

PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Working Group

FFWG Meeting

5-6 December 2023

Novotel Oasis Hotel
Cairns

Final Meeting Record

Note all meeting papers and records are available on
the PZJA webpage:

<https://www.pzja.gov.au/torres-strait-finish-groups>



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Table of Contents

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 1 | Preliminaries..... | 3 |
| 1.1 | Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome and Apologies | 3 |
| 1.2 | Adoption of Agenda | 3 |
| 1.3 | Declarations of Interests | 3 |
| 1.4 | Review of Action Items from Previous WGs..... | 6 |
| 1.5 | Out of Session Correspondence | 8 |
| 2 | Updates from Members | 8 |
| 2.1 | Industry and Scientific Updates..... | 8 |
| 2.2 | Government Agencies Update | 9 |
| 2.3 | Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority Update..... | 10 |
| 2.4 | Native Title Update..... | 10 |
| 2.5 | Climate and Ecosystem Update | 10 |
| 3 | Total Allowable Catch Advice | 11 |
| 3.1 | Spanish Mackerel Total Allowable Catch Advice for the 2024-25 Season..... | 11 |
| 3.2 | Coral Trout Total Allowable Catch Advice for the 2024-25 Season..... | 12 |
| 4 | Management..... | 13 |
| 4.1 | Update to the TSF01 Daily Fishing Logbook..... | 13 |
| 4.2 | Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Priorities | 14 |
| | | 15 |
| 5.1 | Research Priorities | 15 |
| 6 | Other Business..... | 15 |
| 7 | Date and venue for next meeting | 15 |

1 Preliminaries

1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome and Apologies

1. The 5-6 December 2023 meeting of the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Working Group (FFWG) commenced at 0900 hrs. FFWG Chair, Mr Nicholas McClean, welcomed members and observers and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the various lands of which members were participating from.
2. An apology was received from Chad Lunow, member for QDAF. All other members were present at the commencement of the meeting.
3. Apologies were received from permanent observers: the representative for Malu Lamar, and the representative for PNG NFA.
4. The Chair sought consent from the WG to record the meeting for the purpose of ensuring an accurate record. The Chair advised that the recording is kept secure and is deleted once the final meeting record is published. There were no objections to the meeting being recorded.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda

5. The FFWG were invited to adopt the draft agenda (**Attachment A**).
6. The FFWG adopted the draft agenda with no further changes.

1.3 Declarations of Interests

7. Consistent with the Protected Zone Joint Authority Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP 1), which guides the operation and administration of PZJA consultative forums, the WG noted the requirement to declare all interests, perceived or real. Each member declared their interest in the fishery as documented in Table 1 (below). The FFWG recalled that at the previous meeting, in line with the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) standard for declaring potential conflicts of interest in Commonwealth WGs and RAGs to best protect the integrity of advice, members with grouped interests (industry, research, TSRA, AFMA) were sequentially asked to leave the room to allow the remaining WG members to:
 - freely comment on the declared interests
 - agree if the interests precluded the members from participating in any discussions and
 - agree to any methods to treat the declared interest (e.g. the member provides preliminary input but leaves the room when any advice is formed).
8. The WG noted that it was previously agreed that all members were required to participate in discussions for all agenda items. Noting time constraints, and with no new agenda items tabled for discussion at the current meeting, rather than asking individuals with grouped interests to leave the room to discuss conflicts of interest, the FFWG agreed to manage conflicts if they are perceived to arise. Research priorities was identified as one agenda item where conflicts may need to be managed. It remained the obligation of all members to update their declarations

throughout the meeting as required.

Table 1: Attendance and declarations of interests of members and observers to the 5-6 December 2023 meeting of the PZJA Finfish Fishery Working Group.

| Name | Position | Declaration of interest |
|------------------|--|---|
| Nicholas McClean | Independent Chair | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries social science researcher working at University of Technology Sydney Currently undertaking FRDC funded research to develop an Indigenous engagement strategy for Commonwealth fisheries 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 | Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Owner (Kemer Kemer Meriam), Ugar. 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 Prawn Management 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 | Traditional Inhabitant Industry member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Owner (Kulkalgal), Masigal. TIB licence holder Member of the TS Prawn MAC ZK fisheries board member Member of local fishing association |
| Harry Nona | Traditional Inhabitant Industry member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Owner (Kaureg). Fulltime fishermen TIB licence holder |
| Terrence Whap | Traditional Inhabitant Industry member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Owner (Maluialgal), Mabuiag. Member of the PZJA TRL working group President of the local fisherman's association in Maluialgal PBC Director TSRA Board Member and Ranger |

| Name | Position | Declaration of interest |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Benny Dau | Traditional Inhabitant Industry member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traditional Owner (Gudamuligal). TIB FF/TRL licence holder. Works with TSRA team at Boigu. |
| 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. Principal scientist for TSSAC three-year project for Spanish mackerel stock assessment work. Coinvestigator on the TSSAC finfish age-length monitoring project. Member of PZJA Finfish RAG and Working Group. |
| David Brewer | Scientific Member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director – Upwelling P/L (David Brewer Consulting). Chair - Torres Strait Finfish RAG Scientific member – Torres Strait Finfish Working Group Scientific member – Northern Prawn Fishery RAG Current consultancies with Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, Newcrest Mining Ltd. Team member of the current Torres Strait 'Non-commercial catch' monitoring 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. |
| Chris Boon | Executive Officer (AFMA) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise. |
| Rosemary Millward | AFMA Member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Married to QLD East Coast fisher. No pecuniary interests in the Torres Strait. |
| Damian Miley | TSRA Member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by TSRA – Program Manager (Fisheries & Infrastructure). No pecuniary or vested interests in Torres Strait fisheries as an individual. Notes that TSRA holds finfish fishing licences on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. |
| Permanent Observers | | |
| Trevor Hutton | Scientific Permanent Observer (CSIRO) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by CSIRO. Principle investigator for past FF harvest strategy project. |

| Name | Position | Declaration of interest |
|------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could have interests relating to future research projects within the Finfish Fishery, including future coral trout stock assessments. |
| Casual Observers | | |
| Brooke D'Alberto | ABARES | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fisheries scientist with ABARES, assessing TS TRL and FF (FSR). No pecuniary interests. |
| Quinten Hirakawa | TSRA Observer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior Project Officer at TSRA. 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. 25 years working with Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol (QDAF). Recent employment with TSRA Ranger Program and now with the TSRA Fisheries Team. |
| Adam White | TSRA Observer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSRA project manager (Fisheries). |
| Yen Loban | TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> TIB licence holder. Board director of the Zenadth Kes Fisheries Company. Chair of the TSRA Board Fisheries Advisory Committee. |

1.4 Review of Action Items from Previous WGs

9. The WG noted an update from the WG AFMA member on the status of action items as detailed in the agenda paper.

10. The WG provided the following advice against each action item:

Table 2: Status of actions arising from FFWG meetings, updated at FFWG meeting on 5-6 December 2024.

| Meeting | Action | Status update |
|--------------------|---|--|
| Dec 2022, Action 1 | <p>TSRA member to liaise with Stanley Lui of the TSRA Ranger program to organise a presentation on invasive species monitoring for a future meeting.</p> <p>This item replaced a proposed action from Nov 2018 meeting to organise a presentation from Biosecurity Australia to present to the FFWG on monitoring in place to prevent</p> | <p>Ongoing: Presentation sought for future meeting – liaise with Biosecurity rep and/or rangers (Kaureg plus TSRA rangers). In their meeting on 5-6 December 2024, the FFWG noted that the Gudamuligal region and barramundi fishery is particularly vulnerable to invasive species such as climbing perch. The FFWG should pursue education and awareness of potential impacts, especially on the prevention of spread.</p> <p>Agreed to add it as a standing point in the 'climate and ecosystem update' agenda item (invasive species – including COTS).</p> |

| Meeting | Action | Status update |
|--------------------|---|--|
| | invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG. | It was also recommended to develop content / awareness documents on invasive species for next community consultation round (AFMA/TSRA). |
| Dec 2022, Action 2 | AFMA to contact the RAG out-of-session to seek RAG advice on how to proceed with a review of the 2019 coral trout stock assessment. | Actioned: Remove. |
| Dec 2022, Action 3 | TIB members to liaise with AFMA to identify and invite essential participants to harvest strategy workshop proposed for March 2023 (to support MSE project in 2023-24). Due to availabilities of members, the March 2023 workshop was cancelled. Deferred for at least 12 months, subject to endorsement of Spanish mackerel MSE project in future years. MSE not endorsed for 2024-25. | Deferred: FFWG advised to defer the HS workshop, with the current priority to add harvest strategy development to the agenda for community consultation. There is a need to brief the community on the current harvest strategy, to prepare for the future HS workshop. |
| Dec 2022, Action 4 | The AFMA member agreed to distribute the final report for phase 1 of the non-commercial catch project to the WG out of session. | Actioned: Remove. |
| Dec 2022, Action 5 | The AMFA member agreed to provide information on the international compliance risk assessment process, with priorities compiled and presented to the WG out-of-session | Ongoing: AFMA member to provide update out-of-session. |
| Dec 2022, Action 6 | AFMA Senior Manager of National Compliance to attend FAC meeting in February 2023 to progress the process of identifying, prioritising and addressing risks as part of the 2023-25 compliance plan. TSRA agreed to support the review of this risk assessment process. | Ongoing: TSRA/FAC to invite the AFMA Senior Manager of National Compliance to a future FAC meeting. |
| Dec 2022, Action 7 | The AFMA member agreed to investigate the removal of drop-lining as a permitted method, noting that such a change would require an amendment to the Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 14. The WG noted that further advice would be sought before such an amendment could be progressed to the PZJA for decision. | Ongoing: To be considered under the broader suite of amendments to <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 14</i> . |

| Meeting | Action | Status update |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Dec 2022, Action 8 | AFMA to investigate the legal barriers to such an activity (retention of bycatch from prawn trawling vessels to be sold for the use of bait), noting that the TS Prawn Fishery regulates the take of bait species. To report back to the WG at its next meeting. | Actioned: Remove. Current legislation limits the possession of finfish species to 20kg on TSPF vessels. The WG discussed. Reported that ‘pinkies and goaties’ (finfish) would be less economical, however there’s interest in squids/cuttlefish (currently no limits). The FFWG agreed that any further discussions should be held between industry and community regarding the collection of bycatch species for bait. Future developments for non-fish species could be taken to the TSPFWG. Industry members reported that there is no immediate need/infrastructure to process bait species – but if the infrastructure is built, then there is an avenue to set up a bait fishery supported by prawn trawlers. |
| Dec 2022, Action 9 | QDAF to distribute information of bycatch bait species research to the WG OOS. | Actioned: Remove. |
| Dec 2022, Action 10 | Mr Brewer to share bycatch bait fishery viability study with the WG OOS. | Actioned: Remove. |

1.5 Out of Session Correspondence

11. The WG noted the out-of-session correspondence since 10 November 2022 as detailed in the agenda paper.

2 Updates from Members

2.1 Industry and Scientific Updates

Industry Member updates

12. Traditional Inhabitant members provided the following updates to the WG on developments within the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery since the last major WG meeting (7-8 December 2022):
13. Aspirations to conduct a visual dive survey of TS waters were raised, suggesting it would be an opportune time to survey the coral trout stock as a baseline while it is relatively underutilised. The AFMA EO suggested that the FFWG could advise the FFRAG to consider adding this to the 5-year rolling research plan. It was further suggested by TIB members that the proposed coral trout dive survey could be discussed at the TSRA FAC to pursue funding options.
14. It was noted that while a dive survey isn’t an immediate research need for management purposes, it holds cultural importance to Traditional Owners. The FFWG agreed to provide advice to the RAG regarding research priorities during the relevant agenda item.

‘Non-commercial catch’ project update

15. The WG noted an update provided by Kenny Bedford on the current non-commercial catch project. The aspiration of this project is to protect Torres Strait livelihoods, long-term, for future generations. It seeks to achieve this by collecting traditional (non-commercial) catch data to monitor the health of local fisheries. Mr Bedford highlighted the need to advocate and consult with Torres Strait Communities about the importance of collecting traditional catch data, before specific methodology and programs (such as an app) can be developed.

Scientific Member updates

16. The WG acknowledged the completion of the third and final Spanish mackerel stock assessment from the current project.
17. Dr O’Neill provided an update about a broader group of stock assessments currently being planned for the QLD east coast fisheries, with project teams scheduled to be formed in the coming months.
18. The FRDC Spanish mackerel project (east coast) had a project meeting three weeks ago. This project has considering CKMR sampling protocols which may be of relevance to Torres Strait CKMR research and noted that there may be opportunities to collaborate in the future.
19. Additional new research occurring the in the QLD east coast fishery includes:
- Satellite tagging, which is collecting data to assess spatial scales.
 - Shark depredation study, noting that depredation rates have been observed to be less than 10% of commercial catch. Preliminary evidence suggest depredation rates in the recreational sector are higher.
 - Using vessel monitoring systems (VMS) to improve catch-rate standardisations. This is an FRDC project. The WG expressed interest in viewing project as they become available.

2.2 Government Agencies Update

AFMA update

20. The WG noted AFMA updates as detailed in the agenda paper. The WG considered the following update in detail:

WTO approval

The WG noted that in June 2023 the Australian Fisheries Management Authority applied for export approval for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery (TSFF) under the EPBC Act. The application was assessed, and the fishery was declared by the Delegate for the Minister of the Environment and Water, as an approved wildlife trade operation under Part 13A of the EPBC Act until 1 November 2026.

This approval was based on the ‘Assessment of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery October 2023’, which was undertaken by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water. This assessment contained seven approval conditions under Part 13 & 13a of the EPBC Act to ensure ecological risks continue to be managed.

TSRA update

21. The WG noted the following updates from the TSRA member:

Reports are coming through from fishers in eastern Torres Strait that Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) are expanding into the central cluster. This was corroborated by TIB member Gavin Mosby, who reported to have observed increasing “unprecedented” numbers of COTS around Masig. TSRA are collaborating with GBRMPA to pursue a major project to address this issue. This process will involve engaging with local communities to identify COTS hotspots and assess the total spread of this pest species. The Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) has previously completed work with the Meriam community for this purpose.

To be actioned by the TSRA Land Sea Management Unit, a second key component will involve training fishers/community members to conduct control work. Community consultation will be undertaken as a first step in 2024.

The WG agreed that COTS should be included and monitored under the ‘climate and ecosystem’ agenda item moving forward. It was also noted that a recent FRDC study considered the *Effects of climate change and habitat degradation on Coral Trout (Plectropomus spp.)*¹, which considered a consideration of the impacts of COTS. The paper can be found at the following link: <https://www.frdc.com.au/sites/default/files/products/2018-034-DLD.pdf>

2.3 Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority Update

22. The WG noted that PNG NFA were unable to attend the meeting and that no update was provided.

2.4 Native Title Update

23. The WG noted that a representative for Malu Lamar was unable to attend the meeting, and that no update was provided.

2.5 Climate and Ecosystem Update

24. The WG noted that a new standing agenda item has been added to the FFWG workplan. This item was added after the PZJA, at its meeting on 19 July 2023, agreed that a standing agenda item “Climate and ecosystem update” be introduced to all RAG and Working Group agendas where total allowable catch (TAC) and/or effort limits are to be considered.

25. Under this agenda item the WG noted the work being undertaken to incorporate climate change information into fisheries management advice and decisions in other Commonwealth managed fisheries. The meeting papers also provided an overview of recent work undertaken in Torres Strait fisheries related to climate change.

26. The WG then considered the draft Climate and Ecosystem Status report for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery, which is intended to be a document to summarise latest environmental data / forecast indicators that the group can utilise to track the potential risks for Torres Strait fisheries.

¹ Pratchett, M. S., Clark, T. D., Scott, M., Hoey, A. S., Leigh, G. M., & Emslie, M. J. 2022, Effects of climate change and habitat degradation on Coral Trout (*Plectropomus spp.*), Townsville, July. CC BY 3.0

27. The intent of the Climate and Ecosystem Status report will be refined over time based on FFrag, FFWG and expert feedback.
28. The WG recommended to add a page to climate and ecosystem update to record invasive species (this would action the earlier recommendation made under agenda item 1.4).

3 Total Allowable Catch Advice

3.1 Spanish Mackerel Total Allowable Catch Advice for the 2024-25 Season

Reviewing the recommendations from FFrag 15

29. The WG noted an update provide by the AFMA EO regarding the results of the 2023 Torres Strait Spanish mackerel stock assessment and RBC advice provided by the FFrag at its meeting on 29-30 November 2023.
30. The WG noted that the median 2022-23 spawning biomass/unfished biomass derived from the 2023 stock assessment was **41%** (SS model). This is an increase in estimated biomass compared to 31% in 2021-22. This follows an upward trend since an estimated biomass of 23% in 2019.
31. The WG noted that the stock assessment and RBC calculation process was the same as the process utilised by the RAG in 2022, whereby the RAG endorsed a range of data inputs and treatments.²
32. In summary, four potential RBC figures (**Table 2**) were derived from the mean of the results from twelve key model runs. These figures represent a series of fishing mortality 'F' values which denote different 'rebuilding' scenarios, ranging from 'constant' F_{40} (maintain stock at 40% of virgin biomass, to F_{60} (build stock to 60% of virgin biomass). These scenarios were simulated over a projected 12-year timeframe.

Table 2: RBC options considered by the RAG at FFrag 15 (29-30 November 2023), derived from the 2023 Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Stock Assessment.

| No. | Name of RBC approach 1941-2023 SS model | Forecast % of biomass below S_{20} over 12 years and 12 analyses (upper 95% confidence interval in parenthesis) Assuming average recruitment and constant RBC | Median RBC tonnes Over analyses 1 to 12 Gridded analyses bracketed | Do forecasts achieve S_{48} within 12 years? Over analyses 1 to 12 |
|-----|---|--|---|--|
| 1 | Constant F_{40} | 7.7% (11.5%) | 162 (149) | No |
| 2 | Constant F_{48} | 4.0% (5.3%) | 141 (132) | Mostly |
| 3 | Constant F_{50} | 3.1% (5.0%) | 133 (124) | Yes |
| 4 | Constant F_{60} | 1.6% (5.0%) | 97 (91) | Yes |

² Refer to 'FFrag 14' and 'FFrag 15' meeting records for detailed explanation of the review of the SS model and RBC calculation.

33. The WG noted that the FFRAG recommended an RBC of 97 tonnes. This figure was the 'F₆₀' value, which was estimated to satisfy the interim rebuilding target for the fishery to build the stock to 48% virgin biomass within 12 years. This figure was also assessed to satisfy the long-term target reference point to build the stock to 60% of virgin biomass.
34. The RBC figure was selected considering the '90% risk criterion' of the Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy (CFHSP) (utilised by the RAG/WG as a guide), which requires that harvest strategies maintain the biomass of the stock above the limit reference point (LRP: 20% biomass) at least 90% of the time. As the percentage of simulations which estimated the biomass to fall under the LRP was 5% (assuming a constant catch of 97 tonnes per season over 12 years), this RBC figure satisfied the 90% risk criterion.
35. The WG noted that the 'F₅₀' value of 133 tonnes would also satisfy the interim target reference point for the fishery; to build the stock to 48% of virgin biomass in 12 years.

Spanish mackerel total allowable catch (TAC) advice – 2024-25 season

36. In providing its TAC advice, the WG considered the potential effects of climate change. Noting the FFRAG did not include an explicit deduction to account for climate change, it was agreed that the RBC of 97 tonnes (the lowest RBC option considered by the RAG) represented a precautionary approach. The WG agreed that risks pertaining to potential climate change effects have been effectively managed.
37. Having considered harvest strategy guidance, FFRAG 15 advice on an RBC (97 Tonnes), and best estimates of non-commercial catches (20 tonnes), the WG discussed and provided advice on a Total Allowable Catch for the 2024-25 fishing season for Spanish mackerel.
38. The Finfish Fishery Working Group (FFWG) **agreed to recommend a TAC for Spanish mackerel for the 2024-25 fishing season of 77 tonnes.**
39. The recommended TAC is based on an agreed RBC of 97 tonnes minus 20 tonnes of estimated non-commercial catch (15 tonnes traditional fishing (kai kai), five tonnes recreational fishing, zero tonnes charter fishing and zero tonnes PNG catch sharing).
40. Noting the positive trend in the stock's estimated biomass, and considerable work to date in establishing the current TAC-setting strategy, it was suggested that a news article be prepared to document the building of the stock. The WG noted that highlighting the harvest strategy work to date, which has involved significant contributions from Traditional Owners through the PZJA advisory groups, would add value to the Torres Strait brand as a sustainable fishery product in the broader market.

3.2 Coral Trout Total Allowable Catch Advice for the 2024-25 Season

Reviewing the recommended biological catch advice from FFRAG 15

41. The WG considered a summary provided by the RAG EO which detailed the discussions and advice from the coral trout scientific workshop and FFRAG 15 meeting held on 28-30 November 2023.³

³ Refer to FFRAG 15 meeting record for full summary of RAG/workshop advice.

42. The WG noted that the FFRAG, having considered recent catch data, previous assessments, and the 2022 CPUE timeseries, concluded that there is no evidence to suggest amending the substantive RBC of 135 tonnes; the available data does not suggest a decline in the coral trout population, and there were no justifications identified to increase the RBC.
43. The WG noted the FFRAG's recommended biological catch for coral trout of 135 tonnes for the 2024/25 season.

Total allowable catch (TAC) advice

44. Notably, the WG considered a first estimate of non-commercial catch for coral trout to support TAC setting. To date, the TAC for coral trout had not been calculated with an explicit deduction to account for non-commercial catch (e.g. traditional, recreational or charter fishing). This is because it had not been a high priority to undertake work to determine catch estimates whilst catches remain very low compared with the TAC.
45. The WG considered the following estimates of non-commercial catch which were provided by the RAG (12 tonnes):

Traditional/Subsistence Catch

- One tonne (Maluligal Nation)
- One tonne (Gudamaluligal Nation)
- One tonne (Kaiwalagal Kaureg Nation)
- Two tonnes (Kulkaigal Nation)
- Two tonnes* (Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation) *Confirmed at the current FFWG meeting.

Recreational Catch

- Five tonnes

46. The WG supported the FFRAG's advice on an RBC of 135 tonnes **and recommended that the coral trout TAC be reduced to 123 tonnes for the 2024-25 fishing season**. This recommended TAC was calculated with an explicit deduction to account for expected non-commercial catch as estimated above.
47. In providing its TAC advice, the WG considered the potential impacts of climate change. It was agreed that current evidence suggests that the risk of a negative climate effect is low in the short term, and that the nominated TAC is suitably precautionary to account for inherent uncertainties.

4 Management

4.1 Update to the TSF01 Daily Fishing Logbook

48. The WG were asked to review, discuss and provide advice regarding work to date on draft amendments to the TSF01 logbook, noting a presentation from the WG EO.
49. Referring to the draft logbook and questions presented, the WG provided the following advice:
- Add a column to account for both numbers and estimated weight retained for

individual tenders.

- Agreed to the removal of dory-specific catch data for non-target mackerel species.
- Specify daily total sections for both coral trout and Spanish mackerel on the page before 'other catch information' section.
- Could add section to account for carton of coral trout fillets.

50. The WG then discussed an 'all in one' reporting document, proposed for the TIB sector. It was noted that this could be more fit-for-purpose for TIB operators who mostly engage in daily trips from home islands. However, it was agreed that a document in line with a daily fishing logbook would be most appropriate for TIB primary tender operations to ensure the ongoing collection of data on key target species by tender (for standardised CPUE).

4.2 Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Priorities

51. The WG reviewed the management priorities which were discussed at its previous meeting on 7-8 December 2022. Having regard for the management issues discussed at the current meeting, the WG recommended the following priorities for 2024-25:

- **HIGH: Progress the development of a harvest strategy.**

This remains a high priority. Recommended to conduct community consultation on harvest strategy work to date, to inform/prepare stakeholders before the proposed workshop.

- **HIGH: Potential application of Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) on tenders.**

Remains a high priority. The FFWG endorses VMS in principle, noting there are financial considerations for economics of the fishery. Proposed workplan to progress to PZJA for decision for 2025-26 season. The FFWG noted that this could involve the noting future advice from the TSRA FQMC/FAC, then TSRA to prepare paper for PZJA for 2024. The FFWG noted that this proposed amendment would require a variation to licence conditions, which would be administered by AFMA as the licencing delegate.

- **HIGH: Support adherence to WTO conditions**

Added as a priority to support compliance with new WTO conditions.

- **MEDIUM: Formalising total allowable catches for the Finfish fishery.**

Remains a medium priority. No update available, noting that a tender process for a consultant to investigate TRL resource allocation is currently underway.

- **LOW: Supporting consultation on future proposed changes to the Western Line Closure.**

Maintain as a low priority to monitor for potential amendments based on community aspirations. Advice received that current border is appropriate at this point in time.

5 Research

5.1 Research Priorities

52. The WG noted that the RAG at FFrag 15 meeting considered and provided advice on research proposals submitted for the 2024-25 financial year.
53. The WG further noted that the RAG at FFrag 15 deferred discussions on research priorities (updating the 5-year rolling research plan) until June 2024, when the group will advise on Spanish mackerel stock assessment options for 2024-25, and the order of other research priorities. For this reason, the FFWG did not have an updated research plan to review.
54. However, noting recent discussions on data gaps in assessing coral trout at an individual species level, the WG recommended to add a coral trout dive survey to the 5-year rolling research plan. Advice from TIB members was that it should be deemed a high priority to gain a greater understanding about species density and distribution before any increase in the quantum of effort in the fishery.

6 Other Business

55. The WG discussed whether to add a standing agenda item to consider any emerging developmental fisheries opportunities. The group didn't agree on a specific way to action this proposal, however various options were considered. These included adding a section to industry or government updates. The WG noted that the group is always welcome to raise developmental fisheries opportunities for discussion at future meetings.
56. The WG noted advice from TIB members that the TSRA could commence consultation for bait-net fishery opportunities. The WG noted advice from the EO that a developmental permit would be required for commercial bait netting, noting that this activity is not permitted under the Finfish Instrument.

7 Date and venue for next meeting

57. The WG noted the proposed timeline for future meetings.
58. The WG also welcomed closing remarks from all members who acknowledged the ongoing contributions of Egon Stewart to TSFF advisory group meetings and critical data collection for the fishery.

The meeting closed at 1200 hrs on 6 December 2023.

Attachments

Attachment A: FFWG Meeting Agenda – 5-6 December 2023.

MEETING OF THE PZJA TORRES STRAIT FINFISH FISHERY WORKING GROUP

Tuesday 5th December – Wednesday 6th December 2022

8:30am – 5:00pm (6th 8:30am - 12:30pm)

Novotel Oasis Hotel - Cairns

DRAFT AGENDA

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome and Apologies

The Chair will welcome members and observers to the meeting.

1.2 Adoption of Agenda

The FFWG 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.

1.4 Action Items from Previous Meetings

The FFWG will be invited to note the status of action items arising from previous meetings.

1.5 Out-of-Session Correspondence

The FFWG will be invited to note out of session correspondence on FFWG matters since the previous meeting.

2 UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

2.1 Industry & Scientific Members

Industry and scientific members will be invited to provide a verbal update on matters concerning the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery, in particular, providing comment on fishing patterns, behaviours, prices, and market trends this season.

2.2 Government Agencies

The FFWG will be invited to note updates from AFMA, TSRA and QDAF on matters concerning the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.

This item will include an update provided by TSRA regarding a proposed crown of thorns starfish (COTS) control program.

2.3 PNG National Fisheries Authority

The FFWG will be invited to note a verbal update from the PNG National Fisheries Authority if a representative is in attendance.

2.4 Native Title

The FFWG will be invited to note a verbal update from Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC if a representative is in attendance.

2.5 Climate and Ecosystem Update

The FFRAG is invited to note an update on climate and ecosystem changes and discuss their impacts on Torres Strait finfish fisheries.

3 TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH ADVICE

3.1 Spanish Mackerel Total Allowable Catch Advice for the 2024-25 Season

Having considered advice from FFRAG 15 (29-30 Nov 2023) on a Recommended Biological Catch and best estimates of non-commercial catches, the FFWG will discuss and provide advice on a Total Allowable Catch for the 2024-25 fishing season for Spanish mackerel.

3.2 Coral Trout Total Allowable Catch Advice for the 2024-25 Season

Having considered advice from FFRAG 15 on a Recommended Biological Catch and best estimates of non-commercial catches, FFWG will discuss and provide advice on a Total Allowable Catch for the 2024-25 fishing season for coral trout.

4 MANAGEMENT

4.1 Update to the TSF01 Daily Fishing Logbook

The FFRAG will be invited to review the draft amendments to the TSF01 logbook. Subject to endorsement from the FFRAG, these amendments will be finalised before the commencement of the 2024-25 fishing season.

4.2 Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Priorities

The FFWG are asked to discuss and provide updated advice to AFMA and the PZJA on management priorities for the Finfish Fishery.

5 RESEARCH

5.1 Research Priorities

FFWG members will be invited to discuss research priorities for the Finfish Fishery. Noting advice from the FFRAG, the FFWG will review the *Finfish Fishery Rolling Five Year Research Plan*.

6 OTHER BUSINESS

FFRAG members will be invited to discuss other business for consideration.

7 DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING

The FFWG will note arrangements for the next FFRAG meetings and confirm arrangements for FFWG in 2024. The FFWG will also be advised of and PZJA meeting to decide next season's TACs.

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)