

Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group No.10

Meeting Record

3 November 2016

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Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Contents

Meeting Participants	3
Recommendations	5
Agenda Item 1. Preliminaries	5
1.1. Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome / Apologies / Role of observers	5
1.2. Adoption of Agenda.....	6
1.4. Declaration of Interests.....	6
1.5. Actions Items	6
Agenda Item 2. Harvest Strategy – getting information to inform the next steps	6
2.1. Overview of Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy	6
2.2. Overview of previous management strategy evaluation work and examples of harvest strategy options	6
Agenda Item 3. Black teatfish workshop on Erub - outcomes.....	7
Agenda Item 4. Other business- Fishing for white teatfish	9

Meeting Participants

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Anne Clarke	Chairperson	Nil
Steve Hall	HCWG Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts (Attended for agenda item 3 onwards)	QDAF Member	Nil
John Ramsay	TSRA Program Manager, Fisheries	Nil
Tim Skewes	Research Member	CSIRO/Independent Consultant. Previous principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Maluwap Nona	Industry Member	TIB licence holder. Chairperson Malu Lamar.
Francis Pearson	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Michael Passi	Industry Member	TIB licence holder

Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Eva Plaganyi	CSIRO	Research funding
Mick Haywood	CSIRO	Research funding
Mariana Nahas	TSRA Observer	Nil
Andrew Trappett	AFMA, Senior Management Officer	Nil

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Les Pitt	TIB licence holder	Nil
Chris Saylor (attended morning session only)	TIB licence holder	-
James Ahmat (attended morning session only)	TIB licence holder	Nil

Apologies

Name	Position
Ian Liviko	National Fisheries Authority (PNG)
Jerry Stephen	TSRA Fisheires Portfolio Member

Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	<p>Noting the workshop outcomes and the HCWG's previous advice (HCWG meeting No.9, June 2016) that the fishery not be opened until measures are in place to improve reporting, the HCWG recommended the following minimum requirements for allowing further fishing for black teatfish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• development and implementation of community based catch monitoring arrangements (noting that in the short-term these systems would be voluntary); and• implementation of a regulatory-based catch monitoring/reporting tool. The preferred tool being a mandatory fish receiver system.
2.	<p>The HCWG considered progressing these initiatives as a high priority to ensure the PZJA may consider options to open the fishery as soon possible next year. Accordingly the Working Group recommended that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• community catch reporting plans be submitted to AFMA by 30 November 2016; and• AFMA progress the development of a fish receiver system as soon as practical noting AFMA advice that it may take 5-6 months.
3.	<p>The Working Group recommended that a written survey be circulated to all bech-de-mer licence holders to canvass preliminary industry views on convening a trial designed to provide an economic opportunity for a select number of fishers to fish for white teatfish using hookah gear.</p>

Agenda Item 1. Preliminaries

1.1. Opening Prayer / Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners / Welcome / Apologies / Role of observers

Mr Francis Pearson opened the meeting in prayer.

Apologies were received from Ian Liviko (NFA, PNG) and Jerry Stephen.

The Chair noted that all meeting participants, including observers are required to participate in accordance with PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP 1). In accordance with FMP 1 the Chair confirmed the following arrangements apply to casual observers:

- attendance is allowed at the discretion at the Chairperson;
- an inclusive approach is preferred recognising the potential expertise observers may offer the Working Group and the benefit from broader stakeholders observing working group proceedings; and

- observers cannot participate in the formation of Working Group advice;

1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG) adopted the agenda noting that the harvest strategy items are likely to be addressed as part of a single continuous discussion.

1.4. Declaration of Interests

The HCWG noted that there could be potential conflicts of interest for members and observers when providing information and advice on some agenda items and that these conflicts should be declared.

1.5. Actions Items

The HCWG noted the status of the previous action items.

Agenda Item 2. Harvest Strategy – getting information to inform the next steps

2.1. Overview of Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy

The HCWG noted an overview of Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy presented by the AFMA member. This included:

- that a harvest strategy is a pre-agreed management procedure for recommending TACs and sets out data and monitoring requirements for the fishery;
- the [Commonwealth Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines 2007](#) provides a framework for developing harvest strategies;
- a video presentation explaining stock assessments and harvest strategies (Fishwell Consulting, 2010. FRDC Project 2010/306. *Empowering industry through improved understanding of stock assessment and harvest strategies*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emtEzavpaGI>); and
- that CSIRO are being engaged by AFMA to conduct a project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery.

2.2. Overview of previous management strategy evaluation work and examples of harvest strategy options

The HCWG noted the CSIRO overview of previous management strategy evaluation (MSE) work and examples of harvest strategy options (**Attachment 1**), including:

- an overview of the Queensland East Coast Beche-de-mer Fishery (ECBDMF) MSE and model considerations including:
 - potential impacts of climate change;
 - impact of different fishing strategies;
 - uncertainty around natural mortality rates; and
 - use of adaptive monitoring for feedback into the harvest strategy
- an overview of ECBDMF rotation zone scheme developed and recommended by industry and since tested scientifically as the most beneficial model (i.e. higher economic performance and reduced risk to the stock);

- harvest strategy models for data-poor fisheries and the Coral Sea Beche-de-mer Fishery example;
- steps to delivering data-poor harvest strategies;
- next steps for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer harvest strategy including the following key considerations:
 - level of co-management approach;
 - specific management objectives for the fishery;
 - alternative options and tier systems; and
 - future data and modelling requirements;
- discussion on appropriate size limits for Torres Strait species including:
 - black teatfish (current min size limit 25cm) should be increased to ensure opportunity to breed at least once before capture and noting ECBDMF limit is 30cm; and
 - potentially similar case for other species and should be reviewed under harvest strategy.

The HCWG noted industry member advice that rotational harvesting (giving reefs a rest of at least 3 months) was a long standing cultural practice and that a future harvest strategy may build on these established processing.

The Research Member noted the relative crudeness of the current TAC set for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer species and advised that annual? TACs can be assessed and updated through an adaptive harvest strategy. Underpinning this the importance of adequate spatial catch and effort data for the fishery.

Agenda Item 3. Black teatfish workshop on Erub - outcomes

The HCWG noted the outcomes of the industry black teatfish catch reporting workshop held on Erub on 19 October 2016. Members noted the HCWG recommended a workshop be convened to gain broader industry views on possible options for improving black teatfish catch reporting.

The HCWG noted there was majority support for keeping the fishery closed until catch reporting was improved and moving towards greater community-based management control. Members noted that workshop participants from Mer had recommended the fishery to be opened in December.

The HCWG noted that workshop participants, having regard for the differing views held and noting that AFMA would continue to work towards developing a mandatory fish receiver system, recommended:

- a) each community develop their community catch monitoring arrangements in detail;
- b) other community based management arrangements (ie catch allocations, control over who can fish, cultural protocols) be developed and adopted by industry agreement; and
- c) that these proposals to be submitted to the Hand Collectable Working Group and PZJA.

Noting the workshop outcomes and the HCWG's previous advice (HCWG meeting No.9, June 2016) that the fishery not be opened until measures are in place to improve reporting,

the HCWG **recommended** the following minimum requirements for allowing further fishing for black teatfish:

- development and implementation of community based catch monitoring arrangements (noting that in the short-term these systems would be voluntary); and
- implementation of a regulatory-based catch monitoring/reporting tool. The preferred tool being a mandatory fish receiver system.

The HCWG considered progressing these initiatives as a high priority to ensure the PZJA may consider options to open the fishery as soon possible next year. Accordingly the Working Group **recommended** that:

- community catch reporting plans be submitted to AFMA by 30 November 2016; and
- AFMA progress the development of a fish receiver system as soon as practical noting AFMA advice that it may take 5-6 months.

Mer Island fishers proposal – black teatfish opening: Mer only, 7 tonnes

The HCWG noted the proposal by Mer Island fishers for Mer fishers to be permitted to fish for up to 7 tonnes of black teatfish with black teatfish only being permitted to be 'exported' from Mer. Under this arrangement Mer fishers advised that they will take on the responsibility to properly report catches. The industry member for Kemer Kemer Meriam further advised that there was agreement for all black teatfish to be recorded by a single operator and that the catch reporting proposal currently only applied to black teatfish.

The AFMA member noted that whilst the Working Group is not asked to advised on matters of allocation, it is relevant to note that central to the Mer proposal is a catch allocation to a select group of fishers which has not been subjected to any formal stakeholder consultation.

Whilst the HCWG welcomed the Mer fishers initiative to develop improved catch reporting, confirmation of the exact reporting arrangements was sought (for example the industry members verbal advice that all catches would be reported by a single operator). The scientific member advised that he would be more inclined to support the Mer catch reporting arrangement if the fishers could first demonstrate regular reporting and for the reporting to cover all Beche-de-mer species (Industry members confirmed that significant volumes of prickly redfish and other species were currently being harvested). The HCWG reiterated the importance to report catches of all species.

The industry member for Kemer kemer Meriam requested that the Mer Fishers proposal be provided to the PZJA. Whilst the HCWG did not endorse the Mer Fishers proposal it noted that AFMA would provide the proposal to the PZJA as requested.

Agenda Item 4. Other business- Fishing for white teatfish

The HCWG noted that it remains a high priority for some industry members to have the current hookah ban revised to allow more effective targeting of white teatfish. Members noted that several management issues would need careful consideration prior to recommending any adjustments to the current effort controls in the fishery, including the hookah ban. The AFMA member noted that improving current catch reporting and monitoring standards is a priority and is a likely prerequisite for expanding effort in the fishery.

Some industry members recommended that a trial be undertaken to allow a limited number of fishers use hookah to fish for white teatfish. The objective of the trial being to provide an economic opportunity for fishers and in doing so reduce fishing pressure on other species. The Working Group noted that catch data could also be collected during the trial which might inform future fishery assessments. Data collection however was not in itself, a reason to convene a trial. The Working Group noted that data collected from a trial may be used to inform future fishery assessments and alternative Harvest Strategy options.

The Working Group agreed that further consideration of the following issues would be necessary if a trial were to be recommended:

- catch monitoring standards;
- potential impacts of increased effort on other species;
- industry members recommendation to establish a 10nm exclusion zones from communities to protect the values/aspirations of community fishers;
- broad industry concern and low confidence in current management arrangements and catch reporting (as reported at the black teatfish catch reporting workshop held on Erub, 19 October 16);
- access: who should be able to participate in the trial;
- timing (when, season length);
- size limits – relevance to maximise economic returns;
- overall fishery risks. Current initiatives to improve management effectiveness are yet to be completed. Notably the development of a harvest strategy and medium and long-term management arrangements for black teatfish.

The Working Group recognised that access is still likely to be a key consideration for the Torres Strait communities should the PZJA convene a trial designed to provide an economic opportunity for a select number of fishers to fish for white teatfish using hookah gear. The Working Group further noted that it was beyond its term of reference to be provide advice on the allocation of access within the fishery. Noting that the PZJA would likely require significant consultation to inform any decision on access, there was benefit in having preliminary broader industry views on convening a trial as proposed by the industry members.

The Working Group **recommended** that a written survey be circulated to all bech-de-mer licence holders to canvass preliminary industry views on convening a trial designed to provide an economic opportunity for a select number of fishers to fish for white teatfish using hookah gear.