

**18th MEETING OF THE PJJA TORRES STRAIT
FINFISH FISHERY RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP (FFRAG 18)**

Wednesday 25 June 2025 – 9:00am to 11:00am

Video Conference

DRAFT AGENDA

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome and Apologies

The Chair will welcome members and observers to the 18th meeting of the FFRAG.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda

The FFRAG 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 interests 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 RESEARCH

Research Priorities

The FFRAG will be invited to discuss and provide advice on research priorities for the Finfish Fishery. This discussion will lead on from FFRAG 16 and will form final advice for the 2026-27 funding year.

3 OTHER BUSINESS

FFRAG members will be invited to discuss other business 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 – Chris Boon (chris.boon@afma.gov.au)

Torres Strait Resource Assessment Group – Meeting 18	25 June 2025
PRELIMINARIES Welcome and Apologies	Agenda Item 1.1 For Noting

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Resource Assessment Group **NOTE**:
 - a) an acknowledgement of Traditional Owners;
 - b) the Chair’s welcome address;
 - c) apologies received from members unable to attend.
2. As of 23 June 2024, formal apologies were received from Mr Gavin Mosby, Mr Ben Dau, and Mr Terrance Whap.

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Resource Assessment Group – FFRAG 18	25 June 2025
PRELIMINARIES Adoption of Agenda	Agenda Item 1.2 For Decision

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the Resource Assessment Group consider and **ADOPT** the draft agenda.

BACKGROUND

2. The FFRAG at their meeting on 15 October 2024 (FFRAG 17) proposed that the research priorities agenda item be tabled for discussion at FFRAG 18.

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Resource Assessment Group	Meeting 16 25 June 2025
PRELIMINARIES Declarations of Interest	Agenda Item 1.3 For DECISION

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Resource Assessment Group members:
 - a) **DECLARE** all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait finfish fisheries at the commencement of the meeting (**Table 1**).
 - b) **DETERMINE** whether the member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict;
 - c) **ABIDE** by decisions of the Resource Assessment Group regarding the management of conflicts of interest.
 - d) **NOTE** that the record of the meeting must record the fact of any disclosure, and the determination of the Resource Assessment Group as to whether the member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.

BACKGROUND

2. Consistent with *Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1)*, which guides the operation and administration of PZJA consultative forums, members are asked to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest.
3. Resource Assessment Group members are asked to declare all real or potential conflicts of interest or update the standing list of declared interests (**Table 1**) if required.
4. FMP1 recognises that members are appointed to provide input based on their knowledge and expertise and as a consequence, may face potential or direct conflicts of interest. Where a member has a material personal interest in a matter being considered, including a direct or indirect financial or economic interest; the interest could conflict with the proper performance of the member's duties. Of greater concern is the specific conflict created where a member is in a position to derive direct benefit from a recommendation if it is implemented.
5. When a member recognises that a real or potential conflict of interest exists, the conflict must be disclosed as soon as possible. Where this relates to an issue on the agenda of a meeting this can normally wait until that meeting, but where the conflict relates to decisions already made, members must be informed immediately. Conflicts of interest should be dealt with at the start of each meeting. If members become aware of a potential conflict of interest during the meeting, they must immediately disclose the conflict of interest.
6. Where it is determined that a direct conflict of interest exists, the forum may allow the member to continue to participate in the discussions relating to the matter but not in any decision-making process. They may also determine that, having made their contribution to the discussions, the member should retire from the meeting for the remainder of discussions on that issue. Declarations

of interest, and subsequent decisions by the forum, must be recorded accurately in the meeting minutes.

Table 1. FFrag member and observer declarations of interest to be updated at the meeting. Interests declared by those relevant persons at FFrag 17 meeting are shown.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Members		
David Brewer	Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director – Upwelling P/L (David Brewer Consulting). • Honorary Fellow - CSIRO • Chair - Torres Strait Finfish RAG • Scientific member – Torres Strait Finfish Working Group • Current consultancies with Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, Ramu Joint Venture Nickel Cobalt Project. • Project member on the current Torres Strait ‘Non-commercial catch’ project. • As a fisheries consultant, may apply for funds for Torres Strait fishery research projects in the future where consistent with his role as Chair.
Rocky Stephen	TIB industry member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor for Ugar. • Chairperson of Kos and Abob Fisheries Ugar. • Works with brother in a commercial fishing business on Ugar (Brother Bear Fisheries). • Eastern cluster representative on the PZJA Finfish RAG & Working Group. • Traditional Inhabitant member - Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee. • TSRA Board member for Ugar • TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee. • TSRA Board Fisheries Advisory Committee member. • Member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries company.
Gavin Mosby	TIB industry member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yorke Island Central Island representative • Member to Finfish Working Group, Prawn MAC
Harry Nona	TIB industry member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIB licence holder – fulltime cray fishermen • Member for Kaiwalagal
Benny Dau	TIB industry member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIB Licence holder • Member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries company.
Michael O’Neill	Scientific member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal fisheries scientist working with the Queensland Government (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Fisheries Queensland) in the stock assessment program. • Member of PZJA Finfish RAG and Working Group. •
Ashley Williams	Scientific member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSIRO Scientist • Scientific member of Tropical Tuna RAG and MAC • Project leader for Torres Strait Spanish mackerel

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
		Close-kin mark-recapture (CKMR) design project
Chris Boon	Executive Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by AFMA No pecuniary interests or otherwise
Chad Lunow	QDAF Member - Online	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fishery manager for Queensland East coast for Spanish Mackerel, Reef line, Rocky reef and charter fishing. Avid spear fisher and recreational fisher and have no pecuniary interests in either the Queensland fisheries or the Torres Strait.
Casual Observers		
Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by TSRA – fisheries program. TIB licence holder with Spanish mackerel, Reef line, Tropical Rock Lobster and Beche-de-mer endorsements Has a background as a commercial Tropical Rock Lobster fisher.
Toshie Kris	TIB observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Owner - (Maluialgal)
Trevor Hutton	CSIRO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sits on Finfish Working Group as permanent observer Interest in finfish projects
Ian Butler	ABARES observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by ABARES (DAFF) No pecuniary interests.
Brooke D’Alberto	ABARES observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by ABARES (DAFF) Works on Torres Strait Fisheries for Fisheries Status Reports, including Finfish and Tropical Rock Lobster

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Resource Assessment Group	Meeting 16 25 June 2025
RESEARCH Finfish Fishery Research Priorities	Agenda Item 2 For DISCUSSION & ADVICE

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Resource Assessment Group (RAG):
 - a) **DISCUSS AND PROVIDE ADVICE** on the Rolling 5-Year Research Plan for the finfish fishery. This includes providing advice on research priorities to be considered by TSSAC regarding funding commencing 2026-27.

Key Issues

2. At FFrag 16 meeting (19 June 2024), the members present reviewed the 5-Year Rolling Research Plan (the Plan). This document had previously been updated at FFrag 13 (8 June 2023). Noting that a quorum at the meeting was not reached, the Plan was then circulated and cleared out-of-session in August 2024. The updated Plan can be reviewed at **Attachment 2a**.
3. The RAG categorised research priorities as follows:
 - Biological sampling remained the number one priority, noting the importance of collecting an unbroken dataset of biological data for use in current and future stock assessments.
 - A yearly stock assessment for Spanish mackerel was maintained as the number two priority, noting its utility in the RAG's current harvest strategy framework for providing yearly RBC advice. The RAG advised that the next project should explore the application of multi-year TAC-setting.
 - The implementation of a full-scale Close-Kin Mark-Recapture (CKMR) study for Spanish mackerel was maintained as number three priority.
 - Coral Trout Catch Per Unit Effort Standardisation was maintained at 4th position.
 - Harvest strategy development for Spanish Mackerel, addressed through a Management Strategy Evaluation remains a high priority at number five, noting that ongoing work is required to develop specific harvest control rules (HCRs) to be evaluated through a future MSE.
 - The RAG noted advice from the Finfish Working Group meeting (5-6 December 2023), which recommended to add a coral trout dive survey to the 5-year rolling research plan. The RAG agreed to add this research priority to the Plan, however, further RAG advice is required to define the scope/objectives of a dive survey.
 - The remaining priorities (classified as either '6 - essential', or '7 - desirable') were left unchanged.
4. Advice from FFrag 16 was considered by TSSAC in August 2024 when providing recommendations on research funding for the 2025-26 financial year.
5. The RAG will be asked to confirm the order and content of research priorities in the *Rolling 5-Year Research Plan*, to be considered by TSSAC at their meeting in August 2025 regarding funding commencing 2026-27.



Rolling Five Year Research Plan 2024/25 - 2028/29

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery



Compiled by AFMA with FFRAG advice

June 2024

ABOUT THIS PLAN

The Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) seeks input from each fishery advisory body (Resource Assessment Group (RAG), Management Advisory Committee (MAC) or Working Group (WG)) to identify research priorities over five year periods from 2023/24 to 2027/28. This template is to be used by the relevant advisory body to complete their five-year plan. The plans are to be developed in conjunction with the TSSAC Five-year Strategic Research Plan (SRP) with a focus on the three research themes and associated strategies within the SRP.

All fishery five-year plans will be assessed by the TSSAC using a set of criteria, and used to produce an Annual Research Statement for all Torres Strait fisheries.

The TSSAC then develop scopes for the highest ranking projects in order to publish its annual call for research proposals. There are likely to be more scopes that funding will provide for so TSSAC can consider a number of proposals before deciding where to commit funding.

The fishery five-year plans are to be reviewed and updated annually by the Torres Strait forums to add an additional year onto the end to ensure the plans maintain a five year projection for priority research. Priorities may also change during the review if needed.

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Table 1. Five-year Torres Strait Finfish Fishery research plan for 2024/25 to 2028/29.

Proposed Project	Objectives and component tasks	Year project to be carried out and indicative cost					Evaluation		
		2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Priority essential/ desirable	Priority ranking 1-5 (1 = highest)	Theme
Biological sampling program (length freq,sexing, ageing)	Project funded for age, sex and length data for Spanish mackerel and coral trout to support stock assessment.	\$186,159 Funding allocated *Includes 20k for genetic sampling	\$190,000 Funding required *Includes 20k for genetic sampling	\$190,000 Funding required *Includes 20k for genetic sampling	\$190,000 Funding Required *Includes 20k for genetic sampling	\$190,000 Funding Required *Includes 20k for genetic sampling	Essential	1	1a
Spanish mackerel stock assessment - Stock Synthesis	Need for ongoing assessment of key commercial species. The next project should explore the application of multi-year TAC-setting.	Not funded	>\$20k <\$60k TBC Funding required	>\$20k <\$60k TBC Funding required	>\$20k <\$60k TBC Funding required	>\$20k <\$60k TBC Funding required	Essential	2	1a
Implement a full-scale Close-Kin Mark-Recapture for Spanish mackerel	<p>Fishery-independent estimate of abundance of the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery.</p> <p>The RAG endorsed this project as essential, as an alternate index of abundance will provide greater certainty on the stock status.</p> <p>Project would deliver the most accurate results with at least 5 years-worth of samples.</p> <p>As of 2023/24, 3 years of samples have been collected (of which, one year of samples have been processed).</p>	Funding allocated Year 1 of <5+ \$23,491 For contamination analysis (2021/22 – 2024/25 samples).	Funding allocated* Year 2 of <5+ \$240K TBC *Subject to outcomes of contamination analysis	Funding allocated* Year 3 of <5+ \$240k TBC *Subject to outcomes of contamination analysis	Funding required Year 4 of <5+ TBC	Funding required Year 5 of <5+ TBC	Essential	3	1a

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Coral Trout Catch Per Unit Effort Standardisation	<p>A small project is required to further refine the current CPUE standardisation methods and to update the CPUE time series with new catch and effort data.</p> <p>The CPUE series is to be based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> any recommended refinements of the CPUE standardisation methodology developed through the AFMA funded project: Harvest Strategy of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (project number: 2016/0824); and all available catch and effort data. 	0	Funding required \$10k – \$20k TBC	0	0		Essential	4	1a
Harvest strategy development – Spanish Mackerel Addressed through <i>Management Strategy Evaluation of Spanish mackerel for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.</i>	<p>The project team will use Management Strategy Evaluation to quantitatively evaluate the performance of candidate Harvest Control Rules (HCR) to complete the elements of a fisheries harvest strategy. This includes using current HS objectives as guidance (developed during project <i>Harvest Strategies for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery</i>, and engaging with the FFRAG to refine the form of the HCRs.</p> <p>Requirement of Cwth HS Policy and Guidelines to undertake MSE prior to implementation.</p> <p>To be conducted at an appropriate later date.</p>	0	0	0	0		Essential	5	1a
Harvest strategy development – Coral Trout	<p>Component projects to progress Harvest Strategy development for the TSFF are being addressed through research priority 3. (CT CPUE Standardisation).</p> <p>Next steps to be progressed after the CPUE project work is completed.</p>	0	0	0	0	0	Essential	6	
Coral trout stock assessment	Need for ongoing assessment of key commercial species.	The RAG clarified that this research is now essential, given the current interest in increasing the quantum of effort in the fishery. The RAG also noted the ongoing concern of the status of the stock becoming 'uncertain'.					Essential	6	1a

Coral Trout Dive Survey	Further FFRAG advice is required to define the scope/objectives of a dive survey: species density, composition etc.				
Estimating catches outside the commercial fishery.	Acquiring data of catch taken from non-commercial fishers.	Phase 2 currently funded for 2023/24 – 2024/25	Essential	6	1 a , 3 b
Harvest Strategy and Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for coral trout	Requirement of Cwth HS Policy and Guidelines to undertake MSE prior to implementation.	Two separate projects. MSE work requires funding and HS development to be completed first.	Desirable	7	1 a
Stock structure of Spanish mackerel	Define the spatial scale of management and connectivity of Torres Strait populations of SM with adjacent areas (Gulf, Qld, Coral Sea, PNG) potentially through collection of samples for genetic relatedness. Gulf, Qld, Coral Sea connectivity addressed SNPs in CKMR scoping study. The priority is to collect samples from the Gulf of Papua, to further refine the spatial scale of the Torres Strait stock.	Not funded, but listed as a priority for funding for samples to be collected.	Desirable	7	1 a , 1 b
Regular report on the status of climate change impact on Torres Strait Fisheries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Species specific - Region specific Will consider the yet to be funded CC project.		Desirable	7	2
Shark depredation	Study to investigate increased shark interaction with fishery operations and depredation impact on Finfish Fishery catch rates (how to capture and track over time or investigate potential mitigation options).	<p>Not designed or costed.</p> <p>The RAG recommended that this priority be reassessed as relevant research is completed in other fisheries (jurisdictions).</p>	Desirable	7	1 a

Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Resource Assessment Group	Meeting 18 25 June 2025
OTHER BUSINESS	Agenda Item 3 For Discussion

RECOMMENDATION

1. Noting available time, RAG members **NOMINATE** and **DISCUSS** any additional items of business for the meeting.