



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

# **TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP 19**

## **TRLWG 19**

**Thursday 11 December 2025**  
**9am – 5pm**

**TSRA Boardroom, Thursday Island**

## **Meeting Papers**

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP (TRLWG)</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>PRELIMINARIES</b>	<b>Agenda Item 1</b> <b>For NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the WG **NOTE**:
  - a. an acknowledgement of Traditional Owners;
  - b. the Chair's welcome address;
  - c. apologies received from members unable to attend.
2. That the WG consider and **ADOPT** the revised draft agenda, which was circulated to members on 28 November 2025.
3. That WG members and observers:
  - a. **DECLARE** all real or potential conflicts of interest in the Torres Strait Rock Lobster Fishery at the commencement of the meeting (**Attachment 1a**);
  - b. **DISCUSS** 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 WG regarding the management of conflicts of interest; and
  - d. **NOTE** that the record of the meeting must record the fact of any disclosure, and the determination of the WG 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.
4. That the WG **NOTE** the status of actions arising since TRLWG 17 (held on 12 December 2024) (**Attachment 1b**).
5. That the WG **PROVIDE ADVICE** on any new key events to be added to the TRL Management History timeline (**Attachment 1c**).

## BACKGROUND

1. As at 27 November 2025, two apologies had been received:
  - a. Matthew Kame Paipai, Traditional inhabitant member Maluigal; and
  - b. Trent Butcher, Industry member.

### *Declarations of interest*

2. Consistent with the *Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1)*, which guides the operation and administration of PZJA advisory committees, members are asked to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest.

3. WG members are asked to confirm the standing list of declared interests (**Attachment 1a**) is accurate and provide an update to be tabled if it is not.
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 committee 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 committee, must be recorded accurately in the meeting minutes.

**TRLWG Declarations of interests from most recent meetings**

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
<b>Members</b>		
Dr David Brewer	Interim Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Director – Upwelling P/L (David Brewer Consulting).</li> <li>• Chair, Torres Strait Finfish RAG</li> <li>• Chair, Hand Collectables RAG</li> <li>• Scientific member – Torres Strait Finfish Working Group</li> <li>• Current consultancies with Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, The Moreton Bay Foundation.</li> </ul> <p>As a fisheries consultant, may apply for funds for Torres Strait fishery research projects in the future where consistent with his role as Chair.</p>
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	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kemer Kemer Meriam, TIB licence holder and runs an independent freezer facility on Erub Island. Board member of Zenadh Kes Fisheries.
Mr Monti Naawi	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kulkalgal	TIB licence holder.
Mr Aaron Tom	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda maluylgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda maluylgal. Zenadh Kes Fisheries member.
Mr Kame Mathew Paipai	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Maluylgal	Apology.
Mr Thomas Fujii	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalalgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalalgal. Queensland East Coast TRL and TIB license holder. Zenadh Kes Fisheries member.
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 Trent Butcher	Industry Member	Apology.
Mr Mark Dean	Industry Member	TVH boat operator
Mr Keith Brightman	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	QDAF Member	Queensland Fishery manager of tropical rock lobster fishery, aquarium and coral fisheries. Nil interests.
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.
<b>Observers</b>		
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 Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA	TSRA employee, TIB license holder with a TRL endorsement.
Mr Timothy Ward	TRLRAG Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Associate Professor in Fisheries Science, Institute Marine and Antarctic Studies, University of Tasmania</li> <li>• Chair, Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group</li> <li>• Scientific member, AFMA Small Pelagic Fishery Resource Assessment Group</li> <li>• Scientific member, AFMA Sub-Antarctic Resource Assessment Group</li> <li>• Scientific member, Heard Island and McDonald Island Fishery Working Group</li> <li>• Independent Conservation Member, GAB Trawl Fishery Management Advisory Committee</li> <li>• Principal Investigator, AFMA Research Projects (Blue Mackerel DEPM, Scallop Harvest Strategy)</li> <li>• Scientific Advisor, Principal Investigator, Department of Natural Environment and Resources Tasmania (Sardine Fishery)</li> <li>• Independent Conservation Scientist, South Australian Marine Scalefish Management Advisory Committee</li> </ul> <p>Principal Investigator, FRDC Research Projects (various)</p>
Mr John Glaister	TRLWG Chair	To be declared.

### Actions arising from previous TRL WG meetings

#	Action Item	Meeting	Responsible Agency/ies	Status
1.	TIB Members and Malu Lamar to conduct further consultation with communities regarding Proposals 3 – 5	TRLWG13	TIB Members and Malu Lamar	<p><b>Incomplete.</b></p> <p>As at TRLWG 17, AFMA had not received additional advice from TIB Members or Malu Lamar. AFMA and TSRA agreed to explore what support may be needed to progress this, and other action items which may be assigned to TIB Industry Members as they arise.</p> <p><b>Changes to management controls and prioritisation will be discussed under Agenda Item 6.</b></p>
2.	AFMA and TSRA to explore what support may be needed to progress action item #1 above, and any other action items which may be assigned to Traditional Inhabitant Members as they arise.	TRLWG 15	AFMA, TSRA	<p><b>Not commenced. Suggest deletion.</b></p> <p>Future changes to management arrangements is to be discussed under Agenda Item 6.</p>
3.	TSRA to provide to the Working Group, copies of the minutes from the December 2023/January 2024 consultations on emergency measures to change the start of the hookah season from 1 February to 24 January 2024 and remove the February moontide hookah closure.	TRLWG 16	TSRA	<p><b>Complete.</b></p> <p>TSRA provided a summary of the various consultation meetings with AFMA on 12 December 2024. These are attached.</p>
4.	AFMA to undertake a preliminary assessment of benefits and risks/costs of each proposal put forward by MG Kailis against the objectives of the Act and the Fishery to be part of a broader discussion paper to be used in community consultations.	TRLWG 16	AFMA	<p><b>Incomplete. Suggest deletion.</b></p> <p>AFMA commenced this assessment in 2025 however, progression of these proposals slowed due to other competing management priorities in the fishery.</p> <p><b>Changes to management controls and prioritisation will be discussed under Agenda Item 6.</b></p>

**Timeline of key events in the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery<sup>1</sup>**  
**Last updated November 2025**

Commonly used acronyms and terms:

- **FMN** means Torres Strait Fisheries Management Notice.
- **FMI** means Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument.
- **LN** means Logbook Notice
- **PZJA** means Protected Zone Joint Authority.
- **TRL** means Tropical Rock Lobster.
- **TRL Fishery** means the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery.
- **Instrument** means the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Tropical Rock Lobster) Management Instrument 2018*
- **Management Plan** means the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster (Kaiar)) Management Plan 2018*

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
Late 1960's	Fishery development	Commercial fishing for TRL by the non-Traditional Inhabitant sector began in the Torres Strait
1970s-1980s	Fishery development	Traditional Inhabitant fishers begin to enter the fishery.
Dec-1978	Treaty, PNG	Torres Strait Treaty signed
Feb-1985	Legislation, regulations, PZJA	Torres Strait Treaty entered into force, <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> and <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985</i> commenced and the PZJA is established
Feb-1985	Regulations	Under FMN 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Method restrictions introduced - only diving, collection by hand and use of spear permitted</li> </ul>
Feb-1985	PNG, catch sharing	Agreement between PNG and Australia for the joint management of the TRL fishery concluded.

<sup>1</sup> This is intended to be a living document and is to be updated as key events happen.

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
Jul-1985	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 9 (replaced FMN 1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Method restrictions amended to introduce a time period within which the method restrictions are in place – only diving, collection by hand and use of spear permitted between 15 Jul-31 Oct</li> </ul>
Jan-1986	Management arrangements	<p>Introduction of prohibition on prawn trawlers taking TRL during the annual migration period (1 Jul-31 Oct) in order to reduce fishing pressure on the lobster population - in place until 1987, when all prawn trawlers were prohibited from taking TRL</p>
Jun-1986	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 12 (replaced FMN 9):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Method restrictions amended to change the dates between which methods are restricted – only diving, collection by hand and use of spear permitted between 1 July - 31 October only</li> </ul>
Mar-1988	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 19:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of prohibition on the take, processing or carrying of TRL by boats with a prawn endorsement</li> </ul>
Jun-1988	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 22:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum size limit introduced - 100 mm tail length</li> </ul>
Oct-1988	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 24 (replaced FMN 12):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Method restrictions amended - only diving, collection by hand and use of spear permitted, no underwater breathing apparatus except hookah, no underwater mechanical propulsion</li> <li>Introduction of exemption which can be sought for some method restrictions, specifically the use of underwater breathing apparatus and underwater mechanical propulsion</li> <li>Traditional fishing bag limits introduced - 3 per person up to 6 per boat</li> </ul>
October 1988	Management objectives	<p>PZJA agrees to six key management objectives for the fishery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To conserve the stock of tropical rock lobster</li> <li>To maximise the opportunities for traditional inhabitants of both countries to participate, including by managing the fishery for tropical rock lobster as a dive fishery</li> <li>To promote the dive fisheries for tropical rock lobster in Torres Strait</li> <li>Encouragement and facilitation of participation by Australian traditional inhabitants for whom future expansion of the fishery should be reserved</li> <li>Containment of the capacity of the existing commercially licensed fleet and elimination of entrepreneurial speculation and subsequent upgrading/replacement of commercially licensed dinghies with large boats</li> </ul>

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To minimise impact of any new management measures on existing operators.</li> </ul>
March 1989	Traditional Inhabitant access, identification, definition	Tropical Rock Lobster Working Party agrees to Island Coordinating Council suggestion that “amnesty” Papua New Guineans be considered Traditional Inhabitants for fisheries management purposes. Following this, PZJA agrees to “measures to be used for identifying those Papuans resident in Torres Strait who should be treated as Australian traditional inhabitants for all fisheries management and enforcement purposes, including community fishing rights” in the fishery.
Aug-1989	Regulations	Under FMN 31 (replaced FMN 24): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No substantive changes to FMN 24</li> </ul>
November 1989	PNG, catch sharing, cross-endorsement	Catch-sharing arrangements for the fishery agreed by PNG and Australia. 27 PNG lobster dinghies to be allowed to operate in Australian TSPZ waters, while Australian operations in PNG waters are precluded.
1989	Management arrangements, fishery surveys	Fishery independent surveys commence in the TRL Fishery
February 1990	PNG, catch sharing, cross-endorsement	Catch-sharing arrangements come into effect 15 February, but no PNG boats begin fishing.
Oct-1990	Regulations	Under FMN 34 (replaced FMN 22): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No substantive changes to FMN 22</li> </ul>
1991-1992	Traditional Inhabitant access, identification, definition	PZJA establishes a working group to consider the involvement in PZJA fisheries of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginals living in the Northern Peninsula Area of Cape York and Australian citizens of Papua New Guinean origin.
June 1991	PNG, catch sharing, cross-endorsement	Cross-endorsements issued to 4 PNG mother ships with 18 dinghies on 14 June. PNG boats agreed to respect home reefs closures, not go ashore on Australian territory, and make no contact with Australian inhabitants, Australian vessels, or PNG traditional fishers.
Jun-1992	Native title	Mabo High Court decision recognises existence of native title (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights and interests to land and waters according to their traditional law and customs)

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
1993	Community licensing	Concerns about the current licensing systems run by the PZJA and Queensland for community fishing begin to be raised by Island Coordinating Council. Concerns include that Traditional Inhabitants living outside the Island Coordinating Council area are excluded from obtaining licences, the administrative and financial burden placed on island councils by the systems, a lack of detailed information to inform fisheries management decisions, and the fact that island chairmen rather than individual fishers are legally responsible for any fishing violations.
February 1993	PNG, catch-sharing, cross-endorsement	New PNG catch-sharing arrangements commence on 15 February 1993 for a three-year period to 14 February 1996. Allow for cross-endorsement of 27 PNG dinghies and associated freezer boats. Nominations received for cross-endorsement of 3 PNG TRL freezer boats with 27 associated dinghies.
Oct-1993	Regulations	Under FMN 38 (replaced FMN 31): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of prohibition on taking TRL using hookah between 1 Oct-30 Nov</li> <li>Traditional fishing bag limits amended - 3 without a boat, 3 with 1 person in a boat, 6 with more than 1 person in a boat</li> <li>All other requirements remained unchanged - method restrictions</li> </ul>
Dec-1993	Native title, legislation	<i>Native Title Act 1993</i> commences, legislating the framework for recognition of native title (including over maritime areas) in Australia following the High Court's Mabo decision. The Act covers the determination of whether native title exists, acts affecting native title, and compensation for acts affecting native title.
1994	Logbooks	Noted under LN 8: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tropical Rock Lobster Logbook TRL02 implemented – voluntary, records frozen tails only</li> </ul>
1994	Legislation, TSRA	Torres Strait Regional Authority established under the <i>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Act 1989</i>
April-June 1995	Single jurisdiction, licensing	PZJA establishes Task Force to investigate the feasibility of introducing single jurisdiction fisheries management and to advise on matters such as eligibility criteria for entry to the newly created fisheries. Investment warning is issued.
Jul-1995	Regulations	Under FMN 42 (amended FMN 38): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No changes to regulation of fishing provided under FMN 38. Amendments made to correct a drafting error that excluded several words from the section relating to bag limits for traditional fishing.</li> </ul>
October 1996	Single jurisdiction, licensing,	PZJA endorses single jurisdiction (the management of all Torres Strait fisheries by the PZJA, rather than a division of responsibility between the PZJA and the Queensland government) and the Task Force's

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
	community licences, TIB licensing	recommendations for licensing reform. Due to opposition from Islander representatives, related to broader issues such as autonomy and the desire for a regional agreement for Islander control over Torres Strait waters, the implementation of these reforms was delayed and then boycotted until agreement was reached in 1999.
Mar-1997	Regulations	Under FMN 44 (amended FMN 38): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Method restrictions amended - only collection by hand, use of spear or other handheld implement permitted, no underwater breathing apparatus except hookah, no underwater mechanical propulsion</li> </ul>
May-1997	Logbooks	Under LN 8: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tropical Rock Lobster Logbook TRL03 implemented – both TRL02 and TRL03 mandatory for boats with freezing capacity, records both live and frozen tails</li> </ul>
Apr-1998	Regulations	Under FMN 48 (replaced FMN 34): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimum size limits amended - 80 mm carapace length, 100 mm tail length</li> </ul>
1999	Traditional Inhabitant access, identification, definition	PZJA agrees that children of “amnesty” Papua New Guineans be considered Traditional Inhabitants, following the 1989 decision to include “amnesty” people within the definition of Traditional Inhabitants.
July-December 1999	Single jurisdiction, licensing, community licences, TIB licensing	Islander representatives propose a series of principles to underlie community licensing, consistent with the previously proposed system.
Apr-2000	Single jurisdiction, licensing, community licences, TIB licensing	Following a meeting between the PZJA and Islander representatives, the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) licence is introduced for a one year trial period.
Nov-2001	Regulations	Under FMN 58 (replaced FMN 38, 42, 44, 48): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of fishery closure from 1 Oct-30 Nov (revoking previous prohibition on taking TRL using hookah between 1 Oct-30 Nov). Exemption from closure but bag limits apply - 3 without a boat, 3 with 1 person in a boat, 6 with more than 1 person in a boat</li> </ul>

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of prohibition on taking or carrying of TRL while using, or in the possession of, hookah gear between 1 Oct-31 Jan</li> <li>All other requirements remained unchanged - method restrictions, minimum size limits</li> </ul>
2002	Legislation, TSRA, PZJA	<i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> is amended to make the Torres Strait Regional Authority Chairperson a member of the Protected Zone Joint Authority
Nov-2002	Latent effort, fishery participation	A 30% reduction in the number of tenders attached to each non-Traditional Inhabitant licence package was implemented, except where only 1 tender exists, in which case the tender will be entitled to continue working. This was done in order to reduce latent effort in the fishery and restrict expansion of effort by non-Traditional Inhabitant fishers. This arrangement was in place until 2011.
November 2002	Traditional Inhabitant access, Skehill report, management objectives	Skehill report – “A Fair Share of the Catch” – is delivered, evaluating Torres Strait fisheries and establishing an order of priority for their management. Recommends Traditional Inhabitants be given priority of access to the TRL Fishery.
Dec-2002	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 62:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of prohibition of processing or carrying TRL meat removed from the shell on a boat. Exemption provided for traditional fishing.</li> </ul>
Dec-2003	Latent effort	Cap on Traditional Inhabitant licences for boats greater than 6 m with a TRL Fishery endorsement – in place until 2006
2003	QLD East Coast Fishery	Size limit increased to 90mm carapace length and 115m tail length. Seasonal to be in place from 1 October to 31 January implemented.
Late 2003	Logbooks	Torres Strait Seafood Buyers and Processors Docket Book (TDB01) implemented – voluntary
Jun-2003	Logbooks	<p>Under the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Logbook Instrument No. 1</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tropical Rock Lobster Logbook TRL04 implemented – mandatory for all non-Traditional Inhabitant operators</li> </ul>
Jan-2005	Management arrangements	Moon-tide hookah closures (a periodic closure on the use of hookah gear three days either side of the full or new moon each month during between February and September) introduced – first implemented in 2005 as a way to reduce fishing effort to levels recorded in 2002. In 2013 the closures were removed following a buy-out

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
		of non-Traditional Inhabitant licences however were reintroduced in 2014 following agreement from both the sectors, and continue to date
Jul-2005	Management plan	PZJA agreed to create a plan of management to implement a quota management system in the fishery.
July 2005	Allocation	PZJA agrees to transition to initial 50:50 sectoral split in the fishery, brought about by government funded buyout, with a later goal of a 70:30 split between Traditional Inhabitants and non-Traditional Inhabitants, funded by an “open market and self-funded tender process”.
2006	TAC	Notional total allowable catches implemented (notional as allocation had not yet been undertaken nor a management plan developed)
Mar-2006	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 73 (replaced FMN 58, 62):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduction of fishery closure from 1-30 Nov (revoking previous fishery closure from 1 Oct-30 Nov). Exemption from closure for traditional fishing only but bag limits apply - 3 without a boat, 3 with 1 person in a boat, 6 with more than 1 person in a boat</li> <li>Introduction of prohibition on carriage of diving equipment between 1900-0600 AEST. Exemption can be sought, but all diving equipment (face mask and fins) in possession of that person, or on board the boat, is stowed and secured during the prohibited hours. ES states that this was implemented in response to concerns that night diving may occur in the Fishery</li> <li>All other requirements remained unchanged - method restrictions, prohibition of processing or carrying TRL meat, minimum size limits, hookah gear restrictions</li> </ul>
April 2006	IAAP, allocation	PZJA agrees to create an Independent Allocation Advisory Panel (IAAP) to advise on the appropriate basis for the allocation of fishing concessions in the non-Traditional Inhabitant sector.
Sep-2006	Regulations	<p>Under FMN 80 (replaced FMN 73):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Correction made to error in FMN 73 regarding the fishery closure, reinstated to 1 Oct-30 Nov. Exemption from closure for traditional fishing only but bag limits apply - 3 without a boat, 3 with 1 person in a boat, 6 with more than 1 person in a boat</li> <li>All other requirements remained unchanged - method restrictions, prohibition of processing or carrying TRL meat, minimum size limits, hookah gear restrictions, prohibition on carriage of diving equipment between 1900-0600 AEST</li> </ul>
Jun-2007	IAAP, allocation	PZJA agrees to final Independent Allocation Advisory Panel (IAAP) report and a sectoral catch share ratio of 35:65 between the Traditional Inhabitant and non-Traditional Inhabitant sectors as detailed in the ‘Report to

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
		stakeholders on the data used to establish the historical catch ratios of the Community and non-community sectors'
Apr-2008	Buyback, structural adjustment	Australian Government buy-back of non-Traditional Inhabitant licences. 13 primary licences and 29 associated tenders removed from the TRL Fishery. Based on the provisional allocations associated with the 'bought-out' licences the sectoral catch share between the Traditional Inhabitant and non-Traditional Inhabitant sectors changed to 53.5:46.5.
2008	Conversion factor	TRL tail to whole weight conversion ratio (2.677) implemented
2009	Harvest strategy	Interim Harvest Strategy implemented for the TRL Fishery in response to the planned transition to a quota management system, laying out the biological objectives for the fishery and how this could be achieved.
Mar-2010	Environment	Torres Strait coral bleaching event
Aug-2011	Regulations	<p>Under FMI 9 (replaced FMN 80):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application of arrangements extended to PNG Treaty endorsed operators</li> <li>All other requirements remained unchanged – method restrictions, prohibition of processing or carrying TRL meat, minimum size limits, hookah gear restrictions, prohibition on carriage of diving equipment between 1900-0600 AEST, fishery closure.</li> </ul> <p>FMI 9 was intended to amend an administrative oversight that had excluded cross-endorsed fishers from the provisions of FMN 80.</p>
Apr-2012	Buyback, structural adjustment	Based on a further buy-out of one licence (1 primary and 1 tender) the sectoral catch share between the Traditional Inhabitant and non-Traditional Inhabitant sectors changed to 56.2:43.8
7-Aug-2013	Native title, sea claim	The High Court hands down decision regarding Torres Strait Sea Claim Part A. The decision overturned the Full Federal Court decision from March 2012 and found that the native title rights in the sea claim area include the right to take fish for commercial or trading purposes. This was found to be a non-exclusive right, and native title holders are still required to hold the appropriate licences and abide by the relevant laws and regulations.
2014	Fishery participation, Traditional Inhabitant access, 100% ownership	The Protected Zone Joint Authority acknowledges and supports the aspiration of Torres Strait Communities to own 100% of access to commercial Fisheries in the Australian area of the Torres Strait Protected Zone

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
May-2014	Native title	Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation is appointed as the Registered Native Title Body Corporate for the Sea Claim Area Part A.
Mar-2016	Environment	Torres Strait coral bleaching and sea cage mortality event
Oct-2016 to Oct-2017	Buyback, structural adjustment	Based on a further buy-out of three licences (3 primaries and 7 tenders) the sectoral catch share between the Traditional Inhabitant and non-Traditional Inhabitant sectors changed to 66.17:33.83
Jul-2017	Vessel monitoring	Vessel monitoring system (VMS) implemented – mandatory for primary boat and/or operating with a Carrier Boat License (Class A, B, or C). Vessels operating for freight shipping are exempt from installing VMS. Exemptions may also be provided for carrier vessels that are six meters or less in length.
Dec-2017	Logbooks	Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Record (TDB02) implemented – mandatory for all Torres Strait licence holders
10-Apr-2018	Management arrangements	Following a low Recommended Biological Catch, additional moon-tide hookah closures introduced covering all new and full moon periods for the remainder of the 2017-18 fishing season, in order to slow down fishing effort and provide the TIB sector with the longest possible fishing season, avoiding an early closure of the fishery.
27-Apr-2018	Management arrangements, hookah	Prohibition on the carriage and use of hookah gear for the remainder of the 2017-18 fishing season.
29-Jun-2018	Management arrangements, hookah	Federal Court of Australia order to revoke prohibition on the carriage and use of hookah gear – reverted to additional moon-tide hookah closures.
20-Jul-2018	Regulations	Under the TRL Management Instrument 2018 (replaced FMI 9): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Traditional fishing bag limits removed. Noted that PZJA does not have jurisdiction in relation to traditional fishing conducted by Traditional Inhabitants</li> <li>Introduction of capacity to close the TRL Fishery early to commercial fishing, when the total allowable catch is reached</li> <li>Introduction of capacity to prohibit the use of hookah gear (i.e. moon-tide hookah closures) during the hookah season (1 Feb-30 Sep)</li> </ul>

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All other requirements remained unchanged – method restrictions, prohibition of processing or carrying TRL meat, minimum size limits, hookah gear restrictions, prohibition on carriage of diving equipment between 1900-0600 AEST, fishery closure</li> </ul>
31-Jul-2018	Management arrangements	TRL Fishery closed for the remainder of the 2017-18 fishing season due to total allowable catch being reached.
1-Dec-2018	Management plan	<i>Torres Strait Fisheries (Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster (Kaiar)) Management Plan 2018</i> commenced
1-Dec-2018	Regulations	<p>Under the TRL Management Instrument 2018 (amendment to Jul-2018 Instrument):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to close the TRL Fishery early to commercial fishing revoked</li> <li>• Implementation of a split of the total allowable catch for the TRL Fishery between the Traditional Inhabitant (66.17% of the total allowable catch) and non-Traditional Inhabitant sectors – applied from 1 Dec 2017-30 Sep 2018 only</li> <li>• Introduction of capacity to close of the TRL Fishery to the Traditional Inhabitant sector once their part of the total allowable catch is reached – applied from 1 Dec 2017-30 Sep 2018 only</li> <li>• Provide for individual transferrable quota arrangements to be established for the non-Traditional Inhabitant sector via licence conditions – applied from 1 Dec 2017-30 Sep 2018 only</li> <li>• Provide for the operation of the proposed Management Plan should the quota allocation process be finalised before the start of the 2019-20 fishing season</li> <li>• All other requirements remained unchanged – method restrictions, prohibition of processing or carrying TRL meat, minimum size limits, hookah gear restrictions, prohibition on carriage of diving equipment between 1900-0600 AEST, fishery closure, moon-tide hookah closures</li> </ul>
16-Sep-2019	Management plan, allocation	<p>Quota units allocated under the Management Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 662,016 quota units to the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) comprising: 562,000 to hold for the benefit of the traditional inhabitant sector; and 100,016 for the TVH licences it holds</li> <li>• 337,981 quota units to the remaining TVH principal licence holders</li> </ul>
19-Nov-2019	Harvest strategy	PZJA adopts final Harvest Strategy for the TRL Fishery
1-Dec-2019	Management plan, management arrangements	TRL Fishery commences operation under a quota management system as per the Management Plan

Time period	Topic/Keywords	Description
Early 2020	Markets, price, export	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Live export market into China closed temporarily prior to 2020 Chinese New Year.</li> <li>Prices in the fishery were down significantly, similar to lowest prices on record in 2002-03.</li> <li>TVH boats in Torres Strait and QLD East Coast were forced to stop fishing.</li> <li>Whole frozen product only purchased at reject prices.</li> <li>COVID-19 impacts affect flights and freight routes from Australia to Asian markets</li> </ul>
~ October 2020	Markets, export, Cadmium	China began to increase inspection levels and testing of cadmium in Australian live lobster at the point of entry in major Chinese ports, causing considerable delays while inspection and testing was being undertaken. This resulted in high mortality rates of lobster product (not Torres Strait product).
November 2020	Markets, export	China formally notified the DAWE of two instances of non-compliance of lobster shipments with detections of cadmium above the maximum levels set by the Chinese Government.
November 2020	Management Plan, allocation	The PZJA (meeting 36) agreed to amend the TRL Management Plan to provide the PZJA with additional time in which to commence a review of the allocation of quota units to the Traditional Inhabitant sector, to within 4 years of the Plan commencement.
December 2020	Markets, export	China banned the import of Australian lobster product
December 2020	Wildlife Trade Operation	On 4 December 2020 the TRL Fishery was re-accredited as an approved Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> .
December 2023	Wildlife Trade Operation, LENS	In October 2023 the TRL Fishery was re-assessed under the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999</i> and added to the List of Exempt Native Specimens (LENS). Coming into force on 4 December 2023, this allows extended export approval though to 4 December 2033.
April 2024	Cross-endorsement	For the first time in ten years, the first PNG licenced boats with Treaty Endorsements commenced their first cross-endorsed fishing trips in the Australian jurisdiction of the TRL fishery. The boats <i>FV Jupiter</i> and <i>FV Dinh Thang</i> undertook 4 and 5 fishing trips respectively, with their last trip of the season completed on 2 July 2024.
October 2024	Markets, export	Announcement that China would lift its four-year import ban on Australian rock lobsters. This did not address the specific protected species listing of Tropical Rock Lobsters.
December 2024/January 2025	Markets, export	Trade of Australian rock lobsters (excluding TRL) resumed in late December 2024 with shipments beginning in January 2025.

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP (TRLWG)</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>UPDATES FROM MEMBERS</b>	<b>Agenda Item 2</b> <b>For NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the WG **NOTE** updates provided by:
  - a) Traditional inhabitant and industry members;
  - b) Scientific members;
  - c) Government agencies;
  - d) Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority (PNG NFA) representative; and
  - e) Native Title body representative (if in attendance).

## BACKGROUND

1. Verbal reports are sought from Traditional inhabitant, industry and scientific members under this item, with particular emphasis on market and export impacts to the previous and current fishing season.
2. It is important that the WG develops a common understanding of any strategic issues, including economic, fishing and research trends relevant to the management the TRL Fishery. This includes within adjacent jurisdictions. This ensures that, where relevant, the WG is able to have regard for these strategic issues and trends.
3. WG members are asked to provide any updates on trends and opportunities in markets, processing and value adding. Industry is asked to contribute advice on economic and market trends where possible. Scientific members are asked to contribute advice on any broader strategic research projects or issues that may be of interest to the Torres Strait in future.
2. Government agency members are asked to provide updates relevant to the TRL Fishery. Specific AFMA updates are provided in **Attachment 2a**. A verbal AFMA compliance update will also be provided.
4. AFMA has a standing invite for officials from the PNG National Fisheries Authority (NFA) and a Native Title Body representative to attend all PZJA advisory committee meetings. If in attendance, updates are welcome from these participants.

## UPDATE FROM AUSTRALIAN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY

### ABARES fishery status report 2025

5. Each year, the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) compiles fishery status reports which provide an independent assessment of the biological status of fish stock and the economic status of fisheries managed, or jointly managed by the Australian Government (Commonwealth fisheries).
6. The latest ABARES Fishery Status Report 2025 (covering the performance of fisheries in 2024) have now been released. The reports assess all key commercial species from Commonwealth managed fisheries and examines the broader impact of fisheries on the environment, including on non-target species.
7. The ABARES website now has a new interactive dashboard that allows readers to filter and display stock status data from 1992 to 2024 at different levels including by stock, species group, fishery, year, or whether solely or jointly-managed by the Australian Government. The fishery status reports can be accessed on the ABARES website at:

<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/abares/research-topics/fisheries/fishery-status>

8. In summary, the TRL Fishery has been assessed for the 2024 period as outlined below.

**Table 16.1 Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery – biological status**

Stock	Fishing mortality 2023	Biomass 2023	Fishing mortality 2024	Biomass 2024	Comments
Tropical rock lobster ( <i>Panulirus ornatus</i> )	Not subject to overfishing	Not overfished	Not subject to overfishing	Not overfished	Fishing mortality is less than the recommended biological catch. Spawning stock biomass is above the target reference point.

### *Australian Government priority to improve productivity growth*

9. As [requested by the Australian Government Treasurer and Minister for Finance](#), AFMA has [provided advice to the Government on regulatory reform opportunities within fisheries](#) that may contribute to improving Australia's productivity growth. The Government made clear that any suggested opportunities "should be concrete and tangible, have an identifiable implementation pathway, be able to be delivered within existing resources, and not compromise core regulatory objectives and protections". In preparing its advice AFMA consulted the Commonwealth Fisheries Association.
10. In addition to the initiatives AFMA has identified, the Government's prioritisation of improving productivity presents a broader opportunity for AFMA by reinforcing AFMA's desired approach to be innovative and responsive in the way it conducts its business. Without comprising AFMA's regulatory obligations, AFMA expects its MACs and RAGs to also consider opportunities to support productivity improvements when developing management advice.

### *Ministerial Statement of Expectations*

11. The [Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has issued AFMA her expectations of AFMA in managing Commonwealth fisheries](#). Ministerial Statements of Expectations (SOE) are issued by the responsible minister to a regulator to provide greater clarity about government policies and objectives relevant to the regulator in line with its statutory

objectives, and the priorities the minister expects it to observe in conducting its operations. Statements of Expectations are updated with every change in Minister.

12. The Minister's expectation reinforces the important of AFMA existing priorities and align with the Government's productivity agenda. In due course AFMA will reply to the Minister with it's Statement of Intent (SOI). A SOI outlines how the regulator intends to meet the SOE including how it will demonstrate progress.

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP (TRLWG)</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>CATCH SUMMARY FOR THE 2024-25 FISHING SEASON</b>	<b>Agenda Item 3</b> <b>For NOTING</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the WG:
  - a. **NOTE** the reported landed catch for the Australian Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery (TRL Fishery) (**Attachment 3a**).
  - b. **NOTE** the 2025 (January – October) landed catch for the PNG TRL Fishery as reported by the PNG National Fisheries Authority (NFA) (**Attachment 3b**) and an update to the 2024 reported landed catch (**Attachment 3c**).

## KEY ISSUES

### Australian TRL Fishery Catch

2. The Australian TRL Fishery fishing season runs from 1 December through to 30 September the following year. There is a prohibition on the use of hookah gear from 1 December through to 31 January the following year and periodically each month throughout the remainder of the season.
3. The reported landed catch for the Australian TRL Fishery for the 2024-25 fishing season is **378.27 tonnes**. All reported catches are from inside the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) and Australia's declared outside but near area combined. The data is sourced from Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Record (TDB02) and electronic Catch Disposal Records (e-CDRs) and covers the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) and Transferable Vessel Holder (TVH) sectors.
4. 378.27 tonnes equates to **81.45 per cent of Australia's 464.4 tonne total allowable catch (TAC)** for the 2024-25 fishing season. This is a significant increase compared to the 2023-24 season (200.21 tonnes; 56% caught).
5. The **TIB** sector caught **221.36 tonnes** of TRL which equates to **72 per cent of the TIB TAC** and the **TVH** sector caught **156.91 tonnes** of TRL which equates to **99.97% per cent of the TVH TAC**.
6. A summary of the reported landed catch for the Australian TRL Fishery is provided at **Attachment 3a**.

### PNG TRL Fishery catch

7. The PNG TRL Fishery fishing season runs from 1 January through to 31 December each year. There is a prohibition on the use of hookah gear in the waters of Western Province and Torres Strait from 1 December through to 31 March the following year.
8. The TAC for the PNG TRL Fishery in 2024, in PNG waters was 103.2 tonnes. The total reported catch of the PNG TRL Fishery from January – October 2025 is **62.42 tonnes**, with 52.1 tonnes taken from within PNG waters of the TSPZ and 10.3 tonnes taken from outside the TSPZ (**Attachment 4b**). This equates to around 60% of the PNG catch apportionment in PNG waters.
9. On 27 May 2025, AFMA received updated PNG TRL Fishery catch data for the 2024 fishing season (**Attachment 4c**). The RAG is invited to note the update to the reported catch total for the 2024 season.

### Total reported commercial catch for the TRL stock

Area	Total (kg)	TAC (kg)	Remaining (kg)	% caught
Australian TRL Fishery (1 Dec 2024 – 30 Sept 2025)	378,270.58	464,400	86,129.42	81.45%
PNG TRL Fishery* (January – October 2025)	62,417.88	103,200	40,782.12	60.48%
catches inside the TSPZ	52,093.61			
catches outside the TSPZ	10,324.27			
PNG catch allocation within Australian waters	-	120,400	120,400	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>440,688.46</b>	<b>688,000</b>	<b>247,311.54</b>	<b>64.05%</b>

\* Reported as at 28 November 2025.

**Table 1. Reported landed catch (kilograms whole weight) of Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) for the Australian Torres Strait TRL Fishery by month and sector for the 2024-25 fishing season.**

Source: Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Records (TDB02) and electronic Catch Disposal Records as at 20 November 2025.

Month	Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector	Transferable Vessel Holder (TVH) sector	Total (kg)
Dec-24	20,499.91	4,613.33	23,336.84
Jan-25	17,454.29		19,230.69
Feb-25	18,243.08	25,477.45	43,720.53
Mar-25	23,842.38	30,096.11	53,938.49
Apr-25	21,088.69	19,622.27	40,710.96
May-25	24,504.53	27,634.07	52,138.60
Jun-25	31,377.75	24,765.77	56,143.52
Jul-25	30,485.43	22,360.05	52,845.47
Aug-25	22,486.16	2,345.77	23,636.65
Sep-25	11,373.55		12,568.83
<b>Total reported catch (kg)</b>	<b>221,355.77</b>	<b>156,914.81</b>	<b>378,270.58</b>
<b>TAC (kg)</b>	<b>307,441.15</b>	<b>156,958.85</b>	<b>464,400</b>
<b>Reported catch as a per cent of the TAC*</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>99.97%</b>	<b>81.45%</b>

# In accordance with AFMA's Information Disclosure policy (*Fisheries Management Paper 12*), catches by month have been aggregated for December 2024 and January 2025, as well as August and September 2025, as less than 5 boats operated in the Transferable Vessel Holder (TVH) sector. This data is sourced from raw Catch Disposal Records (TDB02) and electronic Catch Disposal Records, and may not account for data cleaning undertaken by Fishwell Pty Ltd during CPUE analysis.

**Table 2. Reported landed catch (kilograms) of TRL for the PNG Torres Strait TRL Fishery by month and processed weight for the period Jan -October 2025**

Source: PNG National Fisheries Authority reported as at 28 November 2025.

PNG Catch Total: Jan - Oct 2025				
MONTH	TAIL WEIGHT (KG)	TAIL CONVERSION (CF. 2.677)	WHOLE (KG)	GRAND TOTAL (KG)
JANUARY	883.20	2364.33	9379.60	11743.93
FEBRUARY	579.98	1552.61	10205.20	11757.81
MARCH	704.17	1885.06	5668.96	7554.02
APRIL	911.86	2441.05	7144.05	9585.10
MAY	850.69	2277.30	4712.49	6989.79
JUNE	328.39	879.10	4951.21	5830.31
JULY	141.88	379.81	1853.23	2233.04
AUGUST	128.70	344.53	1998.23	2342.76
SEPTEMBER	659.80	1766.28	2277.03	4043.31
OCTOBER	14.82	39.67	298.14	337.81
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>5,203.49</b>	<b>13,929.74</b>	<b>48,488.14</b>	<b>62,417.88</b>

PNG Jurisdiction of the TSPZ: Jan - Oct 2025				
MONTH	TAIL WEIGHT (KG)	TAIL CONVERSION (CF. 2.677)	WHOLE (KG)	GRAND TOTAL (KG)
JANUARY	543.00	1453.61	6512.90	7966.51
FEBRUARY	479.18	1282.76	7318.18	8600.94
MARCH	603.40	1615.30	5230.95	6846.25
APRIL	698.06	1868.71	6012.65	7881.36
MAY	825.58	2210.08	4070.56	6280.64
JUNE	297.89	797.45	4837.41	5634.86
JULY	141.88	379.81	1853.23	2233.04
AUGUST	114.10	305.45	1998.23	2303.68
SEPTEMBER	646.80	1731.48	2277.03	4008.51
OCTOBER	14.82	39.67	298.14	337.81
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4,364.71</b>	<b>11,684.33</b>	<b>40,409.28</b>	<b>52,093.61</b>

PNG Waters outside but near TSPZ: Jan - Oct 2025				
MONTH	TAIL WEIGHT (KG)	TAIL CONVERSION (CF. 2.677)	WHOLE (KG)	GRAND TOTAL (KG)
JANUARY	340.20	910.72	2866.70	3777.42
FEBRUARY	100.80	269.84	2887.02	3156.86
MARCH	100.77	269.76	438.01	707.77
APRIL	213.80	572.34	1131.40	1703.74
MAY	25.11	67.22	641.93	709.15
JUNE	30.50	81.65	113.80	195.45
JULY	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
AUGUST	14.60	39.08	0.00	39.08
SEPTEMBER	13.00	34.80	0.00	34.80
OCTOBER	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>838.78</b>	<b>2,245.41</b>	<b>8,078.86</b>	<b>10,324.27</b>

**Table 3. Reported landed catch (kilograms) of TRL for the PNG Torres Strait TRL Fishery by month and processed weight for the Jan – Dec 2024.**

Source: PNG National Fisheries Authority reported as at 27 May 2025.

PNG Jurisdiction of the TSPZ: Jan - Dec 2024					PNG Waters outside but near TSPZ: Jan - Dec 2024				
Month (2024)	Tail weight (kg)	Tail wt converted to whole wt (C. factor 2.677)	Whole weight (kg)	Total Catch (kg)	Month (2024)	Tail weight (kg)	Tail wt converted to whole wt (C. factor 2.677)	Whole weight (kg)	Total Catch (kg)
JANUARY	287.5	769.6375	4,453.71	5,223.35	JANUARY	47.40	126.89	2,175.50	2,302.39
FEBRUARY	24.3	65.0511	4,537.60	4,602.65	FEBRUARY	406.50	1,088.20	1,322.80	2,411.00
MARCH	8.3	22.2191	2,125.00	2,147.22	MARCH	11.30	30.25	1,665.70	1,695.95
APRIL	466.9	1249.8913	2,386.90	3,636.79	APRIL	677.70	1,814.20	1,810.60	3,624.80
MAY	152.5	408.2425	4,675.70	5,083.94	MAY	84.10	225.14	2,558.70	2,783.84
JUNE	123.3	330.0741	15,022.00	15,352.07	JUNE	14.40	38.55	6,816.30	6,854.85
JULY	130.3	348.8131	6,594.20	6,943.01	JULY	23.80	63.71	2,424.70	2,488.41
AUGUST	155.93	417.42461	11,477.80	11,895.22	AUGUST	22.40	59.96	11,416.30	11,476.26
SEPTEMBER	140.9	377.1893	9,735.10	10,112.29	SEPTEMBER	30.90	82.72	5,975.70	6,058.42
OCTOBER	32.6	87.2702	263.30	350.57	OCTOBER	165.30	442.51	274.50	717.01
NOVEMBER	19.7	52.7369	92.2	144.94	NOVEMBER	35.80	95.84	83.50	179.34
DECEMBER	153.8	411.7226	589.6	1,001.32	DECEMBER	99.30	265.83	214.20	480.03
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,696.03</b>	<b>4,540.27</b>	<b>61,953.11</b>	<b>66,493.38</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,618.90</b>	<b>4,333.80</b>	<b>36,738.50</b>	<b>41,072.30</b>

PNG Catch Total: Jan - Dec 2024				
Month (2024)	Tail weight (kg)	Tail wt converted to whole wt (C. factor 2.677)	Whole weight (kg)	Total Catch (kg)
JANUARY	334.90	896.53	6,629.21	7,525.74
FEBRUARY	430.80	1,153.25	5,860.40	7,013.65
MARCH	19.60	52.47	3,790.70	3,843.17
APRIL	1,144.60	3,064.09	4,197.50	7,261.59
MAY	236.60	633.38	7,234.40	7,867.78
JUNE	137.70	368.62	21,838.30	22,206.92
JULY	154.10	412.53	9,018.90	9,431.43
AUGUST	178.33	477.39	22,894.10	23,371.49
SEPTEMBER	171.8	459.91	15710.8	16,170.71
OCTOBER	197.9	529.78	537.8	1,067.58
NOVEMBER	55.5	148.57	175.7	324.27
DECEMBER	253.1	677.55	803.8	1,481.35
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,314.93</b>	<b>8,874.07</b>	<b>98,691.61</b>	<b>107,565.68</b>

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP (TRLWG)</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>TOTAL ALLOWABLE CATCH</b>	<b>Agenda Item 5</b> <b>For DISCUSSION and ADVICE</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the WG:
  - a. **NOTE** on 19 November 2025, Senator Julie Collins determined a total allowable catch (TAC) of 200,000 kilograms of TRL in the Australian waters of the TRL Fishery for the 2025-26 fishing season.
  - b. **DISCUSS and PROVIDE ADVICE** on a global total allowable catch (TAC) for the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery (TRL Fishery) for the 2025-26 fishing season, taking into consideration:
    - (i) the advice from the TRL RAG on the recommended biological catch (RBC) for the TSPZ TRL Fishery for the 2025-26 fishing season based on the application of the recommended revised empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR).
      - the TRLRAG advice and additional supporting information will be presented by the TRLRAG Chair (under **Agenda Item 4**)
    - (ii) to date, based on previous TRLRAG advice, other sources of mortality (e.g. traditional and recreational catch of TRL), have not been deducted from the RBC when recommending a global TAC.

## KEY ISSUES

2. The Working Group is asked to provide advice on a global TAC for the TSPZ TRL Fishery for the 2025-26 fishing season<sup>1</sup>. This is to include consideration of whether to deduct other sources of mortality from the RBC.
3. The RBC for the TSPZ TRL Fishery for the 2025-26 fishing season will be calculated by applying the recommended revised eHCR under the TRL Harvest Strategy, as per advice from TRLRAG 41. A summary of the advice will be presented to the Working Group in session.

## BACKGROUND

### *Revised eHCR*

4. After extensive management evaluation (MSE) testing, and consultation with the TRL RAG, TRL Working Group and other stakeholders, the PZJA Standing Committee at their meeting on 15 October 2025, recommended the PZJA implement the Osprey Rule as the revised eHCR under the TRL Harvest Strategy.

<sup>1</sup> The Australian TRL Fishery fishing season runs from 1 December through to 30 September the following year. The PNG TRL Fishery fishing season runs from 1 January through to 31 December each year.

5. The Osprey eHCR formula uses a statistic that measures the relative performance of the fishery based on the following data inputs:
  - the pre-season survey index of abundance of juvenile recruiting 1+ lobsters (70 per cent weighting);
  - the pre-season survey index of abundance of newly recruited 0+ lobsters (10 per cent weighting);
  - the standardised CPUE index from the TVH sector (10 per cent weighting); and
  - the standardised CPUE index from the TIB sector (10 per cent weighting).

#### **TAC setting process**

6. Under subsection 13 of the [TRL Management Plan](#), the Minister must determine a TAC for the TRL Fishery prior to the start of a fishing season. In making a TAC determination, the Minister must:
  - a. consult with any advisory committee that the PZJA has established under subsection 40(7) of the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*, to provide advice relating to the TRL Fishery; and
  - b. have regard to Australia's obligations under the Torres Strait Treaty.
7. Under section 13 the Minister may also consider the views of any person with an interest in the TRL Fishery or the ecologically sustainable use of the TRL Fishery and take into account the amount of TRL taken in the TRL Fishery as a result of other fishing, such as traditional fishing or recreational fishing.
8. Subsection 14 provides for the Minister to determine an increase to the TAC for a fishing season. Subsections 8-11 prescribe how a TAC is to be administered, including the issuing of a notice when the TAC for the Traditional Inhabitant sector has been reached.
9. Further background on the TAC setting process, how catch is shared between Australia and PNG, and how each sector's catches will be managed for the 2025-26 fishing season is provided in the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery Management Arrangements Booklet 2025-26 available from the [PZJA website](#).

#### **Setting the start of 2025-26 season TAC**

10. At its meeting on 18-19 October 2018, the TRLRAG advised that the start of season catch limit should cover 1 December through to the end of February, and be based on the maximum annual catch amount for the period 2005-2018, being 200 tonnes. This is to minimise the risk that the limit could artificially constrain fishing effort, particularly in a year of high TRL abundance.
11. The RAG also advised that if needed, an additional 100 tonnes be added to the start of season catch limit amount, to account for catches from PNG.
12. It was further agreed that the start of season catch limit be overridden in seasons where the TRL stock abundance is exceptionally low and the final RBC is likely to fall below the start of season catch limit or where overridden by the Harvest Strategy decision rules. In such cases, the use of the start of season catch limit should not be used in subsequent seasons until reviewed by the TRLRAG.

13. Accordingly, on 19 November 2025, the Minister determined start of season TAC of 200,000 kgs (unprocessed weight) for the 2025-26 fishing season under section 13 of the TRL Management Plan.
14. It is expected that the TAC will be increased once the outcomes of the scientific assessment process and the TAC sharing arrangements under the Treaty between Australia and PNG have been considered. Any increase in the TAC is expected to be determined by the end of February 2026.

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP (TRLWG)</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>REVIEW OF MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES</b>	<b>Agenda Item 6</b> <b>For Discussion and Advice</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group:
  - a. **NOTE** a review of management controls currently applied to the TRL Fishery has been ongoing since TRLWG 10 (December 2021) in line with an agreed review process;
  - b. **RECALL** that following extensive workshopping with industry and community consultation, two industry-based proposals were recommended for implementation at TRLWG 12 (15 December 2022) and implemented in May 2025.
    - i. TRLWG 14 further recommended that metrics for measuring the performance of any changes should be established to determine if they are achieving the intended socio-economic objectives.
  - a. **NOTE** that since TRLWG 12, the main proposals that have been raised (TRLWG 15 December 2023 and TRLWG 16 June 2024) relate to changes to the hookah season dates, removal of periodic moontide hookah closures and extension of the TIB free dive season, however due to lack of industry support, and competing management priorities (i.e. revising the TRL eHCR), these proposals have not progressed.
  - b. **REVIEW and DISCUSS** the summary and status of previous proposals to change management controls in the TRL Fishery that have been discussed through the Working Group over time (**Attachment 6a**); and
  - c. Having regard to the above, discuss and **PROVIDE ADVICE** on any future changes to management controls, including prioritisation of such.

## KEY ISSUES

2. Although 2025 was deemed a very good season in terms of TRL abundance and catch rates across both sectors, ongoing external market challenges, supply chain disruptions and increased cost of operations (e.g. fuel and freight) continue to hamper fishing effort and profitability in the TRL fishery. These issues have been characterised by industry as the worst set of external circumstances ever faced by the TRL industry.
3. These pressures have re-defined the rationale for certain changes to management arrangements with a more recent push to increase participation in the TIB sector and remove management barriers to maximise catch and market supply when market prices are at their peak (e.g. just before Chinese New Year).
4. To date, no proposals of this nature have been progressed, either through lack of support from some industry, and due to competing management priorities for the fishery while the TRL empirical harvest control rule underwent a revision. However, it is timely now that the Working Group consider changes to management arrangements where appropriate. To

help inform discussions, a summary of previous proposals to change management controls in the TRL Fishery that have been discussed through the Working Group over time is provided at **Attachment 6a**.

## BACKGROUND

5. Changes to management controls in the TRL Fishery have been discussed for several years in the Working Group before and since the implementation of the TRL Management Plan.
6. Prior to the TRL Management Plan, a suite of changes to management controls were due to be discussed at TRLWG 6 which met on 25-26 July 2017 however the meeting finished early due to a lack of quorum and none of the issues were addressed further.
7. Following this, all management efforts were directed in finalising the TRL Management Plan and developing the TRL Harvest Strategy. During this time the PZJA reaffirmed that no further changes would occur until after the implementation of the Plan which came into force in November 2018.
8. After two seasons of sectoral catch shares and quota under the Plan, the Working Group (TRLWG 11; 17 December 2020) was asked again to revisit proposed changes to management controls with the following considerations:
  - a. That AFMA's preference is to conduct a review in a careful, and considered step-wise manner;
  - b. To ensure a clear understanding of the rationale of any proposed change, including an assessment of expected benefits and outcomes against objectives, relative to a clear set of evaluation criteria;
  - c. To understand who is likely to be affected or who is to benefit, and those might be distributed;
  - d. That any proposed change will need careful consideration of the potential impacts on fishing patterns or fisher behaviour, which may impact catch rates and CPUE indices; and
  - e. That any proposed changes would require broader stakeholder consultation.
9. TRLWG 11 then agreed to a review process which includes:
  - a. determining what's in scope, and out of scope for the review using the list of previously raised proposals to change management controls as a starting point;
  - b. consider the benefits and/or impacts against with consideration of how the proposals align with the objectives for the fishery and the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act) (**Attachment 6b**);
  - c. what criteria may be used to evaluate proposals for changes to management controls;
  - d. prioritisation of proposals;
  - e. consideration of broader stakeholder input on the above at a dedicated stakeholder workshop; and
  - f. public consultation.
10. The Working Group should note that the complexity and/or ease involved in changing an existing management control may be influenced by a range of factors:

- g. Rationale - some proposals will have a clear rationale for change, while others may be less clear and require further discussion and consultation;
- h. Benefits and impacts – some changes may benefit some individuals, or one sector, while disadvantaging others.
- i. Objectives – some changes may or may not be consistent with the objectives of the Fishery and the Act.

Table 1. Summary and status of management controls and proposals for change raised over time.

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
Input controls	Boat length restriction & policy	Option for primary vessels limited to 9.9m being increased to 13.9m	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)	<b>Not Progressed</b> TRLWG 4 identified this item as a high priority following the implementation of the Management Plan.
		Review how/if use of tow cages undermines boat length restrictions	TRLWG 10 (12 December 2019)	
	Fishery closure (Oct – Nov)	Review fishing season dates to align with international markets	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)	<b>Complete</b> Amendment of the fishing season dates to enable the effective implementation of the Management Plan was considered at TRLRAG 24 (18 19 October 2019). No recommendation was made to change the fishing season for this purpose.
	Allow free-dive and lamp fishing year round	12 month season for free-dive and lamp fishing for TIB boats only	TRLWG 5 (5-6 April 2016)	<b>Not Progressed</b> Last proposed for discussion at TRLWG 6 (25 26 July 2017). However, this item was not considered due to the early closure of the meeting (lack of quorum).
		Proposal to permit lamp fishing from TIB boats only	TRLWG 5 (5-6 April 2016)	
		Requested the hookah season commence earlier (on 1 January) and possibly close again in March to allow industry to maximise the catch value in the season by fishing to the Chinese New Year market, and restricting hookah catches in March when market prices are reduced and lobster mortality is higher due to moulting and increased water temperatures and lobster discards.	TRLWG 10 (12 December 2019)	<b>Not Progressed</b>
	Hookah closure (1 December – 31 January)	Emergency measures to change the start of the hookah season from 1 February to 24 January 2024 and remove the February moontide hookah closure.	TRLWG 15 (14 December 2023)	<b>Not supported or implemented</b> Recommendations were agreed to however following consultation undertaken by TSRA, the proposal was not supported nor implemented.

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
Moontide closures		Amend method for setting hookah closures to coincide with full moons and moult cycles	TRLWG 6 (25-26 July 2017)	<b>Complete</b> This was reconsidered at TRLWG 8 who agreed to maintain the existing methodology
		Requirements concerning the possession and use of hookah gear around hookah closure periods, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Creating provisions that allowed for transiting to the fishing grounds before the hookah season re-opened. AFMA advised that in the absence of implementing Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) on all boats (primary, tenders and dinghies), this would be a complex arrangement to enforce.</li> <li>- Bringing the closure forward by 12 hours, allowing boats to leave port from midday, rather than midnight.</li> <li>- Allowing the compressor unit to remain stowed in dories, and only having to remove the hookah hoses whilst in Port.</li> </ul>	TRLWG 9 (19 February 2019)	<b>Not supported</b> The hookah possession requirements were strengthened in 2018 via changes to the TRL Management Instrument.  The three proposed amendments to the hookah possession requirements were widely consulted on in 2022 but were not supported.
		Submission from Trent Butcher and Mark Dean <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Submission received on 25 November 2019 from TVH TRLWG members proposing moon-tide hookah closures be removed for the 2019-20 fishing season onwards.</li> <li>- TVH members advised that their preference in the long-term is to remove all moon-tide hookah closures.</li> </ul>	TRLWG 10 (12 December 2019)	<b>Not Progressed</b>
		TIB members want consideration of having an additional moon-tide hookah closures to alleviate fishing pressure on home reefs and to reduce the competition pressure on free-divers from hookah divers.	TRLWG 10 (12 December 2019)	<b>Not Progressed</b>

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
	Hookah season and moontide hookah closures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implement an earlier hookah season start date (1st, 7th or 15th Jan)</li> <li>Remove three moontide hookah closures during the months of February, April and May)</li> <li>Remove of some restrictions on TIB fishing effort to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow TIB hookah diving Nov-Dec</li> <li>Allow TIB freediving all year</li> <li>Allow TIB freediving and hookah all year</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	TRLWG 15 (December 2023) and TRLWG 16 (5 June 2024).	<p><b>Not progressed</b>  This proposal to amend the hookah season start date was supported to by the WG in Dec 23 and the necessary documents to administer the changes were prepared by AFMA ready for Ministerial sign off, however following consultation undertaken by TSRA in December 2023/January 2024, the recommendation was not supported by communities/industry and the changes were not implemented. As such, the 2023-24 hookah season opened on 1 February as normal, with the first moontide hookah closure proceeding on 7 February as scheduled.</p> <p>The June 2024 proposals were not progressed due to competing management priorities for the fishery (revising the eHCR).</p>
	Tender/dinghy number restrictions	Provide for the temporary transfer of tender boats to operate in conjunction with another primary boat held by the same licence holder	TRLWG 6 (25-26 July 2017)	<p><b>Complete</b>  This is now permitted on a case by case basis as stipulated in the <i>Guide to Licensing Arrangements in the Torres Strait 2021</i> (available on the PZJA website)</p>
	Gear restrictions (SCUBA & propulsion)	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a
	Equipment restrictions (spear/hand)	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a
	Meat removal from shell	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
	Diving equipment at night	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
Licensing Arrangements	A processor/carrier licence is required to process or carry TRL at sea	Grant of a new carrier-only boat licence to non-traditional inhabitants only for vessels that are not licenced to fish.  (all fisheries)	TRLWG 6 (25-26 July 2017)	Last proposed for discussion at TRLWG 6 (25 26 July 2017). However, this item was not considered due to the early closure of the meeting (lack of quorum). Other Working Groups (Finfish Working Group on 16-17 March 2017 and Hand Collectables Working Group on 27 June 2017) have recommended further stakeholder consultation or were not supportive.
	A Master Fisherman's licence must be held by person in charge of the boat	Review arrangements for MFL  (all fisheries)	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)	<b>Not Progressed</b> Consistent with the recommendation of TRLWG 4 (27-28 August 2015), this item has not been progressed since that meeting. TRLWG 4 identified this item as a medium priority following the implementation of the Management Plan.
	Crewing restrictions	Removal of current condition on TIB licences i.e. ability for TIB to have non-indigenous crew  (all fisheries)	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)  TRLWG 10 (12 December 2019)	<b>Not Supported</b> This was widely consulted on in 2022 and was not supported by communities. TRLWG 13 (15 Dec 2022) recommended this proposal be revisited in 3 years time.
	Primary/tender operations	Option for TIB primary vessels to carry any TIB registered dinghy at any time (not in a package)  (applies to Finfish as well)	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)  TRLWG 10 (12 Dec 2019)	<b>Implementation complete</b> This was widely consulted on in 2022 and was largely supported by communities and recommended for implementation by TRLWG 13 (15 Dec 2022). This change was implemented mid-2025.
		Strengthen requirements for tender boats to operate in conjunction with the corresponding primary boat	TRLWG 6 (25-26 July 2017)	<b>Not Progressed</b> Last proposed for discussion at TRLWG 6 (25 26 July 2017). However, this item was

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
				not considered due to the early closure of the meeting (lack of quorum).
Requirement to hold a licence	TIB licenses to be valid for 5 years (all fisheries)	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)	TRLWG 4 (27-28 Aug 2015)	Last considered at TRLWG 4 (27-28 August 2015). The TRLWG recommended AFMA review the licencing dates and period for TIB and TVH sector licences as part of AFMA's 2016 administrative review of licencing processes – low priority. AFMA have scoped the implementation of a common expiry date for licences in the TRL Fishery, however administrative resources are not currently available to progress this matter further. The PZJA approved the development of draft amendments to the Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985 to provide for all licences to be issued for 5 years. However due to lack of key stakeholder support, legislative amendments are on hold.
Requirement to hold unused quota units for a fishing season when taking TRL	No proposal to change			

Management measure	Controls	Changes proposed	Date Raised	Status
Monitoring requirements	Catch reporting	Pursuing Act amendments to make the completion of daily fishing logbooks by the TIB sector mandatory		<b>Ongoing.</b> AFMA is still progressing legislative amendments to the Act.
	Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) for primary and carrier vessels	Consideration of VMS units on all tenders and dinghys to improve spatial data	TRLRAG Data Sub-group (18 June 2019)	<b>Not progressed.</b> The PZJA Standing Committee has agreed to roll out a trial of mandatory VMS carriage in the black teatfish opening in 2026. The outcomes of this trial will be useful in examining potential application in other fisheries like TRL.
Output controls	Total allowable catch for each fishing season	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a
	Weight conversion factor for processed TRL (2.677)	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a
	Size restrictions, minimum tail size of 115 mm or minimum carapace length of 90 mm	No proposal to change	n/a	n/a

### Objectives under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*

In the administration of this Act, regard shall be had to the rights and obligations conferred on Australia by the Torres Strait Treaty and in particular to the following management priorities:

- (a) *to acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of traditional inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing;*
- (b) *to protect and preserve the marine environment and indigenous fauna and flora in and in the vicinity of the Protected Zone;*
- (c) *to adopt conservation measures necessary for the conservation of a species in such a way as to minimise any restrictive effects of the measures on traditional fishing;*
- (d) *to administer the provisions of Part 5 of the Torres Strait Treaty (relating to commercial fisheries) so as not to prejudice the achievement of the purposes of Part 4 of the Torres Strait Treaty in regard to traditional fishing;*
- (e) *to manage commercial fisheries for optimum utilisation;*
- (f) *to share the allowable catch of relevant Protected Zone commercial fisheries with Papua New Guinea in accordance with the Torres Strait Treaty;*
- (g) *to have regard, in developing and implementing licensing policy, to the desirability of promoting economic development in the Torres Strait area and employment opportunities for traditional inhabitants.*

### TRL Fishery Management Objectives

In 2005–06, the Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group recommended new management objectives which were adopted by the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA). These objectives are:

- a. to maintain the spawning stock at levels that meet or exceed that required to produce the maximum sustainable yield;
- b. in accordance with the TS Treaty, to protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of Traditional Inhabitants, particularly in relation to their traditional fishing for TRL;
- c. to provide for the optimal utilisation, co-operative management with Queensland and PNG and for catch sharing with PNG;
- d. to monitor interactions between the prawn and lobster fisheries;
- e. to maintain appropriate controls on fishing gear allowed in the fishery so as to minimise impacts on the environment;
- f. to promote economic development in the TS area with an emphasis on providing the framework for commercial opportunities for Traditional Inhabitants and to ensure that the opportunities available to all stakeholders are socially and culturally appropriate for the TS and the wider Queensland and Australian community; and
- g. to optimise the value of the fishery.

Expansion in the fishery is limited to Traditional Inhabitants so as to maximise their opportunities.

The PZJA has imposed licensing provisions to prevent the growth of the non-Islander sector, both in terms of fishing capacity (boat replacement policy) and the containment of licence numbers. There is also a ban on trawlers taking lobster to prevent pressure on the lobster resource from the prawn trawling fleet.

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP (TRLWG)</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>Research Process and Priorities</b>	<b>Agenda Item 7</b> <b>For DISCUSSION</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the WG **DISCUSS** the research priorities for inclusion in the 2026/27-2030/31 Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery rolling Five Year Research Plan (**Attachment 7a**) and **RECOMMEND** priorities and their order for inclusion in the plan.
2. That the WG **NOTE**:
  - a. That the currently funded three-year TRL project “Fishery independent survey, stock assessment, and Recommended Biological Catch calculations for the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery 2025/26-2027/28”, is the Fishery’s agreed highest ‘essential’ research priority, as recommended by the RAG; and
  - b. The updated TSSAC Fisheries Strategic Research Plan 2025 – 2029 (**Attachment 7b**) and associated research processes.

## KEY ISSUES

### **TSSAC Research Funding Process**

3. Research projects are vital to ensuring Torres Strait fisheries are managed in line with best practice fisheries management, and current science and data for each fishery.
4. Limited funding is available each year, with AFMA historically contributing around \$420,000 each year to the Protected Zone Joint Authority fisheries research budget. In recent years TSRA has committed additional funding of around \$225,000 year towards PZJA fisheries research. The recent baseline Government budget is around \$625,000 annually for all PZJA fisheries research.
5. Additional funding can also be sought from other bodies such as the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC), when needed, and when projects align with FRDC objectives.
6. The Torres Strait research prioritisation and funding process is guided by the five-year Torres Strait Strategic Research Plan (SRP). The SRP was updated in 2025 and specifies 8 research priorities that the PZJA intend to pursue in Torres Strait fisheries during a five-year period.
7. The TSSAC requires a rolling five-year research plan (which is updated annually) for each Torres Strait fishery, which is developed by AFMA through guidance of the RAG and Working Group. The research priorities within the fishery plans must fit into the themes identified in the SRP.

8. Each year the TSSAC prioritises the research priorities across all fisheries, and invites applications for funding for a limited number of projects, depending on the available research budget predicted for that year.

#### **Research priorities for the TRL Fishery**

9. The RAG last reviewed the Torres Strait TRL Fishery rolling Five Year Research Plan in July 2024, and the 2025/26-2029/30 plan was presented to and supported by the TRL Working Group. The Working Group did not identify any new research priorities or changes to existing priorities.
10. AFMA consider the highest 'essential' priority for the fishery remains the need to undertake **fishery independent surveys, stock assessment, harvest control and Recommended Biological Catch (RBC)** work.
11. This work was recommended for funding again from 2025-2028 (three-year contract) under a new research provider (Fishwell Pty Ltd).
12. Although research funding is fairly limited outside of several currently funded multiyear Torres Strait research projects (**Attachment 7c**), it is useful to maintain a complete list of essential and desirable research for each fishery (**Attachment 7a**). If any of these priorities become critical, TSSAC and AFMA as the TSSAC secretariat can explore options for additional funding.
13. AFMA Management is of the view that the most recent (2025/26-2029/30) Torres Strait TRL Fishery rolling Five Year Research Plan still captures the key research needs for the TRL Fishery, and could be used again for the 2026/27-2030/31 plan, however welcomes any suggested updates or changes.

## **BACKGROUND**

14. The TRLRAG discussed the following points when developing the existing five-year research plan for the TRL fishery in 2024:
  - a. There are several projects already underway or scheduled for funding which will address some of the identified research priorities. There projects are already funded through TSRA, however the TRLRAG suggested their inclusion in the plan for visibility. These include:
    - (i) TSRA's WAPIL project which will contribute to **understanding fisher behaviour**
    - (ii) CSIRO's *Modelling climate change impacts on key fisheries resources in the Torres Strait to co-develop adaptation and mitigation strategies*, which will contribute to **understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies**.
  - b. The RAG also noted:
    - (i) that the significance of climate change across all Torres Strait fisheries, including TRL, warrants having it listed as its own priority. This item was separated out from understanding connectivity and placed as a higher priority.

- (ii) The highest 'essential' priority for the fishery remains the need to undertake **fishery independent surveys, stock assessment, harvest control and Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) work.**
- (iii) Undertaking an update to the 2007 **Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)** for the TRL Fishery remains an essential priority.
- (iv) **Improvement of data collection** (to be pursued by the TRL RAG data sub-group) remains an essential priority.
- (v) **Impact and mitigation of climate change effects in Torres Strait fisheries** is an essential priority, noting the CSIRO project on this will benefit all Torres Strait fisheries, including TRL.
- (vi) **Understanding fisher behaviour**, including capturing information on the impacts of COVID-19 on things like effort levels, spatial effort distribution and economically driven changes in behaviour in the fishery, remain essential priorities.
- (vii) **Understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies** is desirable rather than essential, as climate change has been separately identified as a priority and is higher than understanding connectivity implications between jurisdictions.
- (viii) **Understanding changes to fishing power and a science peer review** remain desirable.

**Attachment 7a.** Overview of recent research needs identified or discussed at previous TRLRAG and TRLWG meetings with an update on current status.

Research need	Detail	TRLRAG and WG Prioritisation	Status	Comments/Questions
Impact of climate change on Torres Strait fisheries		<b>Essential</b> (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	Funded by TSRA.	Will contribute to the TRL Fishery's priority of understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies.
Fishery surveys, stock assessment, harvest control rules and recommended biological catch (RBC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitor ongoing changes in the fishery and update or develop fishery performance indicators as required.</li> <li>Recommend a recommended biological catch (RBC) annually for each season.</li> <li>Every third-year update and implement the long-term stock assessment.</li> <li>Conduct a pre-season survey in November each year, including seabed habitat monitoring.</li> <li>Facilitate data sharing with PNG.</li> </ul>	<b>Essential, priority 1</b> (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	<b>Currently funded</b> under AFMA Research Project (2024-0820) until the end of 2027/28.	<p>Needs to be scoped for a new project for 2025/26 onwards</p> <p>Project cost is \$1,193,418 over 3 years.</p>
Understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of migration of different age classes of lobsters between, and within, jurisdictions (e.g. PNG, QLD East Coast and Torres Strait).</li> <li>Understanding of recruitment connectivity between, and within, jurisdictions, including key areas of larval release within each jurisdiction.</li> <li>Management implications of movement and recruitment connectivity between, and within, jurisdictions.</li> <li>Understanding large scale environmental perturbations and their impacts on lobster recruitment, availability and aggregations.</li> </ul>	<b>Essential, priority 2</b> (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	<p>Currently unfunded and requires an indicative cost estimate if there is a need to fund in the next 2 years.</p>	<p>Industry could be engaged to undertake a discrete tagging project of 0+ (recently settled) and 1+ (juvenile) lobsters to examine movement from the East Coast into the Torres Strait.</p> <p>Useful to help better understand any potential disparity between pre-season survey data, and the fishery catch data, noting that the most recent tagging study is over 30 years old.</p> <p>The currently-funded climate project work led by CSIRO will provide greater insights into the available environmental information, and advice on what information should be collected to develop downscaled climate effects models for TS fisheries.</p>
Improvement of data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved monitoring of commercial catch and effort in all sectors of the fishery.</li> <li>Estimate of non-commercial take of TRL.</li> </ul>	<b>Essential, priority 3</b> (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	<p>There is no TRL RAG data sub group planned at this stage. Competing management priorities</p>	The RAG has supported the continuation of the data sub-group as a means to progress options for addressing ongoing fishing

Research need	Detail	TRLRAG and WG Prioritisation	Status	Comments/Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative monitoring techniques of effort, for example GPS tracking.</li> </ul>		<p>have meant the sub-group has not progressed since its first meeting in 2019.</p>	<p>dependent data needs for the fishery.</p> <p>The funding for RAG data sub-groups is to be sourced from the AFMA TRLRAG budget.</p>
Understanding fisher behaviour and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding the drivers and incentives in determining fishing behaviour in all sectors.</li> <li>Understanding fishing behaviour under output controls: the impact of ITQs or competitive quota on the fishery (including social impacts); the extent and impact of discard mortality; the effect of changing market preferences on fishing behaviour under output controls; the extent of value adding e.g. moving to live product, targeting different sizes; the extent of high grading under output controls.</li> <li>Work should also include capturing information on the impacts of COVID-19 on the fishery to ensure that analysis of fishery data is accounting for potential 'COVID noise'.</li> <li>Commencing initial conversations with industry now, to capture qualitative information on fishing activities, would be a useful approach.</li> </ul>	Desirable, priority 2 (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	<p>TSRA is currently funding the related WAPPIL project.</p> <p>The PZJA Standing Committee is also due to consider the next steps in the TIB quota allocation review at their next meeting.</p>	TRL Data Sub-group should commence initial conversations with industry and collection of qualitative data, with a view to developing a structured quantitative survey over time.
Understanding changes to fishing power through time	<p>Understanding changes in fishing behaviour and power over time (e.g. changes to the size of engines, use of GPS, gear, areas fished, time fished, experience of divers), to inform the standardisation of CPUE data.</p>		<p>TRL Data Sub-group to progress once progress on improving data collection has been made – funding for sub-group meetings to be sourced from RAG budget</p>	<p>Following initial qualitative data collection, more specific resources can be dedicated towards the project to develop a representative and structured annual fishing power survey. This will be better facilitated when face-to-face stakeholder engagement is more feasible, allowing for trusted relationships with industry to be built up over time.</p>
Understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding of migration of different age classes of lobsters between, and within, jurisdictions (e.g. PNG, QLD East Coast and Torres Strait).</li> <li>Understanding of recruitment connectivity between, and within, jurisdictions, including key</li> </ul>	Essential, priority 2 (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	<p>Currently unfunded and requires an indicative cost estimate</p>	<p>Industry could be engaged to undertake a discrete tagging project of 0+ (recently settled) and 1+ (juvenile) lobsters to examine movement from the East Coast into the Torres Strait.</p>

Research need	Detail	TRLRAG and WG Prioritisation	Status	Comments/Questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>areas of larval release within each jurisdiction.</li> <li>Management implications of movement and recruitment connectivity between, and within, jurisdictions.</li> <li>Understanding large scale environmental perturbations and their impacts on lobster recruitment, availability and aggregations.</li> </ul>			<p>Useful to help better understand any potential disparity between pre-season survey data, and the fishery catch data, noting that the most recent tagging study is over 30 years old.</p> <p>The currently-funded climate project work led by CSIRO will provide greater insights into the available environmental information, and advice on what information should be collected to develop downscaled climate effects models for TS fisheries.</p>
<b>Ecological risk assessment (ERA)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct an update to the 2007 ERA for the TRL Fishery.</li> </ul>	<b>Essential</b> (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	Not budgeted for in 2026/27	TRLRAG 29 agreed that because the Fishery is based on a single species, collected by hand, there is unlikely to be any significant change in the ecological risk factors relating to the TRL fishery since the last ERA was undertaken in 2007.
<b>Science peer review</b>	Consistent with AFMA's best practice <i>Guidelines for quality assurance of Australian fisheries research and science information</i> (the Guidelines), a peer review be conducted of the TRL Fishery survey design.	<b>Desirable, priority 3</b> (as per TRLRAG 36 advice)	<p>This project is currently estimated to cost between \$60,000 - \$80,000 depending on final scope.</p> <p>The Chair and independent scientific member agreed to finalise the Terms of Reference for the review out-of-session (TRL RAG 29)</p>	Original driver for this research need may be now less important.
<b>Mid-year survey</b>	Conduct mid- year survey, as required under the Harvest Strategy for the TRL Fishery.	To be conducted only if requirement to undertake a mid-year survey is triggered under the Harvest Strategy – indicative cost \$110,000 with in-kind contribution from CSIRO	n/a	Unless triggered under the Harvest Strategy for the TRL Fishery, this project is not a priority for the TRL Fishery.

# Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee

## Strategic Research Plan 2024–2028

### Who we are

The Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) is a Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) advisory committee providing advice to the PZJA on use of research funds for Torres Strait fisheries research.

TSSAC includes members from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), Fisheries Queensland, the Torres Strait Islander industry, and the scientific community.

### Strategic research themes

							
Undertake scientifically robust surveys, assessments and targeted scientific projects, which may include Traditional Ecological Knowledge, for risk-based management of fisheries resources, including the direct and indirect impacts of fishing on stocks and the broader ecosystem.	Understand the relationship between fishing pressures and stock structures in the Torres Strait alongside other jurisdictions (such as Queensland and Papua New Guinea) and the implications for stock assessment and management.	Identify and assist in developing resources and the optimal use of existing resources.	Develop cost effective approaches for data capture, storage, and analysis to improve fisheries assessments.	Address the effects of climate change on Torres Strait fisheries through adaptation pathways for management, for the fishing industry and communities.	Understand what influences participation in commercial fishing by Traditional Inhabitants and explore ways to promote better engagement in under-utilised fisheries.	Identify opportunities to increase economic, cultural, and social benefits arising from Torres Strait fisheries.	Develop, review, and advance harvest strategies to streamline decision making processes, optimise economic return, and instil confidence in management practices.

### Key enablers

AFMA provide secretariat support to TSSAC including organising meetings, managing research contracts and project milestones, linking research teams with Torres Strait community representatives, and publishing final project reports on the PZJA website.

The communication of research outcomes to non-scientific audiences include summary documents on project outcomes and implications for fisheries management, and these are published online and provided to relevant Torres Strait stakeholders.

PZJA continues to facilitate greater involvement of Torres Strait Islanders in fisheries research and management through capacity development and collaborative approaches in research projects.

### Attachment 7b

For more information about TSSAC and our research in the Torres Strait, visit the PZJA website at [pzja.gov.au](http://pzja.gov.au) or contact the AFMA Torres Strait Fisheries team on (07) 4069 1990 or [torresstraitresearch@afma.gov.au](mailto:torresstraitresearch@afma.gov.au).

### Our objectives

- **Develop research priorities** for Torres Strait fisheries in conjunction with resource assessment groups, management advisory committees and working groups, addressing the PZJA's management objectives.
- **Review and provide advice on individual fishery research plans** for Torres Strait fisheries.
- **Advise** the PZJA on allocating research funds.
- **Engage and inform** representatives of Torres Strait communities about proposed research and project outcomes.

Any research recommended by TSSAC for funding will help the PZJA achieve the objectives of the Act.

### Research objectives

This plan responds to the complex research needs for Torres Strait fisheries where the management environment pursues sustainability objectives alongside social, economic, and cultural objectives.

Research carries high costs. In an economic environment of competing funding pressures there is a reliance on PZJA advisory committees for strategic planning to deliver the best long-term return on research investment.

There are significant social objectives in managing Torres Strait fisheries and returns on investment may need to be assessed differently to a typical western economic value model. Assessing the value of research against broader objectives will assist the PZJA pursue the social objectives of the Act, alongside the more routinely measured economic and environmental objectives.

## Committed Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) funds for multi-year projects 2024/25 – 2027/28

Key

FUNDING

Project Title	Cost per year		
	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28
FIS, stock assessment, Harvest Strategy and Recommended Biological Catch calculation for the Torres Strait TRL Fishery	\$456,887	\$373,452.20	\$434,177.70
Finfish Fishery: Coral Trout and Spanish Mackerel Biological Sampling 2021-2024	\$203,448	\$189,997	\$199,646 <sup>1</sup>
TSPF tiger prawn stock assessment update	\$2,400		
Climate change project (Funded by TSRA)	\$177,980	\$29,202	
<b>Total cost for all contracted projects (excluding Climate Change)</b>	<b>\$621,200</b>	<b>\$529,499</b>	<b>\$638,210</b>
Predicted available research budget <sup>2</sup> (excluding Climate Change)	<b>\$621,200</b> \$621,000 AFMA <sup>3</sup> TBC TSRA <sup>4</sup>	<b>\$645,000</b> \$420,000 AFMA \$225,000 TSRA	<b>\$645,000</b> \$420,000 AFMA \$225,000 TSRA
Available remaining funds or shortfall (factoring in TRL, Spanish Mackerel and CKMR projects ongoing and assuming available research budget moving forward)	<b>\$0</b>	<b>-\$115,000</b>	<b>-\$5,000</b>

<sup>1</sup> This is a three year project which has been given funding approval for two years. The third year progressing is dependent on a review of the survey design by the RAG and recommendations.

<sup>2</sup> This is an estimate of the minimum expected budget, noting sometimes PZJA agencies find additional funding for critical research above this amount. Further this amount is not guaranteed as a minimum.

<sup>3</sup> Assumed Government budget allocation

<sup>4</sup> Estimate of an annual ongoing TSRA contribution

<b>TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER WORKING GROUP</b> <b>Thursday Island</b>	<b>MEETING 19</b> <b>11 December 2025</b>
<b>DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING</b>	<b>Agenda Item 9</b> <b>For DISCUSSION and ADVICE</b>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Working Group **DISCUSS** a date and a venue for the next meeting noting proposed meeting dates in the table below alongside key agenda items.

<b>Proposed Date</b>	<b>Key agenda items</b>
First half of 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Progression of changes to management controls subject to advice from TRLWG 19.</li> </ul>
10 December 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider advice of the TRL Resource Assessment Group (TRLRAG) regarding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Results of the November 2026 pre-season survey</li> <li>o CPUE analyses for the 2025-26 fishing season</li> <li>o recommended biological catch (RBC) for the 2026-27 fishing season</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Provide advice regarding a total allowable catch (TAC) for the 2026-27 fishing season.</li> <li>- Consider any changes to management controls</li> </ul>