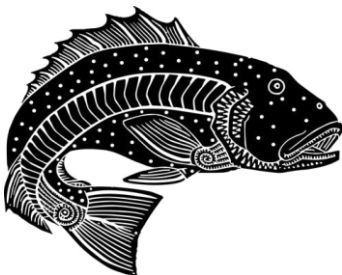


OFFICIAL

Protected Zone Joint Authority

Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group (TRLWG) 18 Final Meeting Record 3 October 2025, Horn Island



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Meeting participants

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Members		
Mr David Brewer	Interim TRLWG Chair	• Director – Upwelling P/L (David Brewer Consulting). • Chair, Torres Strait Finfish RAG • Chair, Hand Collectables RAG • Scientific member – Torres Strait Finfish Working Group • Current consultancies with Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, The Moreton Bay Foundation. • As a fisheries consultant, may apply for funds for Torres Strait fishery research projects in the future where consistent with his role as Chair.
Dr Laura Blamey	Scientific Member	Contributes to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including Torres Strait climate change and fisheries project. No other interests in the fishery.
Mr Les Pitt	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Kemer Kemer Meriam	TIB licence holder.
Mr Monti Naawi	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kulkalgal	TIB licence holder
Mr Aaron Tom	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda maluylgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda maluylgal. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Mr Kame Matthew Paipai	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Maluylgal	TIB licence holder and fish receiver agent for MG Kailis Pty Ltd.
Mr Thomas Fujii	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalgal	Apology
Mr Jake Kingdon	Industry member	Regional manager for MG Kailis Pty Ltd. MG Kailis Pty Ltd is a holder of 5 TVH licences. Seafood buyer from Torres Strait, QLD and PNG TRL fisheries.
Mr Mark Dean	Industry member	TVH boat operator
Mr Trent Butcher	Industry member	TRL TVH licence holder and TVH boat operator.
Mr Keith Brightman (arrived at 11am)	TSRA Member	TSRA Fisheries Project Manager, TSRA holds multiple TVH TRL fishing license on behalf of Torres Strait Communities but does not benefit from them. No personal pecuniary interest.
Ms Jenny Keys (online)	QDAF Member	Queensland Fishery manager of East coast tropical rock lobster fishery, aquarium and coral fisheries. Nil interests.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Mr Ryan Murphy	AFMA Member	Employed by AFMA. Senior Manager for Torres Strait Fisheries. Nil interests.
Ms Georgia Bourke	Executive Officer	Employed by AFMA. Senior Management Officer for Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery. Nil interests.
Observers		
Mr Joseph Posu	PNG National Fisheries Authority	Works in the Fisheries Management Unit responsible for managing the prawn and lobster fisheries in the Western Province. No personal pecuniary interest in the fishery.
Mr Bonny Koke	PNG National Fisheries Authority	Works in the Fisheries Management Unit responsible for managing the prawn and lobster fisheries in the Western Province. No personal pecuniary interest in the fishery.
Dr Eva Plaganyi	CSIRO Invited Participant	Senior research scientist with CSIRO. Contributes to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding.
Mr Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA	TSRA employee, TIB license holder with a TRL endorsement.
Dr Tim Ward	TRL RAG Chair	- Associate Professor in Fisheries Science , Institute Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania - Chair, Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group - Scientific member, AFMA Small Pelagic Fishery Resource Assessment Group - Scientific member, AFMA Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group - Scientific member, Heard Island and McDonald Island Fishery Working Group - Independent Conservation Member, GAB Trawl Fishery Management Advisory Committee - Principal Investigator, AFMA Research Projects (Blue Mackerel DEPM, Scallop Harvest Strategy) - Scientific Advisor, Principal Investigator, Department of Natural Environment and Resources Tasmania (Sardine Fishery) - Independent Conservation Scientist, South Australian Marine Scalefish Management Advisory Committee Principal Investigator, FRDC Research Projects (various)
Mr Daniel Takai	Zenadth Kes Fisheries Ltd	CEO of ZKF. ZKF hold a carrier C licence.
Mr Brett Arlidge	Industry Member	Director and CEO of MG Kailis Pty Ltd. MG Kailis Pty Ltd is a holder of 5 TVH licences. Seafood buyer from Torres Strait, QLD and PNG TRL fisheries.
Mr John Glaister (online)	TRLWG Chair	Not declared.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Mr Graham Hirakawa	TRLRAG Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalaigal	TIB licence holder and employed by Torres Strait Seafoods as a TRL fish receiver/processor.
Mr Patrick Mooka (arrived at 1230pm)	TRLRAG Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda maluyigal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda maluyigal. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.

1 Preliminaries

1. The 18th meeting of the Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group (TRLWG 18) was opened in prayer at 9:00am on Friday 3rd October 2025, at the Wongai Beach Hotel, Horn Island. The Chair welcomed members and observers and provided an acknowledgement of Country. Apologies are recorded in the table above. Meeting participants were informed that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of assisting the preparation of meeting minutes. They also noted that the minutes from the previous meeting can be found on the [Protected Zone Joint Authority \(PZJA\) website](#).
2. The WG adopted the agenda (**Attachment A**) as final.
3. The Chair advised members and observers, that as provided in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1), all members must declare all real and potential conflicts of interest at the commencement of the meeting. Declared conflicts of interest are detailed in the meeting participants table.

2 Updates from members

4. The WG noted verbal updates provided by traditional inhabitant and industry members and observers regarding the performance of the TRL fishery during the 2024-25 fishing season, in particular that:
 - a. Extreme winds and weather limited fishers in the eastern islands since around May. There have been observations of increased abundance of Crown of Thorns starfish (COTS), particularly around Mer, though no signs of coral bleaching. There are fewer COTS around Ugar due to the large population of helmet shells which are a known predator of COTS.
 - b. The crayfish season was one of the best compared to the past four or five seasons in the Western Islands. Typically catches tend to drop off by June or July, however this season catches remained high right through.
 - c. The market followed its typical trends which unfortunately, the peak Chinese market does not align with when the hookah season opens.
 - d. There were ongoing freight difficulties this season but overall, the catches were good and the TIB sector should be congratulated on their high catches this season.
 - e. It was difficult seeing how much stock remained once the TVH quota was caught, noting that under the Dolphin rule, more of the abundance could have been utilised this season.
 - f. There were good signs of small lobsters (0+) suggesting that next year will be good also.
 - g. Overall, it's been a very good season, across the Torres Strait, Queensland East Coast and PNG fisheries, though a challenge still remains with not being able to sell TRL into China.

- h. There have been fewer observations of the rare, pink genetic variant of TRL compared to what was seen in previous seasons.
5. The RAG noted updates from the scientific member:
 - a. The Torres Strait climate change project is halfway through, with 12 months of mooring data now available as of June 2025. The data from these moorings is helping to fine tune and calibrate hydrodynamic model across the region and support ongoing ecosystem modelling work.
 - b. The National Climate Risk Assessment was released in September 2025 and the Australian Climate Service will be hosting webinars through October and November
 - c. The next national marine climate briefing is scheduled for 24 October 2025 and there is likely to be a northern focused marine climate briefing later in the year.
6. Government agency updates were as follows:
 - a. AFMA continues to support high level government discussions regarding the ban on *P. ornatus* into China.
 - b. TSRA is looking to convene an interdepartmental meeting to discuss illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing matters and broader border control issues in the Torres Strait region. The TRL TIB allocation review is ongoing, subject to further community consultation.
 - c. The Queensland Fisheries Minister has recently released the Primary Industries Prosper 2050 Paper – 50 year blueprint for Qld Primary Industries. A primary aim is to increase [Primary Industries to \\$50 Million by 2050](#) and [deliver on the blueprint a Qld Fishing and Action Plan and Regional Action Plans](#) that are being developed.
 - d. 2025 was a good season with 79% of quota taken compared with 32% in 2024.
 - e. Queensland is looking to reduce the length of the commercial TRL closed season. Current closed season is 1 October- 31 December.
 - f. The East Coast TRL fishery has a WTO approval in place for 3 years which requires a contemporary estimate of stock by 1 Feb 2028 to inform sustainable commercial harvest levels.
 - g. The current Queensland TRL Harvest Strategy is due for a review.
7. The PNG National Fisheries Authority noted NFA are finalising updates to their TRL fishery management plan and that catches this season have been very steady, with approximately 50 tonnes reported.

3 Revising the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR)

8. Prior to TRLRAG 40, TRLRAG 37 and TRLRAG 38 had considered a series of Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) tested options on possible revisions to the empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR) under the TRL harvest strategy. This work was undertaken by the CSIRO upon recommendation by TRLRAG 32, that formal revisions to the eHCR be investigated because the average catch multiplier adopted in the eHCR was considered an unreliable indicator when actual catches have been much lower than expected due to non-stock-related reasons (COVID and closure of the Chinese market).
9. In the interim, the RAG had recommended to use the average TAC as the multiplier as an ad-hoc adjustment to the eHCR. Given that previous MSE testing of the default eHCR had assumed that the TAC was completely caught, the RAG was comfortable using this as an interim arrangement but were concerned that it was not actually the formal eHCR stipulated in the Harvest Strategy. Also, testing had revealed that it tended to result in a ratcheting-down effect on the recommended biological catch (RBC) over time. It was planned that a replacement and fully-tested eHCR, that did not involve average catch as a multiplier, could be agreed and formally adopted as part of the Harvest Strategy.

10. In December 2024, both the TRL RAG and TRL WG were unable to deliver consensus advice on a suitable revision to the eHCR. As such, the decision was passed to the PZJA Standing Committee. The Standing Committee felt it important to balance both sets of views between stakeholder groups in the short term, recommending that the PZJA agree to a global TAC of 688 tonnes for the 2024-25 fishing season. This TAC reflected a midpoint between the TAC outputs derived from the two harvest control rules in question (“Seahorse” – 581 tonnes and “Dolphin” – 796 tonnes).
11. In response to this outcome, CSIRO undertook additional MSE testing on a variant of the Seahorse and Dolphin rules that yielded a similar PZJA-agreed TAC for the 2024-25 fishing season. This harvest control rule is known as the “Osprey”.
12. The WG considered a presentation from Dr Eva Plaganyi (CSIRO) outlining how and why the eHCR was being revised and an overview of the different rules. The WG acknowledged that each of the three HCRs under consideration had been scientifically tested and shown to achieve sustainability objectives for the TRL Harvest Strategy. That is, each poses a very low risk to the sustainability of the stock and aims to maintain the stock around the target reference point (i.e., 65% of unfished biomass).
13. The Seahorse rule:
 - a. is an MSE tested and fine-tuned version of the ad-hoc adjustments that have been made to the default eHCR in recent years that uses the previous season’s TAC value instead of the actual catch multiplier.
 - b. has low variability in RBC outputs - lower 20-year average RBCs but higher RBCs during poor years and lower RBCs during good years relative to those outputs using the Dolphin or Osprey Rules.
 - c. will track changes in stock levels up or down much more slowly and with a slow turnaround.
 - d. greater certainty in RBC outputs year to year, expect to generate an RBC in the range of 485t – 644t 80 per cent of the time.
14. The Dolphin rule:
 - a. Is an MSE tested and fine-tuned rule that has greater variability in RBC outputs – higher 20-year average RBCs, but subject to lower RBCs during poor years, and high RBCs during good years, relative to the Seahorse rule.
 - b. is more immediately responsive to changes in stock levels and adjusts up and down more quickly, and goes to higher and lower levels on average than the Seahorse Rule.
 - c. places more weighting on the most recent pre-season 1+ lobster index, therefore adjusts the RBC more rapidly and responsively.
 - d. factors in pre-season survey precision and adjusts weighting if survey is less precise.
 - e. would expect to generate an RBC in the range of 427t – 919t 80 per cent of the time.
15. The Osprey rule:
 - a. is an MSE tested and fine-tuned rule that produces a compromise mid-point RBC between the other two rules.
 - b. Has moderate variability in RBC outputs – higher 20-year average RBCs than the Seahorse rule, but lower than that of the Dolphin rule.
 - c. places more weighting on most recent pre-season 1+ lobster index that is designed to bring down the RBC more in poor years, but with small bonuses in good years, though the response is not as rapid or drastic compared to the Dolphin.
 - d. factors in pre-season survey precision and adjusts weighting if survey is less precise.
 - e. would expect to generate an RBC in the range of 440t – 791t, 80 per cent of the time.

16. The RAG noted the key trade-offs between the three rules (**Figure 1**) and considered how each rule would perform in a good year, a poor year or an average year (using hypothetical data) relative to a stock assessment RBC (**Figure 2**). In each scenario the CPUE inputs remain the same, but the survey inputs changed to hypothetical data to compare. **Figure 3** is a graphical representation of the hypothetical RBC data.



Trade-offs

	Seahorse 	Dolphin 	Osprey 
Risk below Blim	Low risk	lowest risk	Low risk
Inter-annual catch variability	Lowest variability	Highest variability	Medium variability
Average catch	Lowest catch	Highest catch	Medium catch
Risk of fishery closure	Low risk	lowest risk	Low risk
Most recent survey has more weight?	NA	Yes – large influence	Yes – medium influence
Survey precision included?	NA	Yes	Yes

Figure 1. Summary of different trade-offs between each rule.

EXAMPLE comparing RBCs under different scenarios

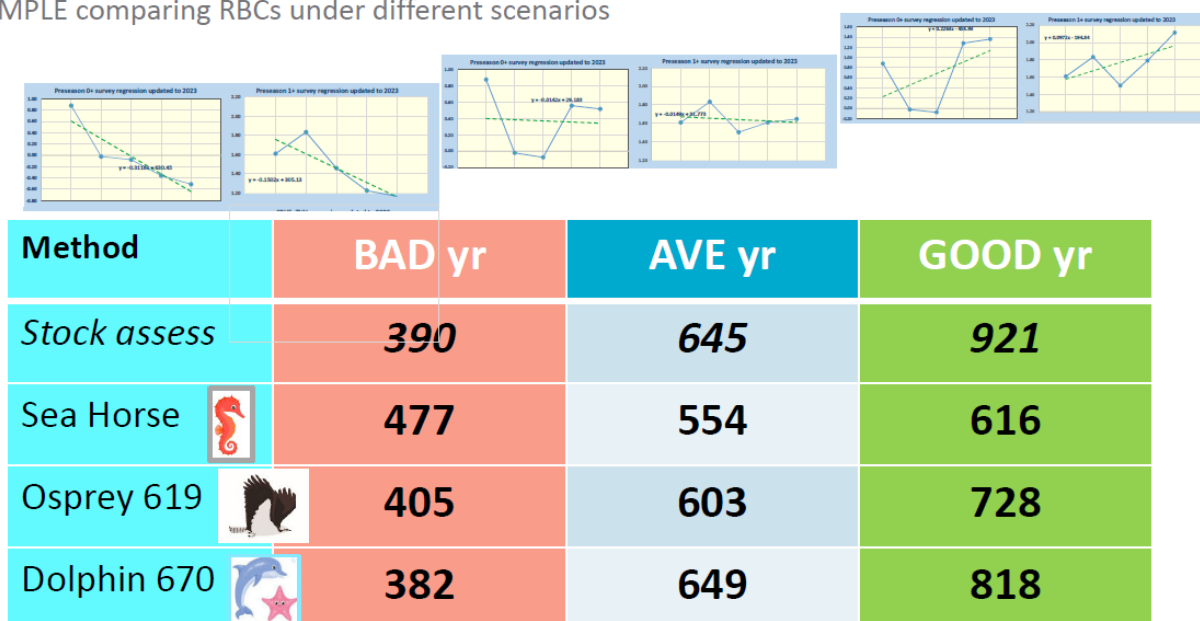


Figure 2. Comparison of hypothetical RBC outputs under different scenarios of bad, average and good years, compared with a stock-assessment.

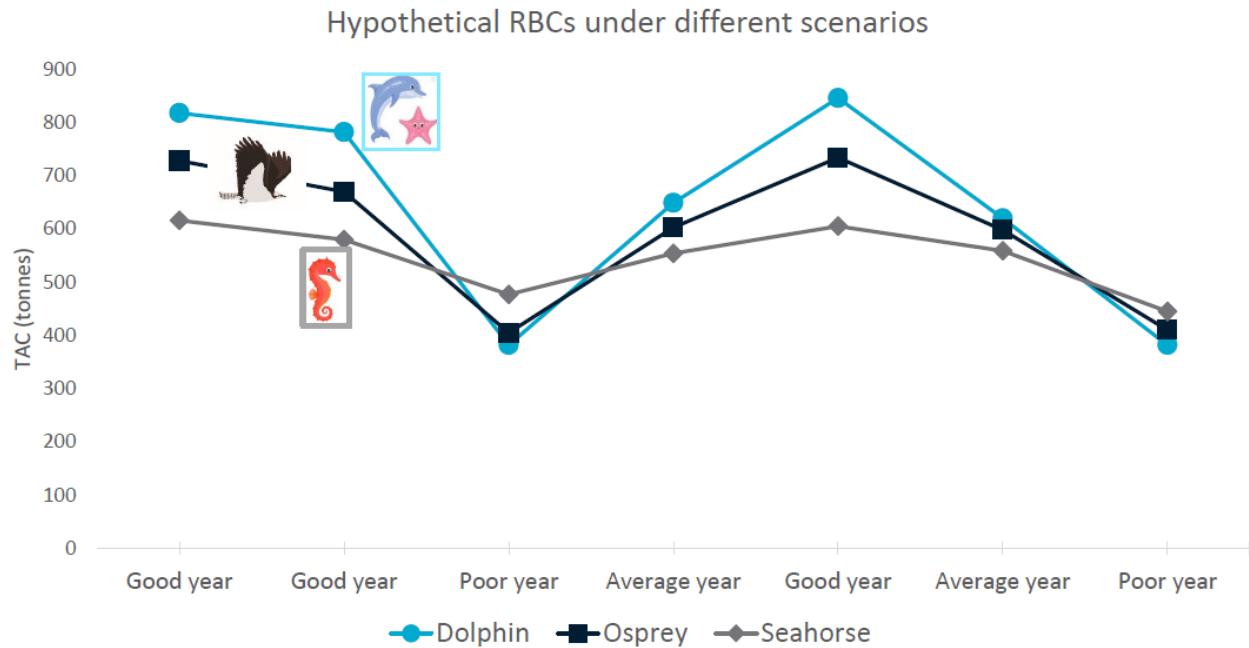


Figure 3. Graphical representation of hypothetical RBC outputs under different scenarios of bad, average and good years.

17. Having regard to the presentation from CSIRO, the Working Group noted an overview of the TRL RAG discussions from the day prior. Fundamentally, that TRL RAG members were unable to reach consensus on an appropriate revision to the empirical Harvest Rule. Noting that the different sectors of the fishery have different perspectives and cultural drivers, there were disparate views among members.
18. Most traditional inhabitant RAG members supported the Seahorse rule as it provides more stable TACs over time, which is considered 'safe'. However, the Seahorse rule was not supported by several members as it achieves that stability by allowing higher TACs in poor years and constraining the fishery in good years. This could then result in lower catch per unit effort (CPUE) in poor years. There is also a risk that the TIB and PNG sectors could reach or exceed their TAC in a good year, resulting in early fishery closure. The Seahorse rule was considered too slow in its response, locking the fishery into low TACs even when the stock is strong, holding back the TIB sector from opportunity that is deserved.
19. Other RAG members supported the Dolphin rule as it produces more conservative TACs at lower biomass levels with slightly lower risk of breaching the limit reference point. The Dolphin more closely tracks the stock assessment outputs and variation in fishable biomass year to year, which provides better fishing opportunities in good years and protects the fishery in poor years. Some members (including all traditional inhabitant members) did not support the Dolphin because of the large variation in TACs year to year, and on average higher TACs compared to the other rules. Factors other than scientific rationale also influenced member's views against the Dolphin.
20. Some RAG members (including one traditional inhabitant member) supported the Osprey as it is considered a balance between two conflicting views, providing an opportunity for consensus by balancing the benefit of stability versus higher TACs. The Osprey was deemed to provide a fairer distribution of benefits across both good years and poor years and finds a balance between stability in catches (like the Seahorse) and stability in catch rates (like the Dolphin). There was no direct opposition against the Osprey.
21. Taking into account the advice from the TRLRAG and following a brief breakout discussion by traditional inhabitant members and observers, traditional inhabitant members and the TSRA member (as well as observers) affirmed unanimous support for the Osprey rule, acknowledging that it is a balance between the Dolphin and the Seahorse rules. They noted that with new understanding, and awareness of the

higher risks of the Seahorse rule (that being that it does not reduce the RBC as drastically in a poor year), they preferred to change the former position of the broader TIB sector to maintain a lower TAC under the Seahorse rule.

22. Industry members reaffirmed support for the Dolphin rule, with a preference for the recommended biological catch to track the fishable biomass as best it can and acknowledging that that Osprey doesn't appear to utilise the resource as best it can in a good season compared to the Dolphin.
23. The Scientific member did not express a preference for any rule noting they each are MSE tested, sustainable and adequately meet the objectives of the harvest strategy.
24. Consistent with the position in the agenda paper, AFMA reaffirmed support for the Osprey rule.
25. The QDPI member also expressed support for the Osprey rule as it better supports the traditional inhabitant sector.
26. In the interest of reaching consensus, industry members and observers, as well as the PNG NFA representative, elected for a brief breakout discussion. Upon their return, Industry members commended the traditional inhabitant members on reaching a responsible compromise, and in that same spirit, expressed their support for the Osprey rule.
27. The Chair congratulated the Working Group on reaching **consensus in recommending the Osprey rule as the revised eHCR to be applied under the TRL harvest strategy.**

4 Other business

28. Traditional inhabitant member for Guda maluigal queried how the industry can seek changes to different policies and management arrangements that are deemed to be hindering the growth and development of the traditional inhabitant sector. AFMA noted that reviewing management controls in the fishery remains a priority for the Working Group and that there will be space in the agenda for those discussions at the next WG meeting.

5 Date and venue for next meeting

29. Members noted the next meeting of the TRL WG was scheduled for Thursday 11 December 2025 on Thursday Island. The meeting was closed in prayer at 1:00pm on Friday 3rd October 2025.

Attachment A – Adopted agenda

TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER RESOURCE WORKING GROUP 18

(TRLWG 18)

Friday 3 October 2025 | 9am – 3pm

Wongai Beach Hotel

2 Wees Street, Horn Island

ADOPTED AGENDA

1 PRELIMINARIES

Welcome and apologies

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

Adoption of agenda

The WG will be invited to adopt the draft agenda.

Declaration of interests

Members and observers will be invited to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest.

2 UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

Traditional inhabitant members, industry, scientific and government agency members and observers will be invited to provide verbal updates on matters concerning the Torres Strait TRL Fishery including updates on fishing patterns, behaviours, prices, and market trends for the 2024-25 fishing season.

Government agency members will be asked to provide updates relevant to the TRL Fishery relevant to their jurisdictions.

The WG will also be invited to note a verbal update from the PNG National Fisheries Authority and Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC (if representatives are in attendance) on matters relevant to the TRL Fishery.

3 REVISING THE EMPIRICAL HARVEST CONTROL RULE (eHCR)

The WG will be invited to consider different options for a revised eHCR, developed and presented by CSIRO. Having regard to TRLRAG advice, the WG will be asked to provide advice on a long-term solution to be applied under the TRL Harvest Strategy.

4 OTHER BUSINESS

The WG will be invited to raise any other matters for consideration. There is no agenda paper for this item.

5 DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING

The WG is invited to note the dates and draft agenda for the next WG meeting.

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 Bourke (georgia.bourke@afma.gov.au)