

TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP (TRLRAG)	MEETING No. 19 13 December 2016
Background Information: Preliminary advection modelling of Tropical Rock Lobster (<i>Panulirus ornatus</i>) larvae in the North Western Coral Sea	Agenda Item 6 FOR INFORMATION

KEY ISSUES

The Australian and PNG Fisheries Bilateral meeting was held on 22 November 2016, Thursday Island.

A key issue discussed was the retention of TRL by PNG trawlers operating in the Gulf or Papua. A copy of the meeting record is provided in **Appendix A** and the relevant section is copied into the Background Section below.

PNG-NFA's advised at the bilateral meeting that trawl catches are being taken outside the known migratory pathway for TRL. AFMA and PNG-NFAs agreed to collaborate to further assess the likely interaction of recent PNG trawl fishing with the TRL spawning migration.

CSIRO has undertaken preliminary modelling **Appendix B**, which builds on previous models, showing TRL larvae dispersal in the Torres Strait. Since the bilateral meeting AFMA has supplied PNG-NFA with the reports listed below and looks forward to receiving the necessary catch and effort information to support further analysis.

BACKGROUND

Report of the Fisheries Committee Bilateral Meeting, 22 November 2016, Thursday Island, Australia

Trawlers retaining TRL catches

5.6. The meeting **NOTED** PNG-NFA advice that PNG trawl operators were granted exemptions since 2014 to retain TRL catches upon industry request. These exemptions were provided recognising that TRL has historically been taken as unreported bycatch and that retention of those catches provides an economic opportunity for the PNG trawl industry which has suffered poor returns in recent seasons.

5.7. The meeting **NOTED** advice from AFMA that the PZJA does not plan to remove the ban on Australian trawlers retaining TRL and AFMA's strong preference for the existing ban to remain in both jurisdictions in recognition of the importance of TRL to Traditional Inhabitants and risk to the stock from large unreported trawl catches.

5.8. The meeting **ACKNOWLEDGED** that the TRL stock is shared between Australia and PNG with the stock reliant on the migration of lobsters from the Protected Zone to the Yule Island spawning grounds - the principle source of recruits to the jointly managed fishery. It was noted that recruits to the Australian and PNG TRL Fishery may also come from spawning in areas adjacent to the east coast of Queensland.

5.9. The meeting **NOTED** that PNG-NFA do not consider the current level of trawl catch to be detrimental to the TRL stock occurring within the Protected Zone. This was in part due to the estimated level of catch and uncertainty on whether or not the trawl fleet was catching migratory TRL. PNG-NFA advised that the trawl catches are being taken outside the known migration pathway. PNG-NFA further advised that PNG trawlers will soon be required to use bycatch reduction devices and that these devices may reduce future TRL catches.

5.10. The meeting **RECOGNISED** that the best available and accepted scientific advice is that the Australian and PNG TRL Fishery is based on a single stock and PNG trawlers operating in the Gulf of Papua can catch migratory TRL from the Protected Zone. Consistent with the precautionary principle and noting the results of previous tagging studies and known ocean currents, there needs to be robust scientific evidence to guide any departure from the assumption of a single TRL stock.

5.11. PNG-NFA **REQUESTED** collaboration with AFMA to further assess the likely interaction of recent PNG trawl fishing with the TRL spawning migration and agreed to supply the necessary catch and effort information to support the analysis. AFMA **WELCOMED** this opportunity and **AGREED** to provide PNG-NFA with scientific reports on the migration of TRL stocks.

5.12. The meeting **RECOMMENDED** that AFMA write to PNG-NFA outlining its concern with the take of TRL by the PNG trawlers.

5.13. AFMA **REITERATED** the importance of timely and accurate catch reporting to ensure the integrity of future stock assessments. This includes reporting of all catches by all sectors, trawl fleets included.

5.14. The meeting **AGREED** that strong monitoring, compliance and surveillance measures are required to protect the long term sustainability of the TRL stocks.

[PNG-NFA advised after the meeting that observers are being placed on all trawlers operating in the Gulf of Papua and that all catch will be recorded and reported to PNG-NFA by the observers. PNG-NFA also advised that Port State Measures are being applied to trawlers including the requirement to give prior notice to entering port to enable NFA to conduct in-port inspections]

5.15. The meeting **NOTED** AFMA's request that in the absence of a trawl ban, any future catch sharing arrangements for TRL take into account expected PNG trawl catches of TRL.