

Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority

Annual Report
2024–25



© Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority, 2025

Unless otherwise noted, copyright (and any other intellectual property rights) in this publication is owned by the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority. Apart from any use permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced by any process without prior written permission. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to:

The Communications Manager
Australian Fisheries Management Authority
Telephone: +61 2 6225 5555
Email: Communications@afma.gov.au

The report should be attributed as: PZJA, 2025, *Annual Report 2024–25*, Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority, Canberra.

ISSN 0819-1050 (Print)

ISSN 1835-7261 (Online)

PZJA annual reports are available at: www.pzja.gov.au/corporate-and-reports

Published by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority on behalf of the Protected Zone Joint Authority

Australian Fisheries Management Authority
Box 7051
Canberra Business Centre
CANBERRA ACT 2610

Email: info@afma.gov.au

ABN 81 098 497 517

Agency websites:

PZJA: www.pzja.gov.au

Australian Fisheries Management Authority website: www.afma.gov.au

Fisheries Queensland: Fisheries | Department of Primary Industries, Queensland

Torres Strait Regional Authority: www.tsra.gov.au

Acknowledgements

Cover artwork and all other artworks used throughout this report: © Laurie Nona, *Zenardh-Zes'aw Malu*, 2022

www.pzja.gov.au/zenardh-zesaw-malu-torres-strait-seas

Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority

Annual report for the financial year

1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025

Presented to Parliament
pursuant to section 41 of the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (Commonwealth)

Contents

Contents4

Introduction5

Background5

Torres Strait Fisheries Legislation6

Native Title6

The Projected Zone Joint Authority6

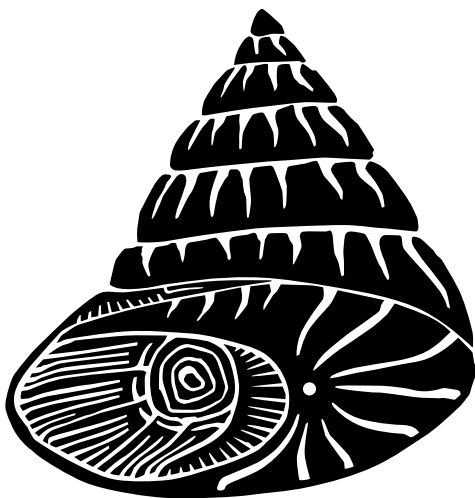
Roles and responsibilities7

The PZJA Standing Committee.....7

Report on the status of fisheries managed by the PZJA8

Surveillance and enforcement.....8

Annex 1: Commercial catches of key species.....10



Introduction

This, the thirty-third annual report of the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA), describes PZJA activities and the condition of the fisheries in the Torres Strait Protected Zone during the financial year ending 30 June 2025.

The PZJA is responsible for management of commercial and traditional fishing in the Australian area of the Protected Zone and designated adjacent Torres Strait waters.

Background

Sea-based resources are important to Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people. Traditional Inhabitants of the Torres Strait have always exploited a diverse range of marine animals for subsistence and use in cultural activities including dugong, turtle, tropical rock lobster, finfish, shellfish, crab and octopus. The relative importance of each group varies between island communities. The most common subsistence fishing activities undertaken by Traditional Inhabitants include hand lining for finfish and diving for many species including tropical rock lobster.

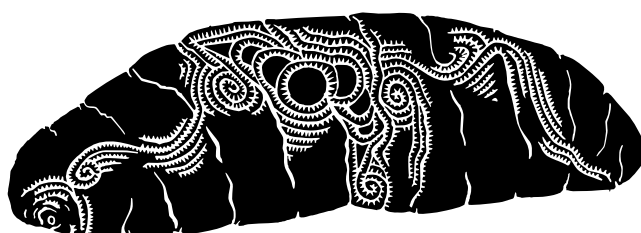
Commercial fishing is the most important economic activity in the Protected Zone for Traditional Inhabitants and provides significant opportunities for achieving financial independence. A priority of the PZJA is to enhance opportunities for Traditional Inhabitants through participation in all sectors of the fishing industry.

While both traditional and non-traditional inhabitants participate in commercial fisheries, expansion in the number of licensed fishers has been reserved for Torres Strait Traditional Inhabitants.

At its 23rd meeting in April 2014, the PZJA acknowledged and supported the aspirations of 100 per cent ownership of Torres Strait fisheries by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Traditional Owners. The Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) continues to lead on the development of strategies to increase ownership of access and participation in Torres Strait commercial fisheries.

Non-traditional inhabitants can only gain access to a fishery by purchasing or leasing an existing Torres Strait Fishing Licence or leasing a Torres Strait Sunset Fishing Licence.

Further information about licensing for fisheries in the Australian jurisdiction of the Protected Zone by both Traditional Inhabitants and non-traditional inhabitants is available at www.pzja.gov.au/licences.



Torres Strait Fisheries Legislation

Management of Protected Zone fisheries in the Australian jurisdiction is subject to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act). The Act came into force on the same day as the *Treaty between Australia and the Independent State of Papua New Guinea concerning Sovereignty and Maritime Boundaries in the area between the two Countries, including the area known as the Torres Strait, and Related Matters* (the Torres Strait Treaty) was ratified on 15 February 1985. The Act gives effect, in Australian law, to the fisheries elements of the Torres Strait Treaty.

The Act also establishes the PZJA, which consists of the Australian Government Minister responsible for fisheries, the Queensland Minister responsible for fisheries and the Chair of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. The members for the reporting period are outlined in Section 3 of this report.

Native Title

In August 2013, the High Court of Australia ruled that native title holders maintained the right to access and take fish and other aquatic life for any purpose in the waters of the Torres Strait where Native Title has been found to exist. The High Court noted that the native title right to access to fish and other aquatic life is non-exclusive, and that although there is legislation in place that regulates access to the fishery, regulation of the fishery is not inconsistent with the continued existence of native title rights where the legislation adequately provides for the exercise of those rights.

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), on behalf of the PZJA, consults with registered native title body corporates (RNTBCs), registered native title claimants and any representative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies in accordance with section 24HA(7) of the *Native Title Act 1993*. Section 24HA(7) sets out when, and for what processes, a formal Future Act Notification and Native Title Notification must be undertaken. In addition, AFMA engages with RNTBCs, registered claimants and representative bodies through formal consultation and as invited participants on the PZJA consultative forums.

Future Act Notifications that have been undertaken by AFMA, including information on each consultation process are published online at www.pzja.gov.au/consultations/native-title-notifications.

The Projected Zone Joint Authority

During the reporting period the members of the PZJA were:

1. Senator the Hon. Murray Watt, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (1 June 2022 – 29 July 2024).
2. The Hon. Julie Collins MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (29 July 2024 – present).
3. The Hon. Mark Furner MP, Queensland Minister for Agricultural Industry Development and Fisheries and Minister for Rural Communities (12 November 2020 – 27 October 2024).

4. The Hon. Anthony (Tony) Perrett MP, Queensland Minister for Primary Industries (1 November 2024 – present).
5. Mr Napau Pedro Stephen AM, Chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (6 August 2016 – 14 January 2025).
6. Mr George Nona, Chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (14 February 2025 – present).

The Australian Government Minister is the presiding member of the PZJA.

During the reporting period, the PZJA held a teleconference meeting on 25 February 2025 and also took decisions via correspondence out-of-session.

Decision records from all meetings of the PZJA, including decisions taken out-of-session, are published online at www.pzja.gov.au/advisory-committees/pzja-committees/protected-zone-joint-authority-pzja.

Roles and responsibilities

The PZJA is responsible for monitoring the condition of the designated fisheries and for formulating policies and plans for their management. The PZJA has regard to the rights and obligations conferred on Australia by the Torres Strait Treaty, and in particular, the protection of the traditional way of life and livelihood of the Traditional Inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing.

Recreational fishing, charter fishing and aquaculture are managed by Queensland under Queensland law. Information on these activities can be obtained from Fisheries Queensland.

The PZJA Standing Committee

The PZJA Standing Committee consists of senior representatives from the PZJA member agencies. The committee provides strategic and operational recommendations to the PZJA on the management of the fisheries in accordance with the PZJA's statutory obligations and to oversee the implementation of the PZJA's agreed policy commitments. Meetings of the Standing Committee are generally held two weeks prior to meetings of the PZJA to form recommendations for acceptance by the PZJA on behalf of PZJA agencies and advisory committees.

Representation	Member
Australian Fisheries Management Authority (Chair)	Chief Executive Officer
Fisheries Queensland	Deputy Director-General, Fisheries
Torres Strait Regional Authority	Chief Executive Officer
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Assistant Secretary, Fisheries Branch

The PZJA has delegated certain powers and functions to these agencies. During the reporting period, AFMA staff members held delegations for fisheries management, licensing and compliance functions in Torres Strait fisheries.

Report on the status of fisheries managed by the PZJA

The fisheries managed under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* are:

- Torres Strait Prawn Fishery
- Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery
- Torres Strait Finfish Fishery
- Torres Strait Pearl Shell Fishery
- Torres Strait Crab Fishery
- Torres Strait Trochus Fishery
- Torres Strait Sea Cucumber (Bêche-de-mer) Fishery
- Torres Strait Dugong and Turtle subsistence fisheries (for conservation purposes).

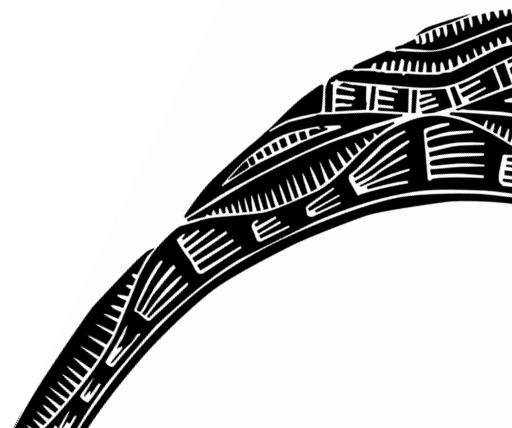
Annex 1 presents a summary of the catches taken in these fisheries. The biological and economic status of fish stocks in the Torres Strait is independently evaluated by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences and can be accessed at www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/fisheries/fishery-status.

Surveillance and enforcement

The PZJA has a responsibility to undertake surveillance and enforce the provisions of the Act, rules, and regulations in the Protected Zone. The purpose of the Protected Zone Compliance Program is to:

- enforce fisheries legislation in a manner that results in a high level of compliance
- educate and advise commercial fishers and fish receivers on the need for fishing laws in a manner that results in a high level of voluntary compliance
- undertake duties as required by the PZJA to protect the resources of the Protected Zone.

AFMA is responsible for undertaking domestic compliance activities of the Protected Zone Compliance Program on behalf of the PZJA.



The Compliance Program is staffed with two full-time authorised sea-going AFMA Fisheries Officers consisting of a Manager and Senior Fisheries Officer, based on Thursday Island, and further supported by AFMA Fisheries Officers located in Canberra, Lakes Entrance and Darwin. The domestic and foreign compliance operations in the Protected Zone are also supported by other government agencies including Australian Border Force, Maritime Border Command, Royal Australian Navy, Queensland Water Police, Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol (QBFP) and the Torres Strait Regional Authority. Inter-agency collaboration improves the ability to patrol, respond to and enforce fisheries legislation throughout the Torres Strait Protected Zone.

During the reporting period a total of 54 commercial fishing boats and 36 licensed fish receiver premises were inspected while 10 sea patrols were achieved. Two significant operations were undertaken focusing on the domestic commercial fishery, which included the Tropical Rock Lobster fishery and the black teatfish season.

Two further operations were undertaken within the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) focusing on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. These operations were supported by the Queensland Police Service and Papua New Guinea's National Fisheries Authority. Operations were successful in building intelligence holdings while disrupting untoward fishing behaviours with a strong emphasis on education and community engagement with stakeholders.

The two Papua New Guinea licensed operations endorsed under the Torres Strait Treaty to commercially fish within Australian Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) fishery jurisdiction continued fishing activities in the early part of this reporting period, with two days being recorded in July 2024. AFMA compliance continued to monitor these operations via vessel monitoring systems and Maritime Border Command aerial surveillance.

All serious offences investigated under the Act are required to be submitted through a brief of evidence to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions where the matter is assessed. Warnings and cautions for minor offences may be dealt with through verbal or written communication with offenders. During the reporting period, AFMA investigated 8 domestic matters with one matter currently before the Magistrates court, while more minor matters were dealt with through official warnings, cautions or education.

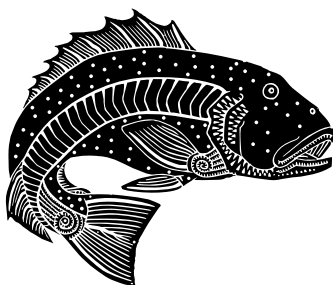
AFMA worked closely with industry and stakeholders of the TSPZ to deliver educational awareness through structured forms including community meetings and during field inspections. International forums were attended by AFMA including the Australian and Papua New Guinea fishery bilateral meeting and the Regional Plan of Action Group. Working with Papua New Guinea, and other regional partners, Torres Strait fishery matters such as IUU fishing can be more effectively addressed as well as presenting an opportunity to foster international resilience.



Annex 1: Commercial catches of key species

Table 1 Commercial catches (tonnes) per fishing season for the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery and Finfish Fishery

Species/stock (scientific name)	2020–21	2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–24	2024–25
Tropical rock lobster (<i>Panulirus ornatus</i>) ¹	243.83	291.18	243.7	196.93	283.79
(TVH ² , TIB ³)	(116.28, 127.55)	(139.7, 151.5)	(118.5, 129.6)	(90.01, 106.92)	(144.42, 139.37)
Coral Trout (<i>Plectropomus</i> spp., <i>Variola</i> spp.) ⁴	19.9	42	63.6	10	10.5
(Sunset, TIB)	(15.7, 4.2)	(30.9, 11.1)	(21.9, 41.7)	(8.9, 1.1)	(9.8, 0.7)
Spanish mackerel (<i>Scomberomorus commerson</i>) ⁴	32.5	59.5	83.4	57.9	449
(Sunset, TIB)	(28.8, 3.5)	(47.3, 12.2)	(47.2, 36.2)	(54.3, 3.6)	(44.1, 0.8)
Finfish basket species ⁴	3.5	5.3	1.8	0.3	0.6
(Sunset, TIB)	(1.9, 1.6)	(3.2, 2.1)	(1.1, 0.7)	(0.27, 0.03)	(0, 0.6)



¹ Fishery Statistics are provided by fishing season, unless otherwise indicated. Fishing season is 1 December to 30 September, unless the TAC is reached before that time.

² Torres Strait fishing boat licence.

³ Traditional inhabitant boat licence.

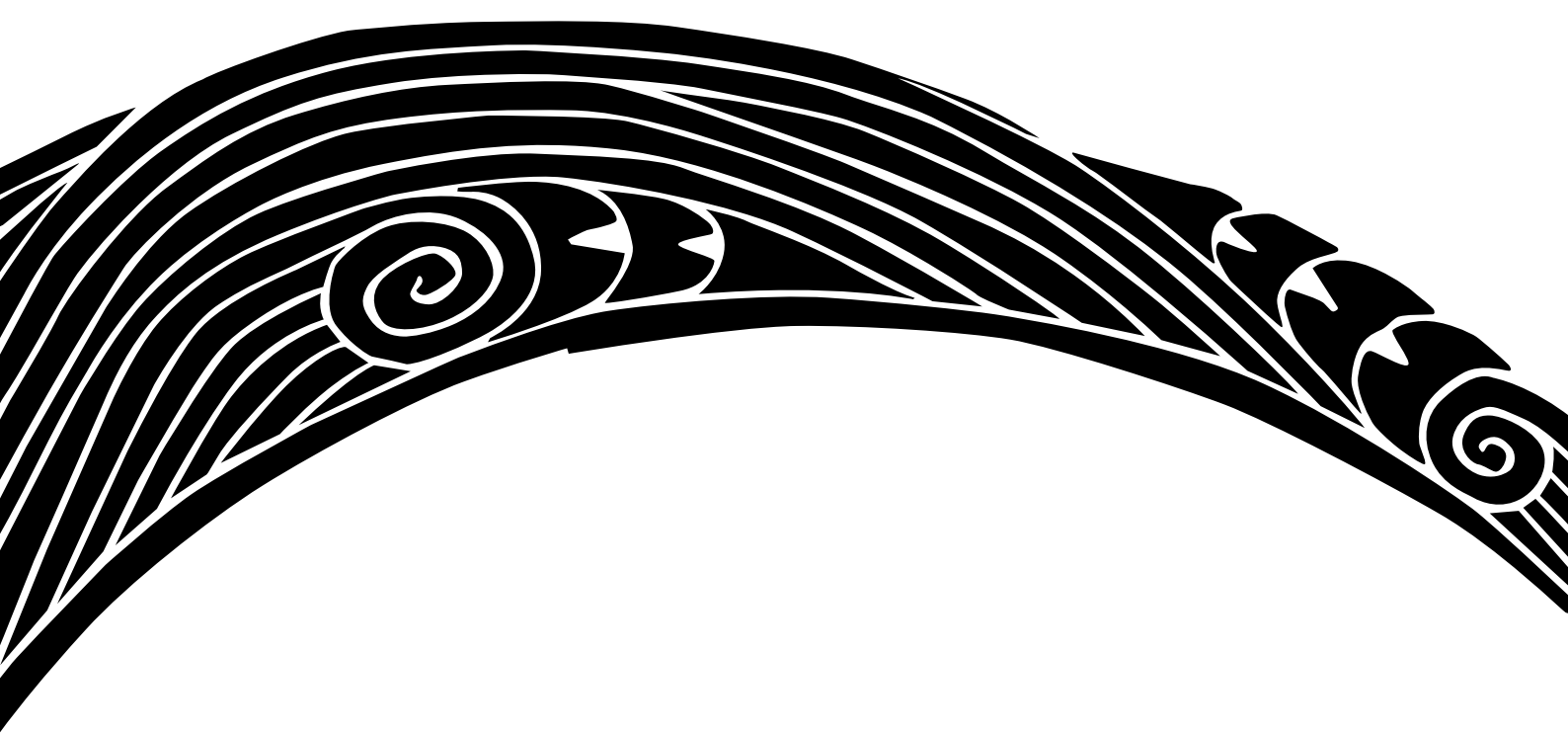
⁴ Fishery statistics are provided by fishing season, unless otherwise indicated. Fishing season is 1 July to 30 June.

Table 2 Commercial catches (tonnes) per calendar year for the Prawn Fishery, Trochus Fishery, Pearl Shell Fishery, Crab Fishery and Beche-de-mer Fishery

Species/stock (scientific name)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Brown tiger prawn (<i>Penaeus esculentus</i>) ⁵	202.7	232.6	264.9	158	307
Blue endeavour prawn (<i>Metapenaeus endeavouri</i>) ⁵	60	62	87	68	88
Trochus (<i>Trochus niloticus</i>) ⁶	0	0	0	0	0
Pearl shell (<i>Pinctada spp.</i>) ⁶	159 (individual shells)	137 (individual shells)	262 (individual shells)	0	0
Mud crab (<i>Scylla spp.</i>) ⁶	0	0	0.4	0.1	0
Black teatfish (<i>Holothuria whitmaei</i>) ⁷	0	17.6	17.1	17.9	15.9
Curryfish – combined (<i>Stichopus hermanni</i> , <i>S. vastus</i>) ⁷	13.6	14.3	2.7	26.3	-
Curryfish – <i>S. hermanni</i> ^{7, 8}	-	-	-	-	15.8
Curryfish – <i>S. vastus</i> ^{7, 8}	-	-	-	-	13.9
Deepwater redfish (<i>Actinopyga echinites</i>) ⁷	0	0.03	0.03	0	0.007
Greenfish (<i>Stichopus chloronotus</i>) ⁷	0.01	0	0	0.01	0.15
Hairy blackfish (<i>Actinopyga miliaris</i>) ⁷	1.4	0.5	0.7	0.4	0
Prickly redfish (<i>Thelenota ananas</i>) ⁷	15.9	15.1	13.1	8.9	1.48

⁵ Fishery statistics are provided by fishing season, unless otherwise indicated. Fishing season is 1 February to 31 December.⁶ Fishery statistics are provided by fishing season, unless otherwise indicated. Fishing season is 1 January to 31 December.⁷ Fishery statistics are provided by fishing season, unless otherwise indicated. Fishing season is 1 January to 31 December. All reported weights are in gutted wet weight.⁸ *S. hermanni* and *S. vastus* added as individual lines from 2024 in response to increased level of reporting at individual species level.

Species/stock (scientific name)	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Sandfish (<i>Holothuria scabra</i>) ^{7, 9}	0	0	0	0	0
Surf redfish (<i>Actinopyga mauritiana</i>) ^{7, 10}	0.2	0	0	0	0
White teatfish (<i>Holothuria fuscogilva</i>) ⁷	1.8	2.0	2.3	1.3	0.43
Other sea cucumbers (all other species in the families Holothuridae and Stichopidae, referred to as basket species)	1.6	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.52



⁹ Commercial fishing for sandfish was closed in 1998.

¹⁰ Commercial fishing for surf redfish was closed in 2000.

