



Australian Government
Australian Fisheries Management Authority

12th Meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group

24 October 2017

Minutes

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

www.pzja.gov.au

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1 Preliminaries

1.1 Opening prayer, acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies

1. Mr Harry Ghee opened the meeting in prayer at 8:50 am.
2. The Working Group observed a minute of silence to commemorate the loss of six fishermen following the sinking of the fishing boat, Dianne, off the coast of Queensland.
3. The Chair welcomed attendees to the 12th meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectable Working Group (HCWG 12). The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the meeting was held and paid respect to Elders past and present. The Chair further acknowledged the value of the knowledge and experience attendees would impart at the meeting and thanked them for taking the time to attend. Meeting attendees were advised that the purpose of the meeting was to provide advice to the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) on the management of hand collectable fisheries.
4. Attendees at the Working Group are detailed in the table below.

Attendees	
Members	
Anne Clarke	Chair
Selina Stoute	Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) Member
John Ramsay	Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Member
Tim Skewes	Research Member
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member – Traditional Inhabitant representative for Gudumalulgal and Maluialgal
Michael Passi	Industry Member – Traditional Inhabitant representative for Kemer Meriam
Executive Officer	
Natalie Couchman	Executive Officer
Invited Participants	
Jerry Stephen	TSRA Board - Member for Ugar and Portfolio Member for Fisheries
Observers	
Allison Runck	TSRA
Eva Plagyani	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) – was present from Agenda Item 3.1.
Nicole Murphy	CSIRO
Patrick Bonner	Industry – Poruma Island
John Tabo	Industry – Mer Island
Pau Stephen	Industry, Kos and Abob Fishers Association – Ugar Island
William Stephen	Industry – Ugar Island
Harry Ghee	Industry – Erub Island
Rocky Stephen	Kos and Abob Fishers Association – Ugar Island

5. Apologies received are detailed in the table below.

Apologies	
Danielle Stewart	Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) Member
Francis Pearson	Industry Member – Traditional Inhabitant representative for Kulkalgal
Patrick Mills	Industry Member – Traditional Inhabitant representative for Kaiwalagal
Ian Liviko	PNG National Fisheries Authority (NFA) Invited Participant
Dennis Passi	Observer – Industry – Mer Island

1.2 Adoption of agenda

- The draft agenda was adopted with changes (**Attachment A**). An item concerning developments in beche-de-mer (BDM) ranching and aquaculture and how this may complement the wild caught Torres Strait BDM Fishery (TSBDMF) was discussed under Agenda Item 3.1. The Working Group also agreed to discuss Agenda Item 3.6 (Prickly Redfish) prior to Agenda Item 3.5 (Black Teatfish).
- The Working Group noted that the meeting record for the 11th meeting of the HCWG was ratified out of session and the final record provided to members on 5 September 2017.

1.3 Declarations of interest

- The Chair stated that as outlined in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1, all members of the Working Group must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait hand collectable fisheries at the commencement of the meeting (see table below). The Working Group noted that if a member discloses an interest, the Working Group must make a decision as to whether, for the relevant agenda items, they can participate in the discussion and in the making of recommendations, or remain absent from the meeting.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Anne Clarke	Chair	Nil.
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil.
John Ramsay	TSRA Member	Nil.
Tim Skewes	Research Member	CSIRO/Independent Consultant. Previous principal scientist for Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) project to develop a harvest strategy for the TSBDMF. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member	TIB licence holder.
Michael Passi	Industry Member	TIB licence holder.
Natalie Couchman	Executive Officer	Nil.

9. The Working Group determined that no member was required to be absent during discussion of or, decisions made on matters which are the subject of conflicts.

1.4 Action items from HCWG 11 and previous meetings

10. The Working Group noted the report provided by the Executive Officer advising of the status of actions arising from previous HCWG meetings (see table below).

#	Action Item	By	Status
Actions arising from the HCWG 9 held on 20-21 June 2016			
1	AFMA to review the size limits set for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery taking into consideration the size limits in place in Queensland and the Commonwealth Coral Sea Fishery.	AFMA	In progress The Working Group noted this action is being addressed as part of the BDM Harvest Strategy project. A review of TSBDMF size limits has been undertaken by CSIRO and is to be presented at the CSIRO Harvest Strategy Workshop to be held on 25-26 October 2017.
Actions arising from the HCWG 11 held on 27 June 2017			
2	An industry observer requested that the historic black teatfish catch data from the early 1990s be made available to industry and the HCWG for consideration of how large catches impacted the fishery.	AFMA	Completed The Working Group noted that historical catch data for the TSBDMF from 1993 onwards has been provided under Agenda Item 3.2. The data from 1993 through 2004 was provided by Tim Skewes who sourced his data from the QDPI logbook database, AFMA docket book (TDB01) database and direct industry sources.
3	Consideration on whether or not changes should be made to the current size limit for Prickly Redfish be undertaken during the Harvest Strategy Workshop noting relevant data will be presented.	AFMA	In progress Refer to action item 1.
4	Industry members and observers to submit any outstanding catch reports to AFMA as a matter of priority.	Industry	In progress The Working Group noted that a reminder regarding this action was sent to members on 22 September 2017. Since that time, AFMA have received partial catch records from Ugar, Masig and Poruma industry. The AFMA member reiterated the importance of catch and effort data to support management decisions. The AFMA member also advised that data for Prickly Redfish is urgently needed to support a pending PZJA decision on the TAC for 2018 fishing

			season. An Industry Member from Mer Island advised that they would submit outstanding catch records immediately, and did so in a break in the meeting. This item was further discussed under Agenda Item 3.5.
5	AFMA to confirm out-of-session the commitment from Masig and Ugar communities to voluntary spatial closures and size limits for Prickly Redfish.	AFMA	In progress The Working Group noted that AFMA sought further comment from industry on the proposed voluntary closures on 27 September 2017, including from Traditional Inhabitant representatives and relevant fishing associations. Industry Members advised that there had been no further developments concerning the proposed voluntary closures. It was further advised that any closure concerning Bramble Cay would need to be decided by Ugar and Erub industry.

1.5 Out of session correspondence

11. The Working Group noted the correspondence circulated out of session since HCWG 11 held on 27 June 2017.

2 Fishery Updates

2.1 Industry update (to include Torres Strait fisheries strategic issues including economic trends)

12. The Working Group noted updates provided by Industry Members and Observers on the recent performance of hand collectable fisheries and strategic issues, including economic trends, affecting the management and development of these fisheries:

- a. An Industry Observer from Poruma Island advised that now the Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) fishery seasonal closure is in effect, there has been a resurgence of fishers diving for BDM. Fishers are increasingly targeting Curryfish as they are abundant on the grounds and industry are working to adapt processing methods to accommodate the fragile nature of this species. The AFMA Member noted that given the targeting of this species, removing Curryfish species from the basket total allowable catch (TAC) is currently being considered under the BDM Harvest Strategy. This will enable more effective management and monitoring of these species and support industry by ensuring TACs are set at a sustainable level thus providing certainty for their operations and future investment.
- b. Another Industry Observer and representative of the Kos and Abob Fisheries Association on Ugar Island noted that in order for the TSBDMF to have a future, industry needs to work within the set TACs and look at how they can value add through better processing and marketing. It was noted that the Association have been involved in the processing of BDM since its establishment in 2013. The current focus of operations is on salted product but there are plans to move to dried product. The Association has secured funding from the TSRA for drying facilities and an upgrade for the Ugar Island community freezer in 2018. These improvements will allow the industry to expand into finfish. It is hoped this will take pressure off BDM while diversifying operations and providing greater security. The Association have been keeping detailed catch records and these have been provided to AFMA.

- c. An Industry Observer from Erub Island observed that industry have been targeting Curryfish and finfish. Curryfish product is boiled then salted, not frozen. Finfish is sold through the Erub Island community freezer.
- d. Industry Members (and Traditional Inhabitant representatives for Gudumalulgal, Maluialgal and Kemer Miriam) residing on Mer Island advised they have two boats fishing for BDM targeting areas around East Cay. With the recent return of good weather, they are now looking to work the reefs further south. One operator on the island has also moved away from BDM, expanding into finfish which is showing good returns.
- e. These Industry Members also acknowledged the importance of data to support management and the future of the industry. Both Members advised that they meet regularly with fellow industry members to discuss their operations, improvements and how they can better work together. The AFMA Member explained that the implementation of the fish receiver system (FRS) is a key focus for management. AFMA will look at how fishery wide catch reports can be provided to industry to support their operations.
- f. Industry Members and Observers were heartened to see the next generation getting involved and investing in their own fisheries operations. It was noted that this next generation of fishers will need support to remain in the industry and grow. It was also noted that females are getting more involved in the industry and need to be empowered to take on greater roles and responsibilities.
- g. The Working Group discussed the challenge of having open access to the TSBDMF for Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) licence holders and the detrimental impacts this may have on both stocks and the livelihoods of the Eastern communities' industry. Further details on these discussions are captured under Agenda Item 2.3.
- h. Industry Members and Observers raised alleged compliance concerns regarding illegal activities involving carrier boats and the illegal use of hookah in the TSBDMF. The AFMA Member advised that any information regarding suspected illegal fishing activities should be reported to the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol (QBFP). AFMA will continue to work with QBFP to investigate all reports.

2.2 Government agencies update (AFMA, TSRA, QDAF)

- 13. The Working Group noted an update provided by the TSRA Member regarding TSRA activities relevant to the management of hand collectable fisheries:
 - a. Fisheries Business Growth Package – introduced in 2016/17, this package is available to all Traditional Inhabitant fishers. Its purpose is to support the establishment and development of commercial fishing operations in the Torres Strait and comprises a mix of financial (loan and grant funding), business and industry support services. This may include business mentoring, assistance in the development of business plans and training in a range of business skills. The TSRA can be contacted to discuss. Information is also available on the TSRA website.
 - b. Fisheries Infrastructure and Services Audit project – it is recognised that infrastructure necessary to support the growth of the Torres Strait fishing industry is lacking. TSRA have secured funding to address this issue. They have recently visited communities to identify infrastructure shortfalls across the region. A report will be provided to the TSRA Board in December 2017 and they will look to develop a funding plan at the start of 2018.
 - c. Feasibility study for the direct export of Torres Strait seafood and seafood branding – a consultant has been engaged to assess the economic feasibility, regulatory

- requirements and infrastructure needs to export seafood directly from the Torres Strait and the potential value derived from creating a brand for Torres Strait seafood
- d. Governance Capacity Building Initiative for Torres Strait Regional Fishers' Associations – the purpose of this initiative is to build the capacity of association members and improve the functioning of associations. The initiative is part of the TSRA Common Funding Round which happens twice a year. Assistance includes funds to hire bookkeepers and administrative staff to support association operations.
 - e. New Zealand (NZ) study –TSRA and industry representatives recently travelled to NZ to meet with government and industry to discuss the experience of the Maori in managing their share of ownership in NZ fisheries. It was noted that the Maori surrendered their TIB equivalent licences and traditional fishing rights in exchange for a share in commercial fisheries. Noting the aspirations of Traditional Inhabitants of the Torres Strait to pursue 100% ownership of fisheries, TSRA have funded a project to examine the NZ experience and how elements of the NZ model may be applied to the Torres Strait. A steering group has been formed to guide the project.
 - f. Fisheries Summit – planned for March/April 2018, more details to be provided closer to time.
 - g. Seafood Industry Leadership Program – the TSRA Member congratulated Charles David on completing the Program. The TSRA will also welcome their first Indigenous cadet shortly. On completion of the cadetship, they will be offered a position at the TSRA.
14. The Working Group noted an update provided by the TSRA Invited Participant and AFMA Member regarding their recent attendance at the Seafood Directions Conference:
- a. The TSRA Invited Participant presented on the Torres Strait Traditional Inhabitants' pursuit of 100% fisheries ownership.
 - b. Seafood Industry Australia was in attendance. This is a new national peak body bringing together wild caught fisheries and aquaculture. They are looking for a representative from the Torres Strait. An Industry Member stated the representative needs to be from industry not government.
 - c. Key messages included the success of industry associations in driving change, the importance of evidence/science based decision making and recognition of the importance of strong management frameworks in providing access to markets something which is applicable in the Torres Strait as export focussed fisheries.
15. The Working Group noted an update provided by the AFMA Member regarding management initiatives relevant to hand collectable fisheries:
- a. Legislative amendments – following PZJA and further Ministerial approval, AFMA is progressing amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act) and *Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985* (the Regulations). The amendments will provide immediate improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of fisheries administration in the Torres Strait. Most recently AFMA has been able to dedicate resources to progress this important piece of work. The TSRA Invited Participant requested that AFMA be mindful of policy changes being explored with regards to Native Title and that these may need to be reflected in legislation further down the track. AFMA agreed to work with the TSRA on this issue, recirculate details of the proposed amendments and, as a standing item, to make a report on the progress of this project at future Working Group meetings.

Action 1: AFMA to recirculate details of proposed legislative amendments to the Act and Regulations and as a standing item, make a report on the progress of these legislative amendments at future Working Group meetings.

- b. Public licence register – following support from all Torres Strait working groups, a register of fishing licences for Torres Strait fisheries is now publically available on the AFMA website. The register will provide important information to fishers as to the validity of their licences, quota holdings (where applicable) and support the implementation of the FRS.
 - c. FRS – AFMA will implement a mandatory FRS for all the Torres Strait fisheries (excluding the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery) on 1 December 2017. This will replace the current voluntary Torres Strait Seafood Buyers and Processors Docket Book system.
 - d. Compliance activities – AFMA have referred a number of domestic compliance matters to QBFP for investigation. There have been some successful prosecutions as a result. AFMA continues to work with the Australian Border Force and regional partners to combat illegal foreign fishing, noting there have been no foreign fishing boats apprehended in the 2017/18 financial year to date.
 - e. Indigenous cadet – AFMA have recently welcomed Neville Johnston from the Torres Strait for an 18 month cadetship. Amongst other work, he is assisting with a project on how AFMA can better engage with Indigenous communities on fisheries matters.
16. The Working Group noted an update provided by the AFMA Member on behalf of the QDAF Member regarding the Queensland government’s fisheries reform program, including:
- a. Development of harvest strategies for all fisheries.
 - b. Implementation of vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirements.
 - c. Formation of a working group for the East Coast sea cucumber fishery. AFMA would like to see the two agencies attend the other’s meetings to share lessons, experiences with a view to both benefitting in terms of improved and more consistent management.

2.3 Native Title update

17. The Chair of the Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC (also Industry Member and Traditional Inhabitant representative for Gudumalulgal and Maluialgal) advised that following the High Court’s decisions on 2 July 2010 and 7 August 2013 regarding Part A of the Torres Strait Regional Sea Claim, it is time that these decisions be reflected in the future management of Torres Strait fisheries. The Chair of Malu Lamar expressed concern that recent advice from the TSRA concerning Native Title rights over land and sea in the Torres Strait, was not consistent with their understanding of the High Court’s decisions. The TSRA Member advised that no such advice has been provided. The Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC has sent a letter to the TSRA detailing their concerns. The TSRA Invited Participant agreed to look into the matter and resolve with the concerned parties outside of the Working Group.
18. The Chair noted that the Working Group was not the forum to try to resolve Native Title issues.
19. Industry Members and Observers advised that the customary rights of communities over their island waters (e.g. 10 nm radial claims) and the cultural protocols relating to how these waters are accessed and by whom needs to be to be agreed between communities and reflected in the fisheries management rules.
20. Industry Observers explained that currently Traditional Inhabitants have a common right to access all fisheries in the region under a Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) licence. This is making it difficult to control fishing effort particularly for vulnerable stocks with relatively low TACs. The livelihoods of the eastern communities are also being impacted. The eastern communities do not have the proximity to high value fisheries such as TRL which

are concentrated in the western Torres Strait. Instead, they rely on lower value fisheries such as those for BDM and finfish. Any effort from the western communities in the eastern Torres Strait has more of an impact than if the reverse was the case.

21. The AFMA Member noted that there is no clear pathway to move to a management framework whereby fisheries resources are allocated. It was explained that for progress to be made on this complex issue, it needs to be driven and informed by the Traditional Inhabitants themselves. Industry Members and Observers advised that government would need to talk to groups of fishers community by community, before bringing them together either fishery by fishery or in one group. Although this will prolong consultations, it will be difficult to make progress without taking the extra time to talk to communities separately. It was also advised that an independent body should facilitate all consultations.
22. The TSRA Invited Participant thanked Industry Members and Observers for their advice, noting he would provide as information to the TSRA Board. The Participant also noted that future legislative changes will require the TSRA to work closely with AFMA to put these into effect.

2.4 PNG National Fisheries Authority update

23. This item was not discussed as the PNG NFA Invited Participant was not in attendance.

3 Management

3.1 Research update and priorities

24. The Working Group noted an update from the AFMA Member on current research projects. The AFMA Member advised that the harvest strategy currently in development for the TSBDMF is a priority and will provide guidance on future research needs in the fishery including surveys and stock assessments.
25. The AFMA Member also advised that there is currently a call for tactical research projects for TSSAC funding for the 2018/19 financial year. The AFMA Member sought advice from the Working Group on research priorities for 2018/19, noting that additional funding was could be used to hold an additional workshop to assist in finalising the BDM Harvest Strategy. The Working Group agreed the BDM Harvest Strategy project remains a priority and recommended the additional workshop be funded through the TSSAC.

Recommendation 1: The Working Group agreed the BDM Harvest Strategy project remains a priority and recommended the additional workshop be funded through the TSSAC.

26. The AFMA Member noted the Smartphone Data Collection project that was completed in 2015/16. The AFMA Member noted that select fishers from the Torres Strait were involved and agreed to circulate a copy of the final report to the Working Group. The Working Group noted that electronic reporting and monitoring systems have been trialed in other fisheries and jurisdictions but that the use of such technologies can be expensive in terms of capital costs, repairs and maintenance, data review and business integration and needs to be weighed against the value of the fishery in question.

Action 2: AFMA to circulate the final report from the Smartphone Data Collection project to the Working Group.

27. The Working Group noted a presentation from the Research Member on recent research concerning BDM biology, ecology, markets, Australian and global production and aquaculture, including:
- a. Findings of recent studies concerning the growth, age at maturity (Black Teatfish five years and Sandfish two years), mortality rates (Black Teatfish $M < 0.4$ and Sandfish $M > 0.6$), movement (remain with a reef/bank – less than four hectares in two years), daily and seasonal feeding and burying cycles (buried in winter, emerge more in summer and emerge more in the afternoon and at night) and ecosystem roles (sediment mixing and negative correlation with seagrass production). Industry Members and Observers confirmed many of the studies' findings from their own experiences.
 - b. Market price information. China have been the largest buyer of BDM. The Japanese sea cucumber comprises the majority of product, with only a small component coming from tropical fisheries including the Torres Strait. Prices are higher in Hong Kong than on mainland China (e.g. for Sandfish \$310/kg in Hong Kong vs. \$140/kg on the mainland). Branding is very important, with nearly all tropical BDM product labelled as Australian whether it is or not.
 - c. In terms of the desired characteristics of product which determine value, in order of importance: dryness; cuts; saltiness (less salty the better); size; shape (straight and symmetrical); minimal damage; country of origin.
 - d. World production of species other than Japanese sea cucumber (which has remained relatively static in comparison) has increased over time, but has resulted in overfishing and depleted stocks. In Australia, the Queensland East Coast BDM Fishery comprises the majority of wild catch. This fishery is managed under a rotational harvest strategy designed by industry and introduced in 2004. There are 156 zones of approximately 100-150 nm. Each zone is allowed to be fished once every three years for a maximum of 15 days.
 - e. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List details ten BDM species as Vulnerable or Endangered, many of these being targeted in the Torres Strait. Should these species be subsequently listed under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), more stringent requirements will be imposed on exported product and this poses a significant operating risk to the TSBDMF.
 - f. Previous research conducted by CSIRO Marine and Atmospheric Research in the Torres Strait include surveys of abundance, conversion ratios, ecology, biology and bioprospecting. A summary of the survey findings was presented.
 - g. Future research needs:
 - i. Stock status (density, size, catch, areas fished, collaboration with PNG on shared stocks).
 - ii. Conversion ratios (Curryfish boiled and salted).
 - iii. Biology (growth, mortality, size and seasonality of breeding).
 - iv. Value adding, best practice processing and drying (particularly for lower value species).
 - v. Requirements for harvest strategy implementation.
 - h. Developments in BDM aquaculture:
 - i. *Astichopus japonicas* – far outstrips global wild sea cucumber production. However, there has been overinvestment in this sector and there are significant issues with disease and slow growth.
 - ii. Sandfish – there have been numerous trials and pilot operations including: Hervey Bay (Bluefin Seafood) hatchery in 2003 (failed venture); Darwin Aquaculture

Centre (Tas Seafoods) in indigenous communities in the NT (some success); James Cook University (JCU) culture and ranching in Fiji (limited success); Vietnam (commercial production).

- i. In order to move forward with BDM aquaculture there is a need to review existing knowledge (culture of juveniles, release strategies and husbandry, potential environmental impacts), seek expert advice, determine local attitudes to reseeding/ranching, identify species for reseeding/ranching and develop a viable business model.
28. The Working Group noted an update provided by Industry Observers of a recent visit to aquaculture facilities at Bribie Island, where the species under culture include prawns and salmon. It was noted that aquaculture may be a way to supplement earnings for those fishers reliant on the TSBDMF. Reseeding and ranching may also support the future of the fishery. It was advised that aquaculture operations need to be tailored to the operating environment the smartest approach to any new venture would be to start small and grow operations over time.
 29. The Research Member agreed with this noting that there are big risks associated with aquaculture, given the technology and techniques are still evolving (particularly in relation to BDM), the high capital expense in setting up and maintaining an operation and disease risks.
 30. The TSRA Member noted that the TSRA has programs to support industry in such ventures, including grant funding, assistance in developing business plans, training and mentoring.
 31. Industry Members and Observers requested a copy of the Research Member's presentation be circulated to the Working Group.

Action 3: AFMA to circulate a copy of the Research Member's presentation to the Working Group.

3.2 Catch data summary

32. The Working Group noted a summary provided by the Executive Officer of catch and effort data for hand collection fisheries, as recorded in logbooks, docket books and from other sources. As noted earlier in the meeting, the Executive Officer advised that AFMA have only received partial catch records from Ugar, Masig, Poruma and Mer industry for the 2015-2017 fishing seasons.
33. The Working Group noted that existing catch and effort data for BDM is currently under review and the figures presented were likely to change. In particular, with regards to Prickly Redfish, AFMA is assessing additional logbook returns received which contain 2015 Prickly Redfish catches. If the catches from these logbooks are not duplicated by docket books received, the amount of the overcatch may further increase. The AFMA member reiterated the importance of catch and effort data to support management decisions.
34. An Industry Observer sought clarification on what is being done with the TVH licence for BDM currently held in trust by the TSRA. The TSRA Member advised that as there is currently no capacity in the fishery to accommodate a TVH operator, the licence is currently inactive. An Industry Member and Observer suggested the licence should be extinguished. The Working Group noted advice from the AFMA Member that the TVH licence is conditioned on a decision being made by the PZJA in order for it to be activated.

3.3 Pearl Shell Fishery update

35. The Working Group noted an update provided by the Executive Officer regarding preliminary findings of the review undertaken into the PZJA's granting of developmental permits in 2015 for the Torres Strait Pearl Shell Fishery (TSPSF):
- a. Developmental permits were issued in November 2015 for a 12 month period to eight licence holders with commercial pearl shell endorsements (four TIB fishers, two TVH fishers and two pearl aquaculture farmers).
 - b. The permits allowed the total take of up to 2,000 gold-lipped pearl oyster (*Pinctada maxima*) between the sizes of 100-130 mm (the regulation size for commercial fishing in the TSPSF is 130-230 mm). The objective of the permits was to support revitalisation of the Torres Strait pearl farming industry, by conducting a commercial trial using smaller shell for seeding and culture to determine whether this can increase the overall productivity of pearl farming.
 - c. Through interviews with permit holders and buyers:
 - i. Approximately 800 pearl shell was reported to have been harvested during the permit period, with roughly 15-20% comprised of shell between 100-130 mm.
 - ii. The pearl shells harvested were used for seeding in aquaculture but due to the low level of undersize pearl shell harvested, any benefits to the aquaculture sector in relation to any improvement in profitability could not be determined.
 - iii. The primary reason as to why there is little interest in fishing the TSPSF by both TIB and TVH fishers is due to more lucrative opportunities in other Torres Strait fisheries (e.g. TRL).
 - d. AFMA will present the findings of the review to the next Working Group with further work in this fishery being subject to competing priorities in other Torres Strait fisheries.

3.4 Implementation of a fish receiver system

36. The Working Group noted an update provided by the AFMA Member regarding the implementation of a Torres Strait FRS, in particular:
- a. The FRS will become mandatory for all Torres Strait Fisheries, excluding the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery, on 1 December 2017. Under this new system licensed fishers will only be able to land their fish to licensed fish receivers and licensed fish receivers will only be able to receive catch from licensed fishers.
 - b. Catch and effort information obtained through the FRS will be used to inform the management of all Torres Strait fisheries. It will be of greatest value in the TSBDMF given the current low level of catch reporting and relatively low volume TACs. It will be a mandatory requirement for any future opening of fishing for Black Teatfish. However, to provide for effective monitoring of an opening for Black Teatfish, it will likely require modification to require daily reporting at a minimum.
 - c. Community visits are currently being conducted with all Torres Strait Island and Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) communities, to discuss and receive feedback on the FRS. General feedback received at these visits has been very positive.
 - d. A total of \$40,000 (\$4,000 per association/organisation) in funding support is available to help fishing industry associations and organisations support their local fishers and fish receivers in meeting the new FRS requirements. Applications for this funding are due by 30 October 2017.
 - e. AFMA will continue to provide education and support to industry to comply with the FRS moving into 2018.

- f. AFMA will review the performance of the FRS following initial implementation.
37. The TSRA Invited Participant thanked all industry representatives that contributed to the earlier workshops and community visits.

3.5 Prickly Redfish

38. The Working Group noted a summary provided by the AFMA Member regarding concerns around the status of Prickly Redfish (*Thelenota ananas*). At HCWG 11 held on 27 June 2017, it was discussed:
- a. The TAC was over caught by 8 tonne in 2015. Total harvest may be in the range of ~40-50 tonnes. Three future biomass scenarios based on different harvest levels presented by CSIRO, simulated depletion of the stock at harvest levels greater than 20 tonne.
 - b. Available science and industry advice on stock availability across the fishing grounds, indicates the stock is likely being depleted at an unsustainable rate.
 - c. The PZJA and industry remain concerned over the amount of unreported catch. Setting TACs is based on knowledge of stock availability which is reliant on the provision and review of reliable fishery data. The availability of reliable fishery information remains poor.
39. The AFMA Member advised that the advice provided at HCWG 11 will shortly be provided to the PZJA for consideration. The AFMA Member further advised that AFMA have only received partial catch records from Ugar, Masig, Poruma and Mer industry for the 2015-2017 fishing seasons. The AFMA Member reiterated that there is an immediate and urgent need for data on the recent catch of Prickly Redfish. While the FRS will assist in providing catch data in the future, there remains a need for this data in the interim to support decisions about management of the fishery. The result may be, that without reliable catch data, the PZJA will consider the risks to the Prickly Redfish stock to be too high and make a decision to close fishing for this species.
40. Further to this, the AFMA Member explained that certainty around the status and management of stocks is needed to support viable businesses and future investment. When fisheries are closed, industry lose out on their investment and this is not a good outcome for any involved. A CSIRO Observer also noted that it is a lot harder to meet the requirements to reopen a fishery than to decrease a TAC to allow depleted stocks to recover. Depleted stocks are also slower to bounce back from fishing pressure than healthy ones.
41. The AFMA Member sought advice from the Working Group on how to obtain catch records from those fishers that had yet to provide them. Industry Members and Observers advised:
- a. Mer Island – the Industry Members from Mer Island advised that they will provide their own catch records and will follow up with their community's fishers and buyers to do the same.
 - b. Ugar – outstanding catch records have been provided.
 - c. Poruma – the Invited Participant from Poruma advised that they would provide their own catch records but that they were not the only buyer in the community. An Industry Member advised they would follow up with the other buyer. It was also suggested that the Industry Member and Traditional Inhabitant representative for Kulkalgal, who was an apology to the meeting, be tasked with following up with the Poruma community's fishers and buyers to provide outstanding catch records.
 - d. Masig – the Traditional Inhabitant representative for Kulkalgal was not present at the meeting to advise.

e. Erub – no advice provided.

Action 4: Working Group Members and Observers acknowledged the serious risk that a lack of data and catch reporting poses to the sustainable management of the TSBDMF and agreed to submit any outstanding catch records and to assist AFMA in obtaining catch records from the BDM TIB licence holders and buyers within their respective communities.

42. The AFMA Member clarified that AFMA is seeking catch records on all BDM species, not just Prickly Redfish. The TSBDMF is a multi-species fishery and as such AFMA needs to monitor every species harvested.
43. An Industry Member observed that voluntary catch reporting is a historical legacy and will require an amendment to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act) in order to resolve this. The Member noted legal advice will need to be provided to Traditional Owners to understand what amendments are being made to the Act and what implications the amendments will have for TIB licence holders.
44. Industry Members and Observers provided an update with regards to the voluntary spatial closures for Prickly Redfish proposed by Mer and Erub Industry Members and Observers at HCWG 11. The AFMA Member noted AFMA had sought further comment out of session from industry, including with Ugar and Masig Island representatives, but no responses have been received.
45. An Industry Member from Mer advised that they continue to support closures around Mer Island, Little Mary Reef and Big Mary Reef. The Member noted that the only time they customarily fish within 10 nm of Mer Island is in rough weather, otherwise it is understood by fishers to be closed – this has been the practice for ten years. The closures around the other islands, Brown reef, Laxton Reef and Bramble Cay need to be decided by the relevant communities (e.g. Ugar and Erub Islands), noting however that Ugar only fish a small area. As the Mer and Erub Island fishers taking most of the catch, it is the closures around these islands that will have the biggest impact. An Industry Observer from Ugar observed they do not fish around Bramble Cay and noted fishers could switch to finfish to supplement their income should the closures come into effect.
46. Industry Members and Observers again raised alleged compliance concerns regarding illegal activities involving carrier boats and the illegal use of hookah in the TSBDMF and expressed frustration at the perceived lack of compliance response. The AFMA Member acknowledged the importance of effective compliance and the impact illegal activities on legitimate fishers and their communities. The AFMA Member advised that AFMA will continue to work with the QBFP to investigate all reports. The AFMA Member also noted that there is some work to do to tighten rules around carrier boats and the carriage of hookah. Proposed changes were put forward at HCWG 11, and will be tabled again at the next Working Group meeting.

3.6 Black Teatfish

47. The Working Group noted an update provided by the AFMA Member regarding the current closure of fishing for Black Teatfish (*Holothuria whitmaei*). The AFMA Member advised that the PZJA has agreed that fishing for Black Teatfish will remain closed until the risk of exceeding the TAC set for the species is substantially reduced through cost-effective management tools. The AFMA Member advised that the FRS is one such tool and will be a mandatory requirement for any opening of fishing for Black Teatfish. However, to provide for effective monitoring, the FRS will require modification to require daily reporting at a minimum.

48. The AFMA Member explained that any recommendation to open fishing for Black Teatfish will need to clearly explain how the risk of exceeding the TAC will be reduced compared to the arrangements from the previous trial openings. While the FRS will be an important tool, other arrangements will need to be implemented to effectively control, monitor and enforce any opening.
49. The Working Group discussed the implementation of community-based management arrangements to address many of the challenges of an opening. The arrangements would involve community catch share allocations, community economic zones and the documentation and observation of cultural protocols.
50. Industry Members and Observers explained that open access to the TSBDMF for TIB licence holders is the biggest challenges of an opening. Fishers that normally have no interest in the fishery, will fish during an opening attracted by the money to be made. The AFMA Member acknowledged these concerns and noted that while community-based management arrangements may be a solution to this issue, the PZJA has a current policy objective of equal and open access. It was noted that while the open access policy provides for greater industry participation, this comes with a trade-off in terms of the economic performance of the fishery. Industry were urged to reflect on how they may be engaged in resolving these complex issues.
51. The TSRA Member advised that redefining fisheries access and allocation in the Torres Strait will be a complex and lengthy process, noting it took NZ 20 years to move to a quota management system whereby the Maori now have defined fishing rights over a substantial portion of NZ's fisheries resources. The Member further advised that the TSRA have a project underway that will look at how to progress similar reforms in the Torres Strait but that this is a long term project and won't provide immediate solutions for a Black Teatfish opening.
52. The AFMA Member queried whether the upcoming Fisheries Summit might be an opportunity to discuss these issues around access and allocation. The TSRA Member advised the summit is not the right forum to resolve these issues as it is not a PZJA forum and will have a different focus.
53. The Working Group discussed other arrangements that could be implemented to effectively control, monitor and enforce an opening, including:
- a. Centralised landing and reporting by restricting landings to specified communities (e.g. to the five eastern communities of Mer, Ugar, Erub, Masig and Poruma) and/or specified fish receivers within a community. The AFMA Member supported the need to better control and monitor where all boats land their catch, particularly when landing to carrier boats.
 - b. Only allow the retention of Black Teatfish during the opening. This would make compliance easier and protects other species from the temporary increase in effort. The CSIRO Member advised that from a scientific basis, the single species targeting would provide valuable data.
 - c. Time the opening to coincide with when the TRL fishery catch and prices peak – March or April were suggested. Previous openings happened in November which is when the TRL fishery is closed.
 - d. Set a daily catch limit to slow the rush to fish by limiting the profit any one fisher can take in a day.
 - e. Community visits to discuss and educate fishers on the conditions of the opening. Industry Members and Observers agreed that they also had a role in educating fishers in their own and other communities.
54. The Working Group agreed that obtaining reliable catch data and limiting effort were the key challenges for an opening. The AFMA Member urged Industry Members and Observers to start discussions with their communities as to how cultural protocols could

be applied to an opening and advise the Working Group accordingly. AFMA agreed to provide further advice at the next meeting as to the process and timeframes for getting approval from the PZJA to conduct an opening.

3.7 White Teatfish

55. The Working Group noted an update provided by the AFMA Member regarding the proposal put forward at HCWG 11 by Mer Island industry to use hookah in Mer waters to fish for White Teatfish (*Holothuria fuscogilva*). The AFMA Member advised that following advice provided at HCWG 11, the PZJA will shortly be asked to consider the recommendation from HCWG 11 to commence formal consultation on this proposal. It was noted that there are some complex implementation issues that will need to be resolved before such a proposal could go ahead. There is also a need to set out a business case for the proposal including its objectives and a cost-benefit analysis in order to enable an informed management decision to be made. An update on progress will be provided at the next meeting.

4 Other business

56. An item concerning developments in BDM ranching and aquaculture and how this may complement the wild caught TSBDMF was discussed under Agenda Item 3.1.

5 Date and venue for next meeting

57. The Working Group noted that the next meeting is tentatively scheduled for April 2018, with a date to be decided out of session. The AFMA Member advised that the reason for more frequent Working Group meetings is to progress the BDM Harvest Strategy.

58. Mr Harry Ghee closed the meeting in prayer at 5:15 pm.

**12th MEETING OF THE TORRES STRAIT HAND COLLECTABLES
WORKING GROUP**

Tuesday 24 October 2017 (8:30 am – 5:00 pm)

Thursday Island (Port Kennedy Association Hall, 64-66 Douglas Street)

DRAFT AGENDA

Followed by CSIRO HARVEST STRATEGY WORKSHOP

Day 1: Wednesday 25 October 2017 (8:30 am – 5:00 pm)

Day 2: Thursday 26 October 2017 (8:30 am – 12:00 pm)

Thursday Island (Port Kennedy Association Hall, 64-66 Douglas Street)

Separate agenda to be provided

1. Preliminaries

- 1.1. Opening prayer, acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies
- 1.2. Adoption of agenda
- 1.3. Declarations of interest
- 1.4. Action items from HCWG 11 and previous meetings
- 1.5. Out of session correspondence

2. Fishery Updates

- 2.1. Industry update (to include Torres Strait fisheries strategic issues including economic trends)
- 2.2. Government agencies update (AFMA, TSRA, QDAF)
- 2.3. Native Title update
- 2.4. PNG National Fisheries Authority update

3. Management

- 3.1. Research update and priorities
- 3.2. Catch data summary
- 3.3. Pearl Shell Fishery update
- 3.4. Implementation of a fish receiver system
- 3.5. Prickly redfish – update on management actions
- 3.6. Black teatfish
- 3.7. White teatfish – update on management actions
- 3.8. Future management priorities

4. Other business

5. Date and venue for next meeting