

# PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group 2018.01

Meeting Record

20 March 2018

Note all meeting papers and records are  
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**Australian Government**

**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

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## Meeting Participants

**Table 1. Working Group members and declarations of interests**

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt MRM, co-investigator on FRDC and TSRA Top Western Fisheries Feasibility project led by A Tobin.
Rocky Stephen	Industry Member	President of Kos and Abob Fisheries Association, Ugar Community. Councillor for Ugar, member of Torres Strait Finfish Resource Assessment Group, member of Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee, member of Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee.
Frank Fuid	Industry Member	TIB licence holder
Andrew Trappett	Executive Officer	Nil
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Nil
Tom Roberts	QDAF Member	Nil
John Ramsey	TSRA Member	Fisheries Program Manager, TSRA holds finfish allocation and some TRL access rights on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. Involved with leasing access to finfish fishery to sunset sector fishers.
Michael O'Neill	Research Member	Principal Fisheries Scientist, QDAF. Principal scientist for TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
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.
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. Representative for sunset licence holders.

**Table 2. Meeting observers and declarations of interests**

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Jerry Stephen	TSRA Board - Fisheries Portfolio Member (Permanent Observer)	TIB licence holder. Traditional Owner, Ugar Island. Member, Fisheries Quota Management Committee Deputy chair TSRA
Joseph Posu	PNG NFA Officer	Nil
Kenny Bedford	Observer	TIB licence holder, was president of Erub Fisheries Management Association but has stepped down in early 2018 now working as an independent consultant. Recently delivered a Services and Infrastructure Audit report to TSRA board.
Allison Runck	TSRA	Nil
John Jones	AFMA	Nil
Andrew Tobin	Researcher	Independent consultant. Investigator on TSSAC project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery. PI on FRDC barramundi, crab fishery project. Owns a retail seafood outlet that buys product from the Torres Strait.
Charlie Kaddy	TSRA	TSRA, soon to be A/g program manager Fisheries, no declared interests. No TIB licence held.

## Action items

Number	Action
1.	<b>FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1:</b> AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG to on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.
2.	<b>FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1:</b> AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.
3.	<b>FWG 2018.1, Action 3, Agenda Item 2.6:</b> AFMA to circulate the QDAF Finfish Working Group communique (6-7 March 2018) to the FWG for interest.
4.	<b>FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6:</b> AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.

## Recommendations

Number	Recommendation
1.	The FWG recommend a 2018/19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches.
2.	The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018/19 season noting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>the age of available data underlying this TAC;</li><li>a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and,</li><li>the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980's) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.</li></ul>
3.	The Finfish Working Group supported the proposed approach of implementing formal and enforceable finfish TACs to be implemented in the 2019/20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.

## Agenda Item 1 - Preliminaries

### 1.1. Opening Prayer, Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, Welcome, Apologies

The meeting was opened in prayer by Frank Faud at 0845 hrs. An acknowledgement of traditional owners of the land on which the meeting was held and elders of the community, past and present, was performed by TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member, Jerry Stephen.

The meeting Chair welcomed members and observers and noted that the Finfish Working Group (FWG) was well placed to help support the growth and development of the fishery and to build a platform to support collection of good data to support sustainable harvests.

FWG members Tenny Elisala, Elizah Wasaga and Maluwap Nona were noted as apologies.

John Ramsay, TSRA member, attended from 0830 to 1230 hrs. Meeting observer Andrew Tobin attended from 1530 to 1715 hrs. Meeting observer John Jones from AFMA attended from 0900 to 1200 hrs.

### 1.2. Adoption of Agenda

The FWG adopted the agenda as circulated noting a paper was submitted by TSRA on 19 March 2018 on estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector catches (**Attachment A**). The FWG agreed to consider the paper at Agenda Item 6.4.

### 1.3. Declaration of Interests

The FWG noted the requirement for participants to declare all perceived or real interests in Torres Strait fisheries. Each attendee declared their interests as documented in Table 1 above. The FWG followed a process where each group of members with similar interests left the meeting to enable free discussion of the interests by the remaining FWG members. The FWG considered whether these interests would preclude members from providing advice on agenda items or whether an agreed treatment of these interests would be put into place at particular agenda items. Following this, groups of members were asked to re-join the meeting and the considerations were tabled.

### ***Research member's interests***

Research members with declared interests (Andy Bodsworth, David Brewer and Michael O'Neill) left the room. The FWG noted that these members may have a perceived or real interest in potentially receiving contracting for future research projects either directly or through their employers. The FWG agreed that these interests would need to be declared by the member at any discussion on future research and managed accordingly. Research members re-joined the meeting.

### ***Sunset sector interests***

The sunset sector representative, Mr Tony Vass, left the room noting his declared interest. The FWG agreed Mr Vass provides good advice and expertise to the FWG and PZJA and manages his interests well. The Chair suggested that it may be in the FWG's interest to have an active sunset sector fisher attend the FWG from time to time to get on-water advice from the fishery. The FWG considered that assistance could be given to Mr Vass's role in liaising with sunset sector fishers e.g. AFMA providing Mr Vass with information about licence holders, information sheets on the PZJA structure and process for advice and decision making. Mr Vass re-joined the meeting.

### ***Traditional Inhabitant Boat sector interests***

Members with declared direct commercial fishing interests in the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector left the meeting (Kenny Bedford, Jerry Stephen, Frank Faud). The FWG considered that industry members have a direct interest in the fishery and that fishers, or the communities they are from, may stand to benefit from certain advice provided to inform decision making. The FWG agreed that these interests must be declared at the relevant agenda times and that these interests could be managed. FWG noted that each member has a single TIB licence, and that these licences are spread across different communities. FWG recognised the very valuable expertise of TIB sector members and observers in the committee and that these members can encourage development and also provide advice from the FWG and PZJA back to communities. TIB sector representatives re-joined the meeting.

### ***Leasing interests***

The FWG noted TSRA advice that their board had met before the FWG meeting and had made a decision about the amount of catch to be leased to the sunset sector for the 2018/19 season.

TSRA Members with interests in this leasing process left the room (John Ramsay, Allison Runck, Charlie Kaddy, Frank Faud, Jerry Stephen).

The FWG noted that TSRA administer the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC) which advises the TSRA Board on the amount to be leased out. This advice is based on community expertise with the FQMC being tasked with matching community needs with sustainable development of the fishery and providing economic benefits through revenue from leasing access to sunset sector fishers.

The FWG noted that the TSRA collect revenue from leasing licences to access the fishery which are held in trust on behalf of traditional inhabitants. It was noted that TSRA are a major contributor to the PZJA providing advice to support decision making through the TSRA chair. It was also noted that TSRA manage valuable initiatives such as grants to support development projects.

FWG members queried why there was a parallel process in place through the TSRA FQMC outside of the PZJA advisory forums and whether it would be wise to seek industry views on the best process e.g. could one forum provide the advice to the PZJA. AFMA clarified the PZJA advisory group roles and processes:

- Finfish Resource Assessment Group has a technical focus and reports to the PZJA and FWG on stock assessments and provides Recommended Biological Catch advice.
- The FWG provides formal advice on Total Allowable Catches to the PZJA.
- Aside from these PZJA groups, the outcomes of the TSRA FQMC are provided by the TSRA Board to AFMA who, as licensing delegate, consider the leasing advice and put the catch entitlements into practice in the fishery through permit conditions.

The FWG Chair noted that both the RAG/FWG and FQMC were providing advice to the PZJA to support decision making through separate processes. It was advised that to be confident in making decisions the PZJA need to be sure that advice from both groups is provided based on the best available information. The Chair advised that there was a need to clarify roles and there is a clear opportunity for the FWG and FQMC to collaborate and share information. The Chair advised that the ANAO audit (agenda item 2.1) is likely to review the functions and roles of such groups and may help identify where room for increased efficiencies might exist.

Regarding the declared interests, the FWG Chair advised that to ensure the integrity of FWG advice, the group must benefit from and balance the expertise of TSRA with the declared direct interest in managing the sunset licence leasing process and development of fishery in a sustainable way. TSRA staff re-joined the meeting.

#### 1.4. Actions Arising

The Working Group noted the status of actions arising from the previous March 2017 meeting.

TSRA expressed disappointment that the meeting was not held prior to the current date noting there is a business requirement for the TSRA Board to consider Finfish Working Group recommendations at their annual March board meeting. TSRA suggested that in the case that finalised advice is not available in time for this meeting, Total Allowable Catch setting advice should be used to set the following seasons TAC. AFMA advised the FWG that the priority for management and the driver for the timing of advisory meetings was to focus on stock assessments and supporting the implementation of harvest strategies. AFMA advised that flexibility will be required over next few years while engaging with harvest strategy researchers and the timing of delivery of project milestones and stock assessment outcomes. AFMA advised that all steps would be taken to accommodate TSRA business requirements whilst also meeting AFMA's work schedules and priorities.

## Agenda Item 2 – Management agencies updates

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### 2.1. Management agencies updates

#### ***AFMA Foreign Compliance***

The FWG noted the following points provided by the AFMA Foreign Compliance Operations team:

- Reports have been provided to Compliance of fishers interacting with protected species and / or mishandling bycatch. While it is not illegal to interact with a protected species, all interactions must be reported. Mishandling bycatch is an offence and can result in prosecution.
- Vessel Monitoring Systems (satellite trackers) have now been implemented in the Torres Strait. It was advised that most operators were adhering to requirement.
- It was advised that the mandatory Fish Receiver System (FRS), implemented 1 December 2017, was in the early stages and has been well received by the industry. It was however advised that some reporting issues were apparent and AFMA was working with new fish receivers to help them manage reporting received catch. It was advised that compliance with this arrangement is most important in protecting stocks through sustainable management and in helping the industry understand what harvests are been taken.
- It was advised that a number of apprehensions of foreign boats illegally fishing in the protected zone had occurred around Warrior Reef and also around the Saibai community. No finfish catches were found aboard these foreign vessels. It was advised that valuable support for these apprehensions had been provided from the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority. Noting that many stocks are shared between Australian and PNG it is important that the two countries collaborate on management and compliance.
- The FWG noted that from 1 July 2018, QDAF Domestic Compliance duties would be delegated to AFMA for on-water Torres Strait operations with QDAF continuing to provide

mainland compliance activities such as inspecting finfish unloads and product moving through Cairns and other ports.

Regarding the issue of reported illegal netting in Top Western communities, the FWG was advised that:

- Illegal gillnetting is known to be occurring around Saibai with fishers setting 10 to 15 inch large mesh gillnets targeting turtle and/or dugong.
- The Mabaduan treaty village in PNG is reported to be under pressure from the Saibai council to reduce the number of visit days issued to treaty villagers to attend Saibai to only one day per week.
- At a recent meeting in the Treaty village of Mabaduan on the issue of illegal turtle and dugong netting, five large mesh nets were reportedly dragged out from under fisher's houses and were burnt in the village square.
- Compliance reminded FWG members that for fishers in the Australian area of the Protected Zone a maximum mesh size of 4" was permitted for gillnets and only for subsistence (kai-kai) fishing – not for commercial fishing.

It was noted that in the context of the top-western scoping study (agenda item 5.1) the Working Group and Finfish RAG should get advice from compliance to better inform consideration of introducing commercial gillnetting and what compliance support such as a monitoring program to support ongoing fishery data collection would be required.

Working Group members were encouraged to report back to their communities on the importance of compliance including the need to report on protected species interactions, report any signs of illegal fishing and to comply with the new fish receiver system.

### ***Australian National Audit Office audit***

It was noted that the Australian National Audit Office is conducting an audit of Australian Government agencies and management arrangements in the Torres Strait. The objective of the audit is to assess the effectiveness of co-ordination of the Australian Government in the Torres Strait. It was noted that auditors would be visiting the Torres Strait in April 2018.

### ***Torres Strait Treaty - Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting Report***

The Working Group noted the tabled paper provided an overview of the fisheries outcomes of the February 2018 Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting and Environment Management Committee Meeting held between Australia and Papua New Guinea. It was noted that:

- PNG and Australia declined to enter into catch sharing arrangements under the Treaty for the Spanish mackerel sector of the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- That there is a threat of two invasive fish species (snakehead and climbing perch) entering into Australian habitats from PNG. It was noted that they could impact juvenile barramundi in brooding areas. PNG-NFA confirmed that snakehead fish are captured in PNG and sold in markets and are becoming an important species for subsistence. The FWG queried what arrangements were in place from PNG and Australian Governments to address quarantine and requested as an action for Biosecurity Australia to address the FWG about what how the threat was being addressed.
- Cane toads pose an invasive species threat for PNG as they are reported to be moving within Torres Strait.
- A presentation was provided at the Bilateral Meeting which outlined sediment outflow from the Ok Tedi mine (Fly River) and potential impacts of copper concentrations on the Torres Strait. Members requested a copy of the presentation if possible.

**FWG 2018.1, Action 1, Agenda Item 2.1:** AFMA to invite Biosecurity Australia to present to the FWG to on monitoring in place to prevent invasive fish species such as climbing perch and snakehead from entering the Torres Strait from PNG and vice versa for cane toads.

**FWG 2018.1, Action 2, Agenda item 2.1:** AFMA to ask JCU researchers for a copy of the presentation from the Fisheries Bilateral Committee Meeting containing remote sensing data of sediment outflow from Fly River and circulate to the FWG for information.

### ***Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority update***

The FWG noted the following points from PNG-NFA:

- There remains limited interest in commercial finfish fishing in Papua New Guinea.
- Most finfish catches in PNG are taken from artisanal fisheries with most commercially based fisheries targeting barramundi and jewfish.
- PNG has declined entering into catch sharing arrangements for the Torres Strait Protected Zone Spanish Mackerel stock for the 2018/19 season.

### ***Torres Strait Regional Authority update***

TSRA advised the following:

- A Torres Strait Fisheries Summit is planned for 15<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> May 2018 to be held on Horn Island. PZJA forum representatives are to be invited. Reappointments for PZJA forum membership are to be actioned at this summit.
- The first phase of the Community Management Framework project is complete. The next phase will identify what the most appropriate governance structure to support a single entity holding catch and access entitlements.
- A report on scoping the development of a baitfish industry in Torres Strait is complete and is to be sent to QDAF and AFMA. The report has suggested that a small scale fishery could be feasible for a small number of operators.
- A scoping study examining the development of crab, barramundi and black jewfish fisheries in Top Western communities was underway. Part of this project includes examining whether gillnet fishing should be introduced and a scientific permit was being sought to undertake a small number of gillnet surveys to help determine the feasibility of gillnetting as an efficient and sustainable method to target Barramundi in the top western region.
- A feasibility study on the cost benefit of direct export pathways and the branding opportunities for Torres Strait seafood products is currently being undertaken completed and the project is reported to be progressing well.

TSRA advised that the Finfish Quota Management Committee had met on 15-16 February 2018 and the TSRA board had met 14-16 March 2018 to consider the outcomes of this committees recommendations which were as follows:

#### *Spanish mackerel*

- 20 t of Spanish mackerel is to be reserved to cover TIB sector catches for the upcoming 2018/19 season and is not to be leased out to the sunset sector.
- The PZJA Finfish RAG recommendation of 10 t to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches of Spanish mackerel was considered.
- 95 t of Spanish mackerel was considered as being available to be leased based on a 125 t Recommended Biological Catch and deductions.

#### *Coral trout*

- 30 t of coral trout is to be reserved to cover TIB sector catches for the upcoming 2018/19 season and is not to be leased out to the sunset sector.
- 105 t coral trout was considered as being available to be leased. Following contracting, this amount will likely be less than 105 t. Some fishers may apply for extra catch mid-year if it is required.

#### *Other reef-line species*

- Other species leasing is to be capped at 30 t.

TSRA advised that there would likely be nine sunset sector boats entering the fishery next season (six boats with Spanish mackerel catch allowances, seven boats with reef-line catch allowances).

## 2.2 Finfish Fishery Export Approval under the EPBC Act

The FWG noted the tabled paper and welcomed the news that a Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) approval under the EPBC Act had been extended to the year 2020 which allows the fishery to export product. The Chair noted the importance of this approval, thanking AFMA for its work in preparing and lodging the necessary supporting sustainability reports. The FWG noted:

- The FWG will be tasked with tracking how the fishery is progressing against the conditions of the WTO approval outlined in the agenda paper.
- An Environmental Risk Assessment is planned to be conducted by AFMA for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery in 2019. It was noted that this is a condition of the WTO and is best practice for good fisheries management.
- QDAF member advised that WTO status had been revoked in some Queensland East Coast fisheries due to failing to meet attached WTO conditions, meaning that no export was allowed which had large impacts on industry. Noting that coral trout was being exported from the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery it was noted that it was important for the fishery to maintain a WTO approval.

## 2.3 Update on Fish Receiver System

The FWG noted the tabled paper updating the group on catches reported through the fish receiver system since 1 December 2017. The FWG noted the improved catch reporting coming from the TIB sector noting that around 3 tonnes had already been reported which was a huge increase over the small amounts voluntarily reported through docket books from previous seasons.

The FWG encouraged fishers to continue to fill out Part B of the Catch Disposal Record form, even though this section is voluntary, as this provides valuable effort data to complement raw catch figures.

## 2.4. Legislative amendments update

The FWG noted the tabled update from AFMA on amendments being made to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* noting that these amendments have a limited scope and are focussed on making immediate improvements to the efficiency of management. The FWG noted:

- The indicative project timeframe tabled in the prepared paper.
- That scientific and developmental permits have to go to the Minister for approval which is a lengthy process. Through amending the act it is intended that these permits are to be delegated to AFMA for their approval. It was noted that a policy is to be developed to support this delegation and maintain transparency.
- There is a strong need to keep transparency and communication happening as this process progresses.

## 2.5 Native Title Update

No native title updates were available as the Malu Lamar observer was an apology for the meeting.

## 2.6 Strategic overview and update including economic and market trends

The FWG welcomed updates from industry and other stakeholders on activities and strategic issues occurring in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery and also on issues from other relevant fisheries:

- It was considered that the outcomes of the TSRA infrastructure initiative would likely increase participation within the Ugar Community in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery.
- Ugar community has been engaging with TSRA initiatives such as direct export of seafood product from Torres Strait.
- Available Sydney Fish Market price data shows strong market prices for Spanish mackerel with a clear spike in prices corresponding with Chinese New Year.

- Erub Community Freezer is intending to make its recent finfish catch data available to AFMA and the PZJA groups for consideration.
- The TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee has seen increased interest from the sunset sector in leasing access to the Torres Strait to catch coral trout.
- The FWG noted that recent seasons on the Queensland East Coast fishery have seen the Total Allowable Catch almost totally filled with lease prices reaching \$6/kg corresponding with peak demand to fill orders for Chinese New Year at the end of the season. It was noted that, based on harvest control rules in place, a likely 200 t increase to the East Coast trout quota in 2018 there may be a decrease in interest from fishers wanting to access the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery reef-line sector. The QDAF member offered to circulate the recent Queensland Finfish Working Group communique for the interest of the FWG. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/fishery-working-groups/-coral-reef-fin-fish-fishery-working-group/communiques/communique-6-7-march>

**FWG 2018.1, Action 3, Agenda Item 2.6:** AFMA to circulate the QDAF Finfish Working Group communique (6-7 March 2018) to the FWG for interest.

- QDAF member advised that consultation is underway on proposed amendments to the *Queensland Fisheries Act* to implement changes including stronger compliance powers and penalties. <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/sustainable-fisheries-strategy/changes-to-queenslands-fisheries-legislation>

**FWG 2018.1, Action 4, Agenda Item 2.6:** AFMA to circulate the QDAF consultation document on amendments to the Queensland Fisheries Act for the information of the FWG.

- QDAF advised that workshops are being held in Queensland on social and economic indicators for East coast fisheries. These workshops are focused on what data can inform social or economic analyses and how can these data be collected and reported. The FWG noted that the findings from these workshops can help inform the development of Torres Strait harvest strategies.

## Agenda Item 3 – Resource Assessment Group Meeting Report

The FWG welcomed a presentation from PZJA Finfish Resource Assessment Group (RAG) Chair Mr David Brewer, reporting on the first RAG meeting held on 9-10 November 2017. The FWG noted that the new Finfish RAG will:

- provide valuable additional scientific expertise,
- focus in the short term on supporting the Harvest Strategy development and stock assessments,
- have an agreed work plan to support stock assessments in 2018 (Spanish mackerel update, coral trout initial assessment),
- provide advice on Recommended Biological Catches and that RBC advice from the Nov 2017 meeting had been tabled for discussion at the present FWG meeting.

## Agenda Item 4 – Recommending Total Allowable Catches for the 2018-19 Fishing Season

### 4.1. Spanish mackerel

#### TAC Recommendation:

The FWG recommend a 2018/19 season notional Total Allowable Catch for Spanish mackerel of 115 t based on a Recommended Biological Catch of 125 t minus a 10 t deduction to cover subsistence (kai-kai) catches.

In making this recommendation the FWG noted the following RAG advice:

- a) The RAG recommended a 125 t for the Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) for the 2018/19 season noting:
  - the most recent 2016 assessment update provided an RBC for Spanish mackerel of 125 t with a B60 target reference point;
  - no new evidence existed to warrant a different approach; and
  - that a further update would be performed on this assessment in 2018 as part of the harvest strategy development.
- b) RAG recommended the estimate of subsistence take of Spanish mackerel used for TAC setting be increased from 5.155 t to 10 t based on the following:
  - data underlying the estimate was ageing and was available from only three islands;
  - the number of TIB (commercial) sector fishing endorsements has increased since the Busilacchi study;
  - effort creep may have been occurring from the 1990s CSIRO studies up to the Busilacchi study, and may still be occurring;
- c) RAG advised that based on the available evidence from QDAF recreational survey data and charter sector logbook data, both recreational and charter catches are likely to be minimal.

Additionally, the FWG discussed the following points in making this recommendation:

- The PZJA Standing Committee agreed to step the TAC down from 187 t to 132 t for current 2017/18 season only and agreed for the fishery to be managed to the 125 t RBC for the 2018/19 season.
- FWG noted that no further updates to the stock assessment have occurred and that, aside from a revised subsistence take estimate, no further information has been put forward for decision making.
- Papua New Guinea have not elected to take up catch sharing arrangements for the 2018/19 season meaning the Torres Strait TAC can be fully utilised by Australian fishers.

Other points discussed:

- The FWG agreed to use the term “Subsistence (kai –kai)” when referring to catch taken for subsistence purposes to avoid confusion with the term ‘traditional take’ which was being confused with catch from the ‘Traditional Inhabitant Boat’ sector, which was a commercial sector.
- Regarding the estimate of subsistence take it was also noted that studies had identified some catch from Commercial TIB sector boats was retained for subsistence purposes.
- FWG noted that there was a clear need to separate discussions/advice regarding setting TACs (this agenda item) and discussions on how the TAC is apportioned to the two commercial sectors; with catch either leased to the Sunset sector or reserved for expansion of the TIB sector (agenda item 6.4).

#### 4.2. Coral trout

TAC Recommendation:

**The FWG recommended maintaining the notional coral trout TAC of 134.9 t for the 2018/19 season noting:**

- **the age of available data underlying this TAC;**
- **a stock assessment will likely be performed for the Torres Strait stock in 2018; and**
- **the need to examine historical catch data (from the 1980’s) where there was an apparent significant decline in catches.**

Points noted:

- Nine boats are proposed to be entering the sunset sector in the 2018/19 season with seven endorsed to fish the reef-line sector in the 2018/19 season.
- AFMA advised that there is interest among the TIB sector in fishing finfish with some new primary-tender operations entering the fishery targeting mackerel and coral trout. Science members advised that this increasing fishing effort, together with increased leasing to the sunset sector of coral trout (up to 105 t) might affect catch rates or profitability of these vessels. It was noted that the reported viable grounds for fishing common coral trout (*Plectropomus leopardus*, preferred for the live trade due to their strong red colouration) with good catch rates was limited to the South East area of the fishery.
- AFMA advised that as licensing delegate, consideration is given to likely catches against the level of the TAC and whether the TAC will a) be exceeded and b) whether it can be enforced.
- QDAF suggested that the FWG should gain an understanding of the performance of the East Coast trout fishery, including comparing catch rates to Torres Strait. It was noted that the far north sector of the East coast fishery yielded about 12 t of catch per month from an area larger than the Torres Strait. It was suggested that this could be actioned as part of the industry workshop scheduled for July 2018.
- The FWG welcomed advice from AFMA that catch reports will be made publically available and provided to both commercial fishing sectors and communities on catches from all species under the Fish Receiver System in line with AFMA's Information Disclosure Policy.

#### 4.3. Other reef-line species

The FWG supported the continuation of existing management arrangements for other reef-line species caught by sunset licences noting this is a cost effective and sensible approach and that the Finfish RAG is well placed to progress this issue.

Points discussed:

- The FWG advises that risks to the stocks of other reef-line species remain low if harvest and interest in fishing these species remains low.
- The FWG noted the priorities for management of the fishery and supported the current arrangements in place that a) cap sunset sector leasing of catches for these species to 30 t in the short term and b) outline a work plan to support expansion above the cap should industry wish to do so.
- The FWG noted that further work to progress this issue would be driven by AFMA receiving a fishing plan from industry which would trigger dedicating management resources towards further expanding understanding and management of these species.
- It was considered that expanded targeting of other reef-line species will likely be a focus for management after the management of target species is bedded down through the harvest strategy.
- QDAF advised that in east coast fisheries some concern existed around the management of individual species within the large 900 t basket containing around 100 species. Consideration is being given to whether trigger points will be put in place for some of these species, particularly long lived, valuable species such as Nannygai. Given that some of these species are key recreational species, QDAF has a dedicated monitoring program in place which collects biological data for key other species (length frequency and ageing) through boat ramp surveys.
- The upcoming Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Environmental Risk Assessment process may offer some data to support the management of the other reef-line species basket.

#### **Other points on Total Allowable Catch Setting for 2018/19 season**

The FWG welcomed advice that:

- TSRA would put details of the sunset sector boats leasing catch on the TSRA website.

- The PZJA public register is available on the AFMA website with licence owner (TSRA) and lease details <http://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/concession-holders-conditions/> .
- AFMA will write to all finfish fishery stakeholders outlining the 2018/19 seasons notional TACs, agreed estimates of mortality used in decision making and the amount available to be caught for both commercial sectors.

## Agenda Item 5 – Research updates

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### 5.1. Updates on Torres Strait Finfish Fishery research projects

#### **Scoping study for finfish and crab fishery development in Top Western communities.**

The FWG noted an update from project Principal Investigator Andrew Tobin and co-investigator Andy Bodsworth. The project team advised that discussion was underway with AFMA on the scientific permit application to support to the field work component of this scoping study. The project advised that aside from this issue the project was progressing well with the team intending to revisit communities after the monsoon season.

#### **Subsistence (kai-kai) take project update (*Monitoring the traditional take of finfish in the Torres Strait Protected Zone*)**

The FWG EO outlined progress to date on this CSIRO project as tabled in the agenda paper.

The FWG noted that the Finfish RAG had supported the revised project scope as proposed and discussed at their November 2017 meeting including considering the use of Torres Strait Rangers or MyPathways staff to assist the project collect data. It was noted that the project was currently forming a statement of work which was being provided to the TSRA as requested for their consideration as to whether resourcing and support could be provided.

The TSRA advised they are keen to get advice from the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee advice on the continuation of the project given the limited outcomes of the project to date.

AFMA suggested that the project steering committee convene again after the requested statement of work was supplied and considered by TSRA.

### 5.2. Research priorities

The FWG noted the prepared research priorities paper and that the available AFMA research budget is almost fully committed with no annual call for research being made. It was noted that the research budget is mainly focussed on developing harvest strategies. A small amount of remaining underspent funding is being considered by the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee as to how it can address tactical research needs. Consideration is being given to using these funds to update the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery stock assessment and adding additional funding to the beche-de-mer harvest strategy development.

It was noted that the Finfish RAG was asked to consider small tactical research projects focused on improving estimates of mortality outside of the commercial fishery (recreational, charter, subsistence kai-kai). The priority tactical research identified by the Finfish RAG was biological data collection including ageing and length frequency analysis to check model assumptions. AFMA advised that RAG advice on stratification, design and costs would be sought at their 21-22 March 2018 meeting.

## Agenda Item 6 – Management

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### 6.1 Formalising finfish total allowable catches

The FWG provided the following recommendation to the PZJA on formalising TACs:

**The Finfish Working Group supported the proposed approach of implementing formal and enforceable finfish TACs to be implemented in the 2019/20 season through catch limits on permit conditions for individual sunset sector fishers and through a competitive catch limit for all TIB licences.**

The FWG provided the following advice on formalising TACs:

- Formal TACs will be a key tool to support development and sustainability of the Finfish Fishery, providing certainty for industry and helping to attract investment.
- The outcomes of the Torres Strait infrastructure review and ongoing fishing business development initiatives will likely see changes in the fishery such as increased catches from the TIB sector; this was another driver for implementing formal TACs.
- While the FWG noted that there is a strong need to have a firm TAC in place with an enforceable limit it was also noted that some flexibility in sunset sector leasing may be required during implementation to cover TIB sector or subsistence (kai-kai) catches as further information is received.
- A priority ahead of the 2019/20 season is to continue to encourage and educate fishers on the importance of providing timely and accurate catch data during the transition to implementing a TAC.

Other points discussed:

- A standing item for the FWG will be considering and reporting on how the fishery is performing relative to the *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Management Plan 2013*. The FWG noted that the Plan requires an allocation of units to be performed prior to setting Total Allowable Catches. It was noted that this process may take some time and that the best interim option available is putting conditions in place on TIB sector and sunset sector fishing permits to regulate the Total Allowable Catch.
- Noting industry advice that a single TIB fishing operation fishing actively could trigger an increase in TIB sector catches, an example of flexible management arrangements to support implementation of formal TACs was put forward where staggered sunset contracts could be implemented with something like 80 per cent of the sunset sector portion leased out initially and, in the case that catches are fully subscribed for the TIB sector, the remaining 20 per cent might not be re-leased mid-season.

The FWG supported the proposed process put forward by AFMA:

- During the 2018-19 season AFMA is to write to, and work with, communities and stakeholders on facilitating and encouraging:
  - the need for continued reporting of timely and accurate data through CDRs, and
  - the plan to put enforceable TACs in place for 2019/20 season seeking comment,
- Native Title notification process is to be conducted for input.
- A paper is to be put to the PZJA for their consideration.

### 6.2 Western line closure removal

The FWG noted previous consideration on this issue from both the FWG and Finfish RAG with general agreement that the western line closure is an older jurisdictional boundary and serves no management purpose and support given for removing the closure.

It was noted that discussion has focussed on two points:

1. When the line is removed, what will the likely impacts on the fishery be given there may be different habitats and species in the western Torres Strait compared to the eastern grounds which are currently fished?

2. Community consultation on resource sharing; such as using the area of waters for commercial fishing versus other uses such as supporting ecotourism (raised at the March 2017 Finfish Working Group Meeting).

AFMA advised that the key issue which AFMA and TSRA are addressing is whether enough consultation has been done to date, noting that it has been a longstanding issue with a lot of previous consideration. AFMA advised of a proposal to action final consultation and capture stakeholder views through the TSRA Fisheries Summit scheduled for May 2018. These stakeholder views are to be presented to the PZJA for their decision on removing the closure. Industry members agreed with the proposed process and advised that the views of Prescribed Body Corporates, active fishers and community elders must be presented to the PZJA.

### **6.3 Draft AFMA Finfish Fishery budget 2018/19**

The FWG noted the draft AFMA 2018/19 Finfish Fishery budget noting that it is based on convening two FWG meetings (2 x one day meetings), two Finfish RAG meetings (2 x two day meetings) and a one day industry meeting. Members suggested that future presentations of Finfish Fishery budget would ideally show all components including funding from TSRA which facilitates the attendance of Traditional Inhabitant representatives.

### **6.4 Estimates of traditional inhabitant boat sector catches**

The FWG noted that to ensure stocks are sustainably managed an understanding of all sources of mortality on the stocks is required to make sure that total catches for the fishery are not being exceeded. To support PZJA decision making, advice is being sought from the PZJA Finfish RAG and FWG on estimates of mortality including TIB sector commercial catches.

The FWG noted this issue had previously been tabled with a range of available estimates presented to both the Finfish RAG (November 2017 meeting) and FWG (March 2017 meeting). It was noted that a single figure had not been agreed at these meetings with recent catch reports for the TIB sector being unreliable due to the poor return rates of the TIB sector voluntary docket books in recent seasons (docket books are now-defunct and have been replaced with mandatory catch disposal records as part of the fish receiver system).

For the 2017/18 season Spanish mackerel TAC, the PZJA Standing Committee met in March 2017 and used a figure of 22 t as the best available estimate for commercial catches from the TIB sector based on the 2003-2010 reference period of the most recent stock assessment (O'Neill 2016). During this period, catch data from docket books were considered to have been voluntarily completed to a reasonable standard by industry. Based on this the Standing Committee agreed to a step-down in the notional TAC of 132 t for the 2017/18 season based on the 110 t leased to the sunset sector plus a 22 t estimate of commercial catches from the TIB sector.

The Finfish RAG was asked to provide advice on the 22 t estimate of TIB sector catch at their November 2017 meeting. No advice to the PZJA was provided from the RAG following TSRA advice tabled at the meeting that providing advice on TIB sector catches was considered to be outside the scope of PZJA forums. Instead, the TSRA Board relies on advice from the Finfish Quota Management Committee (FQMC), which includes representatives from the four eastern communities fishing finfish, to inform the board on leasing an amount to the sunset sector. This recommendation is then forwarded to AFMA for consideration as licensing delegate and is put into regulation through sunset sector permit conditions. The FWG noted the methodology and recommendations of the TSRA FQMC for allocating catch to the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector in the 2018-19 season. The FWG noted that the FQMC considers advice from their members on catch, effort, likely increases in effort and provides precautionary recommendations to the board in lieu of accurate recent catch data.

The FWG noted that the FQMC advised of allotment of catches to the TIB sector for 2018/19 of 20 t for Spanish mackerel and 30 t for coral trout.

Points discussed:

- The FWG noted that this FQMC allotment for TIB Spanish mackerel varied by 2 t from the 22 t assumed by the stock assessment over a previous historical period.

- It was noted that the FQMC figure was based on committee advice on recent catches, effort and interest in increasing the TIB sector effort with the benefit of the TIB sector having priority in these considerations. TSRA advised that the FQMC and TSRA Board did not consider the 22 t estimate from O'Neill 2016 as this advice was not considered to be relevant to the current levels of fishing activity.
- The FWG noted that the 22 t estimate was from an older time period (2003-2010) compared to the more recent FQMC considerations and that change has been occurring in the fishery in recent times with community freezers closing and key fishers leaving the industry. Conversely, the FWG noted that the risk profile in the fishery has changed with the Spanish mackerel catches being almost fully subscribed relative to the Recommended Biological Catch (or total kill) although lower than historical levels of total catch. TSRA advised that the FQMC provided advice to increase the TIB sector estimate from 10 t (as used in recent seasons) to 20 t to reflect expected increased activity in communities in the 2018-19 season.
- The FWG noted member advice that all figures presented from research papers should also report associated error margins, noting that the 22 t of the O'Neill report (2016) did have a standard deviation of around 9 t.
- The FWG advised that there is a firm need for evidence based decision making for TAC setting and the associated consideration of estimates of mortality such as commercial catches. Any deviation from previous advice needs to be supported with a clear rationale, including the nature of any data underpinning such advice; otherwise the integrity of the process could be called into question.
- The TSRA Member raised the disparity between the Spanish mackerel catches in Attachment A to Agenda Item 2.1 and the 22 t figure used by the stock assessment. QDAF advised that this disparity will be investigated.
- The FWG encouraged the TSRA Board and FQMC to utilise the PZJA Finfish RAG which has been formed to provide technical analysis and can also bring in community advice.
- TSRA advised that the fishery is 100 per cent owned by traditional inhabitants. Any concerns of the licensing delegate for ensuring sustainable catches should also take into account that since sunset leasing has occurred there has not been a year when the recommended biological catch has been considered to have been exceeded, and the leasing of licences has proved to be an effective non-regulatory method for limiting catches in the fishery.
- The Chair suggested that the Australian National Audit Office audit beginning April 2018 may help to provide an independent perspective of these issues and provide guidance to the PZJA on the best process for policy support to decision making.
- It was noted that at this early stage catch data from the Fish Receiver System was progressing well and will help inform future allotment of catches to the two commercial sectors.

#### **Finfish working group advice:**

The FWG noted that the PZJA Standing Committee considered a figure of 22 t in the 2017-18 season as the best available estimate of TIB sector catch.

The FWG also noted the paper provided by TSRA which outlined the methodology and decisions made by the FQMC and TSRA Board which recommended 20 t of Spanish Mackerel and 30 t of coral trout be allotted to the TIB sector for the 2018-19 season.

The FWG noted that ideally there would be an aligned process between both PZJA forums (Finfish RAG/Working Group) and the TSRA FQMC with these groups working collaboratively in order to provide the PZJA with the best advice possible and providing stakeholders with a transparent decision making process. TSRA member disagreed with this assessment, noting that the roles of each of the forums was clear. The TSRA member advised that PZJA has no role or decision in allocating catches between commercial sectors or licence holders. The FQMC is a community process for maximising the benefits of the catch entitlements owned by traditional inhabitants.

## Agenda Item 7 – Future management priorities and work plans

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The FWG noted scheduled work plans for both the Finfish RAG and FWG, noting that two Finfish RAG meetings were scheduled for the third and fourth quarters of 2018 to progress the harvest strategy and examine two stock assessments (Spanish mackerel update and initial coral trout assessment).

TSRA queried the timing of the next FWG meeting relevant to the season ending in June and that there is likely adequate time to convene a RAG and WG to provide advice for the next season. It would also align with the FQMC process that occurs in February each year. AFMA advised that all reasonable steps would be taken to accommodate TSRA business requirements.

It was considered that an extra teleconference (or videoconference through AFMA's Blue jeans system) could be convened to focus on considering and endorsing RAG Recommended Biological Catch advice from analysis of assessments. Noting that this had been attempted before, with mixed results and poor feedback from stakeholders, it was agreed that a trial run of this arrangement would need to occur to ensure that all members could hear correctly and fully participate in the virtual meeting. It was suggested that as a test run of the system, AFMA could invite Quarantine Australia to present to the FWG on invasive fish species (Action item from the present FWG meeting) as a 30 minute video conference meeting.

The FWG gave some consideration that if the next FWG meeting was scheduled for Q1 2019, as suggested, this would be advantageous as 12 months of Catch Disposal Record data could be considered at this point.

## Agenda Item 8 – Other business

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The TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Member advised that he would like to request becoming a full member on the Finfish Working Group rather than a permanent observer.

## Agenda Item 9 – Date and venue for next meeting

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As per Agenda Item 7, the next meeting was noted to be either an out-of-session videoconference focused on TAC advice in the fourth quarter of 2018 or a full face-to-face meeting in the first quarter of 2019.

The FWG Chair closed the meeting by thanking participants for their hard work in bedding down working group processes such as declaring and managing interests, noting that this process will become more streamlined over time. The Chair encouraged all Traditional Inhabitant representatives to take the outcomes of the meeting back to their community and stress the need for timely and accurate catch reporting and voluntary compliance with the fish receiver system.

The meeting was closed in prayer at 1715 hrs by Councillor Frank Faud.

### List of Attachments

**Attachment A:** TSRA Paper, 19 March 2018, Estimates of Traditional Inhabitant Boat Sector Catches