

## Class Notification under the Commonwealth *Native Title Act 1993*

### Scientific permit proposed for a Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery survey

**Date of Issue:** 13 August 2019

<b>SECTION OF NTA</b>	Subsection 24HA(2) of the Commonwealth <i>Native Title Act 1993</i>
<b>DEPARTMENT/AGENCY</b>	Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) on behalf of the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA)
<b>CONTACT NAME</b>	Georgia Langdon
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<b>TELEPHONE NO.</b>	07 4069 1990
<b>REFERENCE NO.</b>	NT2019-09 – Scientific permit proposed for a Torres Strait Beche-de-mer (BDM) Fishery survey

The Protected Zone Joint Authority intends to do the following act:

<b>TYPE OF APPROVAL</b>	Granting of a permit for scientific purposes within the area of the BDM Fishery, subject to PZJA approval.
<b>NUMBER OF APPROVALS</b>	1
<b>UNDER WHAT ACT</b>	Section 12(1) of the Commonwealth <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> (the Act).

The approvals, if granted, will permit the following activity to happen:

<b>NATURE OF ACTIVITY</b>	<p>Subject to PZJA approval, a scientific permit would be granted to authorise a fishery independent survey to be undertaken within the area of the BDM Fishery within a period of six months (November 2019 – May 2020). The proposed survey will involve site counts at survey sites across the area of the BDM Fishery in order to calculate precision population trends of beche-de-mer (sea cucumber) species. The survey will be conducted in accordance with similar surveys undertaken in previous years.</p> <p>It is planned for the survey to have three main focuses:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the eastern area of the BDM Fishery with a focus on prickly redfish, curryfish species, black teatfish and surf redfish;</li> <li>a limited exploration of deep water habitats to extend knowledge of the full extent of white teatfish resources in the eastern area of the BDM Fishery; and</li> <li>sandfish on Warrior Reef.</li> </ol> <p>The key deliverables from this survey will be to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>produce stock size estimates and distribution data, and assess the fishery status for each population of</li> </ol>
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	<p>sea cucumber on the BDM Fishery, including sandfish;</p> <p>b. use survey data to make recommendations on potential expansion of the BDM Fishery (e.g. review of total allowable catches (TACs)) and re-opening of closed species; and</p> <p>c. map important habitat variables, especially those relevant to fishery production.</p> <p>The permit will authorise the permit holder, or a person/s acting on behalf of the permit holder, to collect sea cucumber of any size to be measured in length before being returned to the water at the same location.</p> <p>The permit will also provide for part of the proposed survey to occur in conjunction with the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) Fishery pre-season survey scheduled for November 2019. Alignment of the two surveys is intended to provide cost savings through the utilisation of the same research vessel and research officers. The remainder of the BDM Fishery survey is planned to occur in January and/or March 2020 in order to remain consistent with surveys undertaken in previous years. The permit will be valid for a period of six months (November 2019 – May 2020).</p> <p>The BDM Fishery survey was identified by the PZJA's Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG) and Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) as a high priority for research in the BDM Fishery. The survey will provide important information to improve the understanding of the stock status of sea cucumber species and support the implementation of the draft BDM Fishery Harvest Strategy.</p> <p>More information is provided at <b>Attachment B</b>.</p>
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The above activity will be located within:

<b>LOCATION OF ACTIVITY</b>	The extent of the BDM Fishery is described in Item 1, Schedule 2 to the Commonwealth <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985</i> (the Regulations). The Regulations can be accessed online at: <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016C00633">https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2016C00633</a> .
<b>MAPS/PLANS</b>	<b>Attachment C</b> shows the area of the BDM Fishery, as described in Item 1, Schedule 2 to the Regulations.
<b>NAME OF REGISTERED NATIVE TITLE CLAIMANT GROUP/S OR NAME OF REGISTERED NATIVE TITLE BODY CORPORATE</b>	Cape York Land Council Aboriginal Corporation Cape York Pipeline Company Pty Ltd and Parties Kaurareg People #1 Kaurareg People #2 Kaurareg Native Title (Aboriginal) Corporation RNTBC Ipima Ikaya Aboriginal Corporation RNTBC Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC The applicant for the Torres Strait Sea Claim (Part B)

<b>NAME OF NATIVE TITLE REPRESENTATIVE BODY</b>	Torres Strait Regional Authority
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If approved, after consideration of all comments, the management action will be implemented for the following period of time:

<b>DURATION OF APPROVAL</b>	Valid from date of issue to 23 May 2020.
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**You are invited to comment upon the class of proposed future act outlined above by close of business 10 September 2019. If you would like to extend the response period, please contact AFMA by 10 September 2019.**

Any comments must be **in writing** to:

By mail addressed to:  
Australian Fisheries Management Authority  
Att: Steve Hall  
PZJA Secretariat  
PO Box 7051  
Canberra Business Centre  
CANBERRA ACT 2610  
Or by email to: [fisheriesTI@afma.gov.au](mailto:fisheriesTI@afma.gov.au)

**Please note that all written comments will be made public on the PZJA website at [www.pzja.gov.au](http://www.pzja.gov.au) unless confidentiality is requested.**

## **Background Information**

### ***What will the research involve?***

The survey will be conducted in accordance with surveys undertaken in previous years. Site counts at repeated survey sites will be used to calculate population trends. The analysis will include an assessment of recruitment from site counts and size frequency data, a technique that has been shown to be viable from previous surveys. Estimates of environmental parameters such as seagrass and coral cover, will be collected during the survey, not only for assessing the effects of fishing, but for mapping and monitoring the environment in general.

The permit will allow the permit holder or a person/s acting on behalf of the permit holder, to collect sea cucumbers of any size by hand to be measured in length before being returned to the water at the same location.

The permit holder will be responsible for meeting all conditions imposed by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* as it applies to the Torres Strait Protected Zone, and the holder must report any interactions with protected or endangered species to AFMA in writing within 48 hours of returning to port. The holder will not be permitted to commercially sell or retain any product under the authority of the permit.

### ***Why is this research being conducted?***

Sea cucumber fisheries in Australia and the South Pacific have been subjected to increased fishing pressure in recent years due to increased prices for beche-de-mer (sea cucumber) in Asia. Research has shown that many South Pacific sea cucumber fisheries have been over-exploited, with recovery being slow and sporadic (Purcell et al., 2013).

The Torres Strait Beche-de-mer (BDM) Fishery has become an important source of income for Torres Strait traditional inhabitants since it was re-established in the early 1990s. While most sea cucumber species are considered to be in good condition, closure or catch limits have been implemented for several high value fishery species including sandfish, black teatfish and surf redfish. Currently, fishing is mainly focused on white teatfish, blackfish, deepwater redfish, prickly redfish and of late, curryfish species. Recently, there have been indications of local depletion for prickly redfish and curryfish i.e. fishermen reporting decreased catch rates.

The mandatory collection of fishery dependent data through the Torres Strait Fish Receiver System was introduced in the BDM Fishery in December 2017. There is still however, limited information available to assess the status of fishery populations, with incomplete catch and effort time series data available prior to 2017. A survey is presently the only viable method for determining the size and status of fished sea cucumber populations in the Torres Strait.

This research project is supported by the Protected Zone Joint Authority's (PZJA) Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC). The TSSAC is an advisory committee which comprises fisheries scientists, a social/economic scientist, traditional inhabitant representatives, non-traditional inhabitant fishing industry representatives and government representatives from Australia and Papua New Guinea.

As per the Strategic Research Plan for Torres Strait Fisheries, the TSSAC identified key research priority areas for funding in 2019-20 and made a call for research proposals in late 2018. The proposal to which the proposed management action relates has been supported the PZJA's Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG) and the TSSAC.

The HCWG is comprised of the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, traditional inhabitant members and independent scientists. The HCWG considers and provides scientific and management advice on the BDM Fishery and other hand collectables fisheries (including trochus and pearl shell) to the PZJA.

### ***How will this research benefit traditional inhabitants?***

The research conducted under the proposed scientific permit will benefit future sustainable management of the BDM Fishery by providing researchers and fisheries managers with important information to improve the understanding of the stock status of sea cucumber species and support the implementation of the draft BDM Fishery Harvest Strategy.

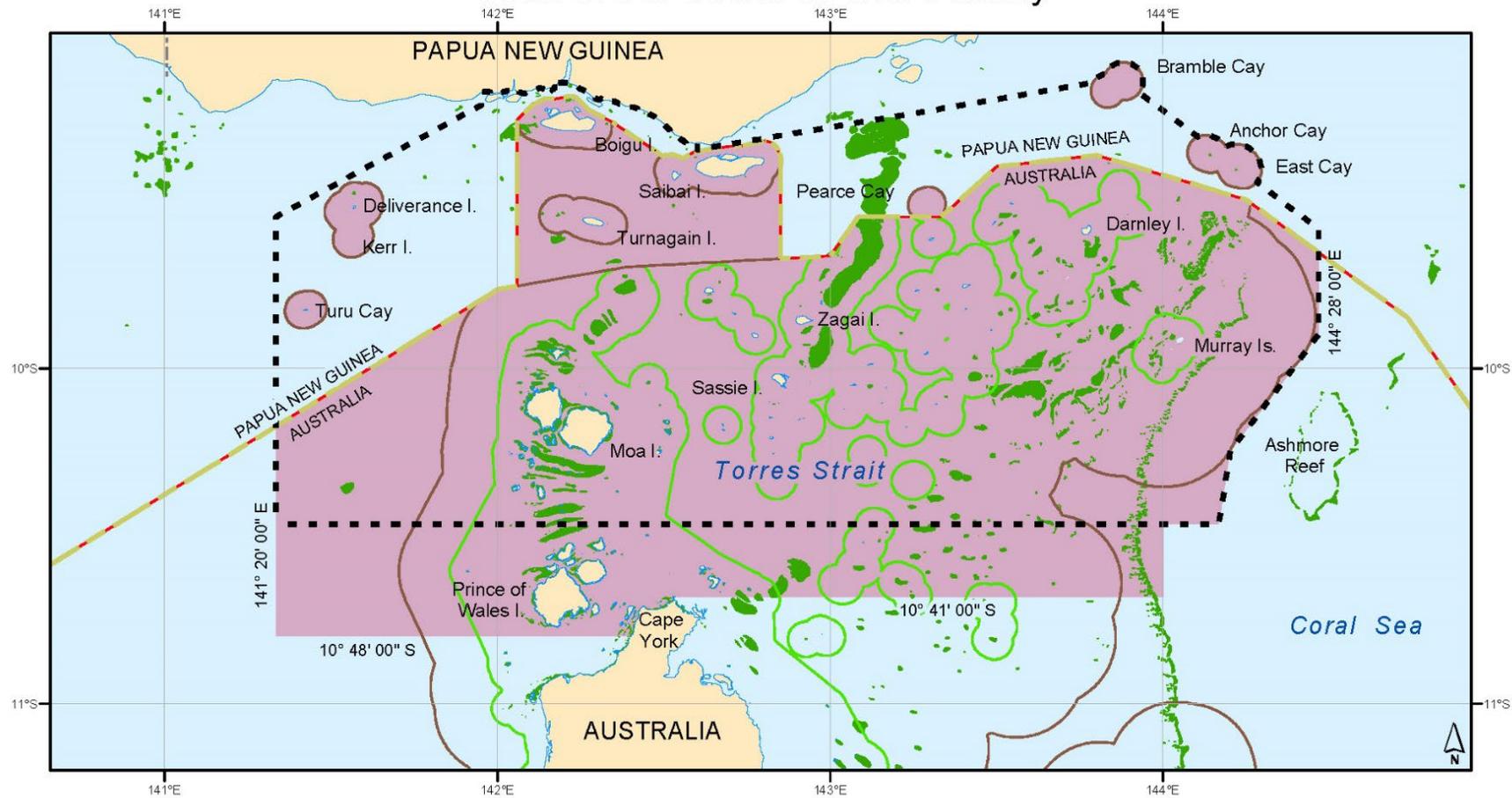
This will result in a flow-on benefits to traditional inhabitants by ensuring the sustainability of the BDM Fishery in turn facilitating long term access to the resource. Given that many of the world's sea cucumber fisheries are fully or over-exploited, and that demand looks to be increasing, the BDM Fishery will likely be more valuable in the future. A sustainable BDM Fishery will provide a substantial source of income and employment for Torres Strait Islander communities and downstream industries.

### **Reference List**

Purcell, SW, Mercier, A, Conand, C, Hamel, JF, Toral-Granda, MV, Lovatelli, A & Uthicke, S 2013, 'Sea cucumber fisheries: global analysis of stocks, management measures and drivers of overfishing', *Fish and Fisheries*, vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 34-59.

# Torres Strait Fisheries

## Area of the Beche-de-mer Fishery



- Coastal Waters limit (3nm)
- Exclusive Economic Zone limit (200nm)
- - - Fisheries Jurisdiction line
- Protected Zone Boundary
- Territorial Sea limit (12nm)
- Low tide elevations and reefs
- Torres Strait Fisheries**
- Beche-de-mer Fishery



Produced by Geoscience Australia  
for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, August 2006  
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Geographic  
Datum: WGS84

**NOTES:**

1. The area of the Fishery is sourced from the Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985
2. Within this fishery, arrangements exist between the Commonwealth and QLD, whereby the Coastal Waters of that State are deemed part of the AFZ
3. The Fisheries Jurisdiction Line and Protected Zone shown on this map are established under the Treaty between Australia and the Independent State of Papua New Guinea. This Treaty entered into force on 15 February 1985
4. The maritime zone boundaries shown on this map are sourced from the "Australian Maritime Boundaries (AMB) v2.0"