

TORRES STRAIT PRAWN MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE	Meeting No. 17 20 April 2016
MANAGEMENT Where to from here?	Agenda Item No. 4.3

RECOMMENDATION

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

4.3.1 DISCUSSES the outcomes of the “*Improving Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Profitability & the Flow of Benefits to Island Communities*” project and agrees to a prioritised list of options that may be pursued to improve profitability and community involvement in the fishery.

4.3.2 NOTES that the prioritised list will form an ongoing TSPMAC agenda item and will provide a guide for TSPMAC input to the TSSAC Annual Operation Plan.

4.3.3 DISCUSSES other forums for assistance in development (i.e. FRDC, the Indigenous reference Group, Indigenous Business Australia and the Torres Strait Regional Authority).

BACKGROUND

In accordance with FMP1, a MAC advises the PZJA on fishery objectives, strategies, reference points, risk profiles and management arrangements for achieving fishery-specific goals. In administering the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984, regard shall be had to the rights and obligations conferred on Australia by the Torres Strait Treaty, including that, in developing and implementing licensing policy, to the desirability of promoting economic development in the Torres Strait area and employment opportunities for traditional inhabitants.

Options to improve effort and profitability levels in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF) have been discussed by the TSPMAC since December 2009. Discussions resulted in a request for more research into ways to improve the flow of benefits from the TSPF to communities, before further changes to management arrangements would be considered. The lack of flow of benefits was seen as one of the big blocks for communities around the TSPF.

In 2014-15, a research project was undertaken by Mr Andy Bodsworth exploring methods for improving profitability in the TSPF, and the flow of benefits to Torres Strait communities. The project had an number of recommendations for improving flow of benefits to communities, including indigenous observer programs, use of bycatch from the TSPF in other fisheries, establishing community licences or other business opportunities such as the sales of product locally to communities (either through private catch or working with another commercial boat). The project also found the most likely avenue to improve profitability for the fishery would be through removing constraints on vessel efficiency such as boat and gear restrictions, and using other management arrangements to ensure sustainable fishing continues.

Following these historical discussions, in August 2015, the PZJA considered a number of management arrangements for the TSPF, including changing management arrangements to allow for larger boats and gear to be used in the fishery and changes to season dates. The PZJA agreed to an earlier opening date (1 February) in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery starting in the 2016 season (note – the TSRA Chair did not support this recommendation as Torres Strait communities have opposed this proposal). The PZJA did not agree to removing the 20m boat and 88m headrope length restrictions.

DISCUSSION

The flow of benefits research project identified a number of possible avenues for increasing the flow of benefits from the TSPF to communities (Table 1), as well as improving profitability for the fishery. The TSPMAC is yet to provide advice on options for promoting economic development in the Torres Strait area and employment opportunities for traditional inhabitants, including the different proposals identified by Mr Bodsworth, their feasibility and which, if any should be pursued, and whose role it would be to support the community capacity building going forward. The TSPMAC should also consider whether there is any more research required regarding these options, or other ideas.

In addition, there have recently been enquiries to both AFMA and the TSRA from traditional inhabitants regarding opportunities for them to access the TSPF. There are no dedicated Traditional Inhabitant Boat Licences in the TSPF (three licences were surrendered in 2005 in exchange for funding which was used in restructure of the finfish fishery). However traditional Inhabitants can lease or purchase licences as others do.

Communities appear divergent regarding their interest and appetite for involvement in the TSPF. If community members were to fish independently through a private business, or through establishing a form of shared community licence, training and experience would be required to run a successful trawling operation. Maritime based training is offered by agencies such as the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, business training and support is provided by the TSRA, industry specific coaching and mentoring is currently a gap and could be provided by industry as well as other training and industry development bodies. There are a number of large costs, both outlay (buying a boat and gear) and ongoing costs (fuel, crew, boat refitting, annual licence and day levies, marketing and product supply costs etc) involved which need to be considered and understood before anyone could enter into a trawl, or any other large business operation. However these costs also provide opportunities for employment and economic return for communities.

Table 1. example evaluation matrix for TSPF flow of Benefits options

	Evaluation Criteria (or filters) for TSPF Flow of benefit Candidates . Range for scores is 1-5 with 5 being most beneficial/valuable.							
Flow of benefit Candidates	Economic Efficiency	Level of Impact (contribution)	Practicality (implementation)	Fits community capabilities	Mutual Value (communities & TSPF)	supports strategic objectives	summed scores	weighted scores
Part time logistics support person (2 days/week?) to facilitate logistical support, spares, maintenance for TSPF boats.	4	4	3	3	4	5	23	23
Encourage regular sale of prawns through community shops and freezer facilities.	3	3	4	4	4	4	22	22
Examine the suitability of using trawl bycatch species for bait in the Coral Trout line sector.	4	2	4	4	4	4	22	22
Seafood branding to capitalise on clean environment, unique culture, and point of origin difference.	3	3	3	3	4	5	21	21
Increase the utilisation of by-product/bycatch through similar arrangements with communities.	4	2	3	4	4	3	20	20
Potential to store frozen prawns in community freezers as a contingency arrangement if required.	2	2	3	4	4	4	19	19
At sea training programs for traditional owners (particularly younger residents).	3	3	2	2	4	4	18	18
Potential for TO's to be trained as fishery observers and operate from home communities e.g. Masig Island;	4	2	3	2	3	4	18	16
Use TSPF bycatch as the basis of solid feed for grow out of ranched TRL in areas close to communities.	3	2	2	2	3	3	15	15
<i>Weighting applied per filter</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1		
Note: evaluation criteria (or filters) are intended to guide selection of the most appropriate flow of benefit options (candidates). Criteria may be changed to reflect current objectives, or priorities for the fishery. For example these may be aligned with the st								
Economic Efficiency: consider - scale of outcomes, financial viability, economically efficient (benefits exceed costs), low cost to TSPF operators								
Level of Impact (contribution): consider - labour (increase supply), increase vessel utilisation, increase catch, increase catch value, increase beach price								
Practicality (implementation): consider - set up costs, timeframe for benefits, likely rate and extent of adoption, champions interested, realistic level of cooperation available, extent of external involvement or funding								
Fits community capabilities: consider - does it fit with existing skills, community knowledge - or will it require training, does it require additional facilities/investment, alignment with aspirations								
Mutual Value (communities & TSPF): consider - extent of benefits accruing to fishers and communities, strategic alignment for TO's, and for TSPF Industry								
Supports strategic objectives: consider - builds relationships, supply chain resilience incl mothership, R&D leverage, extends flow of benefits etc								