

# TORRES STRAIT FINFISH WORKING GROUP MEETING

22<sup>nd</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2007

PEARLS BUILDING, THURSDAY ISLAND

## Recommendations of the FFWG to the TSFMAC

Number	Recommendation	Agenda Item
1	FFWG recommend that the TACC to be set for the life of the management plan with the ability to amendment of TACC included in the management plan through setting a trigger point. Performance of the fishery will be monitored on a yearly basis	5.1
2	FFWG recommend that the average annual catch (TVH & TIB) from 2001-2005 be used to set a TACC for both coral trout and Spanish mackerel	5.1
3	Fisher members requested that the PZJA make a decision on removal of the 25% PNG share from coral trout TACC for TIB and TVH sectors on implementation of the TACC or to provision for and then allocate the 25% PNG allocation to TIB and TVH sectors until such time as PNG request access to the fishery. If the later option is taken, a contingency plan to ensure that both sectors are not unfairly disadvantaged by future potential reduction in quota is considered.	5.1
4	The FFWG recommend monitoring identified fish species (or species group) by monitoring total annual catch and setting trigger reference points for these species such that: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. total annual catch (by species or species group) not be &gt; highest recorded annual catch;</li><li>2. the ratio of total annual catch of coral trout and other species (by species or species group) does not increase by &gt;20% in any one year; and</li><li>3. the ratio of total annual catch of coral trout and other species (by species or species group) does not decrease by &gt;20% in any one year.</li></ol>	5.2
5	The FFWG recommend that the current log books be reviewed in light of the requirement to monitor 'other reef fish' identified by the group as being 'of interest', ie requiring monitoring.	5.2
6	The FFWG recommend that coral trout and mackerel can only be taken, processed, carried or sold by those who hold allocation for the particular species.	5.2
7	The FFWG recommend the list of research priorities presented by Dr Williams to the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (yet to be reformed).	7

## Action Items

No.	Action	Agenda	Agency
1.	The FFWG seeks clarification from DAFF with regard to the availability of government funds for fishers to obtain financial/legal advice for the tender process.	4	AFMA
2.	FFWG to seek information on the responsibilities of those holding AFMA docket books at community freezer facilities to keep confidential all information recorded in the dockets.	5.1	AFMA
3.	FFWG to seek economic advice on the relative merits and costs of both options (i.e. up-front allocation of PNG share versus a compulsory quota reduction at a later date).	5.1	AFMA/DPI&F
4.	Compliance (Lyndon Peddell) to seek clarification on whether the current 20kg limit on reef fish is applied on a per tender or primary boat basis and advise industry accordingly prior to the start of the season.	5.2	Mr Peddell
5.	TVH representatives to discuss the merits of a catch quota rather than an effort quota for the TVH sector with their industry association	6.2	Mr Green, Mr Vass and Mr D'Agair
6.	Investigate tamper proof tags for sealing of freezer(s) on board primary vessels carrying product from the Torres Strait.	6.2	AFMA/DPI&F
7.	Assess the likely economic impacts of implementing 62cm maximum legal size limit for leopard trout ( <i>P. aerolatus</i> ) in the reef line fishery.	6.6	DPI&F/AFMA
8.	CFG representatives to provide a list of agreed local names for fish species to be included in the Finfish Management Plan	6.6	CFG
9.	Dr Williams to carry out Management Strategy Evaluation with TACC for coral trout set at 90t, 120t and 150t, or if four scenarios are possible, TACC set at 80t, 120t, 150t and 170t.	6.6	Dr Williams
10.	Mr Gaddes will provide an update on the progress of risk assessment of "other species" being carried on the Queensland Coral Reef Finfish Fishery at the next working group meeting	8	Mr Gaddes
11.	Australia to raise the issue of PNG's contribution to Spanish Mackerel research at the 2007 bilateral talks.	8	AFMA/DPI&F
12.	Dr Williams will provide the database for the processing of freezer logsheets to the Torres Strait Island Office	8	Dr Williams
13.	Shark mackerel catch will need to be removed from the TACC calculation for Spanish mackerel.	10.1	AFMA
14.	Shark mackerel should be included in the management plan as by-catch in both the Spanish mackerel and reef line fisheries requiring the redefinition of Spanish mackerel and finfish.	10.1	AFMA/DPI&F
15.	An agenda item will need to be included in the next FFWG to discuss minimum and maximum legal size limits for blue spot trout	10.2	AFMA
16.	Dr Williams to provide an outline of the scientific basis for the size limits for blue spot trout.	10.2	Dr Williams
17.	Further information including photographic or other evidence be provided to DPI&F to aid identification of potential source/s of ghost net found on reef near Poruma Island.	10.3	Mr Pearson
18.	Agencies to investigate how responsibility for completing the dockets will be placed on both the fisher selling the product and	10.4	AFMA/DPI&F

	the buyer purchasing it.		
19.	Mr D'Aguiar (or non-community fishing members) to discuss options and issues related to fishing over quota and how this can be avoided with TVH fishers.	10.4	Mr D'Aguiar
20.	CFG members to discuss the framework for monitoring of TIB catch with fishers	10.4	CFG
21.	.AFMA/DPI&F to provide a comprehensive overview of how the proposed quota monitor system will work for both sectors by next FFWG meeting.	10.4	AFMA/DPI&F
22.	Discuss with western Torres Strait communities the option of removing prohibition on finfish fishing in western Torres Strait.	10.5	Mr Finn
23.	Working group members to consider issues related to replacement vessels in the fishery for discussion at next FFWG.	10.6	All members
24.	All members to review the suggested management objectives and performance indicators and discuss at the next FFWG meeting.	10.8	All members

**TORRES STRAIT FINFISH  
WORKING GROUP MEETING**

22 - 23 February, 2007

**PEARLS BUILDING, THURSDAY ISLAND**

**MEETING START TIMES: DAY 1&2 – 8.30AM**

**AGENDA**

**OPENING**

**APOLOGIES**

**ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

1. Ratification of record of previous FFWG meeting (3 – 4 October 2006)
2. Actions and/or business arising from the previous FFWG meeting
3. Outcomes from PZJA 20 (issues of relevance to the Finfish fishery)
  - 3.1 10nm closure options
  - 3.2 PNG Share of the Reef Line Fishery
4. Updated Project Plan
5. TACC Setting
  - 5.1 Options for setting and reviewing the TACC
  - 5.2 Trigger reference points for 'other species'
6. Draft Management Plan
  - 6.1 Progress to date and areas needing further work
  - 6.2 Catch Quota (ITQs/TACC) Vs Total Allowable Effort (TAE)
  - 6.3 VMS and reporting system (including designated anchorages)
  - 6.4 Designated landing areas for TIB sector
  - 6.5 Mackerel and Coral Trout Conversion factors (verbal no paper)
  - 6.6 Management recommendations for Passionfruit (leopard) coral trout
7. Data - AFMA update on strategy to improve data management
8. Research Priorities
  - 8.1 AFMA strategy to improve data management
9. Dates for future meetings and need for out of session consideration of some items.
10. Other business
  - 10.1 Industry proposal to include shark mackerel in reef line fishery
  - 10.2 Minimum and maximum size limit of blue spot coral trout
  - 10.3 Ghost nets in the area of the fishery
  - 10.4 Proposed Quota Monitoring System
  - 10.5 Prohibition of fishing in the western Torres Strait
  - 10.6 Boat replacement
  - 10.7 Live Reef Line Fishery
  - 10.8 Management objectives and performance indicators

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WORKING GROUP MEETING**

**22 - 23 February, 2007**

**PEARLS BUILDING, THURSDAY ISLAND**

**DRAFT RECORD OF MEETING**

THESE ARE **DRAFT** MINUTES WHICH HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED TO MEMBERS OF THE FINFISH WORKING GROUP (FFWG) FOR COMMENT. IF **NO** COMMENTS ARE RECEIVED BY **30<sup>th</sup> March 2007** THESE MINUTES WILL BE TAKEN AS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING AND WILL BE RATIFIED AT THE NEXT MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP.

**ATTENDANCE**

**Day 1**

Members

Ms Dorothea Huber	(Chair)
Dr Jim Prescott	(AFMA)
Mr Shane Gaddes	(DPI&F)
Mr Lota Warriia	(TSRA – Yorke Community Fisher Representative)
Mr Sam Tamu (proxy for Wilson Billy)	(TSRA – Warraber Community Fisher Representative)
Mr Kila Odo	(TSRA – Mer Community Fisher Representative)
Mr Francis Pearson	(TSRA – Poruma Community Fisher Representative)
Mr Bert Matysek	(TSRA – Ugar Community Fisher Representative)
Mr Carl D’Aguair	(Mackerel/Reef line Fisher)
Mr Marcus Finn	(TSRA)
Mr Neil Green	(QSIA)
Mr Tony Vass (proxy for Shaun Hanson)	(Mackerel Fisher)
Dr Ashley Williams	(Research member – JCU)
Dr Annabel Jones	(AFMA)
Mr Lyndon Peddell	(DPI&F)

Observers

Ms Kirsten MacLean	(AFMA)
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**Day 2**

As per day 1

Neil Green (morning only)

Ashley Williams (morning only)

## **APOLOGIES**

Kenny Bedford

(Erub Community Fisher Representative)

## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Tony Vass	Mackerel licence in Torres Strait
Carl D'Aguiar	Licences on East Coast and Torres Strait, Mackerel and reef line
Kila Odo	TIB licence
Sam Tamu	TIB licence
Francis Pearson	TIB licence

## **DAY 1 – Thursday 22 February 2007**

The FFWG members discussed and adopted a revised agenda included with the Draft Minutes.

### **Agenda Item 1: Ratification of record of previous FFWG meeting (3-4 October 2006)**

The draft minutes were ratified by the FFWG as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

### **Agenda Item 2: Actions and/or business arising from the previous FFWG meeting**

Mr Gaddes went through the action items from the previous FFWG meeting. Most of the items had been actioned or were to be further addressed in later agenda items with exception of Action Item 6. This action item has not been addressed as AFMA and DPI&F wished to table consideration of a Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for the Torres Strait Fishing Boat Licence (TVH) sector rather than a Total Allowable Effort (TAE) as per agenda item 6.1.

### **Agenda Item 3: Outcomes of PZJA 20 (Issues of relevance to Finfish fishery)**

Mr Gaddes summarised the outcomes of PZJA 20 held on Thursday Island, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2006, relating to the Torres Strait Finfish fishery.

The Chair noted that the method used to estimate a starting point for Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) and TVH sectors will be a PZJA decision based on the former decision to use data from the period 2001 to 2005. When the decision was made there was not explicit direction on how the five years of data would be used. The FFWG needs to provide suggested method options to the PZJA via the TSFMAC based on catch data from both sectors. TVH and TIB fishers would have the opportunity to discuss these options with the PZJA during the consultation period set for 3-4 April 2007.

#### **3.1: 10nm closure options**

Mr Gaddes opened up discussion on the proposed closure to fishing for TVH fishers within 10nm of Torres Strait communities.

Mr Odo indicated that there may be two additional communities entering the community reef line fishery in coming years bringing the total TIB sector engaged in commercial fishing to six communities. For TIB fishers to be economically viable each fisher needs to catch around 4 t of Coral Trout annually. It was estimated that with five fishers in each of the six communities the TIB sector would require around 120 t annual to be economically viable. As the TIB fishers in their small dinghies could not compete effectively with the larger TVH boats, the Community Fisher Group (CFG) representatives felt that a 10 nm closure around these communities was needed to achieve the required catches. Mr Odo explained that such closures also allow for community management of their sea country. It was noted that historically the TIB reef line catches were much lower and the 120t estimate provided scope for expansion.

Mr Peddell noted a 10 nm closure to fishing by TVH operations would be difficult to enforce, especially if such closures were under community management arrangements which were not legislated. The Management representatives were concerned about how such closures would be implemented under a Finfish Management Plan and how such a plan would deal with the implementation of community management arrangements and the growing number of exclusion zones over time.

TVH fishing representatives noted that 13 t of Coral Trout annually was caught by their sector within the 10nm areas that could be closed to fishing for the TVH sector under the management proposal. They indicated that they would seek compensation if access to these areas was prohibited. The TVH representatives also expressed concern that the introduction of 10 nm closures around the four communities would not solve conflict between TVH and TIB fishers, as both groups would still be fishing together outside the closed area. The CFG representatives disagreed with this notion.

The FFWG discussed if the 10 nm closures would be needed following the tender process, given that it was expected to result in a major reduction of TVH operators. However, the CFG representatives wanted to see the closures maintained whilst there was still a TVH presence in the fishery.

The FFWG discussed the two alternative options for preventing TVH fishing within 10 nm of the four proposed Torres Strait communities but neither option was agreeable to all parties:

- 1) Commercial quota for the TVH sector would be converted at a different rate if caught within the 10 nm area (e.g. catch taken within 10 nm of communities could be deducted from the quota at twice the value as that taken outside this area); and
- 2) No area closures for TVH fishers but all fish caught by them within 10 nm of communities would need to be sold to the closest Community freezer facility;

The TVH representatives were concerned about the size of the TVH sector after the tender process. In particular, they feared that only a few operators would be left in the TVH sector with insufficient quota to be viable and no means of trading quota within the diminished pool of operators. They tabled the following alternative proposal for FFWG consideration:

- 3) Subsequent to the tender process, the few remaining TVH licences left in the fishery could be bought out by the Government on behalf of the TIB sector. It was recognised that these funds would be additional to the funds set aside for the tender process and may need to be sourced from additional monies (possibly another government allocation or reserve funds from the TSRA). The TVH licences bought out under this process would remain separate entities and would not be included in the competitive TAC allocation to the TIB sector. The agency/ entity holding the licences on behalf of the TIB sector could then lease the former TVH licences back to non-Islander commercial fishers, to be fished on behalf of the TIB sector. Conditions could be imposed in the lease contract that included a prohibition on fishing within 10 nm of communities and the requirement for capacity building within the TIB sector through the employment of Islander crew. Money derived from such a leasing arrangement would be returned to the TIB sector through reinvestment in the fishery.

The FFWG felt there was considerable merit in this proposal and that it presented a win-win situation for all parties. However, it was noted that this option was contingent on all TVH licences being removed from the fishery through the tender process and subsequent buyout on behalf of the TIB sector and on sufficient government money being available to fund this option.

The FFWG discussed the likely costs of this option. Historical buy-back schemes have been successful using a figure of around 2.5 x GVP of the fishery. Based on this formula a total buy out of all TVH licences in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery would cost ~ \$8-9M. Management representatives indicated that on-going management costs in the absence of any TVH operations the reduced future management costs would need to be considered in the final cost of a 100% TVH buy-out. TVH representatives stated that they would be seeking to buy licences in the East Coast Reef Line Fishery if they were removed from the Torres Strait Fishery and that they need to consider the east coast licence value and costs to modify their vessels for the live fish trade (eg installation of live fish tanks).

### 3.2: PNG share of reef line fishery

Community and non-community members (TIB and TVH) agreed to recommend that the 25% PNG share of the reef line fishery that could be requested by PNG under the Treaty (but is currently not) be removed from the fishery now to provide for future certainty. This recommendation was reassessed in agenda item 5.1 below and amended.

### Agenda Item 4: Updated Project Plan (including Tender Process)

Mr Gaddes provided an updated project plan to the FFWG.

**ACTION ITEM:** The FFWG seeks clarification from DAFF with regard to the availability government funds for fishers to obtain financial/legal advice for the tender process.

### Agenda Item 5: TACC setting

#### 5.1: Options for setting and reviewing the TACC

Mr Gaddes led a discussion on methods for setting a TACC in the Finfish Fishery under a Management Plan and the critical nature of effort data reported in logbooks to the process. It was recommended that fisher representatives (TVH and CFG) convey this information to their constituents and encourage complete and accurate reporting in future. Spatial and effort information is particularly important in fishery assessments. Fishers were assured that commercial-in-confidence information supplied in compulsory logbooks (such as fishing positions etc) is confidential. CFG representatives expressed concern that information in docket books may not be stored responsibly allowing information to be viewed by other fishers. The group sought clarification regarding adequate storage of AFMA docket books at freezer facilities and the legal responsibility of people that store commercial-in-confidence information.

**ACTION ITEM:** FFWG to seek information on the responsibilities to those holding AFMA docket books at community freezer facilities with regard to the confidentiality of information recorded in them.

FFWG agreed to recommend that the TACC be set for the life of the management plan with the ability to amend the TACC from time to time such as when an identified trigger point is reached. The performance of the fishery against agreed management objectives should be monitored on a yearly basis. It was acknowledged that in the absence of a full stock assessment on the commercial finfish species (except for Spanish Mackerel) trends in catch and effort over time would be useful indicators. It was further recognised that the 2006 data was still incomplete and that the expansion of the TIB sector was reflected in the more recent of catch data. The FFWG noted that the TIB sector tended to have lower catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) compared to the TVH sector.

The FFWG discussed the following options for setting a TACC for Coral Trout

- 1) Average of total catch (TVH + TIB) over a given period but exclude the 2006 data (the past 9 and 5 years were considered).
- 2) Average the annual catch over a stable period of CPUE.
- 3) Use the CPUE from representative fishers to define stable years and average annual catch from those years to calculate a TACC.
- 4) Average annual catch over all years after removing three highest catch years and three lowest catch years.
- 5) Average CPUE of all operators and multiply by total number of boats.

The FFWG agreed to recommend Option 1 for setting a TACC for both coral trout and Spanish mackerel over a 5-year period (2001-2005). This is the same period of catch history as used by the Allocation Advisory Panel (AAP) and as determined by the PZJA for benchmarking the allocation between the TIB and TVH in the tender process. The FFWG also noted that this is a

period which has the most reliable (complete) data set available, it includes growth of the TIB sector but that overall there was no discernible trend in the catches during this period.

The following examples of TACC for both species were discussed given the provisional data provided by AFMA (with acknowledgement that this data is still undergoing verification and may be subject to change).

For Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus spp*) (SPM)

Average annual total catch for TIB and TVH (2001-2005) is ~168 t\* = SPM TACC

40% (67 t) allocated to PNG leaves a remainder of 101 t to be allocated to TVH and TIB.

Historically TIB averaged ~ 11 t /year and TVH averaged ~ 157 t (whole weight) /year

To meet 50/50 sharing between two sectors, 39.5 t will need to be bought back from TVH sector to be allocated to TIB. This is in addition to the 67 t bought from the TVH sector for allocation to PNG. Each sector would then be allocated 50.5 t annually.

\* the group noted that this TACC is in the range suggested in the CRC Reef Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel assessment (Begg et al. 2006).

For Coral Trout (*Plectropomus spp*) (CT)

Average annual total catch for TIB and TVH (2001-2005) is ~128.4 t (whole weight) = CT TACC

25% (32.1 t) allocated to PNG leaves a remainder of 96.3 t to be allocated to TVH and TIB.

Historically TIB averaged ~ 31.4 t/year and TVH ~ 97.0 t/year

To meet 50/50 sharing between two sectors, 16.75 t would need to be bought from TVH sector to be allocated to TIB. This is in addition to the 32.1t bought from the TVH sector for allocation to PNG. Each sector would then be allocated ~ 48.2 t annually.

It was suggested that if PNG does not request access to the reefline fishery, the PNG share would be allocated to TVH and TIB sectors equally, each sector would therefore be allocated 64.2 t annually.

Mr Green expressed concern about the uncertainty of future access to the fishery by PNG. He argued that if this catch is allocated to the TVH and TIB operators in the current process, then in the event that PNG request access to the fishery in the future, the Australian fishers would be subjected to a mandatory quota reduction to accommodate the PNG take. He was concerned that this could lead to unviable operations. Industry members requested that the PZJA makes a decision on how it wishes to deal with the 25% allocation to PNG and advise the operators on this issue before the tender process.

The FFWG discussed the relative merits between allowing Australian operators continued access to the 25% PNG share until such time as PNG wishes to exercise its rights under the Treaty and options (such ex-gratia payments) to ensure that both sectors are not unfairly disadvantaged by future potential reduction in quota.

**ACTION ITEM:** FFWG to seek economic advice on the relative merits and costs of both options (i.e. up-front allocation of PNG share versus a compulsory quota reduction at a later date).

## DAY 2 – Friday 23 February 2007

### 5.2: Trigger reference points for 'other species'

Mr Gaddes addressed this item. The FFWG discussed the need to ensure adequate management of other reef fish species following the introduction of a TACC for coral trout to overcome a potential effort shift to other fish species. It was agreed in the first instance that monitoring of other reef fish species identified as "being of interest" (listed below) would be required to determine if further management action was necessary. Such monitoring would require the determination of performance indicators and trigger points. Further, the FFWG recommended that if a TACC for other reef line species is required that the same method of allocation applied to coral trout be applied in respect of the other species.

Trigger reference points discussed for other reef fish included:

1. Total annual catch (by species or species group) not be > highest recorded annual catch
2. The ratio of total annual catch of coral trout and other species (by species or species group) does not increase by >20% in any one year (assuming the coral trout catch is stable this trigger responds to increasing targeting of other species).
3. The ratio of total annual catch of coral trout and other species (by species or species group) does not decrease by >20% in any one year (assuming the coral trout catch is stable this trigger responds to decreasing targeting or, more importantly, to diminishing relative abundance of other species).
4. Species composition of commercial catch does not change significantly.

Species of interest identified were:

- Barramundi Cod
- Red emperor
- Cods
- Red Bass
- Nannygai
- Stripey Bass.
- Shark
- Other mackerel (other than Spanish mackerel)
- All 'other reef species' or combination of species such as 'Mixed Reef'

The FFWG agreed to recommend the monitoring of finfish species (or species group) as listed above and the trigger reference point presented under options 1-3 above be adopted.

The FFWG agreed to recommend that the current log books be reviewed in light of the requirement to monitor the additional identified fish species (listed above).

The FFWG agreed to recommend that coral trout and mackerel can only be taken, processed, carried and sold by those that hold allocation for the particular species. A recreational bag limit of fish will be allowable for those that do not hold an allocation for the relevant species. The working group noted that this would be contentious with the other fisheries that currently had a 20kg limit which they could do with what they pleased (including selling) but considered for the integrity of the quota system that this allowance should be removed.

**ACTION ITEM:** Compliance (Lyndon Peddell) to seek clarification on whether the current 20kg limit on reef fish is applied on a per tender or primary boat basis and advise industry accordingly prior to the start of the season.

Dr Williams indicated that a risk assessment had been completed for 'other species' of reef fish taken in the east coast reef line fishery and the frame work from this assessment could be applied to the Torres Strait species.

## **Agenda Item 6: Draft Management Plan**

### **6.1: Progress to date and areas needing further work.**

Mr Gaddes addressed this item. The main point needing immediate attention was the discussion of the relative merits of allocating catch or effort quota to the TVH sector as set out in agenda item 6.2 below.

### **6.2: Catch Quota (ITQs/TACC) Vs Total Allowable Effort (TAE)**

Dr Jones presented issues relevant to setting quota or allowable effort for the TVH sector (Attachment 2) for discussion. While there were both positive and negative aspects associated with each of the options, a TACC approach was seen as offering:

- greater protection for the species from overfishing;
- greater economic efficiency and certainty for the operators;
- greater compatibility with the management arrangements in the East Coast reef line fishery;
- greater consistency with the quota system proposed for the TS Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery;

It was recognised that given the major discrepancies in catch rates between the TIB and TVH sectors and between individual TVH operators, it would be extremely difficult to set a realistic conversion factor between catch rate and catch. It was also acknowledged that whilst the monitoring requirements under a quota system were more complex, it provided full verification of the catch taken and was hence of great benefit in the stock assessment process.

The FFWG agreed in principle that a TACC implemented through Individual Transferable Quota (ITQs) for the TVH sector was a better management option than Total Allowable Effort (TAE). However, the TVH representatives were mindful that this was a departure from the previous PZJA agreement and industry's understanding of the proposed management arrangements under a Management Plan. They indicated that they would need to discuss this recommendation further with their industry association.

**ACTION ITEM:** TVH representatives discuss the merits of a catch quota rather than an effort quota for the TVH sector with their industry association.

***Post meeting note: Mr Vass discussed this issue with 11 of the 15 finfish vessels operating in the Torres Strait the majority of whom were happy to progress towards setting a catch quota rather than and effort based quota.***

The group discussed monitoring for final loads of fish of the season that generally are taken to the mainland onboard the primary vessel rather than being transferred to the mother ship. Concern was expressed by managers and compliance officers that this could allow the offload of product prior to inspection thus not be included in the individual's quota. An option discussed was the production of tamper-proof tags to place on freezer doors to ensure that product can not be offloaded until inspection by a fisheries officer at the offload point on the mainland.

**ACTION ITEM:** Agencies to investigate tamper proof Tags for sealing of freezer(s) on board primary vessels carrying product from the Torres Strait.

### **6.3: VMS and reporting systems**

In light of discussions at agenda item 6.2 this item was deferred.

#### **6.4: Designated landing areas for TIB sector**

The FFWG identified a need to identify designated landing points for catch from TIB fishers and identify rules for possession of commercial quantities of fish on non-designated landing point (eg when camping on an island). The areas discussed as suggested TIB landing points were as per the attachments provided with the meeting papers. All fish buyers would be licensed and registered and would therefore be more easily communicated with by management and compliance officers.

#### **6.5: Mackerel and Coral Trout Conversion factors**

In light of discussions at agenda item 6.2 this item was deferred.

#### **6.6: Management recommendations for Passionfruit (leopard) coral trout**

Dr Williams presented research information relevant to biological characteristics of leopard (passion fruit) coral trout (*Plectropomus aerolatus*). The spawning period of leopard trout was found to be earlier than for bar cheek trout or common coral trout. Leopard trout also change sex from female to male at larger sizes and an older age than do the island or common coral trout, and mature at a larger size and older age. This information provides evidence that leopard trout have different biological characteristics which may require separate management strategies (such as size limits) for this species. The FFWG discussed the merits of implementing a different minimum legal size limit for leopard trout, or introducing a maximum legal size limit to protect males of this species.

Mr D'Aguiar expressed concern that there may be a filleting ban introduced if new legal size limits were legislated for leopard trout and such a ban would not be supported by the TVH sector. There was also concern expressed by fishers that a maximum size limit would have large impact on the total catch of coral trout (see table which was provided to evaluate this concern). Concern was also expressed that there was no CFG representative from Erub Is present at the meeting. Erub is an area that has a high proportion of leopard trout in the catch (compared to other trout species) and therefore a change of legal size limits for this species may have bigger impact on this community than others in the eastern Torres Strait. It was noted that the TACC for coral trout will protect all species of coral trout including leopard trout.

Information presented to the group (see Attachment 1, Table 1A and 1B) indicated the estimated impact on catch of leopard trout based on current data of TVH fishing practices from research observations. Currently around 10% of male common coral trout (*P. leopardus*) and blue spot trout (*P. Laevis*) are protected by the current legal size limits, compared to only 2% of leopard trout.

The FFWG agreed to support a maximum size limit for leopard trout (*P. aerolatus*) of 62 cm based on the research information provided, subject to support from Erub Is. CFG representative.

**ACTION ITEM:** AFMA/DPI&F to assess the likely economic impacts of implementing 62cm maximum legal size limit for leopard trout (*P. aerolatus*) in the reef line fishery.

The members discussed the merits of including local names for fish species in the planned management plan for the reef line fishery. It was noted that different communities have different local names for reef fish and this information will need to be included.

**ACTION ITEM:** CFG representatives to provide a list of local names for fish species to be included in the Fin Fish Management Plan.

Dr Williams provided information on the progress of a Management Strategy Evaluation project being conducted by JCU on the Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery. This research will provide information on the relative performance of a range of potential management strategies for the Torres Strait Reef Line Fishery. This project could also evaluate the relative merit of different TACC levels if this would be useful for the working group in making their recommendations. The FFWG agreed that a management strategy evaluation of three or four (depending on resources required) TACC levels (90t, 120t and 150t or 80t, 120t, 150t and 170t). These scenarios were made possible by dropping the evaluation of three different minimum size limits.

**ACTION ITEM:** Dr Williams to carry out Management Strategy Evaluation with TACC for coral trout set at 90t, 120t and 150t, or if four scenarios are possible, TACC set at 80t, 120t, 150t and 170t.

### **Agenda Item 7: Data – AFMA update on strategy to improve data management**

Mr Prescott addressed this item. AFMA staff are currently undertaking a rigorous process of providing records of fin fish catch from all licensed Torres Strait fishers in the Torres Strait Spanish mackerel and reef line fisheries. This process is essential to ensure that TACC is based on the best available information about previous fishing history. Fishers are being asked to check that the records held by AFMA for individual operations are accurate and to provide additional information where the logbook records appear erroneous. TVH fishers have been supplied reports to date and this information is now in the process of being verified. The TIB fishers will have individual reports sent to them once AFMA has rectified the coding information. Mr Prescott noted that the current “data cleaning” process was a precursor to the later process of data verification for the purpose of allocation of fishing rights under the Management Plan and that all operators would have the ability to again address inconsistencies in data holdings.

### **Agenda Item 8: Research Priorities**

Dr Williams outlined a number of fisheries data sources that need additional or more accurate information to improve stock assessments of both the reef line and Spanish mackerel fisheries. The FFWG endorsed the list of research priorities for Spanish mackerel as suggested by Dr Williams while acknowledging that some of these priorities were already being addressed in various ways.

The research priorities endorsed at the meeting were:

1. Development of a long term monitoring program for all sectors. [Urgent & Critical]
2. Improved reporting in the compulsory commercial logbooks and Islander docket books. [Urgent & Critical]
3. Better measurement of effort in the commercial logbooks and Islander docket books. Fishers should be encouraged to record search and fishing times, number of fishers, and days when zero catches occurred. [Urgent & Critical]
4. Assessment of the historical commercial logbooks to reconcile differences between the AFMA and DPI&F databases. [Important & Critical]
5. Assessment of the historical and current impact of neighbouring fisheries, particularly the Indonesian, Taiwanese and PNG gillnet and longline fisheries. [Important]
6. Comprehensive information on population dynamics of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel, including growth, maturity, fecundity and spawning. [Important]
7. Confirmation of the single stock assumption for Torres Strait Spanish mackerel. [Important]
8. Periodic review and update of the assessment as determined by the requirements of AFMA. Operational management objectives, performance measures and decision rules need to be defined for future management strategy evaluation. [Critical]
9. A systematic and transparent stock assessment review process. [Critical]

It was noted that a decision on supporting individual research projects to address these priorities would need to wait until after the tender process when it is known how many, and which vessels remain in the fisheries. The FFWG agreed to recommend the list of research priorities to the next meeting of the, yet to be formed, Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee.

Mr Williams indicated that research log sheets introduced to the freezer facilities at Mer and Erub Islands could not be continued under current funding. It was recognized that the information provided by the communities in the log sheets was valuable (especially with respect to identification of individual species of coral trout). There was discussion with CFG representatives about the potential for recording weights and/or lengths of fish in addition to the information

provided currently. Mr Gaddes indicated that this type of information may be necessary in future for addressing EPBC requirements. Mr Prescott agreed that it is important information but it needs to be supported by the communities. Dr Jones agreed to coordinate this project to ensure it continues and to liaise with the people operating the freezers at Mer and Erub Islands. Dr Jones will also explore the potential to extend this project to Ugar Is. Mr Matysek will discuss this project with freezer staff and fishers at Ugar Is.

Mr Prescott thanked Mr Vass for hosting researcher Mark Jones on a monitoring trip last year which provided important fisheries and biological data for the management of Spanish mackerel.

Mr Williams recommended that the FFWG review the risk assessment of 'other species' being carried out on the Queensland Coral Reef Finfish Fishery when it is completed and determine if this assessment framework would be suitable to apply to Torres Strait fisheries.

**ACTION ITEM:** Mr Gaddes will provide an update on the progress of risk assessment of 'other species' being carried on the Queensland Coral Reef Finfish Fishery at the next working group meeting.

**ACTION ITEM:** Australia to raise the issue of PNG's contribution to Spanish Mackerel research at the 2007 bilateral talks.

**ACTION ITEM:** Dr Williams will provide the database for the processing of freezer logsheets to the Torres Strait Island Office.

## **Agenda Item 9: Dates for future meetings and need for out of session consideration of some items.**

Members were advised that the next meeting of the FFWG was nominally set for the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May.

*Post Meeting Note: Nominal dates for the next FFWG are now rescheduled for the 23<sup>d</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> May.*

## **Agenda Item 10: Other business**

### **10.1: Industry proposal to include shark mackerel in reef line fishery**

Mr D'Aguiar provided historical information with regard to shark mackerel and he suggested that this species be moved from the reef line fishery to the Spanish mackerel fishery. It was generally agreed by fishers that shark mackerel is a species that is predominantly caught by reef line fishers rather than Spanish mackerel fishers.

The FFWG generally agreed that shark mackerel should be included in both the Spanish mackerel and reef line fisheries. This will mean that shark mackerel catch would need to be taken out of calculating the TACC for Spanish mackerel.

**ACTION ITEM:** Shark mackerel catch will need to be removed from the TACC calculation for Spanish mackerel.

**ACTION ITEM:** Shark mackerel should be included in the management plan as by-catch in both the Spanish mackerel and reef line fisheries requiring the redefinition of Spanish mackerel and finfish.

### **10.2: Minimum and maximum size limit of blue spot coral trout**

Mr D'Aguiar and Mr Odo expressed concern with regard to the introduction of minimum and maximum legal size limits for blue spot trout in the Torres Strait finfish fishery. They indicated that they were unaware of discussion of this in previous FFWG meetings. Mr Prescott, consulting records of previous minutes, advised that these changes had been discussed in 2003 when it was agreed that all size limits in Queensland Coral Reef Finfish Fishery would be introduced in Torres Strait. However, the working group noted that blue spot trout were not discussed separately as were barramundi cod and Maori wrasse.

**ACTION ITEM:** An agenda item will need to be included in the next FFWG to discuss legal size limits for blue spot trout.

**ACTION ITEM:** Dr Williams to provide an outline of the scientific basis for the size limits for blue spot trout.

### **10.3: Ghost nets in the area of the fishery**

Mr Pearson informed the members of a report of nets being found tangled on the reef near Puruma Island. Mr Pearson identified the net as a prawn net and had requested that the photo of the net be forwarded from the Community Council. From discussion it was inconclusive as to the source of the net. However, Mr Gaddes indicated that spare nets were often kept by trawlers for repairs to trawl nets and this may have rolled off a vessel during rough weather. Further information as to the source of the net would be required before further action could be taken. If the net is identified as a trawl net, the issue will be raised at the next TS Prawn MAC meeting.

**ACTION ITEM:** Mr Pearson to provide further information including photographic or other evidence should be provided to DPI&F to aid identification of potential source/s.

### **10.4 Proposed Quota Monitoring System**

Mr Gaddes led the members through a step-by-step process for reporting of commercial catch from both TVH and TIB fishers and the FFWG provided in principle support for the following elements of a quota monitoring system in the TS finfish fishery.

#### TVH Sector

A daily log would need to be completed at the completion of fishing each day by TVH fishers such that records of catch in the log book should match the fish kept on the vessel at any time (note that this is currently the required process).

Prior reporting of fish to be offloaded to a mother ship will need to be completed at least 24 hr prior to offload and details would need to be provided of where and when product will be offloaded. An Amended Offload Report including amounts (carton count and estimated weight) will be required at least 12 hrs prior to offload. These reported weights will be used to initially adjust quota for the individual operation. A Transshipment Record including amount of fish (number of cartons and weight) will be recorded on transfer of catch to the mother ship to be signed by the fisher and the mother ship personnel. On arrival in Cairns at a buyer that holds a Fish Receivers Permit (FRP) the catch will be weighed on certified scales and a final report submitted to DPI&F by the fish receiver on the official catch docketing form. This final weight will be used to amend the prior reported catch that had been deducted from the individual's quota. The process also needs to include contingency for emergency prior report (eg to offload to another boat if there are mechanical problems with a freezer),

#### TIB Sector

All catch sold by a TIB licensed fisher must be to a designated offload facility with a current FRP (in most cases this will be the community freezer). Catch weights will be recorded on an official docket completed by the freezer staff. The recorded catch will be deducted from the quota allocated to the TIB sector.

**ACTION ITEM:** Agencies to investigate how responsibility for completing the dockets will be placed on both the fisher selling the product and the buyer purchasing it.

Prior notice of transshipment from the freezer facility will be required no later than 24 hrs prior to transshipment and a Transshipment Record completed by the transshipment vessel and the freezer staff. The process also needs to include contingency for emergency prior report (eg to offload to another boat if there are mechanical problems with a freezer).

### Notification of reaching the TIB's allocated quota or the TVH ITQs

Fishers will be issued with a notice at least one week from closure of the TIB fishery. For individual TVH operators, quota use would be reported on a regular basis to them (for example when 75% and/or 95% used). The group also discussed the potential actions required if a TACC is over fished by either an individual TVH fisher or the TIB sector. The options discussed were the ability to buy additional quota to offset the catch over the TACC by an individual, deduction of quota from the following years catch, and/or fines. No agreement was reached and this issue will require further discussion.

**ACTION ITEM:** Mr D'Aguiar to discuss options and issues related to fishing over quota and how this can be avoided with TVH fishers.

**ACTION ITEM:** CFG representatives to discuss the framework for monitoring of TIB catch with fishers.

**ACTION ITEM:** AFMA/QDPI&F to provide a comprehensive overview of how the proposed quota monitor system will work for both sectors by next FFWG meeting.

### **10.5: Prohibition of fishing in the western Torres Strait.**

Mr Prescott addressed this item and discussed the current legislation and historical issues related to prohibition of commercial finfish fishing in the Western Torres Strait. The option of removing this prohibition for the TIB sector was discussed. An issue was raised regarding inclusion of catch of fish from this region in the overall TACC given that additional fisheries resources would be available if the prohibition was removed. Managers and researchers noted that there was no information currently available on the amount of fisheries resources in the western areas of the Torres Strait.

**ACTION ITEM:** Mr Finn will discuss with western Torres Strait communities the option of removing prohibition on finfish fishing in western Torres Strait.

### **10.6: Boat replacement**

The need to include input controls on the size of vessels in the fishery under replacement boat regulations was discussed in light of fact that the fishery is proposed to be managed under a TACC/ITQs in the TVH sector. TVH fishers supported the removal of the limit on 20 m boats in the Torres Strait Fin Fish Fishery. They expressed a view that this would allow for greater levels of safety and efficiency in the fishery. The CFG representatives pointed to the negative social aspects of having large (> 20 m) fishing vessels on Torres Strait Reefs from a community perspective. The FFWG did not fully resolve this issue and agreed that it should be further discussed at the next meeting.

**ACTION ITEM:** Working group members to consider issues related to replacement vessels in the fishery for discussion at next FFWG.

### **10.7: Live Reef Line Fishery**

Mr D'Aguiar led a discussion regarding the potential for a live finfish fishery in the Torres Strait. He indicated that there was potential to increase value in the reef line fishery by moving to live coral trout if holding and transport facilities could be developed in Torres Strait. The working group generally accepted that there was no need to continue with the ban on live fish when the new management system takes effect.

*Post meeting note: the FFWG at an earlier meeting raised concern on the potential to concentrate fishing effort on common coral trout, the most valuable (live) species if the ban on live exports was lifted.*

### **10.8: Management objectives and performance indicators**

Mr Gaddes drew attention of the members to the need for relevant management objectives for the fishery to be included in the management plan, as well as performance measures by which the performance of the management arrangements would be monitored.

**ACTION ITEM:** All members to review the suggested management objectives and performance indicators for discussion at the next FFWG meeting.

## Attachment 1

Table 1: estimated impact on leopard trout protected and reduction in catch of all coral trout species determined from observation of TVH fishing practices by different minimum legal size limits (A) and Maximum legal size limits (B). All percentages are calculated from total numbers of fish.

<u>(A) Minimum Legal Size Limit</u>	<u>% of leopard trout protected</u>	<u>% reduction in catch of leopard trout</u>
38cm	2%	n/a
40cm	3%	6%
42cm	5%	11%
45cm	7%	25%
<u>(B) Maximum Legal Size Limit</u>	<u>% of leopard trout protected</u>	<u>% reduction in catch of leopard trout</u>
55cm	63%	20%
60cm	24%	7%
62cm	11%	3%
64cm	3%	1%

## Attachment 2:

A number of issues related to setting an effort (TAE) or catch (TACC/ITQ) quota system were discussed. The various positive and negative aspects of these issues were identified. This attachment derives from the presentation at the meeting, but includes additional points that were not discussed in detail.

# Setting TAE vs TACC

## TAE

- Non-Species Specific -
  - All finfish species afforded protection akin to current arrangements
- Ease of use +
  - VMS already in use in prawn fishery
- Setting TAE +/-
  - need to set a TAC firstConversion factor from catch to effort
  - Limited historical data is variable, # boats fishing, # dories used, CPUE etc.
  - differences fishing efficiency TIB & TVH and among TVH boats
- Economic efficiency and certainty +
- Cost +/-
  - VMS on mother boats
  - Spatial systems (already established for Prawn fishery and personnel)
- Safety +
  - Vessels monitored on daily basis
- Compliance -
  - Effort factored in for steaming, bad weather etc.
  - Anchorages need to be defined
  - Dories without VMS
  - Dual endorsements requires reporting of target species on daily basis

## TACC

- Species Specific +
  - TAC for CT and SPM only
  - TAC for Other Species also?
- Ease of use +/-
  - TAC already in use Queensland east coast fisheries (Reef line and SPM)
  - Prior reporting requires reliable communication (mobile or Sat phone)
- Setting TAC +/-
  - Need stable period of annual catch
  - Overcomes differences in CPUE between TIB & TVH
- Economic efficiency and certainty ++
  - promotes efficiency (CPUE)
- Cost +
  - Satphone for suitable mobile phone (depending on mobile coverage)
  - QBFP officers in Cairns to inspect offload (established for EC fisheries)
- Safety N/A
- Compliance +
  - Limited number of boats involved
  - Allows catch validation
  - Upgrading on quota species
  - Shift to targeting other species (reds?)