



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

INDUSTRY WORKSHOP – IMPROVING BLACK TEATFISH CATCH REPORTING

Meeting outcomes

Erub Island – Nora's Ark

19 October 2016

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Attendance

Name	Community/Organisation	Fished in 2014 Trial? Y/N	Fished in 2015 Trial? Y/N
Jerry Stephen	Chairperson	No	Yes
Steve Hall	AFMA		
Selina Stoute	AFMA		
Lyndon Peddell	AFMA		
John Jones	AFMA		
Andrew Trappett	AFMA		
Charles David	TSRA		
Maluwap Nona	HCWG Industry member, Maluialgal & Gudumalulgal		
Mariana Nahas	TSRA		
John Ramsay	TSRA		
John Mathews	TSRA		
Simon Naawi	Masig	Yes	Yes
Chris Saylor	Erub	No	No
Robert Mye	Erub	Yes	Yes
Moa Saylor	Erub	Yes	Yes
Walter Lui	Erub	No	No

Name	Community/Organisation	Fished in 2014 Trial? Y/N	Fished in 2015 Trial? Y/N
Mary Ann Bourne	Erub	No	No
Amina Ghee	Erub	Yes	Yes
Harry Ghee	Erub	Yes	Yes
Isacc Ghee	Erub	Yes	Yes
Rocky Stephen	Ugar, Kos and Abob Fisheries	Yes	Yes
Daniel Stephen	Ugar, Kos and Abob Fisheries	Yes	Yes
Henry Savage	Erub	Yes	Yes
Francis Ketchell	Erub	Yes	Yes
Kapua Gutchen	Erub	Yes	Yes
Florence Gutchen	Erub	Yes	Yes
Rita Kebisu	My Pathways Erub	No	No
Cedric Pearson	Poruma	Yes	Yes
Dennis Passi	MDW, Mer	Yes	Yes
Mark David	Jama	No	No
Francis Pearson	HCWG Industry member, Kulkalgal	No	No
Wes Pitt	Erub	Yes	Yes
Michael Passi	HCWG Industry member, Kemer Kemer Meriam	Yes	Yes

Name	Community/Organisation	Fished in 2014 Trial? Y/N	Fished in 2015 Trial? Y/N
William Bero	MDW	No	No
Doug Passi	Mer, PBC Chair	No	No
Arthur Naawi	Erub	Yes	Yes
Ralph Mounfield	Erub	No	
Kila Odo	Mer		
J. Thaiaday	Erub	No	No
Kenny Bedford	EFMA, Erub		
Tom Stephen	Ugar	Yes	Yes
Tabane Bustard	Erub	Yes	Yes
Belcy Gosa	Erub	Yes	Yes
Charlie Charlie	Erub	Yes	Yes

1 Welcome and agenda

Mr Jerry Stephen, TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member chaired the meeting and welcomed attendees. An opening prayer was conducted and the draft agenda was supported (**Attachment A**).

2 Background

2.1 Objectives of the meeting

Workshop participants noted that:

- the purpose of the workshop was to understand from industry the current challenges for fishers to report their catches and where possible develop options to overcome those challenges and improve catch reporting for the fishery;
- the workshop was recommended by the Hand Collectable Working Group (HCWG) at its meeting in June 2016 and that any outcomes would be considered by the HCWG; and
- the HCWG (meeting June 2016) recommended that:
 - the fishery not be opened until measures are in place to improve reporting; and
 - the workshop to have regard to the preliminary options canvassed by members and observers to improve catch reporting in the short and medium/long term (an excerpt of the HCWG draft meeting record was circulated to workshop participants and is at **Attachment B**)

AFMA confirmed that black teatfish remains closed and advised that the PZJA is likely to require substantially improved reporting arrangements to be in place before any consideration could be given to reopening fishing for black teatfish.

2.2 Status of Torres Strait Black Teatfish stocks and BDM fisheries in the region

Workshop participants noted that:

- historically, most sea cucumber fisheries throughout the world tend to be boom and bust;
- sea cucumbers are vulnerable to overfishing; and
- it is reported that around 20% of the world's sea cucumber fisheries are depleted while 40% are over fished/exploited.

2.3 Outcomes of trial openings

Workshop participants noted that:

- the 15 tonne TAC was overcaught in both years;
- there have been some improvement in catch reporting but not enough to avoid the TAC being overcaught. Late reporting of catches undermined the ability to manage the fishery with the TAC; and
- there is increasing interest to participate in the fishery with licence numbers increasing from 64 in 2014 to 124.

3 Recommendations and advice summary

Among workshop participants there was:

- broad support for moving towards greater community-based management control underpinned by community catch share allocations and community economic zones. Catch allocations were generally considered for five communities only (Erub, Masig, Mer, Poruma & Ugar). Whilst the proposed approach within communities was variable (refer to section 4), greater community control was sought over:
 - catch share allocations;
 - where fishers may fish (based on community economic zones);
 - who may fish in the fishery (proposals varied from having a register managed by the PBC and with fishers living on the island having priority of access (Erub) to no big boats and access to be limited to the current active operators with any new fishers having to work with them (Mer, noting there a four active fishing businesses recognised in the community);
 - catch monitoring approaches ('full time fishers logbooks, everyone else centralised reporting system or combination of the two approaches); and
 - cultural protocols to access areas.
- strong support for introducing mandatory logbook reporting for fishers;
- general recognition that the fishery cannot support everyone (or an unlimited number of fishers) – the fishery is too small to sustain a large number of fishers;
- some recognition that the fishery was based on a wide range of species from which a living could be made, not just black teatfish
- differences in views between those fishers wanting the fishery opened as soon as possible (a 1 December 2016 season open date was proposed) and those wanting to continue to develop catch reporting and a full range of community-based management arrangements.

AFMA confirmed the following:

- in consultation with the PZJA Working Groups, AFMA has been working to introduce a range of new management tools across all Torres Strait fisheries. The initiatives are expected to improve fishery information and monitoring. They include:
 - a) mandatory reporting by fishers (requires an amendment to the Fisheries Act which may take 12-18 months)
 - b) mandatory Fish Receiver System (to replace the current voluntary docket book system); and
 - c) mandatory Vessel Monitoring System for all primary and carrier boats.

- it will be important for any recommendations to reopen the black teatfish fishery to clearly explain how the risk of overcatching will be reduced compared to the arrangements from the previous trial openings;
- there are different process requirements for management options that require regulatory support (law) versus voluntary arrangements (for example those currently practised under cultural lore). Some of the community-based management arrangements proposed, for example catch allocations and delegating control over who may fish in the fishery, would require significant consultation and management evaluation. This does not mean that the options should not be investigated but that it will take more time to resolve; and
- fishers do not need to wait for mandatory reporting to start completing a daily catch logbook. Since the 2015 black teatfish opening AFMA has only received logbook returns from one fisher.

Industry recommendation

Having regard for the differing views held and noting that AFMA would continue to work towards developing a mandatory fish receiver system, industry participants **recommended** that:

- a) each community develop their community catch monitoring arrangements in detail;
- b) proposals include 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.

4 Community and fisher specific proposals on improving catch reporting

The below Community and industry views for improving management of black teatfish were presented to the workshop. These were developed during the Industry meeting held at Erub on 18 October 2016 - the day prior to the workshop.

4.1 Erub Community

The views of Erub Community participants included:

- Closure to the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery unless:
 - there are effective, mandatory catch monitory systems in place for all species.
 - all species have their own individual TAC; and
 - that there is an adequate level of compliance to ensure the future sustainability of Beche-de-mer.

- For the future sustainable harvest of black teatfish:
 - Traditional sea boundary protocols to be respected and adhered to.
 - a respective 5 tonne allocation of black teatfish quota to the communities of Erub, Mer, Ugar and Masig;
 - a 5 tonne allocation to an agreed area outside of the economic zone of the four communities (above);
 - fishing for black teatfish limited to DYI, MDW, STN and YKE licences only;
 - restriction to primary vessels in the agreed 7m dory economic zones of above stated communities, unless authorised by local community PBC;
 - the period for accessing black teatfish not to be:
 - in November;
 - during the closure of the Torres Strait TRL season; or
 - during know spawning time of the species;
 - there be a PBC approved register of vessels, by community, permitted to harvest black teatfish;
 - there be an agreed local, central point of contact to log all daily catches by registered vessels;
 - all Beche-de-mer product leaving the community during the fishery opening be registered at the same central point of contact before it is permitted to leave the island;
 - the fishery is accessed only by residents of the above mentioned communities (ie. fishers must be able to demonstrate they have lived in the community for a period agreed by that respective community); and
 - any levels of over fishing the allocated community quota be subtracted from the following annual allocation (the full submission from Erub Community is at **Attachment C**).

4.2 Mer Island

The views of Mer Community participants included:

- in favour of a black teatfish opening in 2016;
- a total allowable catch should be set of around 20 to 25 tonnes and should be allocated to the five islands with black teatfish habitat (Erub, Masig, Mer, Ugar & Poruma);
- access to be limited to the current active operators with any new fishers having to work with them in their own boat (i.e. Mer fishers report catch throughout the three established fishers on Mer (Dennis Passi, Michael Passi and Maluwap Nona);
- cultural protocols to be followed to seek access to the fishery; and
- Public register of vessels participating in the black teatfish fishing.

4.3 Ugar Island

The views of Ugar Community participants included:

- support black teatfish remaining closed until improved catch reporting ensured and appropriate management tools are in place;

- supportive of a community land- based catch monitoring program with a single designated, shore based person responsible for logging and submitting catches to AFMA and a central point for landing and reporting product (on a daily basis);
- should be opened to all licenced fishers providing cultural protocols and boundaries are respected if fishing around four eastern islands of Erub, Masig, Mer and Ugar (plus poruma); and
- support the following long term options:
 - mandatory docket/log books – with penalty system in place
 - allocation across 4 eastern Islands (Erub, Masig, Mer and Ugar)
 - traditional protocols supported to access fishery from outside
 - Beche-de-mer Management Plan to be developed.

4.4 Masig Island

The views of the Masig Community participant included:

- support black teatfish remaining closed until improved catch reporting ensured and appropriate management tools are in place
- support future openings during the month of December (this may mean that fishers targeting rock lobster would be absent from the black teatfish grounds which could reduce effort);
- recommended that ranching or aquaculture of black teatfish be considered (assistance was sought from TSRA to develop this initiative); and
- Monitoring programme including:
 - community members to be trained/employed as catch monitoring officers, as a My Pathways activity;
 - central point of contact on Masig and Burke Island; and
 - Important to include area where fished in catch report.

4.5 Poruma Island

The views of Poruma Community participants included:

- support black teatfish remaining closed until improved catch reporting ensured and appropriate management tools are in place; and
- would be guided by the recommendations of the other communities.

4.6 Iama Island

The views of the Iama Community participant included:

- support black teatfish remaining closed until improved catch reporting ensured and appropriate management tools are in place.
- supportive of a community managed catch monitoring program;
- noted that Warrior Reef had been hit hard by bêche-de-mer fishing with depletions evident for a number of species (notably sand fish);
- support arrangement for black teatfish allocation to four eastern communities (5 inc. Poruma);
- support complimentary arrangements for beche-de-mer species around Warrior Reef;

- support development of community led program to fish and monitor reef top to get a better understanding of stock status;
- support adherence to cultural protocols included in management plan; and

4.7 Working Group member for Maluialgal & Gudumalulgal

- Strong preference is to open the black teatfish in December 2016. The opening would be supported by the following catch reporting arrangements:
 - full time fishers would fill out daily logbooks; and
 - part time fishers would report their catches to a designated community based point.
- Fishers need to respect cultural protocols; and
- Fishers (licence holders) from outside the eastern region have legitimate rights to access the fishery and they should not be excluded. Professional fishers from outside the region are an important part of the industry and its future economic development. Compensation would be sought by those fishers if they are to be excluded under future allocation or access arrangements.

4.8 Other industry views

It was noted that with increasing interest in the fishery, some kind of limited entry measure may be needed in future. If this was to happen, the issue of compensation for those fishers that could not fish would need to be addressed;

4.9 Other issues - compliance

A number of workshop participants raised ongoing concern over the operations of a Carrier boat fishing for Beche-de-mer that is allegedly towing tenders that are using hookah apparatus. Industry have been reporting this matter to AFMA and QFBP over the past 18 months however the operator allegedly continues to operate illegally.

Attachment A: Meeting agenda

Industry Workshop – options to improve catch reporting for black teatfish

19 October 2016, Erub Community

Meeting Time

Wednesday, 19 October, 9:30am – 4:00pm

Venue:

Nora's Ark Hall

Agenda

1. **Welcome** (opening prayer and recognition of the late Michael Mosby)
2. **Objectives of meeting** (to develop management options to improve catch reporting for black teatfish)
3. **Status of Torres Strait Black Teatfish stocks and Bech de mer fisheries in the region.**
4. **Outcomes of trial openings** (catch data, reporting and participation levels)
5. **Identification catch reporting issues** (industry advice on current challenges)
6. **Development of management options** (Short and longer term options)
7. **Other Business**

Attachment B: HCWG Meeting #9 draft meeting outcomes excerpt

6.2. Black Teatfish – Outcomes of 2015 trial opening and future arrangements

The HCWG noted the outcomes of the 2015 trial opening, including that there were significant improvements in catch reporting by many fishers. However not receiving catch reports on a daily basis undermined the ability to manage the fishery appropriately and resulted in the large overshoot of the TAC. The HCWG further noted that with likely increasing interest in the fishery and size of the TAC, the risk of a future over catch is high unless accurate and timely catch reporting was taken as a priority by all fishers.

Noting the 2015 TAC overcatch of black teatfish and risk of a future overcatch, HCWG **recommended:**

- that the fishery not be opened until measures are in place to improve reporting;
- AFMA, with support from TSRA, convene a workshop including HCWG industry members and up to two fisheries representatives from Erub, Masig, Ugar, Mer lama, Poruma and Warraber to consider immediate options to improve catch reporting;
- the workshop to have regard to the short and medium/long term management options to improve catch reporting as detailed in **Table 1**. These are the preliminary options canvassed by members and observers; and
- the workshop outcomes to be considered by the HCWG.

Table 1. Possible short-term and medium/long-term management options for improving catch reporting for black teatfish suggested by members and observers

Short term or medium/long term	Management tool	Description
Short-term	Mandatory Fish Receiver System	Make it a requirement for fishers to land to a licenced fish receiver and for fish receivers to report landings daily to AFMA. One possible option suggested was for landing reports to be made at 9am each day with all catches to be landed to a buyer onshore, not to carrier vessels.
	Landing restrictions by location	Restrict landings to the four eastern communities (Erub, Masig, Mer & Ugar).

	Change season dates to reduce potential effort	Change season dates to coincide with the open season for the TRL/Kaiar Fishery to reduce the number of fishers participating in the fishery.
	Prohibition on carrier boats	Do not permit carrier boats to operate in the fishery. The fishery should instead be a small boat fishery with fishers working from the community.
	Close fishing of all Beche-de-mer for 1 month after the closure	This means the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery (i.e. all species) closes for on month once black teatfish is closed. This would assist compliance but not necessarily address catch reporting issues.
	Reduce TAC to 10 tonnes	This adds further precaution to the TAC, however based on 2015 catch rates the TAC is likely to be exceeded within 3 days.
	Limited opening time to 3-4 days	The maximum daily recorded catch during the 2015 season was 4341kg. After allowing for a 10% increase in participants the total catch expected over 3 days would be around 14 tonnes.
	Limited entry	Access only developmental permit
Medium to longer-term	Mandatory logbook reporting by fishers	Make it mandatory for fishers to report catches. (would require a legislative amendment which will take over 12 months).
	Community catch share allocations	Allocate catch shares to communities to provide community flexibility to develop catch reporting arrangements. (requires a dedicated consultation process)
	Penalties for misreporting	1. For example: reporting performance could be reflected in subsequent year's allocation if a community allocation was to be introduced. (requires a dedicated consultation process) 2. Fisheries Infringement Notices

Attachment C: Erub Community Submission

Erub Community position and recommendations to the PZJA consultation in relation to the Torres Strait Beche de Mer Fishery

The following position and recommendations are the outcomes of a local meeting of Erubam le on the 17th of October, 2016 that concentrated on providing advice to the regional workshop at Erub, designed to improve future Black Teatfish catch reporting.

This follows advice already provided to AFMA and the TSRA in relation to this fishery.

Erubam le are calling for a closure to the Torres Strait BDM fishery unless:

- there are effective, mandatory catch monitoring systems in place for all species.
- all species have their own individual TAC.
- that there is an adequate level of compliance to ensure the future sustainability of BDM

For the future sustainable harvest of Black Teatfish, Erubam le offer the following solutions:

- That Traditional sea boundary protocols be respected and adhered to.
- A respective 5 tonne allocation of Black Teatfish quota to the communities of Erub, Mer, Ugar and Masig.
- A 5 tonne allocation to an agreed area outside of the economic zone of the 4 named islands above.
- For the Black Teat species to be limited to DYI, MDW, STN and YKE licences only
- For a restriction to primary vessels in the agreed 7m dory economic zones of above stated communities, unless authorised by local community PBC.
- For the period of access to **not** be November.
- For the period of access to **not** be during the closure of the Torres Strait TRL season.
- For the period of access to **not** be during know spawning time of the species.
- That there be a PBC approved register of vessels, by community, permitted to harvest before any Opening.
- That there be an agreed local, central point of contact to log all daily catches by registered vessels.
- That all BDM product leaving the community during the fishery opening be registered at the same central point of contact before it is permitted to leave the island.
- That the fishery is accessed only by residents of the above mentioned communities ie. fishers must be able to demonstrate they have lived in the community for a period agreed by that respective community.
- That any levels of over fishing the allocated community quota be subtracted from the following annual allocation.

“If we can’t account for every single aber being picked up and shipped out of here, shut it down until we can.”