

TORRES STRAIT PRAWN MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE	Meeting No. 16 May 2015
MANAGEMENT Future operating environment of the TSPF – where to from here – boat and gear sizes	Agenda Item No. 4.1.3 FOR DISCUSSION

RECOMMENDATION

That the Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC):

1. **NOTES** the recommendations in Agenda Item 4.1.
2. **NOTES** the history of TSPMAC discussions on management options for the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF) focussed on providing a less restrictive fishing environment (in [Attachment 4.1A-C](#));

BACKGROUND

The TSPF currently limits boats to 20m in length, and gear to 88m of head rope length. As detailed in the background of agenda item 4.1, the TSPMAC began discussions around the boat and gear restrictions in 2009. The Australian Government and licence holders (through levies) have investment extensive time and resources for research and consultation around this matter over the past 5 years.

DISCUSSION

If more flexible management arrangements were in place in the TSPF, each operator would fish in a way that matches their boat and gear configuration. People using larger boats and/ or gear would have increased efficiency/fishing power but this would be offset by a conversion factor that reduces their available fishing days or they would be required to increase their unit holding to fish an equivalent number of days. This conversion factor would be applied by requiring licence holders to “hold” a certain number of units/ nights that would not be able to be fished each season. For example boats that are more efficient may have to “use” 1.5 days (in the form of fishing units) to fish for 1 day. These units would offset the increased efficiency (see [Attachment 3.1C](#) of [Attachment 4.1B](#)). Under these arrangements the level of fishing across a season remains sustainable but provides greater flexibility to achieve profit.

The potential benefits and costs of this management option are discussed giving consideration to the capacity of each option to meet the legislated objectives for the fishery.

Table 1. Potential benefits and costs of changes to boat and gear size in the TSPF.

Objective	general comments	Potential Benefits of this management option against objective	Potential cost of this management option against objective.
<p>TSF Act objective (a): to acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of traditional inhabitants, including their rights in relation to traditional fishing.</p>	<p>Changes to gear length are likely to have negligible effect on this objective when compared to the current arrangements if they were fully utilised (61 boats fishing 6,867 days). This is because increases in net size will be offset by a commensurate reduction in fishing days (i.e. the swept area remains the same).</p>	<p>The annual TAE will be less across the fleet. This is because boats using larger gear will be allowed to fish less days, reducing the overall TAE.</p> <p>More activity in the fishery may translate to greater social benefits (employment opportunities, access to infrastructure - flow of benefits project outcomes).</p>	<p>There are numerous perceived costs associated of greater activity in the prawn fishery (e.g. more boat activity in traditional waters etc). However the TSPMAC should remember that the current management arrangements still have capacity for 61 boats to be fishing 6,867 fishing nights even though effort is currently low.</p>
<p>TSF Act objective (b) to protect and preserve the marine environment and indigenous fauna and flora in and in the vicinity of the Protected Zone.</p>	<p>Changes to gear length are likely to have negligible effect on this objective when compared to the current arrangements if they were fully utilised (61 boats fishing 6,867 days). This is because increases in net size will be offset by a commensurate reduction in fishing days (i.e. the swept area remains the same). Further, Environmental accreditation under the EPBC Act focuses on the overall</p>	<p>NA</p>	<p>NA</p>

	<p>fisheries management arrangements used to ensure sustainability and minimise environmental impacts, including the use of BRDs and TEDs.</p> <p>Other fisheries with larger boats and gear (NPF/ QLD ECOTF) are accredited under the EPBC Act, indicating the size of boats and gear is no more or less important if the overall management arrangement ensure sustainability and minimising environmental impacts.</p>		
<p>TSF Act objective (c) to adopt conservation measures necessary for the conservation of a species in such a way as to minimise any restrictive effects of the measures on traditional fishing.</p>	<p>See comments above.</p> <p>This option would not effect this objective as there is no traditional fishing for prawn.</p>	NA	NA
<p>TSF Act objective (d) to administer the provisions of Part 5 of the Torres Strait Treaty (relating to commercial fisheries) so as not to prejudice the achievement of the purposes of</p>	<p>Whether this option is implemented or not should not effect this objective. The fishery would continue to be managed to ensure traditional fishing is not negatively</p>	NA	NA

Part 4 of the Torres Strait Treaty in regard to traditional fishing.	effected.		
TSF Act objective (e) to manage commercial fisheries for optimum utilisation.	NA	Utilisation of the fishery may be increased if it is more economical to fish (through more efficient gear). The fishery is currently only using around 2200 of a possible 6,867 days annually.	There are no costs for this objective and option.
TSF Act objective (f) to share the allowable catch of relevant Protected Zone commercial fisheries with Papua New Guinea in accordance with the Torres Strait Treaty.	NA. This change would not effect this objective.	PNG in the past have asked for the PZJA to change the rules in the fishery to allow boats greater than 20m so they could fish with their bigger boats. Changing this rule would make it easier for them to fish their 25% in Australian waters.	NA. There are no perceived costs.
TSF Act objective (g) to have regard, in developing and implementing licensing policy, to the desirability of promoting economic development in the Torres Strait area and employment opportunities for traditional inhabitants.		If more boats fish in the fishery due to less restrictive arrangement, it may increase: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment opportunities on boats/ indigenous observers. • Local shops, restaurants etc may get more business. 	This option shouldn't negatively effect employment opportunities for Traditional Inhabitants.
TSPF MP Objective 1 Ensure the optimum utilisation of the fishery resources within the TSPF is consistent with		This option may improve utilisation of the fishery (as stated in the TSF Act objective above). Any change will continue to be in alignment with	The same rules around ensuring the fishery is ecologically sustainable will apply regardless of whether this option is implemented or

the principles of ecologically sustainable development and the exercise of the precautionary principle.		ecologically sustainable development and the precautionary principle.	not.
TSPF MP Objective 2 Promote economic efficiency in the utilisation of the fisheries resources within the TSPF.	The current management arrangements actually inhibit this objective (economic efficiency) for some operators.	This option would likely improve economical efficiency through more flexible gear design.	There are no costs to economic efficiency associated with this option. Although there would be an initial outlay for changes to gear, the overall efficiency should be increased.
TSPF MP Objective 3 Ensure cooperative, efficient and cost effective management of the Fishery.	Whether this option is implemented or not should not effect this objective.	NA	NA
TSPF MP Objective 4 Manage the fishery's interaction with the marine environment including the incidental capture of non-target species and impacts on demersal habitats.	Whether this objective is implemented or not should not effect this objective. The same management requirements to protect non-target species will be implemented.	NA	NA

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are likely to be costs associated with management changes depending on which options are considered or recommended by the TSPMAC. Any recommendations would need to be considered by the PZJA.