



Australian Government  
Australian Fisheries Management Authority



**TORRES STRAIT TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER  
RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP (TRL RAG)  
MEETING NO. 12  
3-4 SEPTEMBER 2013**

PULLMAN CAIRNS INTERNATIONAL HOTEL, CAIRNS, QLD

**MINUTES**

**CHAIR: MR JOHN POLLOCK**

These are **DRAFT** minutes and should not be considered final until ratified at the next meeting of the TRLRAG.

Prepared by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority on behalf of the Torres Strait Protected Zone Joint Authority



# FINAL AGENDA

1. Preliminaries (AFMA)
  - 1.1. Apologies/Adoption of agenda
  - 1.2. Correspondence
  - 1.3. Ratification of RAG #11 Minutes
  - 1.4. Action items from RAG #11
  
2. Update on each Jurisdiction
  - A. Native Title Decision
    - 2.1. Torres Strait (AFMA)
    - 2.2. Queensland (DAFF QLD)
    - 2.3. PNG (NFA)
  
3. Stock Assessment and TAC (CSIRO)
  - 3.1. Report of the 2013 mid-year survey (CSIRO)
  - 3.2. Review 2012 Stock Assessment report and 2013 update (CSIRO)
  - 3.3. Preliminary TAC for 2014 (CSIRO)
  - 3.4. Forecast TAC for 2015 (CSIRO)
  - 3.5. Update regarding fishery dependant data (CSIRO)
  
4. Management Strategy Evaluation Update for Torres Strait – where to from here (CSIRO)
  
5. TSSAC Annual Operation Plan – review of TRL research priorities (AFMA)
  
6. Outcomes from PZJA Consultative Meetings
  - 6.1. TSSAC Meeting #59, #60 and #61 (AFMA)
  - 6.2. PZJA Standing Committee (AFMA)
  - 6.3. Fisheries Stakeholder Forum (TSRA)
  - 6.4. Outcomes of TRLWG #1 and #2 (AFMA)
  
7. Other Business
  - 7.1. TRL Management Plan Update (AFMA)
  - 7.2. Date of next meeting



## **DECISION RECORD – TRLRAG NO. 12 (3-4 SEPTEMBER 2013)**

- 1.3.1 The TRLRAG (Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group) agreed to adopt the minutes of TRLRAG No.11 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.
- 3.2.1 The TRLRAG agreed to accept the outcomes of the 2012 Stock Assessment report and the 2013 Stock Assessment update as presented at the TRL RAG Meeting No. 12.
- 3.3.1 The TRLRAG agreed to the preliminary total allowable catch (TAC) recommendation for 2014 of 616t (90%CI, 294-938 t).
- 5.1 The TRLRAG noted the research priorities relevant to the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster fishery (TRL) fishery included in the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) 2012 Annual Operational Plan.

RATIFIED



The following members and observers were in attendance at TRLRAG No 12:

### **Members**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest</b>
Mr John Pollock	TRLRAG Chairperson	Nil
Mr Brendan Rayner	AFMA Executive Officer	AFMA Staff
Dr Eva Plaganyi-Lloyd	Stock Assessment Scientist	CSIRO Scientist
Dr Darren Dennis	Stock Assessment Scientist	CSIRO Scientist
Mr Nokome Bentley	Scientist/Consultant	Independent Scientist
Mr Steve Bolton	AFMA Senior Manager	AFMA Staff
Mr Tom Roberts	QDAFF Fisheries Manager	QDAFF Staff
Mr Brett Arlidge	Australian Industry representative	QRLA President/M.G.Kailis QLD
Mr John Adams	TSRA Fisheries Manger	TSRA Staff
Mr Philip Polon	NFA Fisheries Manager	NFA Staff
Mr Ned Larry	Central Islands Cluster Representative	TIB Licence Holder/TSRA Board member
Mr Yen Loban	Inner Islands Cluster Representative	TIB Licence Holder/TSRA Board member
Mr Maluwap Nona	Near Western Islands Cluster Representative	TIB Licence Holder/TSRA Board member
Mr Les Pitt	Eastern Cluster Representative	TIB Licence Holder
Mr Charles David	Top Western Islands Cluster Representative	TIB Licence Holder
Mr Trent Butcher	TVH Representative (1 <sup>st</sup> day only)	TRL Fisher
Mr Ian Liviko	Observer	NFA Staff
Mr Joseph Posu	Observer	NFA Staff
Ms Anne Clarke	Observer	TRLWG Chair
Mr Daniel Takai	Observer	TIB Licence Holder/Buyer
Dr Matthew Flood	Observer	ABARES Staff
Mr Jeremy Smith	Observer	TSRA Staff
Mr Mark Gerber	Observer (2 <sup>nd</sup> day only)	TIB Licence Holder/Buyer



## ACTION ITEMS

#	Action Item	Agenda	Champion	Due Date
1)	TRLWG to invite Dr Robert Campbell to present findings from the Annual Abundance Index analysis model for Torres Strait Lobster.	3.2	AFMA	Early 2014
2)	AFMA to amend the TRL section of the TSSAC AOP and distribute to members for comment (out of session).	5	AFMA	Pre RAG 13

Meeting start: 9:15am. Meeting opened with a prayer from Charles David

### Agenda Item 1.1 Apologies/Adoption of Agenda

**Apologies:** Shane Fava (AFMA)

Robert Campbell (CSIRO)

Kenny Bedford (TSRA)

Randall Owens (GBRMPA)

Meriamina Mina (PNG - Industry)

**Agenda:** TSRA requested an additional agenda item of 2.A – Native Title Decision. Agenda adopted.

### Agenda Item 1.2 Correspondence

N/a

### Agenda Item 1.3 Ratification of TRL RAG No.11 minutes

Brett Arlidge commented that under Agenda item 7.1 - Aligning TRL Season with Market Price, it classified one of the Chinese festivals as the 'Lantern Festival', this should be called the 'Mid-Autumn Festival'.

Based on these changes the TRLRAG **AGREED** to adopt the minutes of TRLRAG No.11 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**1.3.1** The TRLRAG **AGREED** to adopt the minutes of TRLRAG No.11 as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

### Agenda Item 1.4 Action items from TRL RAG No.11

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the progress against the action items from TRLRAG Meeting No. 11.

In addition, the following specific comments were recorded:

Action item 3 – Brett underlined that he was not convinced of the reasoning in Dr Hutton's model and he felt that the closure for hookah during the Chinese New Year was disadvantaging operators. AFMA noted that the Fishing Season period will be discussed at the next TRLWG.

### Agenda item 2.A Native Title Decision

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the update from Maluwap Nona highlighting that on the 7<sup>th</sup> August 2013 the High Court of Australia made the decision in favour of the Torres Strait people for the appeal of the Leo Akiba on behalf of the Torres Strait Regional Seas Claim v.



Commonwealth of Australia and Ors case regarding Torres Strait Islanders claims to commercial fishing rights. TSRA handed out a plain English interpretation of the decision.

He noted that Traditional Owners will be meeting on the 16-17<sup>th</sup> September to discuss the legalities of the decision and what it means for Torres Strait Islander people. After this meeting advice will be provided to communities. John Adams reiterated that existing fisheries laws will remain and the Traditional Owner meeting will establish a Prescribed Body Corporate to oversee the aspirations for Traditional Inhabitants of the Torres Strait.

### **Agenda item 2.1 Torres Strait Update**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the Torres Strait TRL fishery update provided by AFMA. AFMA handed out a brochure outlining the recent performance of the fishery. Some of the key points highlighted by the AFMA representative included:

- the 2012 TRL season was another good year for both the traditional inhabitant (TIB) and non-traditional inhabitant (TVH) sectors as predicted in the 2011 stock assessment and TAC estimation process, with catches of 188t and 370t respectively;
- to date, the 2013 season has also been a productive fishing season. By the end of June 2013, TVH fishers had caught approximately 213 tonnes and by the end of February the TIB sector had harvested 30 tonnes; and
- to date, none of the three PNG vessels cross-endorsed to harvest TRL in Australian waters had utilised any of their allocated 635 dory days.

The TRLRAG members agreed that the slight decrease in Catch per Unit of Effort (CPUE) was more in line with previous years and would likely result in total allowable catch (TAC) figures close to that of 2012.

### **Agenda item 2.2 Queensland Update**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the Queensland Fisheries update provided by QDAFF. The following points were raised regarding the Queensland East Coast TRL fishery:

- the 2013 season in the East Coast TRL fishery was once again managed under a quota management system, set at 195 tonnes; and
- there are six licences operating in 2013, of which have harvested 137 tonnes of TRL.

Brett Arlidge noted that he felt the harvested catch would be slightly more than last year, with the quality of live product far better, making up approximately 85% of the harvest.

### **Agenda item 2.3 PNG Update**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the PNG update provided by PNG NFA. PNG NFA handed out a brochure outlining the recent performance of the fishery. Some of the key points highlighted by the NFA representative included:

- in 2012 there were seven vessels licenced to fish in the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ), of which three cross-endorsed to fish in Australian waters;
- the PNG TRL catch for 2012 was estimated at 65 tonnes, mostly tails; and



- the 2013 season, again had seven licences issued to fish in the TSPZ, and 3 vessels were cross-endorsed to fish in Australian waters. However, to date with 635 days allocated to these vessels, no boats have utilised this effort.

### **Agenda item 3.1 Report of the 2013 mid-year survey**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the update provided by CSIRO on the 2013 mid-year survey conducted in May/June, these indicated the following:

- a total of 74 sites were surveyed by divers, though it was one of the worst years for weather and worst underwater visibility since the surveys began in 1989, which can influence the model;
- the 2013 recruiting (1+) year-class was just below the long-term average, which was in contrast to the increasing trend seen during 2009-2012;
- the 2012 fished (2+) year-class was slightly smaller than the 2012 year-class and near the long-term average;
- as the fishery targets the 2+ year-class, the 2013 commercial catch is expected to be similar to the 2012 catch, though will be dictated by distribution; and
- the 2+ year-class were below average across all stratoms except the Mabuiag and Warraber Stratoms.

Darren Dennis highlighted that the fishery was being underutilised, with only 30% of the fishable area available being fished, however 90% of TVH catch taken from the Kirkcaldie complex. Nokome Bentley questioned why you would fish the one area when the CPUE is similar across the Torres Strait. Trent Butcher noted that every year is different and the TRL food source determines where operators fish. Operators are constantly looking to moving to clearer water and assessing where they think the TRL will be found. It just turns out that they are recently found around Kirkcaldie.

Darren mentioned the results from the 'Environmental impacts on the TRL population in Torres Strait' project undertaken by CSIRO. He stated that as the environmental conditions have been very consistent over time, there is little link between TRL and the substrate makeup, though further investigation could be undertaken.

### **Agenda item 3.2 Review 2012 Stock Assessment Report and 2013 Update**

The TRLRAG **REVIEWED** the revised stock assessment models presented by the CSIRO, being the Base, Interaction and the Main Effects models. Noting that CPUE had increased significantly over time, CSIRO felt that a discussion of fishing strategies and how they have changed over time to determine if the current data is adequately capturing the strategies used in the fishery would be useful. The Chair agreed this would be beneficial and suggested that TRLWG invite Dr Campbell to present these findings and discuss further.

<b>Action Item 1</b>	TRLWG to invite Dr Robert Campbell to present findings from the Annual Abundance Index analysis model for Torres Strait Lobster.
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The TRLRAG **AGREED** that the Main Effects model fit the CPUE and the survey data best. Overall the stock assessment indicated that the TRL resource is in good condition with spawning stock biomass in 2013 ( $B_{sp}$ ) estimated to be above the target level.

**3.2.1** The TRLRAG **AGREED** to accept the outcomes of the 2012 stock assessment report and 2013 update as presented at the TRL RAG Meeting No. 12.

### **Agenda item 3.3 Preliminary TAC for 2014**

As per the agreement to accept the main effects with sigma 0.15 model and the outcomes from the 2013 stock assessment, the TRLRAG **AGREED** to accept the recommended preliminary TAC for the 2014 season, acknowledging the associated level of uncertainty.

**3.3.1** The TRLRAG **AGREED** to accept the recommended preliminary 2014 TAC of 616t (90%CI, 294-938 t) as a final TAC to monitor the TRL fishery.

### **Agenda item 3.4 Forecast TAC for 2015**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the forecast TAC for 2015 was recommended at 701t (90%CI; 517–885 t), to be refined in 2014 following the mid-season survey. The forecast TAC will be reassessed at the TRLRAG meeting in 2014.

### **Agenda item 3.5 Update Regarding Fishery Dependent Data**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the future transitional move to quota in the fishery, and reaffirmed the recommendation for a pre-season survey. Previous pre-season surveys analysis fit the mid-season survey history. CSIRO highlighted that 2014 will have a mid-season survey in June and a pre-season survey in November that will incorporate the TVH and TIB operators. The survey methods for the 2015 fishing season will be reviewed by the TSSAC. CSIRO noted that mandatory catch reporting across all sectors would enable more accurate modeling.

TRLRAG members noted the following suggestions to be included in the review:

- Cost-benefit analysis of the altered survey protocol to utilise industry
- Social implications such as inter-sectorial conflict through using both TIB and TVH divers during surveys
- Timelines for TAC setting and sector allocations should be considered
- Independent advice should be sought prior to finalising future survey protocols

### **Agenda item 4 Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) Update for Torres Strait – where to from here**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** CSIROs comprehensive overview of the Torres Strait TRL MSE project assessing the potential impacts of current and alternative management arrangements on the TIB fishers and the TRL fishery. The three different management strategies investigated the impacts on Torres Strait Islanders economically, socially and culturally. The ways forward determined three targets:

1. increase TIB participation;
2. increase TIB catch and efficiency; and
3. increasing the live component of TIB catch





CSIRO highlighted that they would like to extend the MSE further through a pre-proposal to the TSSAC for 2014/15 funding.

**Agenda item 5 TSSAC Annual Operation Plan (AOP) – review of TRL research priorities**

The TRLRAG **REVIEWED** the TSSAC AOP TRL research priorities. The TRLRAG had many suggested changes to the TSSAC AOP, mostly seeking more stakeholder involvement in the development of the document as it is a guide for researchers in addressing the research priorities in the fishery, therefore must come from the stakeholders. Steve Bolton noted that many of the categories were purely management requirements that are statutory obligations and therefore not considered research priorities. The TRLRAG agreed that an amended version was required.

<b>Action Item 2</b>	AFMA to amend the TRL section of the TSSAC AOP and distribute to members out of session for comment.
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**Agenda item 6 Outcomes from PZJA Consultative Meetings**

**Agenda item 6.1 TSSAC meeting #59, #60 and #61**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the update provided by AFMA on Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) funded projects that were completed during 2012/13 as well as projects already underway for 2013/14. AFMA mentioned that the TSSAC are meeting in October 2013 to discuss pre-proposals for the remaining money in the 2013/14 funding year, and the upcoming 2014/15 funding year.

**Agenda item 6.2 PZJA Standing Committee**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the update on the beche de mer species 'Black Teatfish' TAC decision. AFMA highlighted the change of Commonwealth Fisheries Ministers during the last few months and the impact it has had on the decision making through the PZJA process. AFMA reiterated that the opening of the 'Black Teatfish' TAC trial for one month is still in the process of being approved by PZJA members but will be opened after final endorsement.

**Agenda item 6.3 Fisheries Stakeholder Forum**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the update from TSRA relating to the Fisheries Stakeholder Forum held on Thursday Island in June 2013. The then Comm. Fisheries Minister and TSRA Chair confirmed their commitment towards the implementation of a management plan in the fishery. AFMA underlined that it will reaffirm the need for a management plan with the new Minister, and will emphasise the length of time between PZJA meetings.

**Agenda item 6.4 Outcomes of TRLWG #1 and #2**

The TRLRAG **NOTED** the update from the TRLWG Chair who commended the responsible parties for the ability to get good representation at each of the TRLWG meetings. She noted that the first meeting was mostly about establishing a basic understanding of the direction the



management plan and the role of the TRLWG in its development. TRLWG #2 was set to address operational issues in the fishery, however as a result of unfortunate timing, coinciding with the High Court Native Title decision, the meeting was prematurely adjourned. AFMA pointed out that another TRLWG meeting would ideally be in November 2013 but will ensure the political environment is settled before committing.

## **Agenda Item 7      Other Business**

### **Agenda item 7.1      TRL Management Plan Update**

AFMA expressed the implications that the stalled TRLWG #2 meeting had on the already tight implementation schedule for the management plan. As a result the timeline is at least three months behind schedule, however noted that they will be working with the other PZJA agencies and TRLWG to make up this time and continue to aim for a 2015 implementation date.

John Adams noted that an impromptu TIB meeting took place on the second day of TRLWG #2 to discuss aspirations and goals for the management plan and the fishery, and highlighted that it is envisaged that these will be discussed and worked through at future TRLWG meetings.

### **Agenda item 7.2      Date of the Next Meeting**

The next TRLRAG meeting will be held in Brisbane in 2014; dates yet to be confirmed.

Meeting finished at 12.35 pm.

