

Torres Strait Finfish Working Group Meeting

FINAL Meeting Record

7 March 2022

Video conference

Note all meeting papers and record available on
the PZJA webpage: www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting participants

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Independent Chair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independent Consultant – Cobalt Marine Resource Management. Currently involved in Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) fishery assessments. Has previously been commissioned to undertake Torres Strait related fisheries research projects (For example the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Action Plan). Previously worked for AFMA and as Chair for other PZJA Advisory Committees (e.g. HCWG)
Rocky Stephen	Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member, Kemer Kemer Meriam (Ugar, Mer, Erub)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor for Ugar. Chairperson of Kos and Abob Fisheries Ugar. Works with brother in a commercial fishing business on Ugar (Brother Bear Fisheries). Eastern cluster representative on the PZJA Finfish RAG & Working Group. Traditional inhabitant member - Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee. TSRA Board member for Ugar - TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee. TSRA Board Fisheries Advisory Committee member. Member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries company.
Hilda Mosby	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member, Kulkaigal Cluster (Masig, Warraber, Iama, Poruma)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No direct interest in fisheries but has long history with Torres Strait fisheries through family involvement. TSRA Board Member for Masig. Councillor on Masig. TSRA board member for Masig. (environment portfolio, and finfish quota management). Director for Yorke Island Fisherman's Corporation.
Tenny Elisala	Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member (Guda Maluygal I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSRA Ranger Dauan. TIB licence holder. PBC director.
Michael O'Neill	Scientific Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Principal fisheries scientist working with the Queensland Government (Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Fisheries Queensland) in the stock

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
		<p>assessment program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principal investigator for TSSAC three-year project for Spanish mackerel stock assessment work. • Co-investigator of biological sampling project. • Member of PZJA Finfish RAG and Working Group.
David Brewer	Scientific Member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director – Upwelling P/L (David Brewer Consulting). • Honorary Fellow - CSIRO • Chair - Torres Strait Finfish RAG • Scientific member – Torres Strait Finfish Working Group • Scientific member – Northern Prawn Fishery RAG • Current consultancies with Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation. • Co-investigator on the completed Torres Strait 'Non- commercial catch' project funded by TSSAC with RAG member Kenny Bedford. • Team member on the current proposal for phase 2 of the 'Non- commercial catch' project. • As a fisheries consultant, may apply for funds for Torres Strait fishery research projects in the future where consistent with his role as Chair.
Chris Boon	Executive Officer (AFMA)	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Georgia Langdon	AFMA Member	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise

Permanent observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Tony Vass	Industry permanent observer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No financial interests in the Torres Strait. • Former mackerel fisher in the Torres Strait 1990 to 2008, does not own or operate a licence in the Torres Strait.

Casual observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA Senior Project Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TSRA project officer. • TIB licence holder with mackerel, line, cray, and BDM endorsements. • Recent employment with TSRA Ranger Program and now with the TSRA Fisheries Team.
Yen Loban	TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TIB licence holder. • Board director of the Zenadth Kes Fisheries Company. • Chair of the TSRA Board Fisheries Advisory Committee.
Keith Brightman	TSRA fisheries Project Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No personal pecuniary interests. • Role with TSRA is to support Traditional Owners
Danait Ghebrezgabhier	AFMA A/g Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise

1 Preliminaries

1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies

1. The video conference meeting of the Finfish Fishery Working Group (WG) commenced at 1000 hrs on 7 March 2022. FFWG Chairperson, Mr Andy Bodsworth, welcomed participants and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the various lands from which members were participating, and paid respects to the elders of the community past, present and emerging.
2. The Chairperson advised the WG that the meeting was being held to discuss the proposed amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Finfish) Management Instrument 2020*.
3. Apologies were received from Mr Terrence Whap, Mr Ashley Lawson, Mr Trevor Hutton and Mr Harry Nona.
4. The Chairperson reminded the WG that the meeting would be recorded for the purpose of ensuring an accurate record. There were no objections to the meeting being recorded.

1.2 Declaration of interests

5. Consistent with the Protected Zone Joint Authority Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP 1), which guides the operation and administration of PZJA advisory committees, the WG noted the requirement to declare all interests, perceived or real.
6. Each member referred to the provided list of previously declared interests from FFWG meeting dated 25 November 2021. These are detailed in the meeting participant tables at the start of this meeting record.
7. The only member to declare a new interest was David Brewer. All other members retained the interests as declared at the previous meeting.
8. The WG noted that in addition to the process under this item, it remained the obligation of all members to update their declarations throughout the meeting as required.
9. In addition, the Chairperson asked the WG members to raise topics which they felt important to be discussed at the meeting. Members were also reminded of the need to speak in-turn to allow efficient and respectful conversation.

2 Amending the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Finfish) Management Instrument 2020*

10. The WG noted that the FFWG is being asked to consider and provide advice on the technical amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Finfish) Management Instrument 2020* (the Instrument). The AFMA member informed the WG that the *Torres Strait Fisheries Amendment (Finfish) Management Instrument 2022* (the Amendment Instrument) gives effect in legislation to the widely supported partial opening of the permanent closure area (commonly referred to as the Western Line Closure) of the Finfish (reef line) Fishery, as well as supporting future licencing arrangements for fishing without the use of a boat. The WG noted that these amendments were approved in principle by the PZJA at their meeting on 11 February 2022.
11. The WG noted that the outcomes of this meeting would be provided to the PZJA for consideration at its meeting scheduled for 16 March 2022. If approved, the Amendment Instrument would give effect to the proposed amendments as of 1 May 2022.

Amendment to the finfish fishery permanent closure area (western line closure)

12. The WG noted a map which illustrates the proposed amendment to the permanent closure area had been produced by the TSRA. This enabled the WG to review the proposed opening area as

defined in the Amendment Instrument. This map was provided as an attachment to the meeting papers.

13. A scientific member provided a brief summary of the Finfish Fishery Resource Assessment Group's (FFRAG) consideration of data-collection requirements for the proposed fishery opening. Considering the anticipated low level of fishing effort, the FFRAG advised at their meeting on 18-19th November 2021 that a fishery-independent baseline survey of the relevant fish stocks is not necessary.
14. However, the FFRAG recommended that comprehensive catch data be collected immediately from the proposed opening date. Such data will enable AFMA to monitor for any changes in catch rates and species composition over time. The WG noted that future monitoring tools such as biological sampling may be beneficial in the medium to long term.
15. The WG reiterated the importance of conducting training with fishers to ensure high quality catch data is collected through the Fish Receiver System. The data obtained from catch disposal records (CDR) will establish a baseline to monitor the fish stocks in the absence of a fishery independent scientific survey.
16. The WG noted that industry members led a round of community meetings in December 2021 with the support of the TSRA. The purpose of these meetings was to gain further understanding about the level of anticipated fishing effort in the proposed new area of the fishery, as well as to communicate the importance of comprehensive catch reporting. The meetings served to support Guda Maluygal communities in managing the direct and indirect impacts of this new activity. The outcomes from these meetings were considered by the PZJA at their meeting on 11 February 2022.
17. Industry members reiterated that both the FFRAG and FFWG have thoroughly considered the sustainability risks and monitoring options for the proposed fishery opening. They agreed that the priority for the fishery is comprehensive CDR reporting through the fish receiver system to support a responsible opening. The WG noted it was evident during the community meetings in December 2021 that the anticipated level of effort was unlikely to pose a high risk to sustainability. Industry members recommended for the proposed amendments to the Instrument to be approved and highlighted the importance of developing this economic opportunity for Guda Maluygal communities.
18. The WG were informed of a proposal from industry members to undertake educational visits to the relevant communities with the support of the TSRA in the lead up to the recommended opening. An invitation was extended to AFMA to participate in these educational visits to communicate the technical aspects of the licencing and fish receiver systems.
19. Specifically, the priority was to encourage a high uptake of the volunteer 'effort' section on the TDB02 CDR form, as this would provide the most robust dataset with which sustainability can be monitored. The member for Guda Maluygal expressed support for this proposal, and highlighted the importance of recognising past Elders who have championed this amendment but are no longer here to see it come to fruition.
20. The industry member for Kemer Kemer Meriam raised the option to also encourage the uptake of voluntary daily logbook reporting. This was a suggestion which was raised during FFWG meeting in November 2021 and represents an option to further increase the quality of the data coming from the newly opened area of the fishery. The industry member offered to lead the discussion in the relevant communities if Traditional Owners allow in order to support the uptake of high-quality catch reporting.
21. The TSRA member advised the WG that a plan is in place between TSRA and AFMA to support Traditional Owner representatives in delivering a comprehensive communication package. As part of this plan, community meetings have been scheduled to take place on the relevant Islands from the 11 - 14 April.
22. The AFMA member advised the WG of their intention to produce an educational video in collaboration with Traditional Owners to communicate the details of the fisher receiver system. The WG agreed that this would be a useful way to support Guda Maluygal communities with reporting their catch.

23. The WG Chairperson summarised the WG members' comments and reiterated that the proposed amendment to the permanent closure area represents a positive step in providing economic opportunities where there are limited employment options. The Chairperson summarised the considerations of the data needs for the new fishery, concluding that the sustainability of the stocks can be monitored effectively through successful participation in the fish receiver system.
24. **The FFWG recommended that the amendment to the permanent closure area as defined in the Amendment Instrument be submitted to the PZJA for approval.**

Amendment to the definition of a licensed person to allow for the granting of fishing licences without the use of a boat.

25. The AFMA member explained that this issue was being addressed in response to interest expressed by community members wishing to fish commercially without a boat.
26. The WG noted that current management arrangements for the Torres Strait fisheries do not allow for community fishing (commercial fishing carried out by Traditional Inhabitants) without the use of a boat. The WG noted this is due to the way that commercial fishing is regulated, being that commercial fishing is prohibited unless a person is made exempt from this prohibition through a specific set of criteria.
27. The Instrument currently only provides an exemption to the prohibition on taking, processing or carrying of finfish for a person who holds a licence authorising the taking or carrying of finfish with the use of a boat.
28. The WG noted that the proposed amendment to the Instrument would provide an exemption to the prohibition for a person who holds a licence that authorises the taking of finfish without the use of a boat.
29. The WG further noted that this proposed amendment follows in-principle agreement from the PZJA at its meeting on 8 December 2021 to make the necessary legislative changes to support future licencing arrangements for community fishing without the use of a boat.
30. The AFMA member explained that the proposed amendment would support future scenarios in which fishing licences are granted under section 19(4A) of the Act. The WG noted that such future licencing arrangements would be subject to further development and consultation with stakeholders to ensure they are fit for purpose. It was also noted that this approach is consistent with both the TRL and Beche-de-mer Management Instruments and the TRL Management Plan¹.
31. Advice received from industry members detailed broad level support from community members for this proposed amendment. The TSRA observer reported that there is excitement within the community for the opportunity to commercially fish without a boat, especially for female fishers who might reef walk. This amendment is a welcome opportunity to participate in the industry and support the livelihoods of traditional owners.
32. The industry member for Kemer Kemer Meriam advised the WG that the proposed amendment supports the aspirations of traditional owners, representing an opportunity to create an inclusive economic prospect for all community members. This will be particularly relevant for female fishers, who have a long and significant history of participation in the fishery.
33. A scientific member echoed earlier comments in expressing that this is an important step towards achieving gender equity in access to the fishery. A question was raised as to whether the amendments would extend to cover those under 18 years of age. There was also a question from a TSRA observer in relation to how frameworks may relate to the current licencing arrangements which allow multiple fishers to operate from a single licenced boat.
34. The AFMA member advised that future consultations with communities and industry will consider such questions to ensure licencing arrangements support the aspirations of traditional owners. This process will be able to commence once COVID 19-related travel restrictions are eased.

¹ *Torres Strait Fisheries (Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster (Kaiar)) Management Plan 2018*

35. **The FFWG recommended that the amendment to allow for future licencing arrangements involving the taking of finfish without the use of a boat be submitted to the PZJA for approval.**
36. The WG Chairperson in his closing remarks summarised the recommendations of the WG. It was noted that the WG recommended that the Amendment Instrument as drafted be submitted to the PZJA for approval.
37. The Chairperson reflected on the importance of the matters being discussed today. It was noted that it is heartening to hear that that the aspirations of Elders past are being realised and being championed by Elders and leaders present.
38. The TSRA member voiced his appreciation of the efforts from all WG members to draft these amendments given the tight timeframes involved.
39. The video conference concluded at 1130 am.