally withdrawing support for the application of the Seahorse Rule and reaffirmed his original position and support for the Dolphin Rule.

Catch and effort analyses for the 2023-24 fishing season

27. At the time of the meeting, the total reported catch for the Australian TRL fishery (1 December 2023 – 30 September 2024) was 200.2 tonnes, with 107.7 tonnes caught by the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector and 92.5 tonnes caught by the Transferable Vessel Holder (TVH) sector.
28. Total reported catch from Papua New Guinea for 2024 was 120.64 tonnes (January – September 2024, as at 12 November 2024) however, the RAG noted that this number is incomplete for the entire PNG TRL season. Using the same method applied last year (and agreed at TRLRAG 33), that assumes an average monthly catch is also caught in the missing months (October to November), the total extrapolated PNG catch was increased to 154 tonnes, which also includes 12.5 tonnes taken by cross-endorsed PNG boats who fished in Australian jurisdiction.
29. This results in a total Torres Strait TRL catch of 354.2 tonnes, under a 530 tonne global TRL TAC, equating to 66.8 per cent of the TAC.

2024 Pre-season survey results

30. The 2024 1+ abundance index was the highest on record since the pre-season surveys started in 2005, and well above the long term average (2005-2023). The survey variance was higher than 2023.
31. In 2024 the 0+ abundance index estimate was significantly lower than 2023 and the second lowest abundance index for 0+, only above 2017. There was also low variability in counts compared to previous years (similar to 2017).



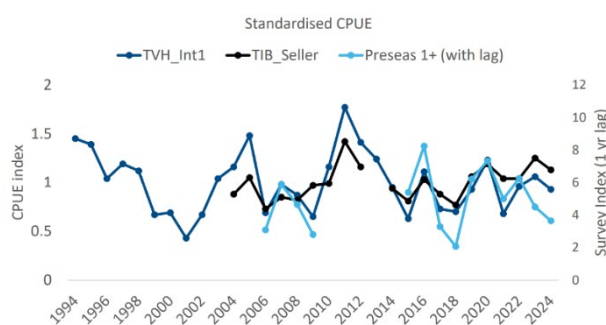
Recommended Biological Catch 2024-25

32. Having regard to the discussions and analyses from agenda items 3, 5 and 6, the RAG considered the outputs of the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR), by applying the 'Seahorse Rule', noting the following key points:
- a) this rule has an upper limit of 1000 tonnes and a lower limit of 300 tonnes;
 - b) the agreed seahorse eHCR applies an average of the previous five years TAC values, being 574 tonnes (see table below).

Season	TAC
2019-20	582
2020-21	623
2021-22	615
2022-23	521
2023-24	530
5 year average input to eHCR	574

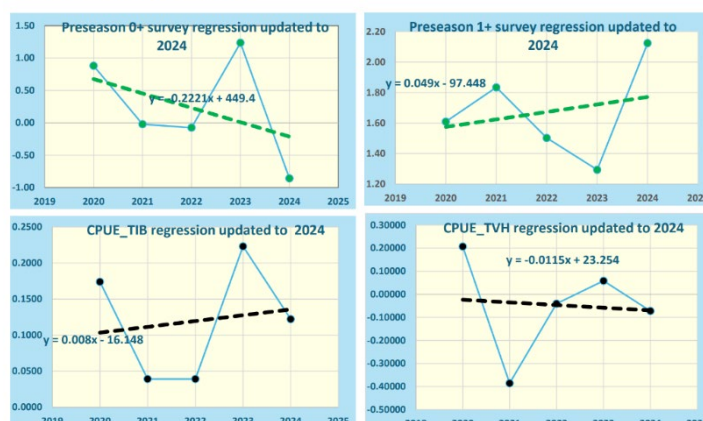
- c) There is good correspondence between the CPUE indices (tracking the abundance of Age 2+ lobsters) and the pre-season survey 1+ index

Comparing trends in indices of abundance



- d) The four indicator slopes:
- The pre-season 0+ slope is trending down due to the most recent low poor estimate in 2024
 - The pre-season 1+ slope is trending up due to the most recent high 1+ index
 - TIB CPUE trend is slightly positive, and the TVH CPUE slope is slightly negative but relatively flat.

Indicator slopes



33. When using each of these inputs into the seahorse eHCR calculation, it provides a recommended biological catch of 581 tonnes.

Preliminary stock assessment results

34. The model results indicate that the TRL spawning biomass is at about 84% of the 1973 reference (B_0) level, which is well above the agreed target reference point of B_{65} under the harvest strategy. The target reference point is deliberately conservative to allow for non-commercial take of TRL in support of traditional practices and livelihoods in the Torres Strait.
35. Although it is not used in this manner under the harvest strategy, the stock-assessment RBC estimate for 2024-25 is 946 tonnes.

5 Revising the TRL Harvest Strategy

36. Having regard to the overview of TRLRAG 38 outcomes as presented by the TRLRAG Chair under Agenda Item 4, the TRL Working Group was asked to provide advice on a revised eHCR.
37. The AFMA member recalled to the Working Group that TRLRAG members were unable to reach consensus at TRLRAG 37 (9 October 2024) and subsequent discussions out of session reaffirmed the view of traditional inhabitant members to continue application of the 'ad-hoc rule' over selecting either the proposed MSE-tested control rules – dubbed 'Turtle' and 'Dolphin'.
38. The AFMA member cautioned very strongly about the potential implications of options that would continue to step outside the Harvest Strategy.
39. After many deliberations, the TRLRAG 38 was able to reach consensus on an option (the seahorse rule, being an MSE tested variant of the ad-hoc rule), to be formally adopted as part of the Harvest Strategy.
40. Notwithstanding this consensus, correspondence was received post-RAG meeting from TRLRAG TVH industry member Brett Arlidge which formally withdrew his support for the seahorse rule and reaffirmed his original position and support for the dolphin rule from TRLRAG 37.
41. Working Group members considered a table showing RBC outputs from various MSE-tested control rules, including:
 - the median RBC over a 20-year projection period,
 - the range of RBCs expected to occur 50% and 80% of the time, and
 - the minimum and maximum RBC values expected to occur (Figure 1)

	Median RBC (20 yr projection period)	50% of time RBC in range	80% of time RBC in range	minimum	maximum
Turtle rule 600	590t	538-637t	512-680t	300t	845t
Dolphin rule 670	624t	520-767t	432-912t	300t	1000t
Dolphin 556	556t	519-601t	484-641t	300t	796t
SEA HORSE	560t	521-605t	486-642t	300t	818t

Figure 1. Comparison of 'turtle', 'dolphin' and 'seahorse' rules with 20-year projections of RBC ranges.

42. Members also considered RBC outputs from each of the candidate rules, and a stock assessment, illustrating potential RBCs during 'good', 'bad' and average years using hypothetical data (Figure 2).

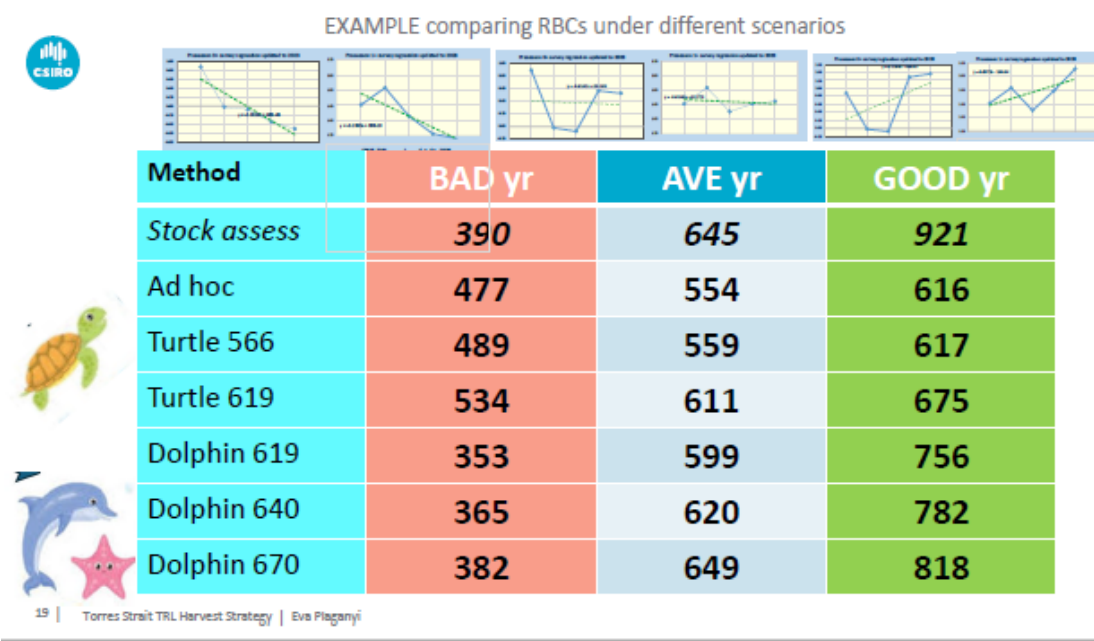


Figure 2. Comparison of hypothetical RBC outputs under different scenarios of bad, average and good years.

43. Members were reminded of the rationale for agreeing to a process before seeing the RBC results so as to protect the integrity of the committees advice and avoid any perception of TAC shopping.
44. Members noted, while each of the control rules were adequately conservative and met the objectives of the TRL Harvest Strategy (i.e. avoiding the limit reference point and maintaining the stock around the target reference point):
 - The Dolphin control rule resulted in higher 20-year average RBCs, but is also subject to lower RBCs during bad years, and high RBCs during good years, relative to the Seahorse rule.
 - The Seahorse control rule (labelled 'ad-hoc in Figure 2) resulted in lower 20-year average RBCs but higher RBCs during bad years and lower RBCs during good years, relative to the Dolphin rule.
45. TRLWG Economics member, Sevaly Sen, highlighted the relative economic trade-offs associated with opting for stability and greater certainty, over variability in future catch limits.
46. Some WG members expressed concern that under the Seahorse rule with a low TAC, in a high abundance fishing season, the TAC could be reached quickly and the fishery would have to close early. AFMA reminded members that a fishery closure is possible under any eHCR rule.
47. The Working Group also noted the long-term implications of choosing a control rule that form the basis of ongoing TAC decisions. They also noted, however, the current Harvest Strategy contains clear guidance on circumstances that would warrant a review of the Harvest Strategy. Best practice is every five years, however there are certain situations that may trigger a review sooner.

48. The Chair sought the views and comments of each Working Group member and observers.
49. TVH Industry member, Peter Frazis shared his views and the following key points to the Working Group:
- a) The Seahorse rule doesn't appear to be as responsive to short-term changes abundance. While the Seahorse rule will produce a higher RBC than the dolphin during poor years, it will produce lower RBCs during good years.
 - b) On this basis, the Seahorse rule doesn't meet three of the seven PZJA agreed-management objectives for the TRL fishery, those being:
 - i. to provide for the optimal utilisation, co-operative management with Queensland and PNG and for catch sharing to occur with PNG
 - ii. to promote economic development in the Torres Strait area with an emphasis on providing the framework for commercial opportunities for Traditional Inhabitants and to ensure that the opportunities available to all stakeholders are socially and culturally appropriate for the Torres Strait and the wider Queensland and Australian community; or
 - iii. optimise the value of the fishery.
 - c) An RBC of 581 tonnes under the application of the Seahorse rule is one of the lowest TACs in recent history, yet the pre-season survey is indicating the highest Age 1+ count and stock abundance from the stock assessment.
 - d) This approach is damaging to all TVH, TIB and PNG fishers in the industry, reducing the overall value of the fishery which has flow on effects for producers, buyers and customers. Reducing overall catch volume increases costs (therefore reduces beach prices to fishers) because the already high costs are then spread across a lesser volume. Lowering the economic value of the fishery impacts all sectors.
 - e) The only certainty the Seahorse control rule provides is certainty that the TAC for the fishery each year will be a low TAC.
 - f) Following four very challenging years for industry, limiting the TAC indefinitely is another significant setback.
 - g) This recommendation going forward is not about TVH versus TIB. It's a recommendation that affects the industry as a whole. It is easier to accept a low TAC when the stock abundance is low, acknowledging that MG Kailis Lobster support sustainability in that regard, however they are of the view that the industry should be catching more lobster when it is available and sustainable to do so.
50. TVH industry member, Mark Dean expressed support for the Dolphin rule, believing industry should take advantage of the stock when it's there.
51. TVH industry member Trent Butcher also expressed support for the Dolphin rule.
52. All traditional inhabitant members expressed unanimous support for the Seahorse rule.
- h) Thomas Fujii stated that an RBC of 581 tonnes under the Seahorse rule is a 'safe option for TIB', claiming that the TVH sector only want a higher TAC. He stated

support for the Seahorse rule as it is seen as a benefit to the TIB sector whether the stock is abundant or not.

- i) Les Pitt reaffirmed his support for the Seahorse, wanting to play it safe and keep things unchanged.
 - j) Patrick Mooka reaffirmed his support for the Seahorse rule as it will provide more certainty to industry in the longer term.
 - k) Charles David expressed support for the Seahorse rule based on the primary objective of the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* of protecting the traditional way of life and livelihoods of traditional inhabitants in the Torres Strait Protected Zone.
53. The TSRA member Damian Miley indicated their role was to assist and support TIB industry members arrive at a view, reaffirming they were comfortable with the traditional inhabitant member support for the Seahorse rule.
54. Economics member Sevaly Sen noted that the overall economic gain of the Dolphin rule is greater than the Seahorse rule. While there is risk, in terms of certainty with the Dolphin rule, when considering the objectives of the Act and the Treaty, the Dolphin rule performs better in that regard.
55. Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries member, Jenny Keys did not express a preference for either rule but could appreciate the advantages and disadvantages of both options.
56. Scientific member Laura Blamey also did not express a preference for either rule, noting they have both been robustly tested and sufficiently meet the objectives of the Harvest Strategy.
57. The AFMA member, Steven Harris noted that, provided the options meet the objectives of the Harvest Strategy, AFMA had no preference for either option.
58. Permanent observer from PNG National Fisheries Authority, Joseph Posu, noted he had originally supported the Seahorse rule in order to provide some confidence in maintaining the TAC slightly higher even in a poor year.
59. Permanent observer and TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member, Yen Loban, supported the Seahorse rule as it provides more certainty that the TIB sector will still be fishing in the next five years by keeping crayfish in the water.
60. Traditional inhabitant observer, Maluwap Nona noted, that the PZJA should be aiming to close the gap on indigenous disadvantage, and that economic opportunities should be a priority. He viewed the Dolphin rule as an opportunity for economic gain for traditional inhabitants in the region and questioned why 'we' would cut ourselves short.
61. Another industry observer, Daniel Takai, CEO of Zenadth Kes Fisheries, also preferred the Dolphin rule. After having the industry suffer for the past 4 years, he believed now there is an opportunity to capitalise.
62. **TRL working group members noted advice from TRL RAG, but were unable to reach a consensus or provide advice on a revised harvest control rule due to dissenting views between members. Members recognised the impasse would be put to the Protected Zone Joint Authority Standing Committee for their consideration out of session.**

63. The Working Group did not discuss other elements of the Harvest Strategy, including any changes to the decision rules or exceptional circumstances (or meta rules).

6 Total Allowable Catch

64. The Working Group noted an overview of the standard TAC setting process, including the recent determination by Minister Collins on a 200 tonne start of season TAC for the 2024-25 fishing season.
65. **Noting that consensus was not reached on an application of a revised eHCR, the Working Group was unable to provide advice on a Total Allowable Catch for the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) TRL Fishery for the 2024-25.**

7 Review of management arrangements

66. WG members noted that AFMA made efforts to progress the proposals to amend the hookah season that was tabled at TRLWG 16 in June 2024. As there was little appetite to support the economic work that would support the changes, AFMA has not followed through for the 2024-25 fishing season.
67. AFMA welcomed further suggestions to changes to management arrangements in the TRL Fishery moving forward.
68. Industry member Peter Frazis expressed a keen interest to revisit changes to the hookah closures in the longer term, noting that changes in the 2024-25 season would not be as impactful given the first moontide hookah closure is later in February (compared to 2024).
69. He noted that the market will peak two weeks prior to Chinese New Year and then likely crash soon after (around 8 February 2025). He strongly suggested that the hookah season opens early to support the supply chain, increased prices and lobster supply for Chinese New Year. The peak period was expected to be 15-22 February. He added that MG Kailis could guarantee a minimum of \$8 price increase for 'unders' and \$10 for 1kg-1.5kg lobsters if the hookah season could open early. This equated to minimum prices of \$33/\$45/\$55 on Thursday Island which could be maintained until at least the end of January.
70. Traditional inhabitant member for Kemer Kemer Meriam noted that hookah is not used in KKM nation, and so the proposal was not supported. This position was shared by the Traditional Inhabitant member for Guda Maluylgal. Traditional inhabitant member for Kaiwalagal stated the preference for inner island fishers is to keep the hookah season opening at 1 February.
71. Traditional inhabitant member for Kulkalgal noted that communicating the value of the changes to communities is key. AFMA and TSRA needed to support members to discuss the proposal with Kulkalgal communities.
72. An observer from Maluylgal nation stated that he is confident the western islands would be supportive. He understood the TIB position and risk of possible backlash, however he noted this is an opportunity for economic gain, after which the north west winds start blowing and fishing effort naturally decreases because of the weather.
73. Members noted that additional conversations needed to be had outside of the meeting. Peter Frazis agreed to report back to AFMA on outcomes by 3pm Tuesday 17 December

2024² noting that if the changes were to go ahead, implementation timelines were critically short.

8 Climate Adaptation

74. Due to time constraints, this agenda item was not discussed.

9 Cross-endorsement

75. AFMA gave a brief overview of the 2024 cross-endorsement season. WG members noted that AFMA had received requests from industry and Malu Lamar RNTBC to have greater input into the development of Treaty endorsement arrangements and sought further advice from members on conditions that could be applied to cross-endorsed boats in future seasons.

76. The NFA representative noted that there is interest for five PNG boats to undertake cross-endorsement in Australian waters. He acknowledged that the maximum number of boats is seven (as there are only seven TRL PNG licences). Noting that VMS will be required on all primary boats and tenders, the number of nominations will depend on how soon the boats can be fitted with VMS.

77. Traditional inhabitant members for Kulkaigal and Guda maluylgal supported the implementation of VMS on all tenders and encouraged there to be the same level of compliance on cross-endorsed boats as there is during the black teatfish openings.

78. AFMA encouraged members to provide advice on treaty endorsement conditions out of session.

10 Other Business

79. No other business was raised.

11 Date and Venue for next meeting

80. Working Group members noted the next TRLWG meeting is scheduled for mid-2025.

81. The meeting was closed in prayer at 5:30pm on Thursday 12 December 2025.

² AFMA received written email advice from Peter Frazis on Monday 16 December 2024 that they would not pursue the hookah season changes for the coming year due to the rushed timing but reiterated that longer term changes need to be explored.

Declaration of interests

Dr Ian Knuckey – August 2024

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 – Victorian Central Zone Abalone Fisheries Resource Advisory Group

Chair – Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery MAC Research Scientific Committee

Scientific Member – Northern Prawn Management Advisory Committee

Scientific Member – Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee

Scientific Member – Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group

Scientific Member – SESSF Resource Assessment Group

Member – The Geelong Agri Collective

Fishwell current projects:

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 – 2024/ 25

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

TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP 17 (TRLWG 17)**Thursday 12 December 2024 | 830am – 5pm****TSRA Boardroom, Thursday Island****ADOPTED AGENDA**

Agenda item	Action required	Presenter	Time allocated
1 Preliminaries			
Welcome and apologies	Noting	Chair	830am 5 minutes
The Chair will welcome members and observers to the 17th meeting of the TRL Working Group.			
Adoption of agenda	Decision	Chair	835am 5 minutes
The Working Group will be invited to adopt the draft agenda			
Declaration of interests	Decision	Chair	840am 15 minutes
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 advice made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.			
Action items from previous meetings	Noting	AFMA	855am 15 minutes
The Working Group will be invited to note the status of action items arising from previous meetings.			
Out of session correspondence	Noting	AFMA	910am 5 minutes
The WG will be invited to note out of session correspondence on WG matters since the previous meeting			
2 Updates from members and observers	Noting	All members	915am 45 mins
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional inhabitant and industry members Scientific and economic members Government agencies Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority Native title 			
TRL WG members and observers are invited to provide updates on matters relevant to the Torres Strait TRL fishery, including recent fishing conditions, research, management, compliance and native title matters.			
Morning Tea (10:00am – 10:15am)			
Agenda item	Action required	Presenter	Time allocated
3 Catch data for the 2023-24 fishing season	Noting	-	Taken as read

The WG is invited to note a summary of total catch of TRL in both the Australian and Papua New Guinean jurisdictions of the Torres Strait Protected Zone.

4 Overview of TRLRAG 38 outcomes and advice	Noting	TRL RAG Chair	1015am 30 minutes
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The Working Group is invited to note an overview of the TRL RAG 38 outcomes to be presented by the TRL RAG chair. There is no agenda paper for this item.

5 Reviewing the TRL Harvest Strategy	Recommendation	AFMA	1045am 1 hour
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Having regard to the advice of TRL RAG 37 and TRL RAG 38 on the revised eHCR, the Working Group is invited to consider any broader changes required to the TRL Harvest Strategy.

6 Total Allowable Catch.	Recommendation	AFMA	1145am 45 minutes
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Having regard to the advice of TRL RAG 37 and TRL RAG 38 on the Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) for the TRL Fishery by applying the eHCR, the WG will then be invited to provide advice on a total allowable catch (TAC) for the TRL fishery for the 2024-25 fishing season

Lunch (12:30pm – 1:30pm)

7 Proposed changes to management arrangements	Recommendation	AFMA	130pm 1 hour
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The Working Group will be invited to discuss any future changes to management arrangements in the fishery.

8 Climate Adaptation	Recommendation	AFMA	230pm 30 minutes
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The WG is invited to provide advice on the application of AFMA's Climate Risk Framework (CRF) to Tropical Rosk Lobster in the Torres Strait. The draft assessment is based on initial input at a CRF Working Group meeting held on 1 November, 2024 and advice from TRLRAG 38 (10-11 Dec 2024).

Afternoon Tea (3:00pm – 3:15pm)

9 Cross-endorsement	Recommendation	AFMA	315pm 1 hour
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The Working Group is invited to note an overview of the cross-endorsement 2024 fishing season and discuss and provide advice on management arrangements and conditions on future treaty endorsements in the TRL fishery.

10 Other business	Discussion	All members	415pm 15 minutes
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The WG will be invited to raise any other matters for consideration. There is no agenda paper for this item.

11 Date and venue for next meeting	Noting	Chair	445pm 15 minutes
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The WG will be invited to discuss suitable dates for the next working group meetings.

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 – Georgia Langdon (fisheriesti@afma.gov.au)