



Australian Government
Australian Fisheries Management Authority



**TORRES STRAIT FISHERIES MANAGEMENT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

OUT OF SESSION MEETING

MINUTES

**23 NOVEMBER 2010
TELECONFERENCE**

CHAIR: MR JOHN POLLOCK



**Queensland
Government**

**TORRES STRAIT
PZJA
PROTECTED ZONE
JOINT AUTHORITY**

Prepared by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority on behalf of the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority

DECISION RECORD

1.1.1 The TSFMAC agreed to accept the minutes from TSFMAC No.11 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

ACTION ITEMS

#	Action Item	Agenda item	Responsibility
1	AFMA will review prior discussion and any agreements regarding closures to line fishing in western Torres Strait and provide information to the Erub representative out of session.	2.1	AFMA
2	Mr Bedford to recommend that the Community Fisher Group consider compulsory reporting of catch from the Islander Commercial Fishing Sector.	2.3	TSRA portfolio member
3	AFMA will request the TRLRAG to provide advice to the TSFMAC on the impact of removing the October/ November fishery closure in the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery.	3.5	AFMA

TSFMAC OOS Attendance

The following members and observers were in attendance at TSFMAC No 11:

Name	Representative organisation	Declaration of Interest
Mr John Pollock	Chairperson	Consultant
Dr Annabel Jones	AFMA	Manager, Thursday Island
Ms Melissa Brown	AFMA	Senior Manager, Northern Fisheries
Ms Lisa Cocking	AFMA – Executive Officer	Senior Management Officer
Mr Ian Jacobsen	DEEDI	Senior Fisheries Management Officer
Mr Neville Nakata	TSRA	TSRA member
Mr Kenny Bedford	TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member	TIB Licence holder
Mr Les Pitt	CFG representative, Erub	TIB Licence holder
Mr Dennis Passi	CFG representative, Mer	TIB Licence holder
Mr William Stephen	CFG representative, Ugar	TIB Licence holder
Mr Gavin Mosby	CFG representative, Masig	TIB Licence holder
Mr Charles David	CFG representative, Iama	TIB Licence holder
Mr Alan Repu	CFG representative, Mabuiag	TIB Licence holder
Mr Yen Loban	CFG representative, Maralag	TIB Licence holder



Mr Graham Hirakawa	CFG representative, Waiben	TIB License holder
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Observers:

Name	Role
Mr Kenny Bedford	TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member
Mr Steve Hall	TSRA - Fisheries Policy Officer
Mr Paul Seden	AFMA – Senior Management Officer
Mr Malcolm Southwell	TSRA

Apologies:

Name	Role
Mr Pearson Wigness	CFG, Ngurapai
Mr Francis Pearson	CFG, Poruma
Mr Dimas Toby	CFG, Boigu
Mr Jerry Babia	CFG, Saibai
Mr John Wigness	CFG, St Pauls
Mr Nathan Pearson	CFG, Warraber
Mr Thomas Mooka	CFG, Dauan
Mr Eddie Jebreen	DEEDI
Mr Shane Fava	DEEDI
Mr Brett Arlidge	TRL - non traditional inhabitant member
Dr Ray Moore	TRL – non traditional inhabitant member



**TORRES STRAIT FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
OOS meeting
9-11am (QLD time, 10-12 EDST) 23 November 2010
Teleconference**

AGENDA

1. Meeting Administration

- 1.1. Ratification of TSFMAC #11 meeting record (AFMA) **For Decision**

2. Finfish Fisheries (Spanish Mackerel and Reef Line)

- 2.1. Fisheries Management Notice amendments (AFMA) **For Noting**
2.2. Management Plan update (AFMA) **For Noting**

3. Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery

- 3.1. 2010 season summary: Australia and PNG (AFMA) **For Noting**
3.2. Lobster Five Year Business Plan update (DAFF) **For Noting**
3.3. PNG Cross endorsement 2010/2011 (DEEDI) **For Noting**
3.4. Outcomes and recommendations from the TRL RAG (AFMA) **For Noting**
3.5. TRL interim arrangements (AFMA) **For Noting**

4. Hand Collectables Fishery

- 4.1. Hand Collectables fishery update (AFMA) **For Noting**

5. Other Business

- 5.1. 2011 Community Consultation visits (AFMA) **For Noting**
5.2. Compliance
5.3. Next meeting

Individuals wishing to attend the TSFMAC as an observer are required to contact the
Chair

Mr. John Pollock: c/o Executive Officer – Lisa Cocking requesting attendance. Lisa is
available on email: lisa.cocking@afma.gov.au, or phone 02 62255451



Meeting start time: 9.05am

Agenda Item 1.1 Ratification of TSFMAC No.11 meeting record

The TSFMAC agreed to accept the minutes from TSFMAC No.11 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Agenda Item 2.1 Finfish Fishery Management Notice Amendments

The TSFMAC noted the progress in amending Torres Strait Fisheries Management Notice No. 78. AFMA has drafted amendments to Fisheries Management Notice No. 78 for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery to implement the following agreed management arrangements:

1. Net size restrictions for traditional fishing;
2. Introduction of a maximum legal size for Leopard Coral Trout (*Plectropomus areolatus*);
3. Removal of restrictions on holding live finfish.

The instrument has been considered by the PZJA Standing Committee and is being progressed to the PZJA for consideration.

Mr Bedford asked if the amended legislation included any changes to the restrictions on line fishing in the west of Torres Strait. Dr Jones explained that no changes to the closure in west Torres Strait had been agreed to by the Finfish Working Group or the TSFMAC. As such, there were no changes to the current restriction on line fishing in western Torres Strait included in the amended management instrument. Such changes would need to be considered and recommended by the Finfish Working Group and the TSFMAC prior to being considered by the PZJA.

ACTION ITEM 1: AFMA will review prior discussion and any agreements regarding closures to line fishing in western Torres Strait and provide information to the Erub representative out of session.

Item 2.2 Finfish Fishery Management Plan Update

The TSFMAC noted the update provided by AFMA on development of a formal management plan for the Finfish Fishery. A draft of the management plan is anticipated for delivery to AFMA in the near future. On finalisation of the draft, AFMA will request the PZJA Standing Committee recommend the PZJA adopt the draft management plan and agree to release the draft for public comment. The planned release will coincide with a comprehensive community consultation phase with agency officers visiting communities in February or March 2011.

They hope to have the final plan endorsed by the PZJA and in place for the 2012 season.

The fishery will be required to undergo strategic assessment under the changed management arrangements. Public consultation on the strategic assessment will be planned to coincide with the management plan public consultation period.

Agenda Item 2.3 Finfish Fishery 2010 Season Summary

AFMA presented preliminary catch records for 2010 noting that data is provisional as complete data for the entire year is not yet available. Catch records for both Spanish Mackerel and Coral Trout are well below the agreed notional Total Allowable Catches (TAC) and are not expected to breach the TAC.

It was noted that the main Spanish Mackerel season was yet to commence with the majority of the catch taken in the later half of the calendar year. The TSFMAC also noted that there had been no leasing of Coral Trout sunset licences in the first half of



2010, resulting in lower catch. In addition, the group noted that the Erub and Mer freezers had ceased operation with the Erub freezer closure hopefully only temporarily. The closure of these freezers will likely reduce the ability for Torres Strait Islanders to access the fishery to their full potential.

Mr Bedford agreed that it would be positive to get more accurate and timely records of catch from the Islander sector and he will recommend this for consideration to the Community Fisher Group. Dr Jones commented that compulsory logbook recording within a given timeframe for the Islander commercial sector would be strongly supported by AFMA.

ACTION ITEM 2: Mr Bedford to recommend that the Community Fisher Group consider compulsory reporting of catch from the Islander Commercial Fishing Sector.

The TSFMAC noted the summary of catch from the Finfish Fishery for 2010 to the limit of records available as provided in the meeting papers.

Agenda Item 3.1 Tropical Rock Lobster 2010 Season Summary

AFMA presented preliminary catch records for 2010 for the Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) Fishery noting that data is provisional as complete data for the entire year is not yet available. The 2010 season was considered by both sectors to be better than 2009, and 2011 anticipated to be another good season.

Considering forward estimates of total catch for 2010 from the Islander and non-Islander sectors of the fishery it was considered unlikely that the Australian notional Total Allowable Catch (recommended by the TRLRAG) would be exceeded in 2010. The non-Islander sector was expected to catch around their sectors allocation (47.5%) of the Australian TAC, while the Islander sector would most likely not take their sectors allocation (53.5%).

PNG crossed-endorsed vessels fished a total of 98 dory days in Australian waters, being less than the allocated days agreed on at the 2009 fisheries Bilateral meetings. A request for the name of the PNG vessel from members, due to concerns that they were not reporting catch adequately, was not able to be answered due to confidentiality laws. However, the members were informed that the vessel had been boarded by compliance officers on a number of occasions and no breaches of cross-endorsement conditions had been reported, including the requirement to report catch accurately.

Concern was raised as to the completeness and accuracy of catch records provided by PNG fishers in PNG waters. Dr Jones explained that PNG NFA provide records of catch from PNG fishers as part of the stock assessment process in February each year. This information is available to stakeholder in the stock assessment reports and other TRLRAG information.

The TSFMAC noted the summary of catch from the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery for 2010 to the limit of records available as provided in the meeting papers.

Agenda Item 3.2 Lobster Five Year Business Plan

The PZJA agreed to develop a five year business plan for the Tropical Rock Lobster fishery in 2009. The business plan is being finalised and will be provided to the PZJA for endorsement. There will be no formal public comment period on the final document following endorsement by the PZJA as a comprehensive public consultation phase was undertaken in development of the plan.

Community Fisher Group representatives stated that there was still some disagreement on some of the contents in the draft plan and this group would like the opportunity to see the final document prior to PZJA endorsement.



The Chair highlighted that the Tropical Rock Lobster Five Year Business Plan is a high level document which PZJA agencies will use to guide the PZJA on the options for managing the fishery and further public consultation was not likely to add much to the document at this time. The TSFMAC were informed that the business plan would be made available to the TSFMAC on the next meeting planned for early 2011.

The TSFMAC noted the progress of the Tropical Rock Lobster Five Year Business Plan.

Agenda Item 3.3 PNG Cross-Endorsement

PNG is entitled to 25% of the Tropical Rock Lobster harvest in the Australian jurisdiction under the agreements contained in the Torres Strait Treaty. Australia provides PNG with this entitlement as a number of days of fishing for a set number of vessels. There are certain endorsement conditions that these vessels must follow when in the fishery.

PNG requested seven main boats each with seven dinghies be cross-endorsed in 2010. Each of the seven vessels had access to 148 tender fishing days for Tropical Rock Lobster within the Australian jurisdiction.

At the 2010 Australia-PNG fisheries bilateral meetings it was agreed that PNG would have access to a total of 968 tender fishing days for the 2011 fishing season although the minutes of this meeting are yet to be ratified.

The TSFMAC noted the information provided regarding cross endorsements to PNG for the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery in 2010 and 2011.

Agenda Item 3.4 Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group

The Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (TRLRAG) met in October 2010 and considered the stock assessment report for the fishery, a recommended 2011 notional Total Allowable Catch (TAC) and performance of the fishery against the TAC. The RAG recommended a notional preliminary TAC of 803t for the whole of the Torres Strait Protected Zone (including PNG) for 2011. The TSFMAC noted the large range in the notional TAC was due to the preliminary nature of the TAC based on mid-season surveys and the stock assessment in the absence of a pre-season survey.

Dr Jones explained that when quota is implemented, a pre-season survey will be conducted in November each year assessing the number of small lobsters just before they reach legal size and enter the fishery providing a more accurate final TAC estimate. Whilst quota is not being implemented, it is not considered necessary to have the higher level of accuracy of a TAC and therefore AFMA is not conducting the pre-season surveys at this time.

Concerns were raised regarding the take of undersized lobster in PNG making the estimates provided from the mid-season survey inaccurate. Dr Jones explained that they have been using the mid-season survey since 1989 and that the models were seen to be able to account for levels of uncertainty (such as illegal take of lobster) and was able to accurately estimate sustainable levels of take and stock sizes. This has been verified by comparing the estimates from the stock assessment against estimates of stock abundance from the mid-season surveys. Mr David suggested employing Traditional Inhabitants to undertake the Tropical Rock Lobster surveys would overcome some of the high costs of conducting the research. Dr Jones explained that they would like to do this, however there were a number of hurdles they have not been able to overcome to allow this to happen.



The TSFMAC noted the following recommendations provided by the TRLRAG to the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee regarding research priorities for the fishery:

- Collecting baseline information which will be used to assess the impact of environmental change
- Determining the level of discarding in the fishery
- Research into animal husbandry and rearing systems to potentially allow the levels of discarding to be minimised
- Ways to maximise the efficiency of use and collection of fishery independent data for use in stock assessments and other fishery monitoring.

The TSFMAC noted the outcomes and recommendations from Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (Meeting No.9, 5-6 October 2010).

Agenda Item 3.5 Tropical Rock Lobster 2011 Interim Arrangements

A community fisher group meeting was held on 22 November 2010 and discussions were undertaken regarding the 2011 interim arrangements (moon-tide hookah closures and 30% tender reduction) for the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery.

The Committee was informed that there was currently no PZJA decision regarding the reintroduction of interim management arrangements for the fishery in 2011. In addition, the TSFMAC noted that the PZJA agreed to use the 5 Year Business Plan to guide the interim arrangements after 2010.

A suggestion of removing the October and November total closure was discussed by the TSFMAC as a means for increasing the fishing time for Traditional Inhabitants, potentially increasing the relative total catch of Tropical Rock Lobster by this sector. Dr Jones explained that the October and November fishery closure is important as at that time Tropical Rock Lobsters are small. This means that larger numbers of individuals must be harvested to make the same profits compared to if those animals were left in the water for two more months. The closure protects those small lobsters from fishing for two months, allowing them to grow larger. Dr Jones suggested that not reintroducing the moon-tide hookah closures would allow for 25% increase in fishing time for fishers, at a time when the fishery was most active and lobsters were larger leading to increased profits. Dr Jones suggested that this may be a more appropriate means of increasing the amount of time Traditional Inhabitant commercial fishers have available to fish than removing the total fishery closure in October and November.

The TSFMAC felt that discussion of removal of the October/ November fishery closure was an issue for the TRLRAG to consider and it should be raised in this forum before coming to the TSFMAC.

<p>ACTION ITEM 3: AFMA will request the TRLRAG to provide advice to the TSFMAC on the impact of removing the October/ November fishery closure in the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery.</p>

Agenda Item 4.1 Hand Collectables Fishery Update

AFMA presented a summary for the Hand Collectable Fishery for 2010 noting that catch data is provisional only as all catch records for the year are not yet available.

Final results from a 2009 CSIRO survey of Beche de mer in east Torres Strait recommended the TAC for Black Teatfish be increased to 25t. The Hand Collectable Working Group (HCWG) has suggested that this be encompassed in community based harvest strategies currently being developed. A further survey of Sandfish was



conducted by CSIRO on Warrior Reef and nearby areas in 2010 with encouraging numbers and sizes of Sandfish recorded. CSIRO have recommended that a 5t experimental catch survey for Sandfish be undertaken to obtain a further, more accurate estimate of the abundance of this species based on the results of the visual survey. This recommendation was supported by the HCWG in July 2009 (HCWG No. 4). A project proposal is being developed by the CSIRO for consideration for funding by the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee.

The TSFMAC discussed the opportunities for the fishery through increases in the TAC of high value species such as Black Teatfish and Sandfish. Dr Jones stated that any decision to lift the current zero TACs for these species would need to be shown to be linked with sustainable management strategies in community based harvest strategies to ensure that stocks remain sustainable. Harvest strategies have been developed for two communities with the remaining communities planned for the near future when resources are available to undertake this activity. The communities will be requested to work with a consultant to formally document their aspirations for the fishery and work together with management agencies to develop sustainable harvest strategies.

Mr Bedford raised concern that fishing for Sandfish in the Australian jurisdiction would trigger activity in the PNG jurisdiction. Dr Jones explained that PNG have a closure in place for three years which started in October 2009, and that PZJA agencies are encouraging PNG to monitor the closure and only open the fishery if the stock shows recovery. The TSFMAC agreed that PZJA agencies should ensure good communication with PNG if activity in the fishery increases in the Australian jurisdiction to ensure it is understood that sustainable management measures are in place in the Australian jurisdiction.

The TSFMAC noted the hand collectables fishing season summary for 2010 to the limit of records available. Further the TSFMAC noted the progress to developing community based harvest strategies for hand collectables by Erub and Warraber Communities and the recommendations for review of TACs for Black Teatfish and other beche de mer species in conjunction with implementation of community based harvest strategies.

Agenda Item 5.1 2011 Community Consultation visits

AFMA and TSRA plan to conduct consultation visits to Torres Strait communities in early 2011 to discuss the draft Finfish Management Plan and other fisheries issues. The TSFMAC acknowledged that the eastern Torres Strait is most active in the Fishery and therefore have the most interest in the Finfish Management Plan; however other communities will also be welcome to discuss the plan if required. PZJA agencies will send out an information package including dates for the community visits and the agenda for the meetings.

Agenda Item 5.2 Compliance

Community Fisher Group representatives voiced concern regarding the low compliance levels around Thursday Island and questioned the ability to monitor the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery closures. The TSFMAC noted that such concerns should be passed onto the domestic compliance officers, Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol.

Agenda Item 5.3 Next Meeting

The next TSFMAC meeting will be held on Thursday Island in February or March 2011.

Meeting closed: 10.50am

