



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

15th Meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group

1-2 August 2019, Thursday Island

Meeting Record

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

www.pzja.gov.au

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1 Preliminaries

1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies

1. Rocky Stephen opened the meeting in prayer at 9:00 am.
2. The Chair welcomed attendees to the 15th meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG 15) at the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) Board Room on Thursday Island. The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which the meeting was held and paid respect to Elders past, present and future.
3. The Chair further acknowledged the role of the HCWG under the PZJA Fisheries Management Paper 1 and reminded members of working group of their responsibilities and respectful nature in which to abide by during the two days of meeting.
4. Attendees at the Working Group are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. List of attendees at the HCWG15.

Members	
Anne Clarke	Chair
Tim Skewes	Scientific member
Michael Passi	Traditional Inhabitant member, Kemer Kemer Meriam
Maluwap Nona	Traditional Inhabitant member, Gudumalulgal
Frank Loban	Traditional Inhabitant member, Maluialgal
Steve Bolton	Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) member
Allison Runck	Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) member
Georgia Langdon	HCWG Executive Officer, AFMA
Permanent Observers	
Yen Loban	TSRA Board Member for Muralag and Ngurupai TSRA Portfolio Member for Fisheries
Casual Observers	
Simon Naawi ¹	Traditional Inhabitant fisher – Masig (Yorke) Island
Rocky Stephen	Traditional Inhabitant fisher – Ugar (Stephen) Island
Eva Plaganyi	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)
Nicole Murphy	CSIRO
Elizabeth McCrudden	TSRA

¹ Mr Naawi only attended on day 2 of the meeting (Friday 2 August)

5. Apologies received are detailed in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. List of apologies for HCWG15.

Apologies	
Patrick Bonner	Traditional Inhabitant member, Kulkalgal
Tony Salam	Traditional inhabitant member, Kaiwalagal
Ian Liviko	PNG National Fisheries Authority (NFA) Invited Participant
Danielle Stewart	Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) member
John Kris	Representative of Malu Lamar RNTBC

1.2 Adoption of agenda

6. The Working Group noted that three additional agenda items were suggested for inclusion on the agenda ahead of the meeting as per draft agenda version two.

7. The Working Group adopted the draft agenda (Attachment A).

1.3 Declarations of interest

8. As outlined in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1, all members of the Working Group must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait hand collectable fisheries at the commencement of the meeting (see Table 3 below).

Table 3. Declared interests from each attendee.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Anne Clarke	Chair	Board member of the Wet Tropics Management Authority Previously contracted with Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland and Torres Strait No pecuniary interests or otherwise.
Tim Skewes	Scientific Member	CSIRO/Independent Consultant. Previous principal scientist for Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) project to develop a harvest strategy for the TSBDMF. Previous CSIRO researcher for TSSAC project investigating traditional take of finfish in Torres Strait.
Michael Passi	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Kemer Kemer Meriam	TIB licence holder
Maluwap Nona	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Gudumalulgal	TIB licence holder, Chairperson of Malu Lamar, Traditional Inhabitant member on TSSAC
Frank Loban	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Maluialgal	TIB licence holder; Traditional Inhabitant Member on TSSAC and Finfish Working Group.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Steve Bolton	AFMA Member	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Allison Runck	TSRA Member	Employed by TSRA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Georgia Langdon	Executive Officer HCWG (AFMA)	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Yen Loban	Permanent Observer	TIB licence holder; TSRA Board Member for Muralag and Ngurupai; TSRA Portfolio Member for Fisheries
Simon Naawi	Casual Observer	Traditional Inhabitant fisher – Masig (Yorke) Island
Rocky Stephen	Casual Observer	Traditional Inhabitant fisher – Ugar (Stephen) Island; Chair of Kos and Abob Fisheries Association; Brother Bear Fisheries; Torres Strait Regional Island Councilor of Ugar; Traditional inhabitant member on Finfish Resource Assessment Group (FRAG), Finfish Working Group (FWG) and TSSAC; currently undertaking a beche-de-mer re-seeding research project with CSIRO on Ugar.
Eva Plaganyi	Casual Observer	Employed by CSIRO. Current Principle Investigator for TSSAC project 'Torres Strait TRL survey stock assessment and harvest strategy'. Previous Principle Investigator for TSSAC project 'Developing a harvest strategy for the TSBDMF'.
Nicole Murphy	Casual Observer	Employed by CSIRO. Current Principle Investigator on TSRA funded project 'Stock survey of Torres Strait Beche-de-mer species'.
Elizabeth McCrudden	Casual Observer	Employed by TSRA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise

1.4 Action items from HCWG14 and previous meetings

9. The Working Group acknowledged that only minor comments were received on the draft meeting record which was finalised out of session and circulated to members on 21 December 2018.
10. The Working Group noted the report provided by the Executive Officer advising of the status of actions arising from previous HCWG meetings (Table 5).

1.5 Out of session correspondence

11. The Working Group noted the correspondence circulated out of session since HCWG14 held on 24 October 2018.

2 Working Group Updates

2.1 Industry and Scientific member update

12. The Working Group noted updates provided by Traditional Inhabitant industry members and observers on the recent performance and strategic issues relating to hand collectable fisheries, including economic trends, affecting the management and development of these fisheries.
13. Traditional Inhabitant industry members and observers made the following comments in relation to hand collectable fisheries:
 - a. While there are limited beche-de-mer resources in the near western region, and therefore very few active BDM fishers, TIB fishers of Maluialgal are always looking for opportunities in Torres Strait fisheries and continue to work closely with Kulkalgal fishers.
 - b. Similarly, there are limited BDM resources in the top western region, however TIB fishers from Gudumalulgal nation are engaging with Kemer Kemer Meriam people.
 - c. With limited fishers operating in the industry, fishers are struggling to fill TACs in order to fulfil export markets. The 7m boat length restriction must be reviewed in order to facilitate TIB fishers fully utilising the BDM TACs. Further, the limitation is becoming a risk for divers who are needing to travel greater distances to reach fishing grounds.
14. With regards to catch rates and on-water observations, industry members and observers noted the following points:
 - a. Beche-de-mer stocks in Kemer Kemer Meriam waters are reportedly looking healthier with many observations of white teatfish, black teatfish and larger sized prickly redfish on the reefs. There is a new BDM buyer operating from Mer purchasing BDM product which is encouraging to see investment in the community. A number of TIB fishers on Mer are working closely with the new buyer to ensure small animals are not harvested. Most of the BDM purchased are sent to Sydney as gutted and salted product. Fishers noted that salted product typically lasts around a week but will keep longer in a cool room. Freight costs are expensive. Product is typically freighted directly to Cairns via Seaswift and then trucked further south. Freight on board flights out of Mer is limited due to weight restrictions.
 - b. There has been a significant period of rough weather, with winds up to 30 knots resulting in fishers out on Mer only working approximately six months of the past year. This is notably different to earlier years but has allowed dive crews some rest time.
 - c. Sizes of prickly redfish are notably larger, with anecdotes that usually around 30-40 pieces (of BDM) are required to make 40kg of product however now the larger sized sea cucumbers only require around 20 pieces to achieve the same weight of product.
 - d. Fishers at Ugar have mostly been focusing on finfish species with very little activity in the BDM fishery. This is largely due to the rough weather, however the mackerel have been continuing to bite. When Ugar fishers are working BDM, the product is typically salted.
15. The scientific member noted the following updates in relation to other BDM fisheries around Australia:
 - a. The Western Australia (WA) BDM fishery has recently been undergoing the certification process under the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) which is expected to be complete this year. This certification process was very challenging to achieve as it was difficult to demonstrate the sustainable management arrangements for sandfish and deepwater redfish through the efficacy of the WA BDM harvest Strategy. It was the commitment to

undertaking surveys every five years and an annual weight of evidence assessment that enabled the final MSC certification.

- b. Some countries (e.g. USA and European countries) hold MSC certification in high regard which can generate large differences in price, however achieving MSC certification is very expensive and the trade-off for the value received versus the cost of certification must be considered. MSC is not the only seafood certification body, however it is notably the most recognised. Should black teatfish and white teatfish CITES Appendix II listings be agreed to, the WA BDM MSC certification will put the WA BDM Fishery in good stead.
- c. The Queensland East Coast BDM Fishery is also considering pursuing MSC certification for some aspects of the BDM Fishery, including the black teatfish fishery. A survey on black teatfish on the EC was undertaken in recent years and did show signs of recovery, satisfying the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA) stipulation that the biomass of black teatfish had to have recovered to greater than 70% unfished biomass with a high level of certainty in order for the fishery to be reopened.
- d. White teatfish remains the other key priority for the EC BDM Fishery. Although only relatively highly targeted, there is very little information on white teatfish population status.. A study with James Cook University (JCU) is looking at remote drop camera surveys which will be interesting to compare with the upcoming CSIRO Torres Strait BDM survey.

2.2 Government updates

2.2.1 AFMA update

16. The Working Group noted an updated provided by the AFMA member regarding management issues relevant to Torres Strait hand collectable fisheries, in particular:

- a. The implications for listing commercially fished beche-de-mer species on Appendix II of CITES;
 - i. If listed, species may still be traded internationally provided the trade, or a specified level of trade, has been determined to be non-detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.
 - ii. The Department of Environment and Energy (DoEE) is responsible for assessing the sustainability of international trade in Australian species listed on Appendix II and undertakes this assessment based on the information provided to it by the exporting proponent.
 - iii. In the case of government managed fisheries, the species-specific information is provided by the relevant managing agency (AFMA), usually within the information provided by the agency for the assessment of sustainability as an approved Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.
 - iv. Where an approve Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) is in already in place for the relevant fishery, the DoEE recommends that arrangements to renew the WTO, or provide an addition to the WTO could be considered.
 - v. Alternatively, information on the sustainability of the species' harvest for international trade throughout its Australian range could be provided for assessment.

17. The Working Group acknowledged that the lack of data on the two proposed species was worldwide and while it does not prohibit fishing for the species in the Torres Strait, it may impose stricter conditions on the trade of the species.
18. One of the implications for a successful Appendix II listing will result in setting a higher bar for their management that will take some additional resources and investment. The implementation of the BDM harvest strategy, mandatory catch reporting and an updated stock status survey are all tools that contribute to the exemplary management of beche-de-mer stocks throughout the world.
19. The Working Group also noted a range of other AFMA updates relating to:
 - a. the outcomes of the Australian National Audit Office audit on the coordination arrangements of Australian Government agencies operating in the Torres Strait;
 - b. the latest Fishery Status Reports from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARES);
 - c. updates on the progression of legislative amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* and *Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985*; and
 - d. the new Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources;
20. The Gudumalulgal traditional inhabitant member, who is also the Chairperson for Malu Lamar reiterated that any changes to legislative amendments must be consulted on with Malu Lamar in order to encompass Native Title rights post the Akiba decision. He added that a submission was provided to the PZJA in 2014 in relation to this however no response has yet been received from the PZJA.
21. The TSRA member suggested that some proposed amendments already have policy approval, such as improving the ability for catch reporting in the fishery, and it is important these changes are progressed, with a separate process established to address Native Title rights issues and the pursuit of PZJA membership by Malu Lamar.

2.2.2 TSRA Update

22. The Working Group noted an update provided by the TSRA member regarding TSRA Fisheries Program activities:
 - a. A part of the program to support PZJA traditional inhabitant members in their roles, the TSRA is working to arrange cluster visits in October 2019 to enable traditional inhabitant members provide updates to communities and other industry members, and seek feedback on the latest developments in their respective Working Groups and Resource Assessment Groups (RAGs).
 - b. The TSRA is progressing a project aimed at increasing the value of Torres Strait seafood products through improvements in the supply chain and branding. A number of the project outputs were presented on at the 2018 Fisheries Summit, however an additional output, being the development of an Exporter's Handbook is close to completion. The handbook is intended to provide information on what happens to seafood product once it is sold to a buyer, what certifications are needed if you are looking to export, outlines e-commerce opportunities and provides a platform for connecting harvesters with buyers.
 - c. The Fisheries Regional Ownership Framework (FROF) project is progressing, with the planned establishment of a company limited by guarantee set up to transition all commercial fisheries assets to the 'Entity' for commercial management. It is expected that such assets (which includes approximately \$1.7 million dollars in finfish sunset lease money) will be transferred over a period of 12-18 months. TSRA is currently undertaking

a full round of consultation and community visits with members of the FROF Steering Committee which includes community representatives Frank Loban and Kenny Bedford, representatives from Malu Lamar and Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council (GBK), as well as TSRA Board Members Horace Baira and Yen Loban, and the TSRA Chair.

- d. The Steering Committee is consulting on a proposal for the company structure, company membership with draft objectives and purpose statement. It is intended that the outcomes of the consultation will be presented to the TSRA Board in September, where the fisheries program will seek endorsement for the next steps of the project. A Fisheries Summit meeting is expected to be convened in early 2020 to provide a more complete update on the Entity to stakeholders.

23. The Working Group noted that the Torres Strait seafood branding project will be progressed to a stage that can be used as a resource for the Entity to utilise, however it is not an asset per se that will be transferred.

24. Further, small business operators who are seeking funding support from the TSRA should continue to do so via the range of support packages available through the TSRA Economic Development Program, separate to the Entity.

2.2.3 QDAF Update

25. While the QDAF member was not present during the meeting, the Executive Officer to the Working Group provided the following brief updates regarding Fisheries Queensland:

- a. Fisheries Queensland is undergoing a significant regulatory reform, with a number of proposed amendments to their Fisheries Regulations being considered.
- b. While a considerable number of amendments relate to both the finfish and tropical rock lobster fisheries in the Torres Strait, the key amendment relevant to the beche-de-mer fishery is the proposed prohibition of the recreational take of white teatfish.
- c. Consultation on the proposed amendments closed on 19 July 2019. AFMA is providing a written submission to QDAF regarding the reform.
- d. The East Coast black teatfish fishery opened on 1 July 2019. The opening was for a 30 tonne Total Allowable Catch allocated equally across the 18 licence holders, and managed under the current rotational harvest arrangements.

26. AFMA will continue to liaise with QDAF regarding further updates on the East Coast black teatfish opening.

2.3 Native Title update

27. The Gudumalulgal traditional inhabitant member, who is also the Chairperson of the Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC provided an update to the Working Group on behalf of Malu Lamar. The Working Group noted the following key points:

- a. Malu Lamar is working closely with TSRA to support the development and consultation of the Entity.
- b. A draft Regional Sea Use Agreement (under the *Native Title Act 1993*) is being proposed to detail how sea country and its resources will be utilised in to the future. The Agreement is to ensure that the interests of Traditional Owners are protected, and that the owners of the resources have a say in how the resources are utilised. Malu Lamar will be consulting

with all relevant government agencies including AFMA, QDAF and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA).

28. The Chairperson further added that the recent Northern Territory Timber Creek decision handed down by the High Court was a significant milestone for Native Title rights. The decision ensured a pay-out for economic and cultural loss to Traditional Owners over the development of a bridge.

29. He also reminded the Working Group of the importance of utilising the protocols outlines in the Nakata report for undertaking research in the Torres Strait.

2.4 PNG National Fisheries Authority update

30. In the absence of a PNG NFA representative, the AFMA member provided a brief update on behalf of PNG NFA based on recent fisheries bilateral events and reports sought through local PNG media:

- a. Selected marine provinces are closed to beche-de-mer fishing until all stock assessment surveys are submitted for analysis and a final decision on opening the fishery is made by the PNG NFA Board;
- b. 2018 exports of beche-de-mer from PNG had an estimated value of around K100 million (~\$42 million AUD).
- c. A Fisheries Committee Bilateral meeting was held on 4 March 2019, Thursday Island between Australia and Papua New Guinea. The Fisheries Committee noted that:
 - i. AFMA requested that complimentary management strategies be developed by Parties for shared beche-de-mer stocks, specifically sandfish;
 - ii. PNG-NFA advice that the South-Fly beche-de-mer fishery remains closed until further notice and that PNG-NFA regard stocks in the South-Fly region as overfished. As a result, PNG-NFA are taking a precautionary approach in assessing possible future TACs. PNG-NFA are committed to undertaking research to determine the status of stocks prior to any future openings in the region. Stock surveys are planned for Warrior Reef and fishing areas around Parama Island. PNG-NFA welcomed the opportunity to collaborate and share the results of any beche-de-mer surveys conducted by each Party.
 - iii. Challenges faced by PNG-NFA in managing beche-de-mer fishing activities around Treaty Villages with Indonesian buyers providing high market demand through illegal trade. PNG-NFA advised that centralised management approaches are less effective when the fishery operates at the village level and driven by external high value markets.

31. The Working Group queried why the level of research collaboration between Australia and Papua New Guinea has been declining in recent years, despite repeated commitments made at Fisheries Bilaterals, and noted that the relationships between Australia and PNG need to be continually strengthened.

32. A traditional inhabitant member raised concerns about poaching of beche-de-mer, stating that a Malaysian buyer is buying PNG product and exporting directly to Hong Kong. The scientific member added that the level of governance in the western provinces is poor which may also be contributing to increased poaching.

3 Harvest Strategy

3.1 Outcomes of the draft Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy consultation

Noting the outcomes of public consultation on the draft Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy, the Working Group recommends the PZJA adopts the draft Harvest Strategy as final.

33. AFMA provided an overview of the eight week public consultation process that was undertaken for the draft Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy (BDM HS), noting in particular:
- The period for public comment was open for eight weeks, following agreement from the PZJA to release the draft BDM HS for consultation.
 - To facilitate consultation, AFMA undertook a round of visits to communities across the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area;
 - A package of information inviting comment on the draft BDM HS was mailed out to licence holders, Native Title Bodies, the co-chairs of the Australia-PNG Bilateral Traditional Inhabitant Meeting (TIM), the Department of Environment and Energy (DoEE), the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) and the PNG National Fisheries Authority. All information was also made available on the PZJA website.
 - Submissions on the harvest strategy were able to be made in writing, over the phone, or in person at community meetings.
34. The Working Group noted that most communities expressed general support for the BDM HS. Badu was the only community that expressed strong concerns about the HS, suggesting that the current management arrangements in the BDM Fishery (e.g. the 7m boat length restriction and the prohibition on hookah) do not support the growth of the fishery in the way that the draft BDM HS intends.
35. Only one written submission of support was received in relation to the draft BDM HS, from Councillor Getano Lui in his capacity as the Australian co-chair of the Traditional Inhabitants Meeting under the *Torres Strait Treaty*.
36. The AFMA member noted that while the comments made during the consultation period about the draft BDM HS are important in their own right, they provide no indication that the draft BDM HS should be further altered or changed in any substantive way from the framework that was agreed to in draft. The draft document may only require some general editing and proof reading before being submitted to the PZJA for its consideration.
37. The Maluilgal traditional inhabitant member suggested that should the BDM HS be approved by the PZJA, it should be shared as a good news story and be accompanied with a complete communication package to promote such a key milestone for Torres Strait fisheries.
38. Dr Eva Plaganyi, principle investigator on the BDM HS project praised all those HCWG members and additional stakeholders involved for their commitment developing the HS document over the years. She added that she has received a lot of interest in the HS from the international scientific community and agreed it would be extremely valuable to have a Torres Strait islander present on the BDM HS next year at the World Fisheries Congress in Adelaide, or other international science conferences.

ACTION ITEM #1: Dr Eva Plaganyi to circulate information about upcoming scientific conferences that could serve as opportunities to showcase the Torres Strait BDM HS as a good news story.

39. Working Group members and observers expressed unanimous support for the BDM HS and formally recommended that the PZJA adopts the draft BDM HS as final.

3.2 Implementation of the Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy

The Working Group recommends that the PZJA agrees to remake *Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15* to give effect to the management of the BDM fishery under the Harvest Strategy.

40. In consideration of the comments and submissions received on the draft BDM HS, the HS will be considered by the PZJA for approval and implementation by the 2020 season. AFMA provided an overview of the necessary changes required to effectively implement the BDM HS, including:

- a. changes to existing Total Allowable Catch limits for some individual species, and species baskets and the addition of new TACs for individual species and species baskets;
- b. changes to the way in which TACs are set each fishing season as guided by the decision rules within the BDM HS;
- c. creating a new mechanism for enforcing TAC limits and requiring fishing to cease once a TAC has been reached;
- d. changes to minimum size limits; and
- e. agreed methodology for applying conversion ratios to reported catches.

41. The Working Group noted that in order to give effect to these changes, AFMA is proposing to remake *Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15* (FMI No. 15). Remaking FMI 15 will:

- a. Provide for the early closure of individual species or species basket before the end of the fishing season (31 December) to ensure the commercial catch of the species or species basket does not exceed the Total Allowable Catch limit.
- b. Regulate the season open and closure dates for a species presently closed to fishing (e.g. black teatfish)
- c. Give effect to the updated minimum size limits.
- d. Align with new legislative drafting standards.
- e. Remove any regulation in relation to Traditional Fishing to reflect that the PZJA's jurisdiction does not extend to traditional fishing.

42. The Working Group noted that at present, TACs for the BDM fishery are prescribed within licence conditions and in order to regulate fishers to cease fishing, licence conditions must be varied (and the TAC varied to zero), and requires formal Native Title Notification. The lengthy process is not considered best practice fisheries administration. The proposed mechanism to cease fishing in the new Instrument is the same mechanism applied to the TRL Fishery. AFMA intends to remake FMI No. 15 in time for the start of the 2020 BDM fishing season.

43. The TSRA member encouraged the Working Group to think about the potential implications of the first step in the catch-based decision rule that stipulates 'no data, no fishing' when providing advice to the PZJA on the next season's TAC. The Working Group discussed that the definition of 'reliable data' will be a subjective assessment of the Working Group at that time. The HCWG will need to consider all available information when applying this rule to species ahead of a new fishing season.

44. Dr Eva Plaganyi noted that should the BDM Fishery commit to more regular surveys longer term and the provision of good quality data improves, a comparison between the two will likely detect if there is a problem with unreported data, or the data is 'unreliable'.
45. Further, AFMA reminded the Working Group that good quality, timely fisheries data will support the harvest strategy and instances of late data submission will have significant implications on the ability for the PZJA to agree on TACs. As an example, an updated final catch figure for prickly redfish from the 2018 was only calculated close to six months after the season had finished due to a very late submission of data up to 12 months after the actual fishing event.
46. In consideration of the potential for similar late catch reports and the impact on harvest strategy implementation, the Working Group discussed options for providing advice on TACs under scenarios where catch reports may be incomplete or there is a significant delay in collation of final catch reports.
47. Dr Eva Plaganyi suggested setting an "interim TAC" similar to the TRL Fishery, where the interim TAC is set at a conservative level (e.g. 80 per cent) that would provide enough catch for fishers to go fishing with a low probability of the interim TAC being reached before the final TAC was determined. Then, pending compilation of final catch reports and advice from the Working Group, the final TAC may be adjusted accordingly under the guidance of the catch-based decision rule (i.e. any overcatch of the TAC up to 20% over is to be deducted from the TAC in the following season).
48. AFMA agreed with this suggestion but noted there may be an issue for species with very small TACs (e.g. deepwater redfish 5 tonnes) which in some extreme scenarios, could be fully caught early on in the season. Dr Plaganyi added that in consideration of the biology and life history of sea cucumbers, it would be reasonable to apply the harvest strategy and analysis of catch data (including any over catch in a particular year) more broadly over a three year period (rather than year to year) to ensure catches remained sustainable on average. As the timeliness of catch reporting continues to improve, the potential lag in catch data analysis will decrease.
49. Other suggestions made to address this issue included shortening the fishing season by one month to allow enough time to collate all the catch data, and implementing a TAC trigger to cease fishing while the data is reviewed.
50. Some members noted that it would not be an ideal situation for industry if the final TAC advice was lower than originally set partway through a season. Others acknowledged that a situation of potential overcatch and application of the catch-based decision rule will not be required until the second year of implementation, by which it is hoped the timeliness of catch reporting will have significantly improved, resulting in a much more accurate compilation of catch records at the end of a season. If an "interim TAC" was conservative enough (e.g. 50 per cent of the starting TAC), then it would be unlikely that the final TAC advice would decrease. It was also noted that should the scenario arise where TAC overcatch is realised well into the proceeding season or the ability to confidently understand harvests in the fishery in a timely manner is not possible, the risk to the fishery is likely to remain fairly low if considered across a three year average period.
51. No formal advice was formulated in relation to this issue, however the Working Group noted it will likely need to be revisited once the BDM HS is implemented.
52. Finally, the Working Group noted that for the HS to operate favourably for industry, and flow on effects for the global market (in terms of market supply), all operators need to be providing good, timely data to support a sustainable and stable fishery, and to avoid any future fishery closures.

3.3 Beche-de-mer Weight Conversion Ratios and Species ID Guide

Conversion Ratios

The Working Group recommends that the conversion ratios specified under the BDM Harvest Strategy, including the use of proxies where there are information gaps; be applied to monitor reported catches against TAC limits in the BDM Fishery, noting that conversion ratios may be updated over time as new information becomes available.

53. The Working Group discussed the role of conversion ratios in managing fisheries and noted the following key points:
- a. TACs in the BDM Fishery are measured in wet weight gutted form.
 - b. Conversion ratios are used to convert processed weights of beche-de-mer (e.g. boiled and salted, or dried) back to a single standard unit of weight (wet weight gutted). This converted weight is then used understand total catches in the fishery and to monitor reported catches against TACs.
 - c. It is important to have accurate conversion factor information so avoid potentially over or under-estimating total catches.
54. The Working Group noted that the key information gaps are for curryfish species. To address this, CSIRO and industry are undertaking research to fill these knowledge gaps through industry based sampling, coupled with in-field training and provision of equipment to selected fishers. With very little fishing effort occurring, no data has been collected to date however CSIRO are continuing to work closely with industry to collect this information.
55. The TSRA member questioned whether there was an increased risk of underestimating TACs when using proxy conversion ratios, given the variation among species' morphology. The Working Group noted that the actual values do not vary significantly much, but that it will be important to identify any critical gaps (i.e. curryfish) and acknowledge these as potentially high research priorities.
56. It was noted that many of the conversion ratios currently being used were developed through previously dedicated research projects supported by the TSSAC.
57. The Working Group acknowledged that in developing the draft BDM HS, conversion ratios for BDM species were already agreed to by HCWG, however AFMA was seeking advice from the Working Group on the application of the ratios, including the use of proxies where there are information gaps. The Working Group noted that conversion ratios are transparent and agreed to in all other fisheries, and that AFMA is seeking the same standard for the BDM fishery.
58. The Working Group agreed that the conversion ratios as they are currently outlined in the draft BDM HS, and the way in which they are applied are sufficient to support the monitoring of reported catches against TACs, noting that they are subject to change as more information becomes available.

Beche-de-mer Species ID Guide

59. CSIRO provided a brief update on the progress made to updating the Beche-de-mer species Identification Guide. The Working Group noted that the new version will now include:
- a. Local/traditional species names;
 - b. Updated minimum size limits and a ruler along the bottom page;
 - c. Total Allowable Catch limits;

- d. Agreed conversion ratios;
 - e. Biological, morphological and life history information;
 - f. Habitat and distribution maps; and
 - g. Species spawning seasons.
60. Some Working Group members requested that information about the ecological role of sea cucumbers should also be included.
61. To support the implementation of the updated size limits, AFMA is developing some size limit rulers to assist fishers in complying with the new limits.

4 Management

4.1 Catch Data Summary

62. AFMA provided an update on the catch and effort reports for hand collection fisheries for the 2019 season to date and an update on the 2018 season since HCWG14. The Working Group noted the following key points:
- a. A total of 4.1 tonnes of beche-de-mer had been reported across seven different species via 30 individual Catch Disposal Records (CDRs) as of 4 July 2019. Data reported during this period was only as recent as 31 May 2019 indicating that no catches of beche-de-mer have been reported in greater than two months. Due to AFMA's data confidentiality rules, a breakdown of species was not able to be provided.
 - b. Compared with the 2018 season up until the same date (31 May 2018), reported catch was 14.1 tonnes, and by the end of the season, beche-de-mer reported as landed before 31 May 2018 was in fact 22.5 tonnes, indicating a significant lag in reporting.
 - c. The updated total catch figure for all species in the 2018 season is 64.3 tonnes, which is an additional 30.1 tonnes reported since HCWG14. Most notably, prickly redfish catches increased from 8.2 tonnes to a final season total of 14.7 tonnes. The Working Group noted that the updated prickly redfish figure was only realised in recent weeks (7 months after the season had closed) as an additional 2 tonnes were submitted to AFMA.
 - d. An additional 110 CDRs were submitted after HCWG14, making a total of 224 CDRs with reported beche-de-mer catch in 2018.
 - e. Since HCWG14 the proportion of CDRs submitted to AFMA with voluntary information regarding Area Fished, Number of Days Fished and Number of Fishers increased. Despite very few CDRs submitted in 2019 (so far), the proportion of CDRs with the same voluntary information reported has also continued to increase.
 - f. Timeliness of reporting did increase from 49% of CDRs being submitted to AFMA "on time" to 65% after HCWG14, though in 2019 this number has decreased back to only 49%. Timeliness of reporting remains a significant concern for AFMA, and the successful implementation of the BDM HS.
 - g. When considering the average number of days between the landing date of the product, and the date the CDR is received by AFMA, the return time is improving. Prior to HCWG14, the average CDR receipt time was 54 days, after HCWG14 this improved to 50 days, and in the 2019 season so far, the average receipt time is 30 days.

63. Noting these data, the Working Group were asked to comment and provide advice on the likely accuracy of the information in reflecting true catch and effort in the BDM fishery, particularly recognising the reports of bad weather and limited fishing activity in recent months.
64. Some industry members reported that because the TRL season has improved this year, more people are fishing for TRL, as opposed to BDM which is why reported catches are low.
65. Given the final catch reports for prickly redfish were so close to the TAC, the Kemer Kemer Meriam Traditional Inhabitant member questioned what would happen if that was this season. AFMA advised that under the harvest strategy, and using the *Fisheries Management Instrument*, AFMA would be likely to close the fishery.
66. The Working Group further noted that curryfish species (totalling 42.4 tonnes) did not exceed the 80 tonne basket, and under the harvest strategy would also not have exceeded the 60 tonne curryfish species TAC. An observer to the meeting added that curryfish harvests would in fact be higher if discarded product was included, however it is difficult to capture discards on CDRs (nor is it required to be reported). The Working Group acknowledged the importance of capturing discarded product on the CDRs where possible even if there is no specific field to write it. CSIRO noted that a ratio of discards can also be extrapolated up and applied more broadly across species.
67. The Working Group was reminded to consider the catch summary catch statistics when discussing a potential black teatfish opening.

4.2 Compliance in the Beche-de-mer Fishery

68. An AFMA compliance officer provided an overview of domestic compliance activities within Torres Strait Fisheries and the Working Group noted the following key points:
 - a. AFMA took over the Torres Strait Fisheries Domestic Compliance Program on 1 July 2019 from the Queensland Fishing and Boating Patrol.
 - b. To increase capacity in this area AFMA has since recruited a third team member to assist with the increase in work load.
 - c. Since taking carriage of domestic fisheries, the compliance program have:
 - i. Focused on educating and raising awareness among industry about the mandatory requirements of a TIB and fish receiver licence, with 18 stakeholder/community meetings held aimed at fostering voluntary compliance with licence conditions and fisheries management plans;
 - ii. With the support of Australian Border Force, the Royal Australian Navy, Queensland Water Policy and the TSRA Rangers, fisheries officers have conducted sixteen 'at sea' patrols with 47 boats inspected, fifteen ports/freight hubs visited and 21 fish receive premises inspected;
 - iii. Referred seven matters to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) for consideration – two cases were not proceeded, one case scheduled for hearing in August 2019 and four are currently under consideration by CDPP.
69. The Working Group noted that it is not a fisheries officer's role in deciding whether cases should be pursued through to prosecution. AFMA fisheries officers collect evidence and build a case to meet the evidentiary requirements for the AFMA Operational Management Committee to consider whether cases are progressed further to the CDPP.

70. In relation to the BDM Fishery in particular, AFMA continue to monitor catch movements through the Torres Strait, intercepting consignments moving on freight carriers and fixed wing aircraft which is identifying catch taken by unlicensed fishers, or catch not landed to a licenced fish receiver. Timeliness of catch reporting and “stockpiling” of product is also of concern.
71. The Compliance officer noted that after the early closure of the TRL season in late 2018, increased fishing activity on BDM was occurring in places like Tudu, no incursions or breaches of licence conditions were detected. Further, there have been no incursions or reports of PNG fishers coming across in to Australian waters in the BDM Fishery on Warrior Reef.
72. The Working Group noted that the CRIMFISH hotline which is widely promoted throughout the Torres Strait is a very successful way for AFMA to receive reports and intelligence on any suspected illegal, unregulated or unreported fishing activities.

4.3 Black teatfish

That the Working Group recommends the PZJA consider a trial opening of the black teatfish fishery on 1 February 2020, contingent on the implementation of the beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy, and remaking of the *Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15* (FMI No. 15); noting that HCWG Traditional Inhabitant members will undertake community consultation regarding constraining access of TIB licence holders to black teatfish resources through customary protocols and traditional lore, and collecting high resolution catch and effort data to complement the BDM stock survey and provide a CPUE baseline.

73. AFMA reminded the Working Group that the black teatfish fishery was not reopened after the previous 2014 and 2015 trial as the trial opening performance indicators of timely and accurate data were not met. As catch data was not provided to AFMA in a timely manner, AFMA did not have accurate information and the TACs in both instances were exceeded.
74. The Working Group noted that it is unlikely the PZJA would support opening the black teatfish fishery unless the appropriate management controls were in place.
75. In order to re-open and effectively manage and monitor a black teatfish opening, it is AFMA’s preference that an opening occur in 2020 following the approval and implementation of the BDM Harvest Strategy, and the *Fisheries Management Instrument* are in place. It is intended that both of these tools are in place by the start of the 2020 fishing season.
76. The Working Group noted that opening the fishery 2020 would allow two complete years of operation under the Fish Receiver System to better demonstrate improved timeliness of catch reporting.
77. In consideration of a pending beche-de-mer stock survey in early 2020, the scientific member highlighted that an opening of black teatfish may provide the potential to collect additional information to support the survey, however it would require high resolution catch and effort data than what’s currently captured within the CDRs to be of most use.
78. Given the potential for over-capacity and catches to exceed the TAC under a ‘goldrush mentality’, coupled with possible increased discarding and wastage through poor handling of a high value species, the scientific member suggested structuring the opening of the black teatfish fishery in the context of an experimental fishing trial at least in the first year or two. Such an opening would therefore be more restricted, and serve as an information gathering exercise to support scientific baseline data. The TAC would remain at 15 tonnes, however participation by fishers would be selected and dedicated based on their willingness to provide high resolution spatial, catch and

effort data. The provision of such high resolution data would strengthen the utility of the broader stock survey on a reef level.

79. Dr Plaganyi added that the value of the experimental trial suggestion is aligned with the harvest strategy which puts greater emphasis on the utilisation of fisher data. While fisher reported data is improving baseline CPUE index of abundance is lacking for most species, particularly black teatfish which is likely to only be open for so few days. While having limited participation would assert more control over the collection of high resolution data, it would still be possible with greater access to the fishery, provided that the same data was being collected.
80. The Working Group noted that any discussion around who would participate is not for the Working Group to advise on. Traditional inhabitant members and observers agreed that any discussion about who would/could participate in such a trial would require substantial consultation with communities and industry members. Communities could not be excluded from the discussion as all eligible traditional inhabitants, regardless of which community they live in, have the right to fish for beche-de-mer species.
81. An industry observer suggested that there may be an opportunity for each of the PZJA Traditional Inhabitants members to consult with communities about opening the black teatfish fishery when they undertake their TSRA supported 'cluster visits' in October/November 2019.
82. TSRA noted that although the black teatfish stock is healthy and in light of the potential research value in undertaking an experimental fishing trial, it would be difficult for the HCWG to advise on and the PZJA to agree on this limited participation approach given the economic value of the fishery, and absence of any significant management barrier to opening the fishery as status quo (i.e. any licenced TIB fisher can access the fishery). This may be further difficult to justify in the event that the stock survey indicates a potentially higher Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) for black teatfish.
83. The TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member supported the experimental trial approach, adding that it is important to ensure our understanding of the fishery is as accurate as possible. The trial would only be in one season, to better support future generations accessing the BDM fishery.
84. Based on the discussions, the Working Group noted two potential scenarios for opening the black teatfish under the clear and HCWG agreed guidance of the harvest strategy:
 - 1) Opening the fishery with 'status quo Olympic model' management arrangements – with no limitations on access; or
 - 2) Opening the fishery as a one-time experimental fishing trial – with potential limited participation and at least reef-level spatial data.
85. AFMA reminded the Working Group that both options are possible, however there are a range of costs and benefits of each scenario to consider (Table 4).
86. In either scenario, the Working Group agreed the timing of an opening should occur during the TRL season. There is also some value undertaking the stock survey before opening the fishery before in verifying that data collection during the opening was accurate, and conversely undertaking the survey before opening the fishery may indicate a higher harvestable biomass.
87. The Working Group noted the timelines for PZJA traditional inhabitant member community consultation and providing advice to the PZJA would vary depending on the preference of the HCWG and the feedback from communities.
88. Some members expressed support for option 1, noting the importance of collecting the baseline CPUE data for the longer term benefit of the fishery and importance of the community

consultation. Other members expressed support for option 2, with one member supporting option 3 to seek community views on a preference of option 1 or 2.

89. The Gudumalugal traditional inhabitant member noted that consultation should be focussed on BDM industry operators over the broader community.
90. The Working Group noted that this opportunity to discuss more broadly with communities is a great opportunity for Traditional Inhabitants to 'self-regulate' and fill a gap that the harvest strategy cannot currently address (in terms of fishery access or participation). The scientific member added that under either scenario, the mechanisms to access the fishery, and close the fishery once the TAC is caught, remain the same (under the Instrument), however under option 1, any resolution of who may be able to participate can be community-led rather than through the regulation of AFMA or decision by the PZJA.
91. The Working Group further noted that under regulation, the mechanism to implement option 1 with limited access would potentially be through variation of licence conditions or scientific permits, but the decision on who would have access would remain subject to extensive consultation.
92. However, it was recognised that it may not be necessary to give legal effect to access in the trial opening if communities were able to agree amongst themselves about who could participate in the trial opening. The fishery would simply open, under the guidance of the harvest strategy, through the implementation of the Instrument, and application of TIB licences, with communities determining who may fish (despite their legal right with a TIB licence), noting there would be no legal means of enforcing any community arrangement.
93. In consulting with communities, the Working Group agreed that the justification of why access needs to be limited must be clearly communicated, noting that it would only be a one-time trial situation and future openings of the fishery would be dependent on timely and accurate catch data being reported.
94. In summary, the Working Group recommended that the PZJA open the black teatfish fishery under the guidance of the BDM harvest strategy on 1 February 2020, contingent on the remaking of the Instrument. The Working Group also recommends that limited access to the black teatfish fishery should be encouraged through the consultative community arrangements led by PZJA traditional inhabitant members (i.e. communities nominate who shall participate in the opening), conditional on the voluntary provision of high resolution (reef-level) spatial data. Further, that any limited access arrangements would not be given effect nor made enforceable through regulation by AFMA.

4.4 Prohibition on hookah

95. TSRA provided an overview of suggested activities that may be undertaken to support the long term use of hookah breathing apparatus in the BDM Fishery, particularly for targeting deeper water species such as white teatfish.
96. Noting that some stakeholders have sought support for use of hookah to target white teatfish for a number of years, the Working Group was asked to consider whether any of the proposed activities should be prioritised.
97. The Working Group noted that there has been a range of risks and issues previously considered including;
 - a. The susceptibility of BDM species to over exploitation due to limited dispersal, patchy distribution, ease of collection, restricted mobility and slow recovery from over fishing.

- b. The lack of timely and accurate catch data which limits the ability of the PZJA to effectively monitor the fishery.
 - c. Compliance risks and cost of monitoring and enforcement to ensure other shallow water species are not over exploited.
 - d. Safety risks for using hookah at depths greater than 20 meters.
98. The Working Group acknowledged that the key objective and desire of some industry members is to permit the use of hookah to target white teatfish, however, how this is to be achieved needs further consideration. AFMA reminded the Working Group that the PZJA must take into consideration the objectives under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* when discussing how to progress this issue.
99. The Scientific member noted that although there are still some inherent concerns with the use of hookah, notwithstanding that some communities do not support the use of hookah in their waters, there are some good management tools already in place (e.g. the Harvest Strategy, the Fish Receiver System) that would ameliorate some of the over-exploitation risk, compliance or sustainability concerns. This means that the remaining concerns are in relation to the aspirations of communities with some supporting hookah and others not.
100. An industry observer expressed support for other communities using hookah but noted that the use of hookah in both Ugar and Erub is not desired or supported by those communities. He supported that progression of a longer term strategic management approach to address how the use of hookah could be introduced.
101. The Maluilgal traditional inhabitant member noted it would be more useful to consider this issue in the longer term only, and take the time to develop clear objectives, management tools and establish a long term vision for the fishery. AFMA agreed that focussing on long term options would provide the space and opportunity to consider the ramifications of permitting hookah and allow the time to map out how the benefits of the resource would be shared in relation to the fishery objectives. It would require a well formed plan outlining exactly how a proposal to use hookah would work, taking into consideration the views of broader industry, for the PZJA to consider.
102. Industry members suggested the following broad points to be developed into a formal proposal that focused on a long term vision for the fishery:
- a. The ability for all TIB licence holders to be able to use hookah;
 - b. To use hookah to fish for white teatfish only;
 - c. Use the TDB02 'areas fished' map to spatially exclude Area 16 from the use of hookah (as per the aspirations of Ugar and Erub communities);
 - d. Comprehensive consultation with broader communities before implementing the proposed change;
 - e. Additional conditions imposed on reporting requirements;
 - f. Mechanisms for ensuring compliance and enforcement of the rules;
 - g. Consideration for a trial basis – allowing a period of review to understand and mitigate against any unexpected outcomes;
 - h. Suggestion to use moon-tide closures;
 - i. Consider the change in management arrangements in the context of the Harvest Strategy and apply the same logic for re-opening a closed species and a 'higher bar' of management standards and additional conditions.

103. The AFMA member suggested that TSRA and AFMA collaborate to draft up a proposal based on the aforementioned points, for comments by HCWG members. TSRA added that in the absence of a full discussion paper, PZJA traditional inhabitant members can discuss the draft proposal with their communities during their 'cluster visits' to seek additional feedback.

ACTION ITEM #2: TSRA and AFMA to develop a discussion paper outlining suggested management arrangements, based on HCWG discussions for pursuing the use of hookah to fish for white teatfish, for further consultation with communities and consideration by the HCWG and the PZJA.

4.5 Future Management Priorities

104. In order to effectively discuss future management priorities for hand collectable fisheries, the AFMA member suggested that the Working Group discuss and advise on a process to develop future management priorities.

105. The Working Group agreed that to allow sufficient time and discussion on management priorities and a strategic vision for hand collectables fisheries, that a dedicated half to full day workshop be held in conjunction with the next HCWG meeting. Participants to the meeting should include HCWG members, other industry stakeholders including factory processors and/or buyers, and should also include discussions on pearl shell and trochus fisheries.

ACTION ITEM #3: AFMA to arrange a half/full day future management priorities workshop in conjunction with the next Hand Collectables Working Group meeting.

5 Research

5.1 Outcomes from the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) meeting

106. The Working Group noted an overview on the outcomes of the recent TSSAC annual research cycle, in particular that:

- a. Seven projects were considered by the TSSAC this cycle, with six projects supported for funding, including the full proposal for a stock survey of Torres Strait beche-de-mer species.
- b. The other projects are:
 - i. A fishery independent survey, stock assessment, harvest strategy and Recommended Biological Catch calculation for the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery;
 - ii. A Spanish mackerel stock assessment;
 - iii. Enhancing biological data inputs to the Torres Strait Spanish mackerel stock assessment;
 - iv. A scoping study on climate variability and change relevant to key fisheries resources in the Torres Strait;
 - v. Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Harvest Strategy;

- vi. Measuring non-commercial fishing (indigenous subsistence fishing and recreational fishing) in the Torres Strait in order to improve fisheries management and promote sustainable livelihoods; and
- vii. An Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery.

107. The projects supported have committed TSSAC research funds for 2019-20 and approximately \$365,000 (of a possible \$411,000) for 2020-21. Acknowledging the BDM stock survey as a very high priority, the TSRA agreed to commit additional funding to support the survey being undertaken as soon as feasible, outside of the available TSSAC funds.

108. The stock survey evolved through a recommendation from HCWG14 to undertake an experimental fishing survey to understand the stock status of sandfish on Warrior Reef, which was then broadened in scope to extend to a full stock survey of all Torres Strait sea cucumber species with an additional focus on deeper water species (e.g. white teatfish).

5.2 Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Stock Survey

109. Nicole Murphy (CSIRO) provided an overview of the upcoming fishery independent BDM survey funded by the TSRA. The Working Group noted:

- a. The project includes three key population surveys:
 - i. the east Torres Strait fishery with a focus on prickly redfish, curryfish species black teatfish and surf redfish;
 - ii. a limited exploration of deep water habitats using underwater video analysis; and
 - iii. a survey focussed on sandfish on Warrior Reef.
- b. The key deliverables from the surveys are to:
 - i. Produce stock size estimates and distribution data, and assess the fishery status for each population of beche-de-mer in the Torres Strait, including the sandfish fishery.
 - ii. Use survey data to make recommendations on potential fishery expansion (i.e. recommended biological catches) and re-opening of closed fisheries.
 - iii. Map important habitat variables, especially those relevant to fishery production.
 - iv. Make survey outputs available in a form suitable for use in the BDM HS.
 - v. Produce formal final reports and a plain English summary document with special consideration of Traditional Knowledge.

110. The Working Group noted that they survey methods will be similar to previous years, surveying reef tops, counting sea cucumbers, as well as recording numbers of giant clams, pearl shells, trochus and percentage coverage of habitat. Any sea cucumbers collected for sampling and identification purposes will be returned to the water in the same location. The survey work is intended to also occur during similar times as previous surveys (summer months), taking in to consideration burrowing times, season, tides and time of day. Underwater video analysis will also be based on previous survey years and will include a comparison of earlier habitat data from other surveys, as well as advice and local knowledge from fishers.

111. Fisher involvement is constrained by CSIRO diving occupational health and safety policies, however there will be other opportunities for Torres Strait Islanders to participate when undertaking reef walking surveys on Warrior Reef and underwater video surveys.

5.3 Research update

112. Rocky Stephen gave a presentation on the independent research work he is undertaking with CSIRO on Enhancing Beche-de-mer Fisheries in Ugar Island, Torres Strait. The Working Group noted that Rocky's research is exploring two options to improve beche-de-mer stocks:
- a. The aggregation of adults on the home reefs of Ugar to ensure there enough males and females in the vicinity to successfully reproduce. This entails finding suitable habitat to aggregate the adults, which may be identified through the broader CSIRO led, Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Stock Survey.
 - b. The release of small juveniles reared in a small, land-based aquaculture facility on land. This entails inducing the spawning of adults in tanks and releasing the juveniles back in to the wild (re-seeding).
113. The research objectives of the project are to:
- a. Develop techniques to improve beche-de-mer fisheries that are cost-effective and work well in the context of the Torres Strait;
 - b. Build local capacity for monitoring and restocking techniques for beche-de-mer resulting in local people having ownership of the work and the ability to carry it on independently after the project is completed;
 - c. Measure the contribution of each restocking technique using marine survey counts and genetic analysis;
 - d. Understanding what stakeholders consider to be a success for the project (e.g. increase in the number of BDM found on home reefs; the ability of people from Ugar to work at sea; the number of jobs generated; increase in income, etc); and
 - e. To engage with the community and develop communication avenues between the Ugar community, researches, industry and management agencies to incorporate both local and scientific knowledge into the project.
114. The Working Group noted some important considerations critical to the success of the project:
- a. To engage with stakeholders to identify needs and expectations, incorporate local inputs, and find common solutions;
 - b. Build local capacity and ownership; and
 - c. Ensure effective communication between researchers and stakeholders to ensure mutual understanding about progress, challenges and opportunities.
115. The project team is currently awaiting the outcome of a funding application submitted to the Cooperative Research Centre for Northern Australia. The request is for approximately \$1 million over three years. The CRCNA is investing \$75 million of Commonwealth funds over ten years to support industry-led research collaborations. The funding is intended to develop new technologies, products and services which addresses issues in Northern Australia with three focus areas:
- a. Agriculture and food (including aquaculture);
 - b. Northern Australia Health Service Delivery; and
 - c. Traditional owner-led business development.

116. The Working Group was unanimous in congratulating Rocky and CSIRO on their efforts to progress this project and expressed broad support for this work to continue. The Working Group welcomes a further updates from the project team.

5.4 Five Year Fishery Research Plan

117. The Working Group discussed and advised on research priorities for hand collectable fisheries in line with the three research themes identified under the TSSAC Strategic Research Plan to support the Five Year Hand Collectable Fisheries Research Plan 2020/21 – 2023/24.

118. Noting a declared conflict of interest in the matter, CSIRO suggested that Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) testing of the BDM HS be considered as a future research priority. The Working Group acknowledged that some components of the BDM HS are underpinned with MSE tested mechanisms, it would be best practice to undertake full MSE testing of the HS to ensure it is achieving its objectives. The outcomes of the testing are useful in helping understand the risk (if any) to the fishery. The Working Group further noted that it may take 3-5 years of harvest strategy implementation and time series of data before MSE testing is achievable, however should there be external pressure (e.g. from a CITES Appendix II listing) to demonstrate the HS is working, MSE can occur sooner.

119. The Malui'algal traditional inhabitant member reiterated the importance of the TIB sector upholding their responsibilities in providing timely and accurate catch data to support MSE testing of the BDM HS.

120. TSRA suggested assessing the longer term socio-economic value of beche-de-mer, trochus and pearl shell fishery and understanding where the maximum value lies in meeting the fishery objectives under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*.

121. Given the anecdotal evidence of increased product wastage, particularly with curryfish species during handling processes, TSRA suggested undertaking an assessment of the risks and impacts of discarded and wasted product on the integrity of TAC limits. This could be coupled with understanding and improving industry processing methods to achieve higher market prices (particularly for lower value species).

122. Industry members agreed that it would be useful to understand more about market chains and trends in supply and demand for beche-de-mer, noting that some of this information is to be included in the TSRA Exporters Handbook.

123. The Working Group agreed that undertaking field sampling of BDM species to develop conversion ratios for boiled and salted weight to gutted weight, and understand critical uncertainties for Torres Strait species and processing methods should remain as an essential and high research priority. Although there are ongoing efforts by industry members to collect conversion ratio data in the field, there are significant benefits in undertaking a small, concise and targeted research project to collect the data in the short term.

124. The Working Group also agreed that identifying gaps in knowledge of biological parameters of BDM species including growth, mortality, size and breeding seasonality should remain as a desirable and lower research priority.

ACTION ITEM #4: AFMA to populate the Hand Collectable Fisheries Five Year Research Plan based on HCWG discussions and circulate back to HCWG members out of session for comment before submitting to the TSSAC for their consideration.

6 Other Business

6.1 Budget Update

125. AFMA provided a brief overview of the 2018/19 budget expenditure and overview for the 2019/20 budget ahead, noting in particular:
- a. AFMA's 2018/19 budget for direct costs for Hand Collectable fisheries was \$84,531 which covered one 3-day working group meeting on Thursday Island, one 2-day Working Group meeting on Thursday Island and one 1-day industry workshop on Erub.
 - b. Underspent funds from the Hand Collectables budget contributed to other Torres Strait fishery expenses including community visits for the fish receiver system and draft BDM HS consultation, the development of minimum size limit rulers (still in production at time of writing) and an industry exposure trip for three PZJA traditional inhabitant members.
 - c. The 2019/20 budget has increased by \$29,814 from 2018/19 to fund a proposed industry/stakeholder workshop ahead of a potential black teatfish opening.

6.2 Other business

126. The Working Group agreed that a standing agenda item update for both trochus and pearl shell fisheries be included on the agenda for each HCWG meeting, noting that while fishing activity in these fisheries is very negligible, it is useful to continue to monitor and discuss them at the Working Group level.
127. Further, the Working Group agreed that an exchange of industry members (not just government) at both TS HCWG and Queensland Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group (SCFWG) meetings would be beneficial. AFMA agreed to investigate the possibility of an industry member accompanying AFMA staff to the next Queensland SCFWG meeting scheduled later in 2019.

<p>ACTION ITEM #5: AFMA to investigate the possibility of a HCWG industry member accompanying AFMA staff to the next Queensland Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group meeting.</p>
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6.3 Date and venue for next meeting

128. The Working Group did not agree on a date for the next meeting of the HCWG but acknowledged that the group is likely to meet following the cluster visits and consultation on black teatfish and white teatfish.
129. The Chair thanked everyone for their commitment and contributions throughout the meeting which was closed in prayer at 4.45pm on Friday 2 August 2019 by Mr Rocky Stephen.

Table 4. Summary of costs and benefits of potential black teatfish opening scenarios.

Option		Benefits	Costs/Risk	Other considerations
1	Experimental trial with collection of high resolution data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scientific value in developing CPUE baseline to compare with survey data • May lead to less precautionary TAC in longer term • Improve industry understanding of importance of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration of limited participation • Cost and time associated with comprehensive consultation • Fishery may open later 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of Harvest Strategy and Management Instrument • Objectives under the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> • Implications of possible CITES Appendix II listing
2	'Status quo' Olympic model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All fishers have ability to participate • Fishery may open sooner • May still enable collection of high resolution data from some volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for 'goldrush' mentality with influx of new TIB licences (although some natural organisation of who will actually participate) • Potential to overcatch the TAC • Possible disadvantage to full time fishers in subsequent seasons • Increased potential for wastage and discards due to poor quality handling techniques and product 	

Table 5. Status of action items arising from previous HCWG meetings.

#	Meeting #	Action item	Responsibility	Status
1	9 (20-21 June 2016)	AFMA to review the size limits set for the Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Fishery taking into consideration the size limits in place in Queensland and the Commonwealth Coral Sea Fishery.	AFMA	Ongoing. Proposed changes to size limits were agreed to at HCWG14 and the corresponding Harvest Strategy Workshop (23 October 2018) as part of the Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy development. If agreed to by the PZJA, changes to minimum size limits will be made through the remaking of <i>Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15</i> .
2	11 (27 June 2017)	Consideration on whether or not changes should be made to the current size limit for Prickly Redfish be undertaken during the Harvest Strategy Workshop noting relevant data will be presented.	AFMA	Ongoing. Proposed changes to size limits were agreed to at HCWG14 and the corresponding Harvest Strategy Workshop (23 October 2018) as part of the Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy development. If agreed to by the PZJA, changes to minimum size limits will be made through the remaking of <i>Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15</i> .
3	13 (24 July 2018)	AFMA to ensure Malu Lamar is included in all aspects of consultation regarding the proposed legislative amendments to the Act and the Regulations.	AFMA	To be removed. AFMA proposes that this be removed from the list of action items. AFMA remains committed to consulting with all stakeholders in relation to the proposed legislative amendments to the <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984</i> , and <i>Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985</i> . An update on the proposed amendments is provided under Agenda item 2.2.2 (AFMA update).
4	Out of Session (July 2018)	The TSRA to assist TIB licence holders to develop a proposal to lift the hookah ban when fishing for white teatfish, to be put up to the PZJA for consideration.	TSRA	Ongoing. The TSRA Fisheries Program is progressing this action and will provide an update under Agenda Item 4.4.
5	14 (24 October 2018)	The QDAF member to provide information regarding an East Coast Indigenous Fishing Permit (FIP) to TIB fishers out of session, to be circulated by AFMA.	QDAF AFMA	Complete. Information on a Queensland Indigenous Fishing Permit is provided at Attachment 1.4b . This information was circulated to HCWG members on 11 July 2019.

6	14 (24 October 2018)	Malu Lamar, AFMA and TSRA to meet and discuss a way forward in terms of an MOU/combined strategy to assist in improved data collection and proposed management arrangements in support of a black teatfish opening.	Malu Lamar AFMA TSRA	<p>Not completed.</p> <p>AFMA will continue to work with all stakeholders and the HCWG on a strategy to improve data collection and develop management arrangements in support of a black teatfish opening. This action item was developed in response to industry observers advocating for the development of an industry based MOU that outlines the standards of data needed to demonstrate improved reporting.</p> <p>AFMA recommends that this proposed action be further discussed under Agenda item 4.3, Black Teatfish.</p>
7	14 (24 October 2018)	AFMA to draft a letter on behalf of the HCWG expressing the support the re-seeding research being pursued by industry members in Ugar.	AFMA	<p>Not for actioning.</p> <p>AFMA is supportive in principle, of research that may benefit industry development and is able to offer specific expertise and advice as needed. The HCWG is an advisory body to the PZJA. Although well intended, it is beyond the Working Groups terms of reference to provide letters of support to third parties.</p>

Attachment A – Adopted Agenda

15th MEETING OF THE PZJA TORRES STRAIT HAND COLLECTABLES WORKING GROUP

1 – 2 August 2019 (8:30 am – 5:00 pm)

TSRA Boardroom, Thursday Island

ADOPTED AGENDA

The meeting will open at 8.30am on Thursday 1 August 2019.

AGENDA ITEM 1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 **Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies**

The Chair will welcome HCWG members, permanent observers, and casual observers to the 15th Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group.

1.2 **Adoption of agenda**

The working group is invited to consider and adopt the draft agenda.

1.3 **Declarations of interest**

Working group members are invited to declare any real or potential conflicts of interests to the group and determine whether a member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.

1.4 **Action items from previous meetings**

The working group will note the status of action items arising from previous HCWG meetings.

1.5 **Out of session correspondence**

The working group will note any out of session correspondence on HCWG matters since the previous meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 2 WORKING GROUP UPDATES

2.1 **Industry and Scientific members**

This agenda item is an opportunity for the Working Group to develop a common understanding of Hand Collectable fisheries including recent fishing, economic, biological and ecological trends. Industry and scientific members are asked to provide a brief verbal update on any recent developments relevant to Hand Collectable fisheries. The Working Group will note the updates from industry and scientific members and observers.

2.2 **Government**

2.2.1 **Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)**

2.2.2 Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA)

2.2.3 Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF)

The Working Group will note updates from each of the PZJA government agency members on the latest developments relevant to Hand Collectable fisheries.

2.3 Native Title

The Working Group will note a verbal update from the Malu Lamar representative if in attendance.

2.4 PNG National Fisheries Authority

The Working Group will note an update from the PNG NFA member if in attendance.

AGENDA ITEM 3 HARVEST STRATEGY

3.1 Outcomes of the draft Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy consultation

AFMA will provide an overview of the outcomes from the recent draft Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy consultation period.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will **consider** the comments made on the draft Harvest Strategy during the recent consultation period and **provide advice to the PZJA** on a final harvest strategy for PZJA endorsement.

3.2 Implementation of the Harvest Strategy

AFMA will outline a plan for harvest strategy implementation by the 2020 season including the remaking of *Torres Strait Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15* (the Instrument).

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will consider the plan for implementation on the draft Harvest Strategy and **provide advice to AFMA and the PZJA** on the proposed remaking of the draft Instrument and associated Explanatory Statement.

3.3 Beche-de-mer Species ID Guide and Weight Conversion Ratio research

CSIRO will provide a brief update on the new version of the Beche-de-mer species ID guide as part of the Harvest Strategy Project.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will **provide comments to CSIRO** on the draft Beche-de-mer species ID guide.

AGENDA ITEM 4 MANAGEMENT

4.1 Catch Data Summary

AFMA will provide an overview of reported beche-de-mer catch and effort data from the 2018 fishing season, and the 2019 season to date.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will **discuss** the data summaries and **advise AFMA** on the likely accuracy of the catch reports, and **provide advice** on the Fish Receiver System more broadly.

4.2 Compliance in the Beche-de-mer Fishery

The Working Group will note an update from the AFMA Compliance Manager will provide an update on the domestic compliance program and compliance risks in the Beche-de-mer Fishery.

4.3 Black Teatfish

In consideration of an updated stock survey of Torres Strait beche-de-mer species and the implementation of the Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy, the Working Group will consider a future black teatfish opening and provide advice on the management arrangements and timing and management arrangements of a possible opening.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will **provide advice to the PZJA** on a suitable time and appropriate management arrangements required to conduct a black teatfish opening in the context of an updated beche-de-mer stock survey and guidance within the draft harvest strategy for re-opening a closed species.

4.4 Prohibition on hookah

The use of hookah is currently prohibited within the Beche-de-mer Fishery. At HCWG13, the TSRA offered to draft a proposal on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants to remove the prohibition. The TSRA will provide an update on the proposal to remove the prohibition on hookah in the Torres Strait beche-de-mer fishery.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will discuss and **provide advice to the TSRA** on the draft proposal to remove the prohibition on the use of hookah.

4.5 Future Management Priorities

Having agreed management priorities and a work plan for Hand Collectable Fisheries aims to achieve a more efficient management process. At each HCWG meeting, the Working Group should review any standing management priorities and consider any future management priorities for Hand Collectable Fisheries.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will **discuss and provide advice** on management priorities for Torres Strait Hand Collectable Fisheries.

AGENDA ITEM 5 RESEARCH

5.1 Outcomes from the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) meeting

The Working Group will note an update on the outcomes of the recent TSSAC meeting which endorsed the full proposal for CSIRO to undertake a stock survey of Torres Strait beche-de-mer species.

5.2 Torres Strait Beche-de-mer Stock Survey

The Working Group will note an update from CSIRO on the upcoming stock survey for the Torres Strait Beche-de-me Fishery. AFMA will also provide an overview of the impact of the survey on the HCWG work plan.

5.3 Research Update

The Working Group will note an update from industry observers, Simon Naawi and Rocky Stephen regarding the beche-de-mer research projects they are involved in.

5.4 Five Year Fishery Research Plan

A five-year rolling research plan for Hand Collectable Fisheries is used to inform the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee's (TSSAC) annual call for research funding proposals.

Expected Outcome: The Working Group will discuss and **provide advice** to the TSSAC on research priorities for the beche-de-mer, trochus, mud crab and pearl shell fisheries under the Five-Year Rolling Research Plan 2020/21 – 2023/24.

AGENDA ITEM 6 OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Budget Update

The Working Group will note a summary provided by AFMA regarding the Hand Collectables fishery budget and expenditure for the 2018-19 financial year, and a brief update for 2019-20 financial year.

6.2 Other Business

The Working Group is invited to nominate any other business for discussion.

6.3 Date and venue for next meeting

The Working Group will consider a date and venue for HCWG16.

CLOSE OF MEETING

Summary of Actions Arising from HCWG15

Table 6. Summary of action items arising from HCWG15.

#	Action item	Responsibility
1	Dr Eva Plaganyi to circulate information about upcoming scientific conferences that could serve as opportunities to showcase the Torres Strait BDM HS as a good news story.	Dr Eva Plaganyi (CSIRO)
2	TSRA and AFMA to develop a discussion paper outlining suggested management arrangements based on HCWG discussions for pursuing the use of hookah to fish for white teatfish, for further consultation with communities and consideration by the HCWG and the PZJA.	TSRA AFMA
3	AFMA to arrange a half/full day future management priorities workshop in conjunction with the next Hand Collectables Working Group meeting.	AFMA
4	AFMA to populate the Hand Collectable Fisheries Five Year Research Plan based on HCWG discussions and circulate back to HCWG members out of session for comment before submitting to the TSSAC for their consideration.	AFMA
5	AFMA to investigate the possibility of a HCWG industry member accompanying AFMA staff to the next Queensland Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group meeting.	AFMA

Summary of HCWG15 Meeting Recommendations

Table 7. Summary of meeting recommendations arising from HCWG15.

#	Recommendation
1	Noting the outcomes of public consultation on the draft Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy, the Working Group recommends the PZJA adopts the draft Harvest Strategy as final.
2	The Working Group recommends that the PZJA agrees to remake <i>Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15</i> to give effect to the management of the BDM fishery under the Harvest Strategy.
3	The Working Group recommends that the conversion ratios specified under the BDM Harvest Strategy, including the use of proxies where there are information gaps; be applied to monitor reported catches against TAC limits in the BDM Fishery, noting that conversion ratios may be updated overtime as new information becomes available.
4	That the Working Group recommends the PZJA consider a trial opening of the black teatfish fishery on 1 February 2020, contingent on the implementation of the beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy, and remaking of the <i>Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15</i> (FMI No. 15); noting that HCWG Traditional Inhabitant members will undertake community consultation regarding constraining access of TIB licence holders to black teatfish resources through customary protocols and traditional lore, and collecting high resolution catch and effort data to complement the BDM stock survey and provide a CPUE baseline.