

# PZJA Torres Strait Finfish Working Group

25 November 2020  
Novotel Oasis, Cairns

## Meeting Record

Note all meeting papers and records are available on  
the PZJA webpage:

<https://www.pzja.gov.au/torres-strait-finfish-groups>



**Australian Government**

**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

## Agenda Item 1 – Preliminaries

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

1. The meeting was opened at 0840 hrs at the Novotel Oasis, Cairns. The Chair welcomed attendees and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the meeting was held and paid respect to Elders past, present and emerging. The Chairperson reminded members of the need to observe good hygiene practices and social distancing throughout the meeting.
2. The Working Group noted:
  - a) QDAF was an apology;
  - b) AFMA's intention to record the meeting to assist in the preparation of an accurate record and that once the meeting record is finalised the recording would be deleted. The Chair sought advice from members on any concerns with this approach and none were tabled;
  - c) advice from members that Mr Terence Whap had been nominated by participants at the recent fisheries summit convened by TSRA to be the new Traditional Inhabitant member for Maluialgal on the FFWG (filling the current vacancy). The TSRA nomination report is to be considered by AFMA, as delegate for appointing persons to the PZJA advisory committees; and
  - d) Malu Lamar RNTBC (Malu Lamar) have a standing invite to attend all PZJA advisory committee meetings as an observer. The AFMA member confirmed that Malu Lamar has requested consideration be given to Malu Lamar holding membership on all committees. In considering the creation of new positions on PZJA advisory committees, the AFMA member advised that it is necessary to clearly define the role of position. Relevantly, Malu Lamar representations who attended a Hand Collectable Working Group meeting in February 2020, advised that Malu Lamar would seek advice on whether a Malu Lamar representative could participate in recommendation making. Members supported the ongoing attendance of Malu Lamar representatives at FFWG meetings noting Malu Lamar's role in supporting initiatives such as fisheries research activities in the region.

### 1.2. Adoption of Agenda

3. The Working Group adopted the agenda with the addition of having a RAG Chair report under Agenda Item 2 (to be added as item 2.3). Traditional Inhabitant members also nominated two items for discussion under Other Business:
  - a) Consideration of potential impacts that might arise from increased fishing effort in adjacent areas to the Protected Zone associated with the potential development of a 'comprehensive multi-functional fishery industrial park' in Daru and catch sharing arrangements for Spanish mackerel under the Treaty; and
  - b) communicating business of the Working Group with stakeholders, including support for Traditional Inhabitant members to fulfil their responsibilities to engage with fishers and communities.

### 1.3. Declaration of Interests

4. The Chairperson advised that consistent now with Working Group procedure for some time (as provided in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1), all members of the Working Group must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest in the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery at the commencement of the meeting. Where it is determined that a direct conflict of interest exists, the Working Group may allow the member to continue to participate in the discussions relating to the matter but not in any decision-making process. The Working Group may also determine that, having made their contribution to the discussions, the member should retire from the meeting for the remainder of discussions on that issue.
5. Declarations of interests were provided by each meeting participant. These are detailed in **Table 1**.

6. The FFWG followed a process where each group of members with similar interests were asked to leave the meeting room to enable the remaining members to:
  - a) freely comment on the declared interests;
  - b) agree if the interests precluded the members from participating in any discussions; and
  - c) agree on any actions to manage declared conflicts of interest (e.g. the member may be allowed to participate in the discussions relating to the matter but not in the formulation of final advice).
7. The FFWG also noted that interest can be revisited throughout the meeting and that if any member becomes aware of a potential conflict throughout the meeting, they must immediately disclose the interest.

### **Research interests**

8. Members with research interests (Andy Bodsworth, Michael O'Neill, Dave Brewer and Quinten Hirakawa) were asked to leave the meeting room. The Working Group, temporarily Chaired by the AFMA member, noted that researchers and/or consultants can have a perceived or real interest in both advice on future research priorities and outcomes of currently funded research projects. At the same time the scientific members were appointed to the Working Group in recognition of their scientific expertise relevant to the fishery and hence research that might be undertaken. Like all members, scientific members must ensure they act in the interest of the fishery. Members noted that future research priorities were not part of the meeting agenda and noted the benefit of having scientific expertise available at the meeting. On this basis, it was agreed that the excused members be permitted to participate in discussions under all agenda items and the formulation of recommendations.

### **TSRA and AFMA**

9. TSRA and AFMA officers were asked to leave the meeting room (Mark Anderson, Quinten Hirakawa, Selina Stoute). It was noted that both TSRA and AFMA are a fundamental part of the Torres Strait Fisheries decision making and management processes and as such bring considerable experience and expertise into the FFWG processes. In addition, TSRA administer the finfish sunset leasing process and hold revenue generated from leasing in trust on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. Several of the Traditional Inhabitant Members' have also been appointed as TSRA Board members (currently in caretaker mode). Members noted the importance of managers supporting elected members and particularly enabling information to get back to fishers and communities.

### **TIB fishing interests**

10. Members with declared commercial fishing interests were asked to leave the meeting room (Cr. Rocky Stephen, Mr Tenny Elisala, Harry Nona, Hilda Mosby and Quinten Hirakawa). The Working Group noted that while fishers may have an interest, real or perceived, in management decisions, either personally or at a community level, their industry expertise and knowledge is critical provided they act in the interest of the fishery as a whole (rather than in a manner that may benefit an individual business and/or specific community). It was also noted that interests can be revisited throughout the meeting. On this basis, it was agreed that the excused members be permitted to participate in discussions under all agenda items, and the formulation of recommendations.

### **Sunset fishing interests**

11. Mr Tony Vass was asked to leave the room. Members noted that while Mr Vass no longer holds a Torres Strait Finfish Fishery licence, he has declared that he represents the interest of the sunset sector. Members recognised the value of Mr Vass's expertise and knowledge of the sunset sector through time. For this reason members agreed for Mr Vass to participate in discussions under all agenda items. To remove any ambiguity, the Chairperson clarified that Mr Vass is appointed on the basis of his expertise and not as a representative of the sunset sector interests.

**Table 1: Torres Strait Finfish Working Group members and observers' declarations of interests**

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Andy Bodsworth	Independent Chair	Independent Consultant – Cobalt Marine Resource Management. Has previously been commissioned to undertake Torres Strait related fisheries research projects (e.g. the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Action Plan). Previously worked from AFMA and as Chair other PZJA Advisory Committees (e.g. HCWG)
Rocky Stephen	Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member, Kemer Kemer Meriam (Ugar, Mer, Erub)	Councillor for Ugar, Chairperson of Kos and Abob Fisheries Ugar, Works with brother in a commercial fishing business on Ugar, Eastern cluster member for the PZJA Finfish RAG. Torres Strait Scientific Advisory committee member. Does not hold a TIB licence. TSRA Board Member for Ugar. TSRA Finfish Quota Management Committee. Member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries company to be established on 1 December 2020.
Hilda Mosby	Traditional Inhabitant Industry member, Kulkalgal Cluster (Masig, Warraber, lama, Poruma)	No direct interest in fisheries but has long history with Torres Strait fisheries through family involvement. TSRA Board Member for Masig.
Tenny Elisala	Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member, Gudmalulgal (Saibai, Dauan, Boigu).	TSRA Ranger Dauan, TIB licence holder, Traditional inhabitant member, Gudmalulgal for the PZJA Finfish RAG.
Harry Nona	Traditional Inhabitant member, Kaiwalagal	Fulltime fishermen, TIB licence holder and member for Kaiwalagal
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member and E/O	Nil
Mark Anderson	TSRA Member	No personal pecuniary interests. Programme Manager for Fisheries and Economic Development TSRA. TSRA holds finfish quota in trust on behalf of Traditional inhabitants and administers the annual leasing process to Sunset licence holders to generate revenue
Michael O'Neill	Scientific Member	Principal Fisheries Scientist, Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Member of PZJA Finfish RAG and Working Group. Project team member for the Torres Strait (Spanish mackerel, coral trout) biological sampling program. Principal scientist for the Spanish mackerel stock assessment project. Was a co-investigator for the research project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery, which closed in 2019. Maintains an interest in undertaking research in the Torres Strait and is likely to submit a funding application to the address the Spanish mackerel stock

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
		assessment research scope in the current funding round.
David Brewer	Scientific Member	Independent consultant - Director of Upwelling P/L (David Brewer Consulting). Honorary Fellow of CSIRO. Chair of the Torres Strait Finfish RAG. Scientific member of the Northern Prawn Fishery RAG. Current consultancies with Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation, Redlands City Council. Co-investigator on the currently funded Torres Strait Non-commercial fishery monitoring project.
Invited participants and observers,		Declarations of interests
Tony Vass	Invited participant	No financial interest in Torres Strait Fisheries. Previous Torres Strait finfish operator from 1990-2007/08. Represents sunset sector interests.
Trevor Hutton	Scientific permanent observer	Research scientist with CSIRO. CSIRO maintains an interest in undertaking research in the Torres Strait and is likely to submit a funding application to the address the harvest strategy research scope in the current funding round. Was the Principal investigator for the research project to develop a harvest strategy for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery, which closed in 2019.
Quinten Hirakawa	Observer	TSRA employee and TIB licence holder with Spanish mackerel and coral trout entries. Co-investigator on the Spanish mackerel and coral trout biological sampling project.

#### 1.4. Actions items from previous meetings

12. The Working Group noted progress against actions arising and the final meeting record from the FFWG meeting on 29 November 2019. The Working Group noted that AFMA emailed the TSRA commissioned baitfish scoping study to members on 24 November 2020 after receiving the report from TSRA. The Working Group acknowledged AFMA's previous attempt to have a biosecurity officer attend a Working Group meeting to advise on any monitoring programs in place for invasive pest fish species and associated risks within the region. The Working Group reiterated the importance of obtaining such information and therefore maintaining the action item.

## Agenda Item 2 – Working group updates

### 2.1 Industry and scientific member updates

13. The FFWG noted the following general updates from industry members and invited participants.

#### Sunset sector

14. There has only been one sunset licence holder operating so far for the season. The fisher started a month later than normal and has reported very good Spanish mackerel catch rates. The fisher is reporting 'fished hours' more accurately now rather than the reporting 3 hours irrespective of time fished which was a long-standing practice by the sunset fishing sector.
15. The TSRA member asked why fishers seek access to the Torres Strait Spanish mackerel fishery when the quota value on the QLD east coast is 80-85 cents per kilogram compared to

\$1.25 per kilogram in the Torres Strait. The TSRA member advised that TSRA don't set the price rather operators submit tenders for access each year and nominate a price.

16. Mr Vass advised that when leasing commenced it was intended for the lease price to be 10 percent of the beach price (a common rule of thumb in fisheries) but in recent years the price has increased. Sunset fishers also view the lease pricing differently, in that the price is effectively set and therefore has been increased. The Torres Strait Fishery is attractive in the sense that fishers know they can catch their quota. On the east coast fishing is little by little. The east coast fishery does not catch the TAC. The TAC is around 570t and last season only around 300t was caught. The east coast fishery also supplies the whole fish Sydney market selling at around \$25 per kilogram. Torres Strait product is snap frozen processed.
17. The Scientific member also noted that Torres Strait fishery is based on fishing a spawning aggregation with limited competition from other fishers. Mr Vass advised that on the east coast about half the fleet fish spawning aggregations (e.g. off Lucinda) and half don't. Mr Vass further advised that the loss of the spawning aggregation off Cairns may be more to do with run-off pollution rather than fishing pressure.
18. Members supported the participation of active sunset fishers at future working group meetings.

### **TIB sector**

19. Little fishing has occurred this year from Eastern communities due to poor weather. It has only been the last month that fishers have started to go fishing for Spanish mackerel. Some fishers are focusing on coral trout.
20. The Spanish mackerel biological sampling project has been progressing well and visits to engage communities in the research have been well received. Ugar has just sent samples to QDAF for the project.
21. The Erub freezer is back running following funding from TSRA. The freezer business, 'Darnley Deep' is supporting an increase in fishing effort. Darnley Deep has now sent several (4) shipments of mixed seafood to mainland buyers (TRL tails, coral trout, Spanish mackerel).
22. At Masig there are usually a few older fishers going out for Spanish mackerel. A big TIB vessel is now operating in the central islands and the fisher has sought approval to work around Masig.
23. Traditional take catches have been reportedly very good. Spanish mackerel is an important resource for Traditional fishers.
24. Mer fishers have been selling whole Spanish mackerel for \$18 per kilogram. Mer fishers reportedly caught 1 tonne of Spanish mackerel in a week.
25. Ugar community members expressed concern that Spanish mackerel being taken for subsistence and recreational fishing are significant (maybe more than the TIB catches) but are not being recorded. The fish receiver system records commercial catch only. Members recognised the importance of collecting more accurate catch data for TIB Traditional Fishers (kai kai) and are eagerly awaiting the outcomes of the scoping study investigating options for monitoring Traditional take catches being led by Kenny Bedford.
26. The scientific member confirmed that the 2019 QLD recreational fishing survey did not adequately cover the Torres Strait. The survey is focused on the east coast with limited sample occurring in the Torres Strait.

## **2.2 Government member updates**

### **TSRA**

27. The TSRA member advised that the TSRA funded export and branding project is almost complete with the final report due soon. The report will be publicly available. The aim of the project is to develop export opportunities for Torres Strait product to alleviate reliance on the Chinese market.
28. Following support from participants at a recent summit convened by TSRA, an entity, called Zenadth Kes (meaning four winds of the Torres Strait) is set to be established on 1 December

2020. The entity will slowly take over ownership of Torres Strait Fisheries assets. The TSRA member advised that once the entity starts, information about the entity will be publically available, for example on websites.

## **AFMA**

29. The Working Group noted the AFMA update as tabled in the agenda item paper. The AFMA member highlighted the management and data history document that AFMA has compiled for the Torres Strait Spanish Mackerel Fishery (Attachment B to the agenda item paper). Members were invited to consider the current draft and if possible out of session, provide advice on any gaps in the information so far compiled.

### **2.3 RAG Chairperson report**

30. The Scientific member, Mr Brewer provided an overview of the outcomes of Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FFRAG) meetings held since the last Working Group meeting. Mr Brewer is the Chairperson of the RAG. Mr Brewer reported that the RAG met on 8 October 2020 (meeting 7) to consider data inputs, model scenarios and methods for calculating the Spanish mackerel stock Recommended Biological Catch (RBC). The RAG met again on 4-5 November 2020. Mr Brewer provided a brief outline of the RAG meeting outcomes noting more detailed consideration of key RAG advice will occur under subsequent agenda items. A copy of the meeting record is at **Attachment A** of Agenda Item 3.1.

31. The Chair noted the importance of the RAG's work, particularly with respect to clear advice and recommendations supporting TAC setting for the Spanish mackerel fishery. Also recognising that the good work done by the RAG also made the work of the FFWG more efficient.

## **Agenda Item 3 –Total Allowable Catch advice**

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### **Agenda item 3.1 Spanish mackerel TAC advice for 2021-22 fishing season**

32. The Working Group considered and discussed:

- a) an overview from the AFMA member on the advice being sought from the Working Group (as detailed in the agenda paper);
- b) a presentation from the Scientific member, Dr O'Neill on the Spanish mackerel 2020 stock assessment (Attachment B to the agenda paper);
- c) a verbal report from the Scientific member and Chairperson of FFRAG, David Brewer outlining relevant advice from FFRAG (as detailed in the agenda paper);
- d) verbal reports from Traditional Inhabitant members who also serve on the FFRAG outlining the rationale for the FFRAG recommendations on increasing the estimates of catches for Traditional (kai-kai) and recreational fishing (as detailed in the agenda paper). The Working Group noted that, for an abundance of clarity, further discussions would be held in the FFRAG to confirm if the increased estimates apply to any previous years. If so, the catch history for the fishery would be adjusted accordingly;
- e) verbal reports from Traditional Inhabitant members who also serve on the FFRAG outlining the rationale for why Traditional Inhabitant members of the FFRAG recommended a 94 tonnes RBC over a possible RBC of 105 tonnes (as detailed in the agenda paper);
- f) the draft meeting record for FFRAG meeting 8 held on 4-5 November 2020 (Attachment A to the agenda paper); and
- g) FFRAG/WG and industry advice to date on components, guiding principles and key fishery attributes to help shape the development of a harvest strategy for Spanish mackerel (Attachment C to the agenda paper).

33. The Working Group noted that, overall, the current biomass has increased. With increased catch rates and inclusion of new age-frequency data into the model, the RBC recommended by the FFRAG is based on forecasted biomass for the 2021-2020 fishing season. The RBC is

likely to build the stock to a target reference point of B48 within a reasonable timeframe and acceptable level of risk.

34. Having considered advice from the FFRAG and advice on the harvest strategy to date, the Working Group agreed to recommend a TAC for Spanish mackerel for the 2020-21 fishing season of 74 tonnes. The TAC:
- a) is based on an agreed RBC of 94 tonnes minus 20 tonnes of estimated catches that could be expected to be taken outside of the Fishery (15 tonnes Traditional fishing (kai kai), 5 tonnes recreational fishing, 0 tonnes charter fishing and 0 tonnes PNG catch sharing);
  - b) reflects the preference of Traditional Inhabitant members of both the RAG and Working Group to have a harvest strategy that is balanced and careful by 'hastening slowly' and 'banking' fish if the biomass is increasing. This harvest strategy approach reflects the advice to date on developing a harvest strategy for Spanish mackerel.
35. The Working Group thanked Dr O'Neill, the stock assessment project team and FFRAG for all the work undertaken to assess the status of the stock and recommend a TAC. In particular, the detailed work undertaken to include new age-frequency data, refine data inputs and model scenarios and to support RBC forecasting for the relevant fishing season.

### **Agenda item 3.2. Coral trout TAC for the 2020-21 fishing season**

36. Having considered advice from the FFRAG (as detailed in the agenda item paper) the Working Group agreed to recommend maintaining the coral trout TAC at 135 tonnes. In making this recommendation the Working Group noted that:
- a) catches remain low in the fishery (catches for the 2019-20 fishing season were 32.34 tonnes);
  - b) FFRAG advice that the preliminary stock assessment undertaken in 2019 indicated that the stock biomass is likely to be high (the preliminary stock assessment estimated biomass to be around 80 percent (B80) of estimated virgin biomass (B0) with all of the model estimates of spawning biomass being above B65);
  - c) consistent with FFRAG advice, it is priority at this time to develop estimates of catches taken outside the fishery and for the TAC to be reduced accordingly. However, this work should commence, further highlighting the importance of the Torres Strait Non-commercial fishery monitoring project currently funded and due to report soon.
37. The Working Group noted FFRAG advice on the data priorities for the fishery and information needed to support the development of a more accurate stock assessment that could be relied upon to adjust the TAC and therefore have greater confidence around the future harvest levels. The Working Group noted the importance of such information to guide investment decisions and provide insights into potential future expansion of the Fishery. The priorities include a fishery-independent dive survey of abundance, together with improvements to the accuracy of logbook reporting (effort, species 'split'), biological sampling and habitat mapping.

## **Agenda Item 4 – Management**

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### **Agenda item 4.1 Western Line Closure**

38. The Working Group noted previous Working Group advice and advice from FFRAG, Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) RAG discussion, and previous outcomes of public consultation on the proposal to remove the Western Line Closure. The Working Group noted further advice from the FFRAG (meeting 8) on removing the closure in the northern 'top hat' area of the Torres Strait Protected Zone only, for example north of Turnagain Island or Numar Reef. Members noted that that the 'top hat' area does not overlap with significant TRL fishing grounds. Interactions with the TRL Fishery was a key concern raised during public consultations.
39. Noting advice from the FFRAG (as detailed in the agenda item paper), the Working Group supported AFMA's intention to undertake further targeted consultation with Gudamalulgal

communities, in partnership with nominated industry members of the RAG (Tenny Elisala, Cr Rock Stephen and John Tabo) to broadly develop the conditions for removing the closure in the 'top hat' area.

40. The Working Group recommended that potential biosecurity concerns associated with invasive fish species be considered; supporting the Traditional Inhabitant members recommendation to delay community visits until early next year to enable more preparation time (AFMA had been working towards including the Western Line Closure matter in meetings scheduled with Gudamalulgal communities for the first week of December 2020). Traditional Inhabitant members noted that communities want to open the area but they haven't yet had the information to think through the risks and options for managing those risks. In their view therefore, it was important to not rush and be well prepared, and to share and gather the right information.

#### **Agenda item 4.2      Torres Strait Finfish Fishery management priorities**

41. Working Group members were asked to provide advice on recommended management priorities for 2021-22. Members noted AFMA had outlined several priorities for the Working Group's consideration (detailed in the agenda paper). Members did not recommend any other priorities but provided the following advice on those outlined by AFMA:

- a) *Progress the development of a harvest strategy.* Supported as a priority. However, it was noted that clear guidance from AFMA to prospective funding applicants on expected deliverables is needed. It was noted that the RAG and Working Group have been developing a harvest strategy approach for Spanish mackerel over the last four years and arguably there are no immediate risks for coral trout given the low fishing effort. However, the Working Group recognised that it is best practice to develop agreed harvest strategies to provide certainty to stakeholders on the information requirements and decision rules for setting TACs in the fishery. This certainty enables more informed business decisions and importantly supports industry and community leaders in building broader stakeholder support for improving data for the Fishery. To ensure a clear return on investment, members agreed that it was essential that a future project build on work already completed to develop a harvest strategy for the fishery. In this regard all potential applicants were encouraged to contact AFMA to discuss proposals prior to submission.
- b) *Supporting possible changes to the Western Line Closure.* Supported as a priority. It was noted as a long-standing issue, but that good progress has been made more recently to understand the views of Torres Strait Islanders throughout the region and to develop risk-based management options. It was noted that advice needed to be made clear on allowable fishing methods.
- c) *Supporting the PZJA's consideration of quota unit allocation options.* The Working Group noted the PZJA decision and rationale. That being to consider quota unit allocation options for the Finfish Fishery alongside the review it must undertake for the Traditional Inhabitant quota unit allocation in Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery. The AFMA member advised that having clearly defined catch entitlements (i.e. quota units) will be important to support the transfer of the sunset leasing arrangements from TSRA to non-government entity/ies. Members noted that the PZJA has not yet allocated quota in the Finfish Fishery despite there being a plan of management in place to do so. The AFMA member advised that, following Australian Government buyout of licences held by non-traditional inhabitants in 2008 and therefore potential effort, the PZJA agreed that it was no longer a priority to introduce quota management. Some Traditional Inhabitant members raised strong concerns that a quota allocation process could start to divide their people and cause in-fighting. In their view it should be a matter for the new Zenadth Kes Fishing Company (the entity) to consider whether to pursue such an option. The Working Group noted the sensitivities around allocation and whilst there was support to involve the new entity as a means of involving stakeholders, members

noted AFMA member advice that the nature and extent of any involvement would be subject to the role of the entity. Details on this are to be released by TSRA once the entity is established (refer to TSRA update under agenda item 2.2).

- d) *Formalising total allowable catches for the Finfish fishery.* Supported as a priority noting the Working Group's previous consideration and support for ensuring the TAC is binding on all sectors. The Working Group noted that, in the absence of having quota management under the management plan, current arrangements do not limit catches by the Traditional Inhabitant sector. Having an enforceable TAC was noted as a necessary part of carefully managing catches in the fishery.
- e) *Potential application of VMS on tenders.* The Working Group did not consider this a high priority at this time, however, supported further information being tabled on the pros and cons on having VMS on tenders (boats that work in conjunction with a primary boat). Some Traditional Inhabitant members did not support having VMS on TIB boats but supported the measure applying to the sunset sector noting concerns with sunset boats breaching the 10nm closures around eastern communities. The AFMA member noted that the FFRAG had previously considered the use of VMS as an option for addressing the spatial data needs. The AFMA member further advised that whilst VMS is generally considered to be a cost-effective compliance tool, there was still much analysis to be done by AFMA on matters such as implementation costs across all licence holders to support further consideration of this initiative. AFMA maintains this as a lower priority, subject to resourcing.

## Agenda Item 5 – Research

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### Agenda item 5.1 Research updates

- 42. The Working Group noted that the four research priorities recommended by the FFRAG were supported by the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) and have recently been released by AFMA in the call for research funding proposals in 2021-22. The AFMA member advised that advice would be sought from the FFRAG and Working Group on any proposals received with pre-proposals due to AFMA early February 2021.
- 43. The Working Group further noted advice from the AFMA member that TSSAC plans to convene a face-to-face meeting in May 2021 to consider strategic research priorities and funding opportunities. Other potential funding partners such as FRDC will be invited. The AFMA member noted that with the conclusion of both the climate change and traditional take scoping studies it will be timely to consider future research directions and possible funding partnerships.

## Agenda Item 6 – Other business

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### Agenda item 6.1 Other business

***Consideration of potential impacts that might arise from increased fishing effort in adjacent areas to the Protected Zone associated with the potential development of a 'comprehensive multi-functional fishery industrial park' in Daru and catch sharing arrangements for Spanish mackerel under the Treaty.***

- 44. Traditional Inhabitant Working Group members sought information on the potential risks to fisheries in the region if fishing effort increased in areas adjacent to Protected Zone as a result of proposed fisheries infrastructure expansion in Daru Island, PNG as recently reported by the media (a 'Comprehensive Multi-functional Fishery Industrial Park'). Members also sought clarification on the catch sharing arrangements for Spanish mackerel.
- 45. The AFMA member advised that the Treaty recognises the rights of both countries to Protected Zone commercial fisheries. This recognition is implemented through catch-sharing arrangements. For Spanish mackerel, PNG is entitled to 40 percent of the agreed TAC for the Protected Zone and outside-but-near areas. The AFMA member advised that AFMA and its PNG counterpart, the PNG National Fisheries Authority (NFA) consult and co-operate with

each other to manage Protected Zone commercial fisheries arrangements. Any expansion in fishing effort in the region needs to be carefully managed within appropriate arrangements and monitoring. AFMA and NFA work closely with each other on fisheries compliance monitoring and enforcement for the region.

***Communicating business of the Working Group with stakeholders, including support for Traditional Inhabitant members to fulfil their responsibilities to engage with fishers and communities.***

46. Traditional Inhabitant members advised of the challenges with communicating with fishers and community stakeholders on Working Group business. Members advised that information is not getting back to all communities. The Working Group agreed that this was central to ensuring the Working Group can provide informed advice and recognised the ongoing efforts to support members and communication more generally. Most recently the initiatives include:
- a) TSRA committing to an annual round of ‘cluster’ meetings led by Traditional Inhabitant members. The first round of cluster meetings occurred in October and November 2019;
  - b) TSRA preparing meeting outcome summaries (based on the agreed meeting record) to support members liaison with fishers and communities;
  - c) TSRA undertake pre-meeting briefings with Traditional Inhabitant members to go through meeting agenda’s and material;
  - d) TSRA provide new Traditional Inhabitant members with an induction training which is designed, in part, to build their capacity to understand and communicate outcomes;
  - e) AFMA undertakes at a minimum, an annual round of meetings with all communities in partnership with relevant Traditional Inhabitant members.
47. Working Group members offered a number of suggestions for potentially improving and supporting communication:
- a) Greater use of technology. For example, there are applications that allow material to be posted to multiple social media platforms simultaneously;
  - b) Appointing a communications specialist within TSRA to communicate and gather information;
  - c) One Traditional Inhabitant member recommended having common membership across RAG and Working Groups;
  - d) One Traditional Inhabitant member emphasised the need for all members within a cluster to use one another to share information with fishers and communications from all of the PZJA advisory committees; and
  - e) The AFMA member advised that AFMA continues to explore opportunities to use the TSIRC video conference network to liaise with outer island communities. Being able to video link with communities would allow more frequent direct communication with fishers and fisher associations. AFMA also uses SMS messaging. SMS messaging could be use in future to alert fishers to meeting agendas and outcomes (with links to the PZJA website).
48. Working Group members encouraged both the ongoing development of communication options to support members and for members to continue their efforts to liaise with stakeholders.

**Agenda item 6.2      Date and venue for next meeting**

49. The Working Group noted the proposed meeting schedule together with key items for discussion as detailed in the agenda paper and **Table 2** below.
50. In closing, the Chairperson thanked all members for their contribution and acknowledged the ongoing work undertaken by the Spanish mackerel project team and the FFRAG to improve the stock assessment and develop harvest strategy options. Noting that improved confidence in the stock assessment process would help to ensure a more robust TAC setting process, and improved investment confidence for the fishery. The Chair further recognised the stewardship

shown by Traditional Inhabitants in making recommendations to benefit the long-term sustainability of the fishery. He noted the development of the newly formed Torres Strait fishing entity, Zenadth Kes, and the importance of maintaining good engagement and communications between the FFWG and this group, as well as Malu Lamar. The meeting closed around 1600hrs.

**Table 2: Proposed Torres Strait Finfish Fishery FFWG and FFRAG meetings and key items for 2021.**

Date	Group	Key agenda items
January 2021 (TBC)	PZJA	Decision on 2020-21 season TACs.
1 July 2021 - Torres Strait Finfish Fishery 2021-22 Season Opens		
Date TBC	FFRAG 9 Data Meeting	Review new data available from 2020-21 season to support 2021 stock assessments. Review and advise on research priorities
2-3 September 2021	FFRAG 10	Preliminary assessment update for Spanish mackerel.
14-15 October 2021	FFRAG 11	RBC advice for 2022-23
25-26 Nov 2021	FFWG 2021	TAC advice for 2023-23 season.