



## Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee

Meeting #57

Townsville, 7 March 2012

# CHAIR'S SUMMARY

Chair: Mr Ian Cartwright

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

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The 57<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) was held in Townsville on 7 March 2012.

### **Major outcomes**

The TSSAC:

- Recommended two full research proposals for funding in the 2012/13 financial year provisional on the PIs satisfactorily addressing the amendments requested by the TSSAC.
- Noted presentations regarding Turtle and Dugong research in the Torres Strait and Turtle and Dugong Community Based Management Plans.
- Reaffirmed their agreement to recommend that an independent review of Turtle and Dugong research in the Torres Strait be conducted.

### **TSSAC Research**

#### **Indigenous Fisheries Workshop Outcomes**

The TSSAC noted that the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) will discuss the potential to conduct an Indigenous Fisheries Workshop with the Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC) at their upcoming meeting in mid-May.

#### **Turtle and Dugong presentations**

The TSSAC noted presentations from Dr Mark Hamann on Turtle research and Professor Helene Marsh on Dugong in the Torres Strait.

Dr Hamann's research indicates that although recruitment of Turtles to the Torres Strait is low, the overall population of green Turtles in Australia is large and many key nesting and foraging habitats are protected. However, work on hatchling production, recruitment and impacts of climate change on habitat is necessary to prevent decline in future years. Prof. Marsh's research indicates that Dugong numbers have not declined and the population is genetically healthy. However, there is uncertainty as to the current level of removal from the stock by hunting and other non-natural sources of mortality and, therefore, the sustainability of the fishery.

Mr Stan Lui from the TSRA gave a presentation to the Committee on Turtle and Dugong Community Based Management Plans. Seven Plans have been implemented, and another eight are in the process of implementation. Whilst there are challenges still to overcome, such as the Plans not being legislated and compliance being voluntary, the Plans mark an important step in managing fishing at the community level. The degree of sensitivity needed to successfully gain the confidence of communities and thereby ensure the Plans are implemented effectively was emphasised.

#### **Research projects overview**

All research projects currently funded by AFMA and supported by the TSSAC are progressing and are on track.

#### **AFMA data storage systems**

The TSSAC noted the current capability of AFMA to store some research data. AFMA stores data from commercial fishing logbooks, observer programs and vessel monitoring systems (VMS). However, data from research projects undertaken by external parties is not usually stored on AFMA systems. The Intellectual Property of the data resides with the party who undertakes the research in most cases and the formats are often different to

what AFMA databases are designed to hold. There was some support for investigating the storage of data at locations that can ensure long-term data storage and management, such as CSIRO, where there is considerable experience and expertise in this field. AFMA is not equipped to offer such services and universities and other organisations are similarly not always set up to handle long-term data storage and management.

AFMA database managers have suggested that, in the first instance, the TSSAC consider creating a data catalogue to collate metadata on data from research projects. The catalogue would include information on the storage location of the data and its format, as well as accessibility of the data to third parties. The TSSAC will discuss engaging someone to undertake this work at TSSAC 58.

### **Update from AFMA working groups and committees**

The Committee was provided with an update from the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group. The Committee agreed with the recommendation from the Working Group to bring forward the timeframe for the research priority '*Complete assessment and estimate Total Allowable Catch for target species*' to 2013 from 2015 given that activity in the fishery is increasing. This will be changed in the Annual Operational Plan when it is next updated.

The Committee also noted the status update for Torres Strait fisheries.

### **TSSAC processes**

#### Assessment of full proposals for the 2012/13 financial year

The TSSAC assessed two full proposals for Torres Strait research for funding in the 2012/13 financial year. The Committee agreed to recommend two projects to AFMA for funding subject to some amendments being made to the full proposals. The Committee withheld a recommendation on the third project until a full proposal is submitted. The Committee noted a further proposal provided to the group outside the normal funding cycle but did not have sufficient time at this meeting to assess it in detail. As this project had links to one of the recommended research projects, the TSSAC requested that linkages between the two groups be considered through the supported project.

#### Strategic Research Plan mid-term review

The Committee noted the suggested changes to the Strategic Research Plan but, due to limited time at the meeting, requested the changes be reviewed by members out-of-session.

#### Research priorities table

The Committee considered a method for facilitating the objective ranking of research priorities recommended by the Torres Strait Working Groups and Committees, as well as for monitoring research activities against these priorities. The Committee agreed that the proposed content and layout of the table will be useful in allowing the TSSAC to rank and update research priorities as well as communicating the priorities to Torres Strait working groups and committees. The table forming the basis of the suggested method will be further refined at the next meeting of the TSSAC.

#### Independent review of Turtle and Dugong scientific research

The Committee discussed the need for an independent review of Turtle and Dugong research following the previous discussions of the TSSAC, comments provided by the TSRA to the group and the research presentations at this meeting.

The majority of the Committee felt that an independent review would objectively assess the capacity of the available research to inform the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) of the efficacy of current management measures to ensure a sustainable fishery. The Committee highlighted the need to use previous reports where possible and avoid overlaps with recent reviews that have occurred in the past or that are planned for the future. The Committee noted that similar reviews are common among both state and federal fisheries research organisations and have yielded many positive results. Such reviews are not aimed at denigrating the current or previous research, but provide a valuable opportunity to review and suggest enhancements to current research efforts based on past and present research, both in the Torres Strait and other relevant situations. The Committee noted the ongoing efforts of Torres Strait communities under individual Community Based Management Plans for Turtle and Dugong and stressed that the review must not undermine this key initiative. The TSSAC also stressed that the TSRA and researchers should be encouraged to engage with the review process wherever possible to ensure that maximum benefit is derived from it.

Whilst the majority of the Committee supported an independent review, it was noted that the TSRA were strongly opposed.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Cartwright', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Mr Ian Cartwright**  
**TSSAC Chair**

In attendance at TSSAC 57 were:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest</b>
Mr Ian Cartwright	Chairperson	Consultant, AFMA Commissioner
Dr Annabel Jones	AFMA Representative	Manager, Thursday Island
Ms Rebecca Williams	Executive Officer (AFMA)	Senior Management Officer, Canberra
Dr Michael O'Neill	Scientist	Agri Science QLD, DEEDI
Dr Roland Pitcher	Scientist	CSIRO researcher
Dr Stephen Newman	Scientist	WA fisheries scientist
Ms Sevaly Sen	Social/Economics Member	Consultant
Mr Tony Vass	Industry Representative	Ex Mackerel Licence Holder
Mr Steve Hall	TSRA representative	Fisheries Policy Officer
Mr Gavin Mosby	Traditional Inhabitant representative	Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee member
Mr Stan Lui	Observer/presenter	TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit
Mr Daniel Takai	Observer	

#### **Apologies**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest</b>
Dr Ian Jacobsen	Fisheries Queensland Representative	Fisheries Queensland Fisheries Manager
Mr Ludwig Kumoru	PNG Representative	PNG National Fisheries Authority