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Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC)

CHAIRS SUMMARY
TSPMAC 10
30 JUNE – 1 JULY 2010

NORTHERN FISHERIES CENTRE CAIRNS

CHAIR: Mr. Jim Gillespie

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

TSPMAC No. 10, 30 June – 1 July, 2010

The 10th meeting of the Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC) was held at the Northern Fisheries Centre in Cairns on 30 June to 1 July 2010. The key outcomes of the meeting are summarised below. A complete decision record can be found at Attachment A and attendees at Attachment B. To view the agenda item papers referred to in this summary please go to the PZJA website under TSPMAC 10. For further information, please contact Ms Lisa Cocking, the TSPMAC executive officer on (02) 6225 5451.

Industry report

TSPMAC industry members provided an update of the happenings in the fishery for the 2010 season to date. There is less participation than last year with an estimated 6 prawn vessels (varies from 4 – 12 vessels) fishing consistently in the Torres Strait. This was subsequently reflected in the total nights fished, tiger prawn catch (88t compared to 378t average) and endeavour prawn catch (30t compared to 562t average) which were all down when compared to historic averages. Industry members also noted that incidental catch is down for squid and bugs. These declines in commercial catches relate more to a reduction in the overall fishing effort, rather than poor catch rates resulting from low stock biomass. The MAC also discussed the new cargo service, Silentworld Shipping which is now servicing the Torres Strait.

Observers

The MAC noted that the level of observer coverage for the 2010 season had been reduced to 90 days, based on the requirement to achieve 2.6% observer coverage of actual effort in the fishery. Ninety days was considered to be a conservative estimate based on the effort from the 2009 season (2105 days for 2009). It was necessary to be conservative to balance the risk of overshooting the 2.6% target for effort.

Data and Preliminary Trends in Catch and Effort Data

Dr Clive Turnbull presented information on trends in catch and effort data for the TSPF for the 2010 season to date. Catches are well below historic levels and MSY which is a direct result of the very low levels of effort in the fishery. Effort and catch for 2010 appears to be tracking at approximately 60% of 2009 effort and catch. Tiger prawn catch rates (CPUE) are the highest recorded yield in recent years due to fishers targeting tiger prawns & catch being less than the maximum sustainable.

TSPF Harvest Strategy

The TSPMAC discussed the final draft of the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Harvest Strategy. The MAC noted that a few changes had been made to the framework which was agreed to at TSPMAC 9. The first amendment relates to the target reference point. At TSPMAC 9 the MAC agreed that there should be a target reference point of B_{MEY} , however the TAE for the fishery would continue to be set at 9.200 days (which corresponds to B_{MSY}) until triggers under the decision rules were reached. Following TSPMAC 9, it was agreed that this approach wasn't the most appropriate as it may be confusing to set a TAE that is not in alignment with the target for the fishery (i.e. setting a TAE based on sustainability with an economic target). As such, it was agreed that the target should be changed to have a short term target of B_{MSY} with a long term target of B_{MEY} . B_{MEY} would then be set when the targets are reached under the harvest strategy. While this achieves the same objective, it also provides a more

transparent process. The MAC agreed this was a more appropriate management decision.

2011 Total Allowable Effort Limit

The TSPMAC discussed the TAE for the 2011 season and agreed it would be useful to set it now to allow more time for vessel operators to plan their season. It was agreed that the TAE should be set at a level of 9,200 days for the 2011 season. Subsequent to TSPMAC 10, the TSPMAC agreed that the TAE would be set for a 3 year period (as allowed by the management plan) in order to save on administrative costs within the fishery. It was noted that the TAE can be changed within this period if required.

Review of Management Arrangements for the TSPF Including 20m Boat Rule

At TSPMAC 9 (December 2009), the MAC discussed ways in which effort and profitability in the TSPF could be improved. A number of options were identified including changes to gear and vessel restrictions (e.g. the 20m boat limit) a review of closures, allowing fishing in PNG and formalising external leasing arrangements.

At TSPMAC 10, this item was tabled for discussion again. In addition a letter from A Raptis and Sons PTY LTD requesting that the TSPMAC consider the possibility of changing the 20m boat rule among other restrictions to enable NPF (and other) and other vessels to enter the fishery was considered. The MAC discussed the benefits and concerns associated with changing the boat size restrictions and agreed that a discussion paper should be developed. The paper will outline the pros and cons to enable a thorough consideration of the issues. The paper will be considered by the TSPMAC OOS so that it can provide advice to the PZJA.

A summary of the pros and cons raised by the MAC included:

Positives

1. There may be some increase in demand for licenses/ units. However this will be dependant on rules around letting larger vessels in (e.g. larger vessels may have to hold two licenses for one vessel);
2. Profitability of larger boats may be greater depending on other restrictions. Profitability is unlikely to increase without changes to gear restrictions as well.
3. Some MAC members held the view that bigger vessels allow value adding through processing aboard vessels.
4. Increased employment particularly to indigenous sector.

Concerns

1. Increased competition focused around the commencement of the season may cause a pulse fishing effect.
2. There will be a need to ensure fishing power is properly accounted for so effective effort does not increase past the recommend TAE.
3. There are community perceptions around larger boats and a lack of understanding about what this means.
4. There are environmental concerns amongst community about larger boats if they do sink, as they will be more difficult to salvage etc.
5. If there are changes to gear, increased net sizes may make them more dangerous to turtle and dugong.

6. Will we have an open ended change or place a new cap on boats size.
7. If larger vessels come in to the fishery and there are less vessels overall, there will be a need to determine if the increased profits out way increases in levies which will occur through the total costs being spread across a smaller pool of license holders.
8. Compliance concerns with added complexity of different net sizes.

If industry members have any additional support or concerns about the 20m boat rule that are different from those raised above, please contact Lisa Cocking, Senior Management Officer on 02 6225 5451 or at lisa.cocking@afma.gov.au

The MAC discussed the potential for vessels from the NPF to operate in the TSPF should the 20m boat limit be lifted. The MAC noted that NPF vessels would likely operate in the TSPF fishery before and between NPF seasons. It was also noted that there are only a limited number of vessels that have registered interest in entering the fishery at this point in time.

The MAC also noted that the average size of the vessels interested in entering the TSPF was around 22m. In comparison. the majority of the vessels in the TSPF at present are generally 19.5m-20m (was around 18m in the past) although industry members did note that there are several vessel greater than 20m currently operating in the TSPF. The indigenous sector also noted that if this information was explained properly to the traditional sector that concerns surrounding the use of larger vessels would likely be reduced.

The MAC reiterated that if larger vessels were allowed to enter the fishery at some point, managers would need to ensure fishing power is properly considered and thus effective effort does not increase. For example, a bigger vessel may have less days than a smaller one, and there may be less vessels in the fishery as a whole (see table below). It was explained that there are 9,200 effort units in the fishery that are in force for the life of the management plan change. The current TAE of 9,200 days means each effort unit equals one day and is distributed across 61 license holders. If larger boats are introduced, we may only allow for 50 vessels and 5000 days of effort. If larger vessels and different nets are introduced, this may mean there are only 30 license holders allowed in the fishery and only 3000 nights. **(It is important to note that these are only examples that were raised at the meeting for ease of explanation, not official regimes that are being considered at this point).**

	Current situation	Larger boats same nets	Larger boats bigger nets
Effort	9,200	9,200	9,200
Boat	61	50	30
Effective Fishing Days	9,200	5000	3000

Ghost Nets and Marine Debris - Outcome of Survey of Rubbish

The TSPMAC noted the outcome of the survey undertaken to assess the level of commercial rubbish on the seabed adjacent to Kodall Island in an area commonly known as the 'Crabpot'. A reconnaissance survey was undertaken by a survey team from DEEDI with support from Mr Mosby and Kailag Enterprises sponge farm employees. The surveys involved towing a camera which was dropped down from the surface to approximately 20m. This technique proved to be unsuccessful in scoping the wide area of debris on the bottom. As such an additional survey is going to be undertaken later in the year (most probably using community divers to undertake the surveys using gear (cameras etc) provided by DEEDI).

External Leasing

The TSPMAC noted that a draft framework was being developed to provide for external leasing in the TSPF however the concept is yet to go to the PZJA Standing Committee for consideration. The policy needs to go through the PZJA SC before it can be progressed.

Fisheries QLD commented that they needed TSPMAC advice regarding the process in which licenses will be transferred back at the end of the season to the owner. It was explained that the QLD East Coast Trawl Fishery currently has a system whereby the license is transferred back once the licensing system is initiated for a season. This would occur before the new levy invoices are paid. Because this system is already in place in the East Coast Fishery it will reduce costs of administering it in the TSPF. The TSPMAC agreed that this would be the best option.

TSPF draft budget

The MAC discussed the draft budget for the TSPF. The overall combined cost recovered budget for AFMA and QLD was \$473,043 for 2010/11, a reduction of \$66,337 compared to 2009/10. The AFMA portion of the budget makes up \$303,166 (this includes a government contribution of \$21,853), a reduction of \$49,744 compared to 2009/10. The QLD component is \$169,876, a decrease of \$16,595 compared to last year.

The MAC discussed the need to source permanent funding for the ongoing data analysis that is currently undertaken by Clive Turnbull at Fisheries QLD. The MAC noted that this sort of data analysis is usually cost recovered through the levies under general salary costs. However this fishery hasn't done this to date as it was fortunate to receive some additional funding for this work for a period. It was noted that this funding had not ceased and this work needs to be funding in an ongoing way. The MAC agreed that it should be put into the levies and additional savings should be sought through other areas in the budget including further reducing observer days. It was noted that coverage is getting to a low level and it is possible that we could go over budget in order to ensure we are meeting the 2.6% effort requirement under the Strategic Assessment Report if effort increases. If this occurs, the money will be recovered the following season through levies.

The MAC also acknowledged that the TSPMAC will need to provide some advice at some point over the next 12 months regarding the Cost Recovery Impact Statement and its application to the TSPF.

TSPMAC 10 decision record

- 1.1.1 The TSPMAC **AGREED** to adopt the minutes from the TSPMAC 9 meeting held on December 8-9, 2009.
- 1.2.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the information updates provided regarding the action items from previous TSPMAC meetings.
- 1.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the correspondence received since the last TSPMAC meeting.
- 2.1.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the Industry report provided verbally in respect of the 2010 Torres Strait Prawn Fishery, both the season to date and an outlook.
- 2.2.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the information updates on the management of the TSPF.
- 2.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the Domestic Compliance Report for the period December 2009 to June 2010.
- 2.4.1 That TSPMAC **NOTED** the current environment report.
- 2.4.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** whether the observer program objectives and protocols could be improved to collect more useful data for the TSPF.
- 2.5.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the final catch statistics for the 2009 fishing season; and the preliminary information presented on the monthly trends in the 2010 catch and effort data compared with earlier years.
- 3.1.1 That the TSPMAC **NOTED** workload requirements related to data assessment and reporting in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF).
 - 3.1.2 That the TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the possibility of funding routine data assessment and reporting work through observer programme savings and **AGREED** that these services should be recovered through the levies for the 2010/11 budget, noting AFMA will try to make additional savings in observer and overhead costs.
- 4.1.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**:
 - (a) *the draft TSPF Harvest Strategy which will be provided to the PZJA via the PZJA Standing Committee for consideration and endorsement;*
 - (b) *the reasons for setting the harvest strategy target at B_{MSY} instead of B_{MEY} ; and*
 - (d) *the progress on PZJA agencies reviewing the profitability of the current management arrangements for the TSPF.*
- 4.1.2 The TSPMAC **AGREED** that an amendment should be made under trigger 1 to include “within the Australian jurisdiction” so it is clear this is not referring to effort with the PNG and Australian jurisdiction combined.

- 4.1.3 the TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** the draft TSPF harvest strategy to the PZJA noting the changes recommended by the TSPMAC.
- 4.1.4 TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that the TAE for the 2011 season for the TSPF be set at 9,200 days in accordance with the draft harvest strategy..
- 4.2.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the letter received from A Raptis and Sons PTY LTD requesting that the TSPMAC consider the possibility of lifting the 20m boat rule for the TSPF.
- 4.2.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED**;
- a) the option of removing the 20m boat rule from the TSPF to facilitate full utilisation of the fishery resource within the sustainability and economic guidelines of the harvest strategy.
 - b) The pros and cons or concerns of the TSPMAC regarding the removal of the 20m boat rule.
- 4.2.3 The TSPMAC **CONSIDERED** the range of issues, both positive and negative regarding the 20m boat limit for the TSPF.
- 4.2.4 The TSPMAC **AGREED** to further explore ways to increase the participation with the TSPF to benefit all stakeholders.
- 4.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**:
- (a) The outcome of the survey which identified the level of marine debris problem on the seabed adjacent to Kodall Island; and
 - (b) That TSRA, DEEDI and the community will continue to explore options on removal of marine debris; if that is the preferred option once the investigation is complete.
- 4.3.2 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the concerns with the level of the marine debris in the area of the crabpot and supports the initiative for it to be removed.
- 4.4.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**:
- a) The status of the actions regarding the sponge farm from TSPMAC 9 which sought to eliminate the potential risk to personnel and infrastructure on the farm site;
 - b) The CFG representative for Masig's concerns that more work could still be done to eliminate risks to personnel and infrastructure on the site;
 - c) The recent report from *Kailag Enterprises Sponge aquaculture farm*;
- 4.5.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** progress regarding the development of more formal external leasing arrangements in the TSPF.
- 4.5.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** potential business rules surrounding the temporary transfer of licences.
- 4.5.3 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that the external leasing policy provide for the temporary transfer of licenses to occur using the same method that is currently used for temporary transfer of units in the TSPF.

- 4.6.1 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the final draft of the industry code of practice for responsible disposal of marine debris.
- 4.6.2 The TSPMAC **AGREED** to the content of the industry code of practice for responsible disposal of marine debris with the suggested amendments.
- 4.6.3 TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that the code of practice be printed and distributed to license holders with the 2011 season handbook and the weblink on the PZJA website be provided to license holders through the industry TSPMAC 9 letter.
- 4.7.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**;
- a) that the investment warning in the TSPF is no longer considered necessary now that the TSPF Management Plan 2008 has been implemented; and
 - b) that the Investment Warning for the TSPF is not currently up on the PZJA website.
- 4.7.2 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that the TSPF investment warning be lifted.
- 4.7.3 The TSPMAC **AGREED** that PZJA agencies should seek to lift the investment warning.
- 5.1.1 That the TSPMAC **NOTED**;
- a) the draft 2010/11 budget for the TSPF which is based on the PZJA approved cost recovery framework (AFMA's 2004 Cost Recovery Impact Statement (CRIS)); and
 - b) that AFMA has a new cost recovery framework for 2010 onwards and that the PZJA will be asked to consider whether this CRIS should apply to the entire TSPF budget. To advise the PZJA the TSPMAC will be asked later in 2010 to consider various options.
- 5.1.2 TSPMAC **AGREED** to include the costs for routine data analysis for the TSPF in the budget, to request that AFMA reduce observers to 60 days on the basis that this would still meet the target observer coverage and to request that AFMA review overheads.

The TSPMAC **NOTED**;

- 6.2.1 the research priorities for the Torres Strait Prawn fishery identified by the Torres Strait Scientific Committee for its 2010 draft Annual Operational Plan; and
- 6.2.2 That the TSPMAC will be given opportunity to provide feedback if appropriate at an OOS meeting in the coming months.

TSPMAC 10 attendees

Members
Chair – Mr Jim Gillespie
AFMA and EO – Ms Lisa Cocking
QPIF – Mr Ian Jacobsen
QPIF – Mr Eddie Jebreen
AFMA – Mr Malcolm Southwell
Scientific member – Mr Clive Turnbull QPIF
QBFP – Mr Bob Russell
Industry – Mr Marshall Betzel
Industry – Mr Ron Earle
CFG – Mr Gavin Mosby
CFG – Mr Francis Pearson
TSRA – Mr Neville Nakata