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| <b>TORRES STRAIT PRAWN<br/>MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE</b> | <b>Meeting No. 16<br/>23-24 June 2015</b>     |
| <b>MANAGEMENT<br/>TSPF Season Opening Dates</b>              | <b>Agenda Item No. 4.1.2<br/>For Decision</b> |

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**4.4.1** That the TSPMAC **NOTES** the previous consultation around TSPF season dates in 2013/14.

**4.4.2.** The TSPMAC **DISCUSSES** the options for changing the TSPF season dates to allow an earlier season opening.

## BACKGROUND

At TSPMAC 14 in July 2013, the TSPMAC considered a proposal to change the TSPF season opening date to improve the marketability of TSPF products.

As was the case in 2013, the last two years has not seen any change in the export market for Australian prawns to overseas countries. The weaker Australian dollar has helped in a minor way, but still nothing of any real significance.

As a result the industry has continued to develop strategies that have been designed to increase domestic consumption, particularly in non traditional prawn consumption periods. The Love Australian Prawns campaign has been extremely successful in implementing this strategy, and over the past couple of years we have experienced some real growth in domestic consumption. As a part of this marketing campaign, particular focus has been on the Easter period, which has been quite successful in terms of drawing the consumer's attention away from just thinking of Easter as a fish consumption period and broadened the public's mind to seeing this as an overall Australian Seafood consumption occasion. There is a building momentum for this market, but the TSPF continues to miss optimum market supply and price, given the present inability to access the fishery until March.

Case in point was Easter this year. Good Friday fell on 3<sup>rd</sup> April. With the season opening date of 1<sup>st</sup> March, by the time the vessels had an opportunity to fish, and then despatch their catch back to port via the mothership, 3 weeks had lapsed leaving no suitable time to distribute product into Southern markets from Cairns.

In 2016, with Good Friday falling on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, this problem only worsens.

At TSPMAC 14, the TSPMAC considered the option of moving the opening date of the Torres Strait prawn season, on a trial basis for the 2014 fishing season. Three options considered were:

1. That the 2014 season be changed to commence on February 1<sup>st</sup> (one month extension).

2. That the 2014 season be changed to commence on February 15<sup>th</sup> (two week extension).
3. Option one or two above with a closure period incorporated (either mid-season or end of season), commensurate with the altered season opening time.

At TSPMAC 14, the TSPMAC RECOMMENDED that:

- a) The PZJA AGREE to a one month extension of the TSPF season for a one year trial, commencing 1 February 2014; and
- b) If this trial extension isn't progressed for the 2014, then point the recommendation is for a one year trial commencing 1 February 2015.

### **DISCUSSION**

Given that under the Torres Strait Fisheries Act, objective (e), there is a requirement to manage commercial fisheries for optimum utilization and that also under the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Management Plan, objective 2 states:

“to promote economic efficiency in the utilization of the fisheries resources within the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery “, I believe the TSPMAC should revisit the proposal to trial at the very least a two (2) week earlier opening for the TSPF, but optimally a one month alternative should be considered. This trial should occur in 2016.

As the Total Allowable Effort level would remain capped at 9,200 days, there would be no increase in the effort allowed in the fishery regardless of the length of the season.

### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There would be costs associated with issuing a direction to amend the season dates. There could be economic benefits to fishers in terms of potential increased returns for their catch given they would have a better opportunity to land product into the domestic market to meet a peak period of demand in Easter.