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Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC)

CHAIR'S SUMMARY
TSPMAC NO. 8
16-17 JUNE 2009

NORTHERN FISHERIES CENTRE
CAIRNS

CHAIR: Mr. Jim Gillespie

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

TSPMAC No. 8, 16-17 JUNE, 2009

The 8th meeting of the Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC) was held at the Northern Fisheries Centre in Cairns on 16-17 June 2009. The key outcomes of the meeting are summarised below. A complete decision record can be found at Attachment A and attendees at attachment B. TSPMAC 8 papers can be found on the PZJA website. For further information, please contact Ms Lisa Cocking, the TSPMAC executive officer on (02) 6225 5451.

Industry report – 2008 season summary

Industry member Mr Marshall Betzel stated that operators can't afford to fish for the amount of product they are catching given the current economic circumstances. The TSPMAC discussed that the exchange rate of the Yen is affecting the export market. Mr Betzel added that the depressed market in Japan is having more effect on exporting than the exchange rate and all prawn fisheries are having a problem with exporting. He added that the Japanese are moving towards more western food which reduces the market however these trends usually work in cycles and will likely change again in the future.

TSPMAC industry members also discussed the logistical constraints which are reducing fishing. Due to a reduced number and frequency of mother ships and withdrawal of the direct air service, transferring crew and obtaining parts for vessel maintenance are all difficult and less economical to deal with.

Mr Winston Harris of the Queensland Seafood Industry Association indicated that a TSPF license holder had concern regarding the increase in levies especially considering the lack of formal external leasing. This means license holders with vessels in no boat status have no safe mechanism for recuperating costs from their license.

Ms Cocking from AFMA questioned whether industry members were aware of any leasing of effort units which is occurring in the fishery to date. The TSPMAC industry members commented that they are not aware of any leasing thus far this season. They added that the allocation of the PNG nights has decreased the need to lease.

2008 Observer program report

TSPMAC discussed the current limitations of the observer program including limited temporal and spatial coverage across the season and fleet and the need to improve this to ensure robust data collection. They also discussed the current level of observer coverage in the fishery, being 180 days and the methods of changing this level of coverage to reflect the current effort level in the fishery. The TSPMAC acknowledged that the requirement of the observer program is to have a robust level of observer coverage and if we can ensure it is robust, the level can be changed. That TSPMAC agreed that a letter should be drafted to DEWHA regarding the level of observer coverage in the TSPF requesting a change to a percentage of coverage to reflect the current effort levels in the fishery. The letter should also explain that the current percentage of effort is on par with other Australian Fisheries and that we are undertaking a process to increase temporal and spatial coverage of observers to improve data collection.

The TSPMAC agreed that PZJA agencies should review the pros and cons of a crew member observer program and a traditional sector observer program as a method of reducing costs.

Compliance Report

Compliance breaches were minimal in the 2008 season and the TSPMAC discussed the need to review the fisheries infringement notice system to allow on the spot fines for specific simple infringements which would make compliance operations more effective and cost efficient.

The TSPMAC discussed avenues for improving real time response to compliance risks including the possibility of utilising the land and sea management unit ranger vessels.

The TSPMAC recommended that QPI&F undertake a review of the level of effort and efficiency of the compliance program and the fisheries infringement notice system for presentation to the PZJA Standing Committee.

TSPMAC discussed the concern from Community Fisher Group representatives of fishing vessels operating within close proximity to home reefs. CFGs commented that they thought there was an agreement not to operate within 1nm of home reefs and the TSPMAC agreed that they should present a paper with a proposal for consideration at the next TSPMAC.

Environment Report

The TSPMAC discussed the major environmental matters effecting the TSPF at present including:

- The fishery has export approval for product until 25 February 2012 in line with management arrangements under the TSPF management plan;
- AFMA are currently determining whether a full SAFE assessment must be conducted through the ecological risk assessment process or whether Dr Roland Pitcher's report can be used;
- Educating license holders that as long as you are operating in line with the management plan and relevant legislation which take all reasonable steps to prevent interactions with protected species, it is not an offence to interact with protected species however it is an offence not to report these interactions;
- quarterly reports for protected species interactions are developed by DEWHA and are available on the AFMA website;
- In 2009 in the TSPF there was an interaction rate of 0.08 protected individuals per trawl shot in the fishery;
- Marine bioregional plans are not occurring in the TSPZ however the North and East plans may affect TSPF operators as they surround the fishery. The plans aim to be finished by mid to late 2010.

Final report for the research program

2008 season summary

Information on the 2008 fishing season and from the final report to come out of the DAFF funded research project was presented. Endeavour prawn catch has decreased steadily with the decrease in effort since 2001 and tiger prawn catch has remained similar, demonstrating that fishers are shifting and focusing on catching tiger prawns and not endeavour prawns. Unstandardised catch rates suggest tiger prawn CPUE is high indicating high biomass and the lower tiger prawn catch in 2008 is likely due to less effort rather than stock abundance.

The key points to come out of the research project include:

- the stock in the PNG area is a continuation of the stock in the Australian area.
- Approximately 18% of the stock is in the PNG area, equating to the 200t estimate that has been used for the catch sharing calculations.
- The area around Yorke island has the highest proportion of tiger prawns and CPUE.
- Highest spawning rates occur in the deeper water for tiger prawns and shallower areas for endeavour prawns.
- if tiger prawns are managed effectively then the endeavour prawn stock should also be effectively managed.

Future funding for stock assessments

The TSPMAC discussed the ongoing research needs for the fishery and the need to find new funding sources as previous funding sources have now been exhausted. They acknowledged that PZJA agencies have presented a paper to the PZJA Standing Committee with potential options for funding future stock assessments run by QPI&F to ensure the long term research needs for the fishery are secure.

TSPF Management Plan Objectives

The TSPMAC discussed and noted the objectives of the TSPF management plan 2008 and avenues for achieving these objectives within the specified timeframes. During these discussions the TSPMAC agreed that PZJA agencies should develop an article to distribute positive information regarding the TSPF including bycatch reduction for presentation in forums including the TSRA newsletter, the QSIA news letter and the Torres News.

Harvest Strategy

The TSPMAC acknowledged that the first meeting of the TSPF harvest strategy working group met the day before the TSPMAC and includes representatives from PZJA agencies, industry and harvest strategy experts. The working group will report to the TSPMAC and is responsible for assisting in the development of the harvest strategy which will put into place the decision making processes for determining the TAE for a given season.

The harvest strategy meeting resulted in a timeline and work plan for the group. The TSPMAC agreed that a letter should be distributed to TSPF license holders informing them of the industry contacts for providing comments regarding the HS. The TSPMAC also agreed that it would be useful to conduct port visits to liaise with the wider industry regarding the HS if it fits within budget constraints.

External leasing

The TSPMAC discussed the methods of “external leasing” that are currently occurring in the fishery and that there are a number of license holders for and against external leasing. Although PZJA agencies are not against external leasing, there has been no policy shift pushing them to promote it, the increase in use of informal “external leasing” arrangements have stemmed from industry members requesting information on avenues for transferring effort.

The TSPMAC agreed that a letter be developed for distribution to industry which will include:

- a) information on the current external leasing arrangements and their risks;
- b) how formal leasing arrangements would be facilitated by PZJA agencies;
- c) a questionnaire asking if license holders are for or against external leasing and stating that a lack of response will be considered a vote for external leasing.

Ghost nets and marine debris – Industry code of conduct

TSPMAC discussed the progress on the development of an industry code of conduct for addressing the responsible disposal of marine debris in the TSPF and the proposal to clean up trawl rubbish in the areas around York and Coconut Islands. The TSPMAC agreed that PZJA agencies will work with TSPMAC industry members to develop the code of conduct out of session and TSPMAC industry members commented on the importance of ensuring the code is well publicised at every possible opportunity to ensure its successful uptake. The TSPMAC also discussed the benefits of reducing trawl rubbish that it will make the fishery more marketable.

The TSPMAC agreed that it would be beneficial for PZJA agencies to liaise with TSRA regarding developing a funding proposal for scoping the level of marine debris in the TSPF and costs of removal as the TSRA have been successful at getting funding for similar projects in the past.

PZJA decision making process

TSPMAC discussed the request from past TSPMAC industry members to develop a PZJA decision making protocol paper. The process for developing the paper was discussed at TSPMAC 7 where PZJA agencies requested assistance from an industry member to develop the paper. TSPMAC industry members at the time decided not to be a part of the process.

The TSPMAC questioned whether this is a bureaucratic issue rather than a TSPMAC issue and agreed that it would be useful for industry to know how the decision making processes occur as it is complex and difficult to understand. The TSPMAC identified that the decision making processes are already outlined in the handbook and thus there is little need to develop something else however the issue could be raised again in future if needed.

Dissemination of information from the TSPMAC to TSPF license holders

The TSPMAC discussed the methods of ensuring information from the TSPMAC is being disseminated to the TSPF license holders. TSPMAC industry members agreed to write a short summary report from the TSPMAC to be provided to the TSPF license holders which would be distributed through the TSPMAC executive officer. The TSPMAC also agreed that it would be beneficial to publish positive information regarding bycatch reduction and other positive aspects of the fishery in local papers and newsletters such as the TSRA and QSIA newsletters and the Cairns post.

Sponge farming

Community Fisher Group representatives of the TSPMAC presented information on sponge farm project occur in the Torres Strait. They commented they are hoping to close the nearby areas to traffic to protect the sponge farming infrastructure and explained that there would be selected areas that anchorage would be allowed which have been agreed to by the local communities.

The TSPMAC acknowledged the need to consult with TSPMAC license holders the loss of trawl grounds for these farms and the TSPMAC agreed that information should be provided in this project in the TSPMAC summary which will be distributed to industry members.

Attachment A TSPMAC No. 8 DECISION RECORD

MEETING ADMINISTRATION

Ratification of TSPMAC No. 7 meeting record

8.1.1.1 The TSPMAC **AGREED** to adopt the minutes from the December 11, 2008 TSPMAC meeting (TSPMAC No. 7).

Ratification of OOS TSPMAC meeting and OOS decisions

8.1.2.1 The TSPMAC **AGREED** to adopt the minutes of the out of session teleconference TSPMAC held on 9 February 2009 (Attachment 1.2A); and

8.1.2.2 The TSPMAC **CONFIRMED** the out-of-session decisions from the TSPMAC at the 9 February 2009 OOS meeting.

Actions and/or business arising from previous TSPMAC meetings

8.1.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the information updates provided regarding the action items from previous TSPMAC meetings.

PZJA FMP No. 1

8.1.4.1 The TSPMAC **AGREED** to abide by all policies for the operation and administration of Management Advisory Committees as described in PZJA FMP No.1 (May 2008).

REPORTS

History of recent management decisions and future developments for the fishery (AFMA)

8.2.1.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the presentation on the recent history of management decisions and future developments for the TSPF.

Industry update – 2008 season and 2009 to date

8.2.2.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the Industry report provided verbally in respect of the 2008 Torres Strait Prawn Fishery season and 2009 season to date.

2008 Observer program report

8.2.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the activity in the observer program in the fishery for the 2008 season and the update of observer activity in 2009.

observer program – coverage and objectives

8.2.4.1 That the TSPMAC **AGREED**:

- a) on the need to increase the number of Torres Strait Prawn Vessels participating in the TSPF Observer program and that the TSPMAC industry members have agreed to encourage TSPF license holders to take observers.
- b) that AFMA determine the process and costs associated with determining a robust level of observer coverage for the fishery.
- c) that AFMA explore the possibility of having islander observers participate in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery observer program.
- d) that AFMA should determine whether budgeted observer savings (i.e. not using all budgeted days) can be rolled into the following years budget.

8.2.4.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the reviewed set of objectives for the TSPF observer program and agreed that further objectives should be developed by AFMA in consultation with the TSRA, CFGs and TSPMAC Industry members.

Compliance report

8.2.5.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the Domestic Compliance Report, Period August 08 to April 2009.

8.2.5.2 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that QPI&F undertake a review of the level of effort and efficiency of the compliance program for presentation to the PZJA Standing Committee.

8.2.5.3 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that a review of the Fisheries Infringement Notice system and benefits it will offer to the fishery should be conducted and an options paper provided to the PZJA Standing Committee.

8.2.5.4 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the concerns of the traditional sector about TSPF vessels operating within close proximity to the reef and agreed that the CFG's should develop a paper regarding this for presentation at TSPMAC 9.

Environment report

8.2.6.1 That TSPMAC **NOTED**

- a) the environment update provided at Attachment 2.6A;
- b) the recommendations of the strategic assessment report;
- c) the current status of the Ecological Risk Assessment Process for the TSPF, including the intention to review the need to conduct a SAFE assessment for the fishery and estimated costs associated with this;
- d) The protected species interactions for the 2008 season and that it is not an offence to interact with a protected species in the TSPF however is an offence not to report these interactions;
- e) Information about Marine Bioregional Planning (MBP) the regions adjacent to the TSPF noting the MBPs are not applicable to Torres Strait Fisheries.

RESEARCH

Torres Strait Prawn Research Program - Final report

8.3.1.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**;

- a) the final report for DAFF consultancy of QPIF titled the Torres Strait Spatial Management Research Project 2007-09;
- b) the final catch and effort estimates for the 2008 fishing season; and
- c) the preliminary catch and effort information for the 2009 season.

Future funding for stock assessments

8.3.2.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**:

- (a) Resources required for research/scientific advice in the Torres Strait Prawn Fisheries (TSPF) are provided by Queensland Primary Industries and Fisheries (QPIF) with funding coming from a range of sources;
- (b) The current funding agreement between the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and QPIF which provides funding for the current research into the TSPF is due to end on 12 June 2009; and
- (c) The PZJA are currently in the process of identifying an appropriate source of funding for research/scientific advice in the TSPF post 12 June 2009.

Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee

8.3.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** that:

- (a) The former Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) ceased in August 2006 with the closure of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) Torres Strait;
- (b) Following the cessation of the CRC, the TSSAC and Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) agencies reviewed the research prioritisation and funding process occurring within the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ);
- (c) At the PZJA 21 meeting the following items were agreed upon:
 - i. the composition of the TSSAC including the chair (see attachment 3.1A)
 - ii. change to the terms of reference (TOR) to reflect the TSSAC's return to being solely a PZJA advisory body (see attachment 3.1B).
 - iii. the TSSAC be requested to consider its role on providing advice on a range of issues for the Torres Strait Prawn fishery, including stock assessment advice

MANAGEMENT

TSPF Management Plan Objectives

8.4.1.1 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** and **NOTED** the objectives set out in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Management Plan 2009 and the timeline for achievement.

FMI's– Update

8.4.2.1 That the TSPMAC **NOTED** the progress on implementing five Fisheries Management Instruments (FMIs) and the time frame for getting them registered.

Long-term Harvest Strategy

8.4.3.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the progress of the development of a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery and the timeline to come out of the TSPF HS working group meeting.

8.4.3.2 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that a letter be distributed to TSPF industry members to inform them of the development of the HS and processes for providing comment during its development.

External leasing

8.4.4.1 That the TSPMAC **NOTED** that:

- a) Industry members have repeatedly stated that the level of economic viability in the TSPF is marginal, this statement has been reflected in recent publications from the Bureau of Rural Science (BRS);
- b) That fisheries management options exist in the TSPF to transfer effort units (days) on a permanent or non permanent basis;
- c) That external legal arrangement options exist for licenced operators in the TSPF to transfer effort units (days) to vessels currently not licenced in the TSPF;
- d) While some industry members of TSPMAC have requested that external leasing be prevented in the TSPF this has not been the unanimous view of industry;
- e) Whilst the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) do not actively promote the use of external leasing arrangements PZJA agencies consider that external leasing is a beneficial mechanism for providing greater economic benefit to industry;

- f) Industry members perceive that the current private external leasing arrangements are burdensome, prohibitively difficult and confusing; and
- g) PZJA agencies would be willing to consider facilitating external leasing if this was broadly supported by industry and the TSPMAC; providing that any arrangements do not result in an unacceptable transfer of business risk from licence holders to the PZJA.

8.4.4.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the current fisheries management arrangements and external arrangements currently being used by industry members to transfer effort and licenses in the TSPF.

8.4.4.3 The TSPMAC **AGREED** that a letter be developed for distribution to industry which will include:

- d) information on the current external leasing arrangements and their risks;
- e) how formal leasing arrangements would be facilitated by PZJA agencies;
- f) a questionnaire asking if license holders are for or against external leasing and stating that a lack of response will be considered a vote for external leasing.

Ghost nets and marine debris

8.4.5.1 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** a method for developing an industry code of conduct for the responsible disposal of fisheries associated marine debris, including gear loss and marine waste within the fishery aligning it where possible with the recommendations of the Threat Abatement Plan.

8.4.5.2 The TSPMAC **AGREED** that AFMA should work with TSPMAC industry members to develop the industry code of conduct OOS.

8.4.5.3 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** and **NOTED**:

- a) the PZJA agencies intention to conduct an “in house” preliminary marine debris assessment of trawl rubbish in the area around Yorke and Coconut Islands.
- b) the need to engage CFG stakeholders when undertaking the surveys to ensure they are effective and other impacted sites are identified.

8.4.5.4 The TSPMAC agreed that PZJA agencies should liaise with TSRA regarding developing a funding proposal for scoping the level of marine debris in the area around Yorke and Coconut Islands and costs of removal. The proposal will include a two tiered study:

- scoping the extent of trawl rubbish; and
- removing the trawl rubbish.

Survey of Turtle Excluder Devices, Bycatch Reduction Devices and Try-Nets

8.4.6.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** and **APPROVED** the final BRD survey (attachment 4.6A) pending it being user friendly following completion by a subset of TSPF industry members.

8.4.6.2 The TSPMAC **NOTED** PZJA agencies intentions to postpone any technical review of the BRDs used on prawn vessels in the TSPF considering the other research priorities in the fishery at present.

Australian Maritime College BRD trials

8.4.7.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the preliminary results provide by the Australian Maritime College regarding the use of light as a bycatch reduction device in prawn trawl fisheries.

TSPMAC decision making protocols paper

8.4.8.1 That the TSPMAC **NOTED**:

- a) that at TSPMAC 7 industry members raised concerns with senior PZJA agencies officials over the way that decisions are progressed to the PZJA.
- b) that at TSPMAC 7 agreement could not be reached for the development of the TSPMAC decision making protocols.

8.4.8.2 That the TSPMAC **AGREED** that there is no need to develop a protocol paper for the decision making processes as there are already protocols in place that are outlined in the TSPF handbook.

8.4.8.3 The TSPMAC **NOTED** that the TSPMAC decision making protocols can be readdressed in the future if need be.

FINANCE

Budget update

8.5.1.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED**:

(a) that the TSPF budget has not been finalized as AFMA are still awaiting a decision regarding which cost recovery impact statement will be used to attribute costs for the TSPF budget.

(b) that the final budget would be presented to the TSPMAC OOS, likely with the 2010 levies.

Independent Chair costing

8.5.2.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the costs that would be incurred by hiring an independent chair for the TSPMAC.

OTHER BUSINESS

TSPMAC Self Assessment Process

8.6.1.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** and **DISCUSSED** the performance criteria for the TSPMAC self assessment process.

8.6.1.2 The TSPMAC **AGREED** that a self assessment would be conducted at the first TSPMAC meeting in 2010.

Attachment B – TSPMAC 8 attendance

Members	Permanent observers
Chair – Mr Jim Gillespie	DAFF – Mr Anthony Cuthbert (16 th) and Mr Mark Rowsell (17 th)
QPI&F – Mr Shane Fava	BRS – Mr James Woodhams
QPI&F – Mr Eddie Jebreen	PNG – Mr Phillip Polon (17 th)
AFMA – Mr Stan Lui	
AFMA & EO – Ms Lisa Cocking	
Research – Mr Clive Turnbull QDPI&F	Observers
Industry – Mr Marshall Betzal	Steve Hall – TSRA
Industry – Mr Ronald Earle	Mr Ian Jacobsen - QPI&F
CFG – Mr Gavin Morsby	Ms Carissa Featweather – QPI&F
CFG – Charles David	Mr Damien Miley - TSRA
CFG – Francis Pearson	Mr David Maynard – Australian Maritime College
TSRA – Mr Neville Nakata	
QPI&F compliance – Mr Lyndon Pedell	