

TORRES STRAIT SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEE	Meeting 57 7-8 March 2012
Update from Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group	Agenda Item No. 3.1 FOR DECISION

PURPOSE

That the TSSAC:

1. **NOTE** the major outcomes from the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group.
2. **CONSIDER** the HCGW recommendation to bring forward the timeframe to 'Complete assessment and estimate TAC for target species', to 2013 from 2015 as set out in research area 1a) of the 2011 Annual Operation Plan.

BACKGROUND

The most recent Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG) was held on Thursday Island on the 29 and 30 of November 2011. The HCWG was informed that 2010 activity and catch in all hand collectable fisheries was insignificant. However, there had been a significant increase in effort in the Bêche de mer fishery in 2011. At the time of the meeting substantial numbers of white teatfish (>13 tonne) and prickly redfish (>10 tonne) had been collected by operations using hookah gear under development permits during the 2011 season.

The major outcomes from HCWG 5 were as follows:

- 1) The CSIRO sandfish survey results from Warrior Reef were presented to the HCWG showing some signs of recovery, however overall abundance was not found to have increased from previous surveys.
- 2) PhD candidate Alifereti Tawake presented two Community-based Hand Collectable Fisheries Harvest Strategies developed by Erub and Warraber communities.
- 3) The HCWG agreed to recommend to the Torres Strait Fisheries Management Advisory Committee that a 15 tonne Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for black teatfish be introduced to be fished for a maximum of one month during the Tropical Rock Lobster hookah season. This will be provisional on a quota monitoring system (including mandatory reporting of catch) being agreed to by the PZJA agencies based on options presented to the HCWG by the Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC) members with assistance from the TSRA.
- 4) The HCWG agreed to recommend to the Torres Strait Fisheries Management Advisory Committee that blackfish and deepwater redfish be removed from the current 80 tonne 'other species' TAC and introduce individual 5 and 25 tonne TACs respectively for these species.
- 5) The HCWG considered the current restriction on use of hookah in the Bêche de mer fishery and agreed to review the ban in twelve months when more information from the two current developmental permits allowing for the use of hookah gear is available.

- 6) The HCWG considered the current restriction for Traditional Inhabitant (TIB) licence holders in the Bêche de mer fishery to fish from vessels less than 7m in length. The IFAC members requested more time to consider the views of community members and fishers on the current restriction before the HCWG makes a recommendation on this management arrangement.
- 7) The HCWG considered the research priorities in the 2011 Annual Operational Plan and agreed that there were no additional priorities for the hand collectable fisheries to recommend to the TSSAC at this time. However it was agreed by the HCWG that the timeframe set for research area 1a) within the 2011 Annual Operation Plan '*Complete assessment and estimate TAC for target species*' should be brought forward to 2013 (from 2015). The recommendation was based on recent evidence that activity in the fishery was increasing.

RECOMMENDATION

That the TSSAC:

3.1.1 NOTE the major outcomes from the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group

3.1.2 AGREE to bring forward the timeframe set against research area 1a) of the 2011 Annual Operation Plan, '*Complete assessment and estimate TAC for target species*', to 2013 from 2015.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil.