

Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2016.01

Meeting Record

12-13 July 2016

Note all meeting papers and record available on
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Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting Participants

Members

| Date | Name | Position | Declaration of interest |
|-----------------|-----------------|--|--|
| 12-13 July 2016 | Andy Bodsworth | Chair | Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM (recently developed Torres Strait Finfish Action Plan report for TSRA/FRDC) |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Steve Hall | FWG Executive Officer | Nil |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Selina Stoute | AFMA Member | Nil |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Tom Roberts | QDAF Member | Nil |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Mariana Nahas | TSRA Member | Nil |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Michael O'Neill | Research Member | Principal Fisheries Scientists, QDAF. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | David Brewer | Research Member | Independent Consultant. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Maluwap Nona | Industry Member | TIB licence holder. Chairperson Malu Lamar. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Tenny Elisala | Industry Member | TIB licence holder. Ranger, TSRA. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Frank Faud | Industry Member | TIB licence holder |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Tony Vass | *Industry (sunset licence holder representative) | No financial interest in Torres Strait Fisheries. Holds Queensland East Coast quota for coral trout and 'other' finfish species. Previous Torres Strait finfish operator. |

| Date | Name | Position | Declaration of interest |
|------|------|----------|--|
| | | | Representative for sunset licence holders. |

Observers

| Date | Name | Position | Declaration of interest |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| 12-13 July 2016 | Kenny Bedford | *TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio | TIB licence holder. Member, FQMC President - Erub Fisheries Management Association |
| 13 July 2016 | Ian Liviko | *NFA (PNG) | Nil |
| 12-13 July 2016 | John Ramsay | TSRA Program Manager, Fisheries | Nil |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Nicole Murphy | Researcher, CSIRO | Principal scientist for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Andrew Tobin | Researcher, JCU | Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Pau Stephen | Fisher, Member of Kos & Abob | TIB licence holder. |
| 12-13 July 2016 | Yen N. Loban | TSRA Board | TIB licence holder. Member, TSFA. |
| 12 July 2016 | Harry Nona | Fisher | TIB licence holder. |
| 13 July 2016 | John Mathews | Project Officer, TSRA | Nil |

* Permanent observer

Apologies

| Name | Position |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Eliziah Wasaga | Industry Member |
| Jerry Stephen | Industry Member |
| Ian Liviko (Day 1) | NFA (PNG) |

Action items

| Number | Action |
|--------|---|
| 1. | QDAF member to provide a presentation at the next FWG meeting on the Queensland Government's Recreational Fishing survey and its application to Torres Strait, including survey methods and design. |
| 2. | QDAF member to provide a summary of charter boat logbook data relevant to the Torres Strait at the next Working Group meeting. |
| 3. | QDAF provide an update on recreational fishing data and charter boat operations within the TSPZ as a standing agenda item for future FWG meetings. |
| 4. | Dr Michael O'Neill to provided FWG members out-of-session the full report on the stock assessment for the East Coast coral trout fishery. |
| 5. | AFMA to confirm the nature of logbook changes that occurred in 2003 |
| 6. | AFMA to provide advice on the date of when the investment warning for the fishery was issued. |
| 7. | AFMA to report on the percentage of coral trout and Spanish mackerel fish caught within and outside the 10nm exclusion zones prior the introduction of those closures. |
| 8. | Compliance updates be added as a standing agenda item for future meetings. |

Recommendations

| Number | Recommendation |
|--------|--|
| 1. | <p>The FWG recommended for the 2017-18 Spanish mackerel fishing season that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ TAC setting advice to be finalised subject to consideration of updated stock assessment and advice from the newly convened Technical Scientific Working Group; ▪ Technical scientific working group to review stock assessment update to allow for full consideration of inputs and outcomes. Technical scientific working group to report back to FWG; ▪ The technical scientific working group should comprise the follow members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Scientific members ➤ Two industry members: Tony Vass, Kenny Bedford ➤ Andrew Tobin ➤ Nicole Murphy ➤ Government ▪ The technical scientific working group should consider the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Disproportionate effort in Bramble Cay |

| Number | Recommendation |
|--------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Local factors – unexpected factors (eg environmental and/or climate change related effects) ➤ Changes in accessible area of the fishery (closures) ➤ Estimates of TIB, Traditional, Recreational catches ➤ Logbook data quality ➤ Stock structure ➤ Catch rate objectives (effort & catch) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recognising the importance of precautionary approach, as an interim approach (noting Harvest Strategy to be developed) TAC should not exceed best estimates of MSY after taking into account all other sources of fishing mortality; |
| 2. | <p>The FWG recommended that the Spanish mackerel TAC remain unchanged (187.7t tonnes) for the 2016-17 fishing season noting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the current TAC (187t) is based on average catches 2001-05. A stable period of catch; • recent reported catches are > 100 tonnes; • proposed lease amount for 2016-17 is 99 tonnes (across four boats) (18% TIB to TVH catch ratio was used in updated stock assessment); • management risks include unreported catches and potential unknown impacts from coral bleaching; and • on balance management risks are acceptable this season however the next season TAC setting process should take into account updated stock assessment and agreed estimates of catch from other sectors. Catches and the TAC remain within estimates of maximum sustainable levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Begg et al 2006</i> maximum sustainable levels 146-264t • <i>O’Neil & Tobin 2016/17: Defining the status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ maximum sustainable levels 145-210t ▪ catch rates may erode if future average harvest exceeded 150t |
| 3. | <p>The FWG recommended that the coral trout TAC (134.9 tonnes) remain unchanged for the current fishing season (2016-17) and the 2017-18 fishing season noting the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the TAC (134.9t) is based on average catches 2001-05. A stable period of catch; • although there is no stock assessment for coral trout, the Management Strategy Evaluation conducted (Williams et al 2007) using four constant catch scenarios (80-170t) predicted biomass of at least 70% of unfished by biomass by 2025; • proposed lease amount for 2016-17 is 74 tonnes (across four boats); and |

| Number | Recommendation |
|--------|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> industry feedback that catch rates on Islands are considered good. |
| 4. | <p>For the 2016-17 fishing season the FWG recommended that the leasing out of 28.5 tonnes of other species by TSRA be supported subject to following ACTIONS:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> improved logbooks (that enable accurate reporting of all species. The FWG noted that the AFMA logbook would require reprinting creating a possible timing issue and use of the QDAF logbook may be constrained by administrative constraints); Prior reporting (possible use of QDAF system?) |
| 5. | <p>The FWG recommended that subject to further consideration by the Technical Scientific Working Group of coral trout to byproduct catch ratios when targeting coral trout and total take of 'other species' by other sectors –</p> <p>there should be no further increase above 30 tonnes until systems are in place to independently verify catches, a species-specific risk assessment has been undertaken and where applicable catch triggers and control rules have been agreed.</p> |

Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

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

Mr Frank Faud opened the meeting in prayer.

Apologies were received from Eliziah Wasaga and Jerry Stephen (industry members), and Ian Liviko (NFA, PNG) for the first day of the meeting. Mr Liviko attended the second day of the meeting.

1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The Finfish Working Group (FWG) adopted the agenda without change.

1.3. PZJA requirements of WG members

The Chair noted that all meeting participants are required to participate in accordance with PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1; the Chair noted the roles and functions of the FWG and the responsibilities of members and observers in the FWG when providing recommendations and advice.

1.4. Declaration of Interests

The FWG generally noted that there could be potential conflicts of interest for members and observers when providing information and advice on some agenda items. The Chair

explained that members may be asked to leave the room for certain agenda items if specific conflicts arose.

1.5. Actions Arising Apologies

The FWG noted the status of the previous action items and the following key updates on the Queensland Government's Recreational Survey and charter boat arrangements:

- recreational surveys were conducted in 2010 and 2013. Completed through randomised phone survey. Data for Torres Strait is poor due to small sample size; and
- charter Boat operators must be licenced and complete logbooks. Currently there are nine charter boat licences with registered addresses in the Torres Strait. Since 2005 the total recorded catch of finfish from charter boat licences within the TSPZ is approximately 12 tonne.

The FWG noted industry advice that there has been an increase in multi-purpose charter boat operations working in the Torres Strait, and that there are several businesses based on the Cape.

The FWG agreed that it would be useful to gain a better understanding of the Queensland Government's recreational fishing survey including survey methods and design noting there may be potential to supplement the survey to improve data for the Torres Strait.

The FWG agreed to the following **ACTIONS**:

1. QDAF member to provide a presentation at the next FWG meeting on the Queensland Government's Recreational Fishing survey including survey methods and design;
2. QDAF member to provide a summary of charter boat logbook data relevant to the Torres Strait at the next Working Group meeting; and
3. QDAF member provide an update on recreational fishing data and charter boat operations within the TSPZ as a standing agenda item for future FWG meetings.

Agenda Item 2 – Fishery Update

2.1. AFMA management

The Working Group noted an update on historical catch reported for Spanish mackerel, coral trout and other reef line species as detailed in the Agenda paper.

The Working Group noted there is likely under-reporting of catch data for the TIB sector. Members noted the importance of good catch reporting to facilitate effective fisheries management. The FWG noted the outcome from other PZJA forums to support amending the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1995* to enable mandatory catch reporting for the TIB sector. The FWG **agreed** to support the proposal for the PZJA to implement mandatory catch reporting for the TIB sector.

2.2. TSRA update

The FWG noted the follow updates on current and planned activities for the TSRA Fisheries Program:

- Implementation of the TSRA Finfish Action Plan. The Finfish Action Plan provides a 10 year pathway for increasing catches within the TIB sector;
- In line with actions identified in the Finfish Action Plan, TSRA:
 - have partnered with FRDC (Fisheries Research Development Corporation) to fund projects investigating the feasibility of:
 - developing Jewfish, barramundi and crab fisheries;
 - exporting seafood product directly from the Torres Strait; and
 - developing a Torres Strait fisheries brand;
 - are undertaking an project internally to investigate the feasibility of a developing baitfish fishery (garfish and sardines) based around Warraber and Poruma;
 - Capacity building initiatives include the funding of:
 - two participants in the FRDC National Seafood Industry Leadership Course; and
 - two cadetships in marine science studies as part of a TSRA employment succession plan;
- The TSRA Investment Strategy will be released on 1 July and will initially have a focus on fisheries. Community consultation on the strategy will be undertaken; and
- Increased market interest in leasing opportunities noting outcomes of the proposed Finfish leasing for 2016-17 and Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) outcomes will be discussed in more detail at agenda item 5.3.

The FWG noted that management advice, assessment and planning would be required to support the sustainable development and/or expansion of finfish fisheries and encouraged all related proposals to be tabled with the FWG for advice. Members also welcomed further updates on TSRA capacity building and investment strategy initiatives as they relate to fisheries.

2.3. Native Title

Mr Maluwap Nona requested that Malu Lamar be recognised as a formal member of the FWG, and that he was participating in the meeting in his capacity as an industry member and not Malu lamar. As a result, Mr Nona was not able to provide a native title update. The AFMA member advised that AFMA would work with Malu Lamar on possible representation options.

2.4. PNG

The FWG noted the following relevant updates for the PNG finfish fisheries (note: updates were provide by the AFMA member on meeting day 1 and the PNG-National Fisheries Authority representative on meeting day 2).

On day 2, Mr Ian Liviko (NFA) provided a further update on finfish developments in the PNG jurisdiction, including:

- PNG-NFA advised at the Fisheries Bilateral meeting in November 2015 that PNG would not be taking up their Spanish mackerel catch entitlements in the Australian jurisdiction of the TSPZ. It was noted at the meeting that PNG fishers are eager to enter the fishery in the future;
- an increase in the catch rate of barramundi has recently been observed. This is despite there being no increase in effort by fishers or the number of operators. Research to further investigate this trend is to be conducted in December 2016;
- a barramundi aquaculture facility in Daru recently ceased operation but still holds brood stock. There are plans for the facility to be handed over to NFA for it to determine the facility's future prospects;
- currently there is no compliance enforcement on (including mesh size limits of nets) on finfish catches in the fishery;
- most fishing activity for finfish occurs around Daru; and
- Juvenile Jewfish and mackerel (25-45 cm) have recently been caught by trawlers targeting other species, however, species identification and catch data are needed to verify whether these are the juveniles of commercially important species for the Torres Strait.

2.5. Strategic overview and update (including economic and market trends)

The FWG noted the following update by members and observers on recent fishery performance, trends, activities and issues occurring in the Torres Strait finfish and relevant fisheries:

- Queensland East Coast finfish fisheries (ECF):
 - fishers are experiencing good catches of coral trout and came close to reaching the TAC in the 2015-16 season (96% caught). As a result there is a high demand for coral trout quota which is now fully utilised;
 - in recent years species other than coral trout ('other species') have gone from being byproduct to now being specifically targeted by fishers as a result of high market demand. There is potential for similar trends to occur in the Torres Strait and it is important that good information (e.g. stock status and catch data) is available before further expansion occurs across these species and potential new areas. Some of these finfish species may be more vulnerable to overfishing;

- Spanish mackerel catches in the ECF were poor in 2015-16 (300t caught equating to 51% of the TAC. Average catch to TAC ratio is 73%. Lowest catch recorded was 226t in 2007/08), with catch rates declining in recent years to the point where frozen product is not available (i.e. not enough mackerel are being caught to warrant freezing of product as the small amount of catch is going straight to market as fresh product);
- with the interest in coral trout quota exceeding demand, more intense and targeted fishing for other species and a deteriorating Spanish mackerel fishery in the ECF, it is likely there will be increasing interest in Torres Strait finfish quota (Spanish mackerel, coral trout and other reef line species). The Torres Strait fishery (including Spanish mackerel at Bramble Cay) are considered to be in good condition.
- anecdotal evidence suggests that there has been a recent increase in the incidence of fin rot in live coral trout product. The cause is still to be determined, however it has been suggested it may be due to additional environmental stresses on the fish following the recent climatic conditions that resulted in the large-scale coral bleaching event off the far northern Queensland coast. QDAF are testing some samples.
- Torres Strait finfish update from industry;
 - there is renewed interest in targeting live trout in Torres Strait, as shown during the FQMC's recent assessment of expressions of interest to lease finfish quota in 2016-17. Two operators are planning to trial live;
 - there are signs that interest in the fishery from the TIB sector is growing;
 - Ugar fishers are currently focused on the Beche-de-mer Fishery as the local freezer is not operational. The freezer is required to support finfish operations;
 - noting possible resourcing constraints, community based strategies should be examined to improve the efficiency of compliance;
 - there is ongoing need to balance the benefits of leasing quota to non-indigenous operators while still providing fishing industry development and employment opportunities for locals (in line with the COAGs commitment to closing the gap in indigenous disadvantage). The TIB sector needs to be supported to participate directly in the fishery.

Agenda Item 3 – QLD Inshore Finfish and Spanish mackerel fisheries – overview of management and stock status

The FWG noted an update on the ECF including an overview of the East Coast Finfish Logbook and reporting parameters, harvest control rules and TAC setting process. A presentation on the ECF was requested to broaden members understanding of management approaches and issues in finfish fisheries within the region. The presentation provided is at **Attachment A**. Members noted key features of the ECF management framework including:

- mandatory catch reporting comprised of prior reporting, unload reports and catch disposal records; and
- a harvest strategy for coral trout comprising:
 - a target biomass of 68% of unfished biomass levels. A high biomass target was agreed based on the high costs of fishing and subsequent need to maintain high catch rates;
 - a target Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) of 25kg/dory day with a maximum TAC of 1 288 tonnes (recently CPUE has been around 19kg/dory day);
 - a limit CPUE of 7.25kg/dory day; and
 - a target fishery catch of 1150t which is equivalent to the average recorded catch between 2006 and 2008.

The FWG noted advice from some industry members and observers that Torres Strait fishers want to report catches but first to need to understand why and how. Members noted advice that TSRA have commissioned the development and delivery of a Fisheries Management Training course for PZJA consultative forum representatives through the University of Wollongong. Pilot courses have been run with more to follow.

The FWG agreed for the following **ACTION**:

- Dr Michael O'Neill to provided FWG members out-of-session the full report on the stock assessment for the East Coast coral trout fishery.

Agenda Item 4 – Research

4.1. Traditional take catch estimates: past estimates (Dr Busilacchi) and future research (CSIRO)

Past estimates of traditional take catches (Busilacchi, 2008)

The FWG noted the past estimates of traditional catches of finfish reported from the research project titled “*The subsistence coral reef fish fishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment*”, including:

- the traditional catch of finfish by Erub, Masig and Mer in 2005/06 was estimated as 169 tonnes and included 62 different species. This was a notable increase from catch estimated by CSIRO in the 1990s.
- only a small proportion of the 2005/06 catch was Spanish mackerel or coral trout (CT), although this is still a significant quantity (approx. 20 tonnes).
- for the commercial species (including Spanish mackerel and coral trout) about 15% were taken for subsistence.

- the largest components of other species taken were Siganids (rabbitfish, spinefoot, parasa), mullet (thurud, wap) and trevally (whitefish).

The FWG **agreed** that the figures from *Busilacchi (2008)* are the current best estimate of traditional take of finfish.

Future research: 'Monitoring the traditional take of finfish species in the TSPZ'

The FWG noted the presentation by the Research member on the research project titled: "*Monitoring the traditional take of finfish species in the TSPZ*". Members noted the overview of the study and that data collection was yet to commence. The project team advised that:

- the first field trip is planned for August followed by another in February. The focus of the first trip will be to train monitors; and
- the aim is for monitors to visit all households weekly for 12 months. The project is attempting a 'census' of households rather than surveying a sample of households.

Advice from the FWG was sought on the project methodology, preferred process for consultation and identification of traditionally important species. FWG members advised the following:

- communication will be critical and island specific approaches may be necessary;
- the project should aim to build peoples capacity to independently complete catch forms and where possible, the project should trial the collection of fish length data. Both of these initiatives may have long lasting benefits for future cost-effective data collection programs;
- "Other" species to be prioritised in the project should be determined using the following criteria:
 - vulnerability to overfishing;
 - importance for traditional fishing (high value / target species);
 - commonly caught based on previous catch surveys; and
 - overlap with commercial fishery (are they taken by commercial fishers)
- the Poruma fishers association is best suited to do the data collection for the Poruma community;
- names for each finfish species vary across communities and the best way for community members to identify individual species and correct names will be for the researchers to supply pictures of finfish species endemic to the Torres Strait; and
- results from a previous Tagai College fish naming project for the central islands should be taken into account.

4.2. Spanish mackerel stock assessment update

Dr O'Neil (Research member) presented the draft findings of the revised Spanish mackerel stock assessment, completed as part of the research project "*Defining the status of Torres Strait Spanish mackerel to inform future fisheries allocation and sustainable fishing*". Dr O'Neil noted that comments on the draft report were pending from the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee.

The FWG noted that four stock analysis were conducted resulting among other outputs, four estimates of harvest levels to achieve Maximum Sustainable Yield (MSY). The estimates ranged from 145t to over 210t. Higher estimates were more uncertain.

Members also noted advice that the data contained less than expected year classes which may reflect the restricted length frequency sampling undertaken (Bramble Cay only for a few months). Maximum age of east coast Spanish mackerel is 26 years.

It was noted that further discussion of the revised stock assessment outcomes would be considered in relation to research priorities and recommendations for future TACs under agenda items 4.4 and 5.2 respectively.

The FWG agreed for the following **ACTIONS**:

1. AFMA to confirm the nature of logbook changes that occurred in 2003;
2. AFMA to provide advice on the date of when the investment warning for the fishery was issued.

4.3. Smart phone project

The FWG noted an update by the Executive Officer the project *Smart phone technology for remote data collection in Torres Strait traditional inhabitant fisheries*. Key updates and observations from other members included:

- the final draft report is pending (due April 2016);
- the project demonstrated that fishers were able to report catches through a smart phone catch reporting system however there were challenges around the logistics in engaging operators and maintaining user uptake of a voluntary catch reporting system;
- Erub fishers and the community freezer business found the smart phone application (the App) very useful. The additional information provided through the App was popular and used to assist fishers to determine the best time to go fishing (for example taking into account prevailing tides);
- TSRA strongly supports the continued development of an App system noting the potential benefit to fishers in having ready access to broader fishing related information and business tools; and
- the AFMA member advised that AFMA would continue to investigate AFMA's capacity to support catch reporting through an App noting back-end infrastructure is required to receive the information. AFMA is assessing and supporting a number of e-reporting initiatives, including e-logbooks across Commonwealth managed fisheries. Initiatives in the Torres Strait need to be considered within the context of AFMA's broader e-reporting program.

4.4. Research priorities

The FWG identified the following data and research needs:

Data needs

- Review logbook structure;

- Monitoring of non-commercial take (note partly being addressed through current research project on the traditional take of finfish);
- Improved rate of returns of freezer records for the TIB Sector; and
- Age and length structure data (medium term – relates to Harvest Strategy work, phase 2).

Research needs

- Genetic studies on Spanish mackerel to test single stock theory – particularly if PNG and NE QLD catches increase. This potentially could be achieved by using fishery data, fisher participation and/or a PhD study;
- Management Strategy Evaluation on harvest strategy options; and
- In the event that the western closure line is removed, investigate the potential impact on TAC.

The FWG also agreed on the following **ACTION**:

1. AFMA to report on the percentage of coral trout and Spanish mackerel fish caught within and outside the 10nm exclusion zones prior the introduction of those closures.

Agenda Item 5 – Management

5.1. Finfish Harvest Strategy

The FWG noted the project proposal to develop a harvest strategy for the fishery and that the funding proposal was still under consideration by the TSSAC.

Members and observers supported the development of a harvest strategy and provided the following observations and advice:

- a harvest strategy provides a clear management procedure for recommended TACs and in doing so, can provide greater certainty for industry;
- one benefit of harvest strategies is that they generally have a strong consultation process where key stakeholders have opportunity to provide their view on how the fishery should be structured. Furthermore, harvest strategies can include guiding principles;
- a harvest strategy for the finfish fishery should set out agreed set of decision rules for key species (i.e. Spanish mackerel and coral trout) and also include other species for which there is growing interest by fishers to target;
- the FWG should be proactive in managing what might become a valuable fishery in the future and that even with a lack of data the simplest form of control rules should be developed and can be built up as more data is available;

- it will be important to engage existing sunset licence holders in the development of the harvest strategy as these are the operators who have long-term experience and knowledge of the fishery and operational factors impacting the fishery;
- it will also be important to communicate well with fishers on the importance of data with all sectors in the development of the harvest strategy;
- catch per unit effort (CPUE) is a pivotal metric used to guide decisions in many fisheries. As an example, CPUE is the sole indicator in place for the ECF coral trout fishery. A simple rule based on CPUE may be appropriate for the Torres Strait. A suite of other parameters used in the TVH fishery could also be considered and added through time to make sure the desires and aspirations for the fishery are maintained, noting that the primary objective is for sustainable stock and healthy economic return but other needs may to be considered in the Torres Strait context;
- the business decisions made by sunset licence operators is very dependent on the decisions and rules put in place to manage the fishery, and although they are an important sector for generating income for communities, they are at times in the dark about their future in the fishery (e.g. unsure if they'll be successful in accessing the fishery until a month or only weeks before season opening); and
- holding a pre-season briefing to hear from all sectors of the industry on what they want for the fishery is an option, particularly during the harvest strategy development. Pre-season briefings would be a good opportunity to build networks and provide a forum for the medium to long term aspirations for the fishery to be well communicated. Operators could then make informed decisions on how they structure their businesses.

5.2. Spanish mackerel and coral trout TACs

Spanish mackerel

The FWG **recommended** for the 2017-18 Spanish mackerel fishing season that:

- TAC advice to be finalised subject to consideration of updated stock assessment;
- a Technical scientific working group be convened to review the stock assessment update to allow for full consideration of inputs and outcomes. Technical scientific working group to report back to FWG;
- the technical scientific working group should comprise the follow members:
 - Scientific members
 - Two industry members: Tony Vass, Kenny Bedford
 - Andrew Tobin
 - Nicole Murphy
 - Government
- the technical scientific working group should consider the following:
 - disproportionate effort in Bramble Cay;

- local factors – unexpected factors (eg environmental);
 - changes in accessible area of the fishery (closures);
 - estimates of TIB, Traditional, Recreational catches;
 - logbook data quality;
 - stock structure; and
 - catch rate objectives (effort & catch);
- recognising the importance of precautionary approach as an interim approach (noting Harvest Strategy to be developed) TAC should not exceed best estimates of MSY after taking into account all other sources of fishing mortality.

The FWG **recommended** that the Spanish mackerel TAC remain unchanged (187.7t tonnes) for the 2016-17 fishing season noting the following:

- the current TAC (187t) is based on average catches 2001-05. A stable period of catch;
- recent reported catches are > 100 tonnes;
- proposed lease amount for 2016-17 is 99 tonnes (across four boats) (18% TIB to TVH catch ratio was used in updated stock assessment);
- management risks include unreported catches and potential unknown impacts from coral bleaching on stocks; and
- on balance management risks are acceptable this season however the next season TAC setting process should take into account updated stock assessment and agreed estimates of catch from other sectors. Catches and the TAC remain within estimates of maximum sustainable levels:
 - Begg et al 2006 maximum sustainable levels 146-264t
 - O'Neil 2016:
 - maximum sustainable levels 145-210t
 - catch rates may erode if future average harvest exceeded 150t

Coral trout

The FWG **recommended** that the coral trout TAC (134.9 tonnes) remain unchanged for the current fishing season (2016-17) and the 2017-18 fishing season noting the following:

- the TAC (134.9t) is based on average catches 2001-05. A stable period of catch;
- although there is no stock assessment for coral trout, the Management Strategy Evaluation conducted (Williams et al 2007) using four constant catch scenarios (80-170t) predicted biomass of at least 70% of unfished by biomass by 2025;
- proposed lease amount for 2016-17 is 74 tonnes (across four boats); and
- industry feedback that catch rates on Islands are considered good.

The FWG identified the following issues for further consideration:

- significant decline in effort following buyout. What are the drivers?
 - historically, significant catches were taken within 10nm closure areas
 - possible localised depletion?
 - lack of effort - only one sunset licenced boat operating

- local factors – unexpected factors (eg environmental)
- moving to live coral trout - possible driver for changes in catch composition?
- QLD east coast data – take into account trends.
- estimates of TIB, Traditional and Recreational catches.

5.3. The Proposed leasing arrangements for 2016/17

The FWG considered the proposal for 28.5 tonnes of unspecified mixed reef species to be leased-out to sunset licence holders in the 2016-17 fishing season. The FWG's advice focused on potential sustainability risk associated with targeting of new species and increasing effort on other species. The FWG focused on more immediate risks, also addressing medium term risks in the event there was continued industry interest in these other species.

Proposed fishing plans

The FWG noted advice on the various fishing plans of operators seeking to take 28.5 tonnes in total of other species. The proposed fishing plans include:

- the take of 'other' species as a byproduct (ie not targeted);
- two operators plan to land live coral trout;
- one operator plans to target deepwater 'other species' (20 tonnes) including:
 - Emperor
 - Job fish
 - Flame snapper
 - Nannygai
- live fish to be unloaded in Cairns (via SeaSwift?); and
- one operator proposes to use two 'primary' vessels (note same operation is required to have VMS under QDAF conditions).

Relevant catch information and other considerations

The FWG noted relevant Information regarding past catch trends and catch ratios between coral trout/Spanish mackerel and other species include:

- Williams *et al* 2008 – *Population biology of coral trout species in eastern Torres Strait: Implications for fishery management*
- AFMA Logbooks
- Busilacchi 2008 – *The subsistence coral reef fish fishery in the Torres Strait: monitoring protocols and assessment.*

The FWG noted that regard should be given to management approaches within Queensland and appropriate native title consultation depending on the nature of these proposed fishing operations.

Risks and benefits

The FWG identified the following the risks and benefits associated with the proposed leasing of 28.5 tonnes of other species:

Risks

1. Uncertainty around catch composition (ie risks to specific species) arising from incomplete and/or inaccurate catch and effort reporting.
2. Current logbooks – not optimal for reporting a wider range of ‘other’ species.
3. Discards (survivorship? (i.e. targeting a wider range of species may change the composition of unwanted species that are caught and discarded (and the survivorship of those is largely unknown). Ultimately, there may be a wider range of species that are subject to higher mortality rates than previously and the consequences of that are unknown).
4. Deepwater species generally long lived 30-40 years. NT and Gulf area assessment found species have low natural mortality = sustainable harvest rate is low (take a low percent of the stock). 6 spp in aggregate in the Gulf limit = 450t.
 - Crimson snapper age at maturity 4-7yrs
 - Large mouth nannygai 9-12yrs
 - Red emperor 10-13yrs
 - Goldband snapper 6-8yrs
 - Mangrove jack 8-11yrs
 - Golden snapper 10-13yr

Benefits

1. Sustainable fishing industry development for traditional inhabitants

Recommended management options (managing the risks) immediate and medium term

Immediate

For the 2016-17 fishing season the FWG **recommended** that the leasing out of 28.5 tonnes of other species be supported subject to following **ACTIONS**:

1. improved logbooks (that enable accurate reporting of all species. The FWG noted that the AFMA logbook would require reprinting creating a possible timing issue and use of the QDAF logbook may be constrained by administrative constraints);
2. additional reporting conditions (ie in addition to daily logbook); and
3. Prior reporting (possible use of QDAF system?)

The FWG agreed the **priority outcome** from reporting measures is to have reliable catch data*, catch composition, location, timely reporting (by trip), effort and length (Dr O’Neil to advise on sample sizes, length classes).

*Not verified

Medium term

The FWG **recommended** that subject to further consideration by the Technical Scientific Working Group of coral trout to byproduct catch ratios when targeting coral trout and total take of 'other species' by other sectors -

there should be no further increase above 30 tonnes until systems are in place to independently verify catches, a species-specific risk assessment has been undertaken and where applicable catch triggers and control rules have been agreed.

The FWG identified the following measures that may support further expansion in effort to other species:

1. observer coverage – provides verification of logbooks and biological samples (length and age);
2. port sampling – for biological samples;
3. species triggers (possible vulnerable species) and/or area triggers (possible risk of localised depletion);
4. consideration of iconic species, other values;
5. VMS (Agenda 5.7);
6. Fish Receivers System (Agenda 5.6); and
7. possible requirement for minimum 'quota' holdings for 'other' species.

The FWG identified the following for further consideration:

1. preliminary assessment of catches and catch ratio Coral trout and byproduct.

5.4. Removal of the western closure of the reef line fishery

The FWG noted that:

- the removal of the western closure of the reef line fishery was a long standing item and had broad support amongst Torres Strait communities;
- there is no management basis for the closure. Instead the closure reflects a historical jurisdictional boundary;
- there are potential economic benefits for the TIB sector in removing the closure;
- in the event that the closure was removed, TSRA would retain the closure within sunset licence lease agreements for the TVH sector. This approach could be reviewed subject to the direction of the community; and
- members had varying views on whether or not sufficient consultation on removing the closure had occurred. A key development since the last FWG meeting (2012) has been the Native Title Determination on the Regional Sea Claim, and it was noted that notification to the relevant Registered Native Title Bodies Corporate groups would be undertaken prior the PZJA making a decision.

Noting the need to undertake appropriate Native Notification, the FWG supported in-principle the removal of the western closure of the reef line fishery.

5.5. Finfish legislative instrument – consideration of measures

The FWG noted the proposed remaking of the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery legislative Instrument.

In relation to the 50cm minimum size limit for grey mackerel (*Scomberomorous semifasciatus*) the FWG noted:

- that the minimum size limit for grey mackerel was well below the size at maturity and below the size limit for the ECF;
- a more appropriate size limit for grey mackerel would be 75cm;
- grey mackerel are not a common catch in the Torres Strait fishery and there are no logbook records of this species being caught in the Torres Strait; and
- that any changes on the limit for grey mackerel should be deferred as the priority is to have the instrument remade at the earliest opportunity.

5.6. Fish Receiver System

The FWG supported the proposal to replace the current Torres Strait Seafood Buyers and Processors Docket Book system with a mandatory Fish Receiver System for the all Torres Strait Fisheries, excluding Torres Strait Prawn Fishery by 1 December 2017 noting that the system will require:

- a) all licence holders (including Traditional Inhabitants) to only dispose of commercially caught fish in those fisheries (not including fish caught during the course of traditional fishing) to a holder of a Fish Receiver licence; and
- b) it will be mandatory for holders of Fish Receiver licences to comprehensively report details of all fish received (landed) for each fisher.

The FWG noted that AFMA would work with stakeholders to finalise the operational details of the Fish Receiver System

5.7. Vessel Monitoring System

The FWG supported the proposal to implement mandatory Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) for all commercially licenced primary and carrier vessels operating under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* by 1 July 2017 where;

- a) a primary boat is the boat nominated to the licence as the primary commercial fishing boat for the licence from which tender boats are authorised to operate;
- b) freight shipping vessels are exempt; and
- c) exemptions may be provided for carrier vessels that are 6 meters or less in length.

The FWG noted that industry would responsible for the installation and maintenance cost for VMS units whilst AFMA would be responsible for monitoring costs. AFMA's costs would be covered within AFMA's existing budget.

5.8. Future Management Priorities

The FWG agreed on the following future management priorities:

- development of a harvest strategy;
- progressing issues identified under agenda items 5.2 and 5.3 through the Technical Scientific Working Group; and
- improving fishery data (freezer data, possible length frequency and otolith data collection).

The FWG agreed to the following **ACTION**:

1. Compliance updates be added as a standing agenda item for future meetings.

Agenda Item 6 – AFMA Finfish Fishery Budget 2016/17

The FWG noted AFMA's 2016/17 Finfish Fishery Budget.

Agenda Item 7 – Other Business

There was no other business.