



Australian Government  
Australian Fisheries Management Authority

# 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group

21 Feb 2020, Thursday Island

## Meeting Record

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

[www.pzja.gov.au](http://www.pzja.gov.au)

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# 1 Preliminaries

## 1.1 Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners, welcome and apologies

1. Sereako Stephen opened the meeting in prayer around 9:00 am.
2. The Chair welcomed attendees to the 16th meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG 16) 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. The Chair thanked the TSRA and Traditional Inhabitants for supporting the cultural awareness training held the day before the HCWG meeting. In speaking with other members following the training, the Chair reported that members found the training extremely helpful in building insight into the local culture and the experiences of Torres Strait Islander people. This was considered invaluable in better understanding the aspirations and values of Torres Strait Islander people and how they might relate to fisheries. The Chair thanked all members for their willingness to share their personal advice and experiences
5. 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
Patrick Bonner*	Traditional Inhabitant member, Kulkalgal
Tony Salam	Traditional inhabitant member, Kaiwalagal
Selina Stoute	Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA) member
Mark Anderson	Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) member
Danait Ghebrezgabhier	HCWG Executive Officer, AFMA
Casual Observers	
Sereako Stephen	Malu Lamar (torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC
Keith Brightman	TSRA
Kalya Yamashita	AFMA
Lyndon Peddell**	AFMA, Compliance

\* Mr Bonner left the meeting at 0930 and did not return.

\*\* In attendance for agenda items 1,2, 5 and 6.

6. Apologies received are detailed in the **Table 2** below.

**Table 2. List of apologies for HCWG15.**

Apologies	
Steve Purcell	Scientific Member
Yen Loban	TSRA Fisheries Portfolio Board Member
Ian Liviko	PNG National Fisheries Authority (NFA) Invited Participant
Danielle Stewart	Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) member

## 1.2 Adoption of agenda

7. The Working Group accepted AFMA's recommendation to discuss agenda item 4 before item 3 and adopted the agenda.
8. The Working Group agreed to break for lunch early noting the Malu lamar representative had a short commitment outside the meeting at 1130. The Working Group wanted to ensure the Malu Lamar representative was included in all business.

## 1.3 Declarations of interest

9. The Chair advised members and observers, that as provided in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1), all members of the Working Group must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait TRL 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 may also determine that, having made their contribution to the discussions, the member should retire from the meeting for the remainder of the discussions on that issue.
10. Declarations of interests were provided by each meeting participant. These are detailed in the **Table 3** below.
11. The Working Group followed a process whereby each group of members with similar interests were asked to leave the room to enable the remaining members to:
  - a) Freely comment on the declared interests;
  - b) Discuss if the interests precluded the members from participating in any discussions; and
  - c) Agree on any actions to manage declared conflicts of interests (e.g. the member may be allowed to participate in the discussions relating to the matter but not in the formulation of final advice).
12. The scientific member was also asked to leave the room. The AFMA member noted by way of example, that when discussing potential research projects (for example under agenda item 7 on providing advice on research pre-proposals) scientific members may have real or perceived conflicts of interest. However it is their relevant expertise in fisheries research relevant to the fishery that is highly valued in the development of Working Group advice. Having regard for the declarations made by the Scientific Member and the importance of having relevant scientific expertise, it was agreed that the scientific member be permitted to participate in discussions under all agenda items and the formulation of Working Group recommendations.
13. Those members and observers holding a fishing licence, including the TSRA officers were asked to leave the room. The remaining members agreed that although the excused members may have real or perceived conflicts of interest, their expertise is critical in the development of advice that impacts industries and traditional inhabitants more generally. It was also noted that potential conflicts can arise when specific members or communities from which the members are from are

likely to benefit directly from particular management decisions. In these situations members must be sure to consider the fishery as a whole rather than one particular operator or community over the other. Noting the importance of having traditional inhabitant industry advice and reminding members to act in the best interest of the Fishery at all times, it was agreed that the excused members be permitted to participate in discussions under all agenda items in the formulation of Working Group recommendations.

14. Government members were asked to leave the room. The remaining members noted that TSRA hold a BDM licence in trust on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants but considered the potential risk for a perceived of real conflict of interest to be manageable within the meeting and again recognised the importance of having TSRA contribute to the meeting discussions and advice.

**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. Has been a member of HCWG for the last 6 years. Has interest in the BDM, Trochus and Pearl Shell Fisheries.
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.
Patrick Bonner	Traditional Inhabitant member, Kulkalgal	Kulkalgal representative, Chair of Mura Porumalgal Fisheries Coproation
Tony Salam	Traditional inhabitant member, Kaiwalagal	TIB licence holder covering all fisheries. Member for kaiwalagal.
Selina Stoute	AFMA Member	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Mark Anderson	TSRA Member	Employed by TSRA, no pecuniary interests as an individual, TSRA holds fishing licences on behalf of traditional inhabitants.
Danait Ghebregabhier	Executive Officer HCWG (AFMA)	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Sereako Stephen	Casual Observer	TIB licence holder, Director of Malu Lamar and GBK, Chair of the Ugar RNTBC.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Keith Brightman	Casual Observer	Employed by TSRA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Kayla Yamashita	Casual Observer	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise
Lyndon Peddell	Casual Observer	Employed by AFMA, no pecuniary interests or otherwise

## 1.4 Action items from HCWG15 and previous meetings

15. The Working Group noted the report provided by the Executive Officer on the progress against actions arising from previous meetings, including those that are now complete (Table 4) and noted the following additional comments in relation to some of the action items:

- a. Action Item 4 – As detailed in the agenda paper, while a formal MOU has not been developed AFMA has worked directly with fishers to make significant improvements in reporting. AFMA recommended that this process continue and the action item be removed. AFMA however advised that it remained opened to suggestions from Malu Lamar and stakeholders more generally on improved processes. The TSRA Member advised that TSRA was working with Malu Lamar to agree a service level MOU. The details of the MOU were yet to be worked through however there may be scope to include programs aimed at improving reporting. The Malu Lamar Chairperson expressed preference to maintain the development of the MOU to ensure it remains an option if needed. Having regard for views tabled the Working Group agreed for the following action:

**Action item 1.1** - Malu Lamar to make recommendations to AFMA and TSRA on an as needs basis to establish an MOU to assist in improved data collection in the Fishery.

- b. Action Item 5 – While Mr Frank Loban has expressed interest in presenting at a scientific conference, he called upon the other more senior members of the Working Group to also attend and present. Mr Michael Passi, Mr Simon Naawi and Mr Maluwap Nona to be put forward to the CSIRO and the TSRA as nominees for the opportunity to attend and present on the BDM Harvest Strategy at upcoming scientific conferences. This is in recognition of their extensive effort in the development of the Harvest Strategy and the level of goodwill placed upon them by their respective communities. The Working Group noted that this is a very exciting opportunity to share the work that has happened in the BDM Fishery to date.
- c. Action item 9 – PZJA Traditional Inhabitants could not attend the last Queensland Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group meeting due to confidentiality considerations of the agenda items being discussed. However they are supportive of HCWG Traditional Inhabitants attending their future meetings. The status update for the action item will be revised to reflect this sentiment.

16. The Working Group noted the final meeting record for HCWG 15, which was finalised out of session and published on 16 September 2019.

## 1.5 Out of session correspondence

17. The Working Group noted the correspondence circulated out of session since HCWG15 held on 1-2 August 2019.

## 2 Working Group Updates

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### 2.1 Industry member update

18. 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.

19. Traditional Inhabitant members of the PZJA advisory committees recently led community and industry consultations, organised by the TSRA and supported by AFMA, to report on activities related to the PZJA fisheries over the last 12 months and seek input on key issues for the management of the fisheries in the Torres Strait. With regards to the BDM Fishery, Traditional Inhabitant members sought industry and community feedback on the proposed black teatfish trial opening, and the current prohibition on hookah. The key discussions points, feedback and recommendations relevant to the HCWG from the consultations are provided at **Attachment B**.

20. In addition to the attached consultation summary, Traditional Inhabitant members on the HCWG provided the following updates on their respective cluster consultations, strategic issues affecting the management and development of Torres Strait Fisheries and on-water industry updates.

21. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Gudumalulgal led the consultation at Gudumalulgal on 21-14 October 2019 and Kaiwalagal (on behalf of the Traditional Inhabitant member for that cluster) on 21 January 2020 and added that:

- The implementation of the new BDM HS was discussed at the community level and reiterated its value as a tool that will ensure the sustainable management of the resource to build intergenerational wealth.
- Issues relating to the Tropical Rock Lobster and Finfish (re the impacts of the western line closure on the Saibai and Duan communities) Fisheries were also touched on.
- It was recognised that the use of hookah is an issue for the Eastern Nations and would need to be undertaken under Meriam protocols, if the hookah prohibition is removed.
- Fishing has been ok and efforts are being made to encourage other TIB operators to actively participate in the fishery.
- Operators are facing safety risks by traveling long distances with large loads of product and salt or free diving up to 20m for more catch, sometimes in inclement weather. Permitting access to deep water BDM species closer to home (i.e. white teatfish) would alleviate this safety risk and take pressure off the shallow water fishing grounds.
- There is concern that reef walkers may not be adhering to the minimum size limits and may be depleting local resources.
- Reiterated that even within nations one community cannot speak for another with regards to the use of hookah. Harvest for white teatfish using hookah should be permitted on a trial basis to create better income opportunities and as a safer option to how operators are currently fishing for white teatfish in deep waters.

22. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Kemer Kemer Meriam added that:

- The Chinese ban on the live seafood import due to the Coronavirus outbreak has affected the Tropical Rock Lobster industry but not the export of BDM to the Asian market.

- Curryfish catches dropped significantly in the 2019 fishing season as operators on Erub and Masig Islands have been focused on live TRL but efforts may now shift back to sea cucumbers given the Coronavirus impacts.
- There was general lack of support from Ugar for the use of hookah due to sustainability concerns, however, not all on Ugar are opposed the use of hookah.
- Erub supported the recommendations from Mer to use hookah for harvesting white teatfish.
- Industry is pursuing the establishment of processing facilities on Mer.
- It was good to have an AFMA Compliance officer attend the cluster visit and assist with talking to operators about permits and also the catch disposal system to encourage improvement on data collection.

23. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Kemer Kemer Meriam read the summary of consultations for the Kulkalgal cluster on behalf of the Traditional Inhabitant member for that cluster. The Traditional Inhabitant member noted that a lot of the TIB operators' opposition to hookah for white teatfish may also be due to lack of understanding as most fishers on Masig and Poruma Islands have never fished for white teatfish. White teatfish fishing occurs mostly off Mer Island

24. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Kaiwalagal provided the industry update below and deferred to the Traditional Inhabitant member for Gudumalulgal for the update on the cluster consultation as he did not attend the meeting:

- Coronavirus has affected TRL business. It is a nature of fishing and industry need to weather through it but are positive that the BDM market is still active.
- He is currently familiarising himself with the ecological and business aspects of the BDM industry with a view to redirecting his effort into the industry, noting that it is currently harder and riskier to target high value BDM species.

25. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Gudumalulgal noted that the interest of operators in this cluster is mainly on TRL due to their distance from the BDM fishing grounds. While willing to listen to BDM and finfish related matters, they indicated they would take advice on the use of hookah from those that actively target the resource.

26. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Maluialgal advised the Working Group that he can only speak on behalf of the fishers that live in his region and not those that live away from the region. He drew the Working Group's attention to the cluster summaries provided, adding that the majority are TRL operators and the eastern grounds are too far away from them to fish. Nevertheless, they were supportive of improved reporting and timely provision of the data to AFMA to inform management.

## 2.2 Scientific member update

27. The Scientific member advised that he was involved in the stock survey in late 2019 and early 2020 for which he will be presenting the preliminary results under Agenda Item 4. A survey of Warrior Reef was initially included in the project. However, the scientific member was informed during the first leg of the survey that he had been banned from Warrior Reef by Malu Lamar due to a complaint from an Iama Island Traditional Owner regarding an incident that occurred in 2012 – though no formal advice on the grounds for the exclusion has been provided. As it was too late to find a replacement, and given the uncertainty regards the safety of the survey team, the Warrior Reef survey leg was cancelled. The scientific member sought clarity from Working Group members whether they objected to him presenting those results given he was excluded from Warrior Reef.

28. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Gudumalulgal, in his capacity as the Chair of Malu Lamar, advised the Working Group that specific details about the previous incident was not provided when Malu Lamar was called upon to ban the Scientific member from undertaking the Warrior Reef BdM survey. The Chair of Malu Lamar stated the organisation had acted on behalf of the people whose interests it represents to exclude the Scientific Member from the said area to avoid the issue escalating. Malu Lamar is of the view that the issue needs to be resolved by the research team and the CSIRO, AFMA, the Chair of Magani Lagaugal and the relevant individuals from Tudualgal that made the complaint and provide advice back to the Malu Lamar Board. The Malu Lamar Chair and the Malu Lamar Board member Mr Sereako Stephen offered to assist with the resolution of this matter.
29. The AFMA member acknowledged Malu Lamar's position on the matter and commented that it was unfortunate that the Traditional Owner's complaint came in very late and did not provide formal advice on the allegations so that AFMA could better understand the nature of the concerns held by Traditional Owners and as far as possible have them addressed. In the absence of having these concerns raised in detail and in a timely and formal fashion with it, AFMA had no basis on which to formally substantiate and/or investigate the concerns. Having respect for the views of the traditional owners of Iama and Tudu and noting potential safety risks, AFMA and TSRA agreed at the time to discontinue the Sandfish component of the survey. It would not have been appropriate to run the survey with a different group of scientists. CSIRO was commissioned to undertake the research based on an evaluation of their proposal and importantly their demonstrated expertise to deliver such a project. In the absence of formal advice to substantiate the claims, AFMA fully supports the Scientific member and the project team.
30. The concern raised by Traditional Owners was not anticipated by any of the agencies involved as there had been long standing support provided by stakeholders through the HCWG for this research to be undertaken. The HCWG and TSSAC still strongly supported the project proposal. It was noted that specific to the current research project and prior to the project being funded, comment on the funding proposal was sought from every PBC Chair and relevant fisher association and no concerns or complaints were raised through that consultation process. Concerns were also not raised by traditional owners who attended the PZJA traditional inhabitant member cluster consultation held on Iama on 6 November 2019.
31. The Malu Lamar Chair further commented that matters such as this place Malu Lamar in a difficult position when representing people that operate under two laws and given the angst that still exists amongst individuals regarding past events. He agreed that there needs to be a mechanism and process in place to identify, address and resolve such issues in the future in a timely manner and suggested that a Memorandum of Understanding would provide the framework through which such situations can be mitigated and resolved in the future.
32. The TSRA member reiterated that the TSRA, as the funding body of that project, undertook all formal recognitions and notifications on the scientific activity to communities and relevant bodies. From a process perspective it is very difficult and disempowering to the HCWG for the project to be impacted given the process that was gone through to put the project up on, what seems to be, the view of one individual.
33. Some Traditional Inhabitant members on the Working Group commented that they had not been aware of the issue but understood the need to discontinue the Sandfish component of the

survey due to safety concerns. Following this discussion, the Working Group welcomed the Scientific Member to continue presenting the preliminary survey results.

34. The Chair reiterated that such complaints need to be formalised in writing in a timely fashion in the future as a matter of proper procedure.

## 2.3 Government updates

### 2.3.1 AFMA update

35. The Working Group noted the update provided by the AFMA member regarding management issues relevant to Torres Strait hand collectable fisheries as detailed in the Agenda paper, in particular:

- a. The BDM Harvest strategy was adopted by the PZJA at their meeting on 19 November 2019, and came into effect on 1 January 2020 in time for the start of the 2020 fishing season. New TACs for individual and basket species and the conversion ratios were implemented through licence conditions but the old minimum size limits are still in place pending the review of the Fisheries Management Instrument 15 which is currently underway and due to be completed in time for the 2021 fishing season.
- b. The implications for listing commercially fished beche-de-mer species on Appendix II of CITES;
  - i. The 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 Agriculture, Water and Environment (formerly the Department of Environment and Energy) 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. The Commonwealth (AFMA), Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia have agreed to support a national approach being funded by the Queensland Sea Cucumber Industry Association (the Association) in seeking a non-detriment finding (NDF) for both black teatfish and white teatfish. Fishwell Consulting has been engaged by the Association to collate all required information for the DoEE's consideration of a non-detriment finding which must be submitted to the Department by early April 2020. AFMA will support the process for the Torres Strait and Coral Sea fisheries.
  - iv. Once the take for trade is considered to be sustainable (i.e. a non-detriment finding is approved), trade is generally regulated through permits authorising export of the specimen and exporters will require a permit from the DOEE.

36. The Working Group also noted a range of other AFMA updates relating to:

- a. the latest Fishery Status Reports from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics (ABARES) were released in September 2019. All BDM species are classified as not being subject to overfishing, with Sandfish being the only species in the Torres Strait that continues to be classified as overfished. The fishing mortality and stock status for two species taken in 2018 remains uncertain mainly due to the lack of more recent survey data
- b. updates on the progression of legislative amendments to the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* and *Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985*; and

### 2.3.2 AFMA Compliance update

37. A verbal compliance update was provided by the AFMA Fisheries Officer Mr Lyndon Peddell as follows:

- Current staffing is three Fisheries compliance officers on Thursday Island with further operational support provided from other AFMA officers.
- Adherence with reporting requirements has generally been good. Officers continue to detect and report noncompliance, in most cases these matters have been dealt with through education.
- AFMA has two matters before CDPP for consideration.
- AFMA undertook at sea and aerial surveillance in partnership with Queensland Police based on specific intelligence received on addressing Tropical Rock Lobster stockpiling in the lead up to the TRL fishery opening. Compliance was good and no stockpiling was detected.
- At sea patrols have been conducted with focus on enforcing the hookah closure.
- AFMA is also working with Border Force to utilise their platforms to undertake on-water patrols and surveillance.
- Fisheries Officers have attended some community engagement visits alongside TSRA and Fisheries Management Officers and further assisted community members with compliance related matters.
- Foreign – incursions have been low in the TSPZ, some activity has been detected in the north and Deliverance island areas. No apprehensions have been made but some activities were observed in the calm weather and inclement weather may see this lessen.
- Traditional Inhabitant members requested that they be informed when operators are likely to appear in court so they can be provided with the appropriate legal assistance and representation. Mr Peddell advised that he is not at liberty to discuss details of an ongoing investigation however, each person has the right to engage legal representation.
- Industry members advised that they will be submitting information on illegal fishing activity to AFMA for further investigation.

### 2.3.3 TSRA Update

38. The Working Group noted the update below provided by the TSRA member:

39. TSRA response to the Corona Virus and impacts on fishers:

- Immediate response has been to offer a loan pause for home and business loan clients affected by the virus
- Coxswain training courses have been put on for fishers that have opted to not continue fishing due to the down turn in the market
- A Seafood trade advisory website has been set up to provide the fishing industry with updates on what is happening at the national level to respond to Coronavirus impacts.
- Considerations include not leasing TSRA held permits to non-traditional fishers to alleviate some of the pressure due to dislocation of effort from one fishery to another.
- Developing a Recovery Action Plan (RAP) to better equip the region to emerge from the impacts
- Working with the State Govt on developing the Grant Guidelines

40. Fisheries Regional Ownership Framework:

- Steering committee continues to work towards the creation of the entity by 1 July
- Summit dates have been locked in for 27 – 29 April at Stadium on TI

41. Warpil – Fishing for our futures

- 60 jobs and 180 trainees over the next two years
- Programme is focussed on the fisheries infrastructure

- Commenced at Erub with Boigu, Saibai and Mer commencing in coming months

#### 42. Torres Strait Marine Safety Programme TSMSP

- 470 TIB licences
- 330 to 350 coxswains have been trained
- 250 TIB fishers traded in fishing
- 60 TIB vessels currently hold a certificate of operation which is required by AMSA to operate as a commercial fishing vessel. exemption to operate without a coxswain certification expires on 30 June 2020.
- Industry members noted that recreational operators are opting to get a TIB licence as it is cheaper than getting a recreational one and provides ease of identification and recognition to be able to access areas and this may be inflating the number of actual commercial TIB fishers in the region.

#### 43. Nationally accredited training

- The TSRA is working with TAFE to develop a Fishing qualification that would be nationally accredited under the AQF

#### 44. TSRA is continuing to work on the enhanced TIB representative model.

- TSRA wished to acknowledge the work and commitment of the reps
- All island visits had now been completed with the TIB reps leading the presentation

### 2.3.4 QDAF Update

45. In the absence of the Fisheries Queensland representative, the Working Group members noted the written update provided on the changes to fishing rules in Queensland that came into effect on 1 September 2019. Of note for the HCWG are the doubling of the recreational boat limit for sea cucumbers and the introduction of no take rules for white teatfish, the requirement for vessel tracking on all commercial vessels and stricter licensing requirements.

## 2.4 Native Title update

46. The Malu Lamar representative updated the Working Group as follows:

- Malu Lamar continues to seek full membership status for it and GBK on various fishery advisory groups as the cultural voice of traditional communities and an acknowledgement of Malu Lamar's importance as a stakeholder.
- With regards to the previous discussion on the outcomes of the cluster consultations, the Malu Lamar representative raised concern that not all TIB operators were represented to contribute to the discussions on the use of hookah to catch white teatfish.

47. The AFMA member acknowledged Malu Lamar's request for membership on the PZJA advisory committees has been a long standing issue. To assist in having Malu Lamar's request processed the AFMA member requested that if possible, Malu Lamar formally write to AFMA and in doing so, give guidance on their proposed role on the advisory committees having regard for FMP 1. In particular how Malu Lamar would participate in recommendation making.

48. Malu Lamar welcomed this opportunity and advised that it would seek legal advice on the roles and responsibilities that such membership confers on the organisation and whether a formal Malu Lamar member on a fishery advisory group will be seen to be acting on behalf of the whole of Malu Lamar when it comes to supporting decisions and/or making recommendations.

## 2.5 PNG National Fisheries Authority update

49. An update was not available due to the unavailability of NFA officers.

### 3 Catch and effort Summary

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50. The Working Group noted the catch summary for the 2019 fishing season for the BDM Fishery provided under Agenda Item 3 and noted the following highlights from the Executive Officer:
- The catch report for the 2019 fishing season has been updated to include more up to date figures as catch disposal recorders have continued to be submitted and entered in the database. As at 18 February 2020, the total reported catch was 36 tonne.
  - The summary of changes in key reported metrics from the 2018 to the 2019 fishing seasons has been slightly amended to reflect the significant improvement in the timelines of reporting. Average CDR receipt time in the 2019 season was half that in 2018.
  - Species level identification has also improved with no 'unidentified sea cucumbers' reported in 2019.
  - Total catch reported has dropped by 46% from 2018, mainly due to the significant drop in curryfish catches. This is consistent with Industry's update that operators known to catch large amounts of curryfish on Darnley and Yorke have shifted their attention to live TRL.
  - Catch reports in 2019 have slightly decreased by 7% (20 CDRs)
  - Spatial and effort reporting has also improved with 69% of the CDRs submitted reporting the 'Area fished' and 70% reporting the 'Number of days fished'.
51. The AFMA member congratulated industry on their concerted effort within their respective communities to improve reporting in the fishery. AFMA will continue to ascertain the level of participation in the fishery through the number of active licences until such time a more reliable measure is available.
52. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Kemer Kemer Meriam reiterated that reporting by part-time fishers could be improved and noted this as a concern that needs to be addressed. This comment was supported by other industry members and a suggestion was made to find a way to engage part time operators to impress upon them the importance of reporting catch data or come up with a way to limit the amount of catch that they can land without infringing on their right to fish as TIB licence holders.
53. This is also an issue in the TRL fishery and a better approach may be to address the issue across the entire TIB licencing process.

### 4 Preliminary results of the Beche-de-mer stock survey

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54. The Scientific member, Mr Tim Skewes, presented the preliminary results of the Beche-de-mer underwater dive surveys undertaken in eastern Torres Strait between November 2019-January 2020 as part of the TSRA funded and CSIRO led project 'Stock survey of Torres Strait Beche-de-mer species' (AFMA Project No. 2019/0826). As well as assessing the distribution and stock status of beche-de-mer species in the Torres Strait, the survey also undertook some exploration and mapping of deep water habitats to help inform better environmental management and ground truth reef mapping from previous projects. Sandfish populations at Warrior Reef were not surveyed as planned due to the banning of a project scientist by the Malu Lamar based on objections raised by Traditional Owners of Iama and Tudu.
55. A total of 297 sites, in 6 zones and a range of strata in East Torres Strait were surveyed, most of which had also been done in the 2002-2009 surveys. 53 new deep water sites were surveyed to investigate potential deep water populations species such as white teatfish. The deep water surveys covered 20m-50m depths and a TSRA camera system recorded underwater footage during 10 minute drifts of transects (40m – 675m long). The outputs of the survey include relative density estimates over time, and estimates of stock size. The results for the Barrier zone are excluded from the comparative density estimates as it was not surveyed every time. It is still used in the stock estimate. The project also carried out detailed sampling of sea cucumbers and habitats on Ugar reefs to support a potential reseeded project there. The

results for the Ugar mapping will be provided once they have been finalised and presented to the community.

56. The preliminary results of the survey are summarised below:

**a. Black teatfish (*Holothuria whitmaei*)**

- i. Black teatfish density across all zones and strata surveyed averaged 7.4 per hectare (Ha) – with the average density in the reef-top buffer strata, its preferred habitat, of about 12 per Ha. None were seen in the deep water strata (>20m). The Barrier and Don Cay zones had the highest average density of black teatfish (>17/Ha) which is well above the 12.5/Ha indicative natural carrying capacity for Black teatfish from a FAO global review. The Darnley, Great North East Channel (GNEC) zones had the lowest density of black teatfish as expected but the results of this survey show a decrease from previous surveys. The results of the Seven Reefs zone on the other hand show an increase in density from previous surveys.
- ii. The preliminary analysis indicates that the virgin population biomass is likely to be at approximately 10/Ha ( $B_0$ ) for all zones and strata combined, which would place the limit reference level ( $B_{LIM}$ ) at about 4/Ha (40%  $B_0$ ). While this is slightly less than the indicative natural carrying capacity for black teatfish of 12.5/Ha, 10/Ha is acceptable for the Torres Strait given the large area of the fishery surveyed, which also includes areas that are not suitable Black teatfish habitat. The 2019/20 survey density estimate was 7.7/Ha, well above the limit reference point.
- iii. The 2019/20 density is only slightly less than the 2009 density which was considered to have recovered to close to  $B_0$  levels. Together with the very high density observed in the Barrier zone in 2019/20 (not included in 4 zone average density estimate), this indicates that the black teatfish population is currently in a healthy state.
- iv. The fishery biomass for black teatfish was estimated to be 830 t (lower 90<sup>th</sup> percentile as gutted weight) pending further assessment to finalise the analysis.

**b. White teatfish (*Holothuria fuscogilva*)**

- i. Preliminary analysis of the survey results indicates that the deep water strata (20 m - 50 m) (where sampled) in 2019/20 had the highest densities of white teatfish of any strata, with an average density of 15 per Ha. This high density was consistent in all zones sampled. They were also in high density on the reef top in the Barrier and Don Cay zones, especially on the deeper reef top habitats. Don Cay had the higher overall density of any zone at over 10 per Ha.
- ii. White teatfish average (stratified) density in east Torres Strait reef zones was very variable over the years. Don Cay zone again had the highest density of White teatfish in the east Torres Strait area, and the Barrier zone had the highest ever observed.
- iii. The highest overall (4-zone) average stratified average for white teatfish (shallow reefs only) observed was in 2002 at 2.5 per Ha. While the 2019/20 estimate of 1.83 per Ha was not as high as 2002, the observed density coupled with the substantial population in deeper water that is likely unfished, indicates that the white teatfish population was still in a healthy state.
- iv. The preliminary fishery biomass population estimate (lower 90<sup>th</sup> percentile as gutted weight) for white teatfish in 2019/20 was 668 t, with almost half of that found in the deep water strata, but none found beyond 36m (deep water strata area is assumed to be the same as the reef edge area – more analysis will be required to better estimate the area of this habitat). The highest density occurs between the depths of 20m-36m and the species seems to prefer sandy bottom habitat.

- v. Additional work is required to advise on carrying capacity and the limit reference point for this species

**c. Prickly teatfish (*Thelenota ananas*)**

- i. Preliminary analysis of the survey results indicates that the highest density was in the Barrier edge strata, and this was true overall as well, with the reef edge having an average density of 16 per Ha. There were few prickly teatfish seen in deep water (>20 m). The Barrier zone also had the highest overall density at 18 per Ha.
- ii. Overall (4-zone) density was the lowest ever observed for prickly teatfish at 1.5 per Ha, being only 63% of the 2005 estimate, and continues a downward trend for this species since 2005. This trend is concerning and will need to be further investigated through analysis of the size data collected.
- iii. The Cumberland zone, which has a large area and is an important habitat for this species, had a relatively low density, especially when compared to the Barrier zone, which likely does not see high levels of fishing.
- iv. The preliminary fishery biomass population estimate (lower 90<sup>th</sup> percentile as gutted weight) for prickly teatfish in 2019/20 is 336 t.
- v. The low prickly redfish densities observed at Darnley were not surprising and seemed consistent with fishers' observations to that effect. It was noted that the Darnley fishing grounds are usually better known for their curryfish assemblages.

**d. Curryfish (common) (*Stichopus hermanni*)**

- i. Preliminary analysis of the survey results indicates that the highest common curryfish density was on the reef top buffer strata, particularly in the Darnley zone, at 38 per Ha. They were also seen on the reef edge and, to a lesser extent, on the reef top strata. Some were even observed in the deep water strata, but in low densities. The Darnley zone had the highest overall density. Cumberland and Don Cay zones also had significant densities of common curryfish.
- ii. Zone and overall survey density over survey years for this species was quite variable. Overall the density was lower than in 2009, and similar to 2002, however, there was not a great variation in density over time.
- iii. The preliminary fishery biomass population estimate (lower 90<sup>th</sup> percentile as gutted weight) for common Curryfish in 2019/20 was 509 t. Note that deep water strata area is assumed to be the same as the reef edge area. More analysis will be required to better estimate the area of this habitat.
- iv. Provisional harvest strategy limits do not seem to have been breached, however as per prickly teatfish, the declines in density from previous surveys, while not unexpected given the level of fishing effort on them, need to be investigated further to ensure that the stock remains sustainable.

57. The Scientific Member made a general comment that some deepwater blackfish and redfish species were also observed during the survey.

58. The Scientific member also noted that the reefs in general looks to be in very good condition with high coral cover, minimal to no bleaching and no crown of thorn starfish.

59. The Scientific Member outlined the additional work below that still needs to be carried out to finalise the project as follows:

- Analyse all data for all species
- Refine deep water habitat estimates
- Population modelling

- Analysis outputs suitable for CITES non-detriment
- Habitat analysis (coral, seagrass, CoT, clams)
- Ugar reef mapping for potential re-seeding

60. The Working Group thanked the Scientific member and the rest of the project team for their work on the project to date and for all their effort in making the preliminary results available for the Working Group's consideration so soon after the completion of the last survey.
61. The Working Group further noted that the next project progress update will be provided at the Hand Collectable Working Group's meeting, tentatively in August, with the project due to be completed in December 2020.

## 5 Future Black teatfish opening

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62. The Working Group noted:

- that HCWG 15 (1-2 August 2019) recommended a trial opening of black teatfish, contingent on:
  - the implementation of the beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy and that the strategy has since been agreed by the PZJA (November 2019), and
  - remaking of the *Fisheries management Instrument No. 15* (FMI No. 15) in 2020. AFMA advised that this process was an ongoing however TAC arrangements for black teatfish could be administered through licence conditions;
- outcomes of the HCWG Traditional Inhabitant members community consultations to seek feedback on the proposal to restrict TIB licence holder access to a black teatfish opening through customary protocols and traditional lore (presented under item 2.1);
- the preliminary stock survey results for black teatfish from the Torres Strait beche-de-mer species stock survey undertaken in late 2019 (presented under Agenda Item 3);
- the overview of catch and effort data for the beche-de-mer fishery during the 2019 season (presented under Agenda Item 4); and

63. The Working Group supported the application the *Torres Strait Bech-de mer Fishery Harvest Strategy November 2019* (the BDM Harvest Strategy) in developing advice on an appropriate TAC and managements arrangements for a future black teatfish opening

### **Applying the BDM harvest Strategy: Section 2.11.4 Re-opening Decision Rule**

#### **Condition 1 – Using all available information, is the stock above a limit reference point level?**

64. The Scientific member advised that the preliminary outcomes of the recent stock survey (AFMA Project No. 2019/0826) indicate that the black teatfish stock in the TS is very likely above the limit reference point (BLIM) and at a level that can allow the potential opening of the fishery. The Scientific member advised that through further analysis of the survey data, the Working Group will be better placed to advise on upper reference points such as a target reference point within the BDM Harvest Strategy.
65. Noting the preliminary survey outcomes together with: a) outcomes of the 2009 survey, and b) the limited recorded fishing effort on black teatfish since its closure in 2003 (two openings 2014 and 2015) the Working Group agreed that all available evidence indicates that the stock is likely above the reference point (the default limit in the BDM Harvest strategy, BLIM, being 40% of B0).

#### **Condition 2 - Are monitoring and management adequate?**

66. The AFMA Member noted that the mandatory fish receiver system that has been in place for the last two years has resulted in substantial improvements in catch and effort reporting. As presented under item 4 the timeliness of reporting along with, species identification and voluntary effort reporting has improved to a relatively high standard.
67. The AFMA member advised that should fishing for black teatfish re-open, the mandatory fish receiver system can be used to require daily reporting of landed catches. Daily reporting would be essential to minimise the risk of over catching the total allowable catch (TAC).
68. The AFMA member further advised that AFMA now having responsibility for domestic compliance is able to undertake targeted compliance activities to support a black teatfish opening.
69. A traditional inhabitant member expressed concern at the catch disposal records being the only source of data for the fishery and would prefer to have had other forms of data inputs to support the re-opening of black teatfish. The AFMA Member advised that the BDM Harvest Strategy is designed to guide management decisions based on available information. This means that management is more precautionary when there is greater uncertainty about the stock and catches. Accordingly a precautionary management approach is recommended to convening a black teatfish opening at this time.
70. Other a traditional inhabitant members advised that Eastern communities had already begun discussions on voluntary measures they would adopt to further reduce the risk of mis-reporting (see detail below under condition 3).
71. The Working Group was supportive of the improvements to reporting and general management of the fishery to date. The Working Group noted that the ability to obtain accurate and timely catch and effort data was essential under the BDM Harvest Strategy to redeveloping the fishery on an ongoing basis. Members noted the harvest strategy recommends that a) if a trial TAC is exceeded by more than 5% then the fishery should be automatically paused for the following year; and b) if data collection during the Trial opening was not conducted satisfactorily, then the fishery should be closed again and the re-opening rule process applied again.

**Condition 3. If conditions 1 and 2 are met then a conditional trial opening is possible subject to the following conditions:**

*Accurate catch and effort reporting is required:*

72. Working Group members were supportive of the additional reporting requirements that were previously discussed, these being the daily, reporting of catch by licenced fish receivers to AFMA. AFMA advised that it would make provision for catch disposal records to be submitted electronically (SMS, Email) with hard copies to be forwarded to AFMA through the mail. It was noted that operators would need to ensure that they land catches in areas with telecommunications reception. Whilst this may place operational constraints on some fishers, on balance the need for daily reporting was considered by the Working Group to be a priority.
73. Traditional inhabitant members advised that fishers in the Eastern communities (Mer, Erub, Ugar and Masig) had commenced discussions about adopting voluntary reporting procedures to further reinforce timely and accurate reporting during a black teatfish opening. For example agreeing to land to a single fish receiver. The Working Group commended industry on taking such initiative. Traditional Inhabitant members however expressed concern that part-time operators or new operators attracted to fish just for black teatfish (the 'goldrush' effect) may not adhere to either the daily reporting rules or the additional voluntary measures being developed.
74. The Working Group sought advice from Traditional Inhabitant members on how such agreements could be further developed and agreed by fishers across the region. Traditional Inhabitant members advised that provided the cultural and industry agreements were discussed at the fisher level and didn't get 'political' and fishers from the central and western nations didn't feel excluded, agreements could be successfully implemented. The Working Group noted advice from the Gudumalulgal Traditional Inhabitant member that the

Gudumalulgal communities had already confirmed that they would respect the culture lore developed by the Meriam people for a black teatfish opening. This includes cultural lore on who can fish where.

75. To assist traditional owners and the BDM industry more broadly to agree on relevant cultural lore and voluntary industry agreements to reinforce timely and accurate catch reporting, the TSRA member offered to fund Malu Lamar to convene a stakeholder workshop. The TSRA member advised that the workshop would be led by Malu Lamar and facilitated by the TSRA in consultation with AFMA.
76. The Working Group welcomed the initiative by Traditional Owners and the industry. The Working Group noted that the proposed initiatives would likely complement the regulatory measures being proposed such as daily reporting.
77. Members noted the importance in future community consultations to continue to emphasise the benefits of improved reporting in ensuring the sustainability of the black teatfish stock for future generations. Improved management and data collection will also inform the development of non-detriment findings (NDF) to allow the continued export of Black and White teatfish once their Appendix II CITES listing comes into effect in August 2020. An NDF for Black and White teatfish would place the Torres Strait BDM Fishery in the unique position of being one of very few fisheries worldwide that is able to export sustainable black and white teatfish.
78. The Working Group also asked that AFMA explore media opportunities such through regional radio to widely communicate the additional management and reporting requirements for a black teatfish re-opening.

**Action item 5.1** – Malu Lamar to take the lead in convening a stakeholder workshop to further discuss and agree on cultural lore and industry agreements with respect to fishing for black teatfish and report outcomes to the HCWG.

**Action item 5.2** – AFMA explore media opportunities such as radio to widely communicate the additional management and reporting requirements for a black teatfish re-opening.

*Setting a precautionary trigger limit:*

79. The Working Group agreed that setting a precautionary catch trigger limit as a stop-go mechanism to allow for compilation of catch data within season may not be feasible given the expected very short time period that black teatfish fishing would be open for under a conservative TAC. The 2015 opening lasted eight days.

*An effective warning system required to alert fishers as catches approach the TAC:*

80. AFMA advise that it would collate catches and provide daily reports to operators on how catches are tracking against the TAC throughout the black teatfish fishing season. Catch updates would be circulated via SMS, email and the PZJA website.

*Consider the need for any further condition, including limitations on which species can be harvested in conjunction with a re-opened species, or with particular gear.*

81. The Working Group discussed the need further conditions to support a possible future opening such as;

- a. restricting catches to only black teatfish during the opening;
- b. imposing trip limits on the amount (number or weight) of black teatfish that can be landed per trip, and/or
- c. granting access through a tender process. This would restrict the number of fishers able to fish for black teatfish and generate revenue.

82. On balance the Working Group did not recommend any further conditions. The additional conditions briefly discussed were considered at this time to be unnecessary, complex and/or not supported by current PZJA licencing policy.

*Trial fishing dates to coincide with fishing dates for other species to spread the effort:*

83. The Working Group noted previous advice from Traditional inhabitant members that future black teatfish openings should coincide with fishing in the Tropical rock lobster (TRL) Fishery. This was to reduce potential management risk of having a 'goldrush' of participants entering the Fishery. However, the Working Group noted that this timing may not be possible for the current year as TRL fishing has slowed down considerably due to the current live import restrictions into China because of Coronavirus.

84. The AFMA member advised that further discussions with industry could take place as part of the proposed Workshop to agree a date for the opening. PZJA agencies would work to get a PZJA decision on having an opening sometime this year prior to the TSRA Board entering caretaker mode late April.

85. With regards to the trial opening dates, the Working Group was mindful that the fishing period needs to be long enough to provide operators with ample opportunity to fish in favourable weather and tides so as not to compromise safety.

*Cultural laws and community agreements:*

86. Traditional Inhabitant members reiterated that agreed that cultural lore and community agreements could be used to support additional voluntary reporting requirements and oversight as to who can fish where (see discussion under accurate catch and effort reporting).

**Condition 4. Set a demonstrable conservative TAC with reference to default values.**

87. The Working Group recommended adhering to the harvest strategy default trial opening TAC of 15 t for black teatfish (see Table 3 of the harvest strategy). In making this recommendation, the Working Group discussed whether a larger, but still sustainable, TAC could alleviate some of the risk of the conservative 15 t TAC being overshoot as per the 2015 trial opening. One option was to set a 40 t TAC that is a little bit less than the sustainable catch estimate of 5% of the preliminary biomass estimate obtained from the scientific survey. As part of its deliberations, the Working Group considered the Scientific member's advice that while a 40 t TAC would still be considered sustainable, it should be viewed as aspirational at this stage given the preliminary nature of the assessment and it does not completely remove the risk of TAC overshoot. The collection of high quality spatial catch and effort data during the trial opening will allow for greater confidence to set higher TACs in future seasons.

**Recommendation summary**

88. In line with the harvest strategy (section 2.11.4), Working Group recommended a trial fishery reopening for black teatfish subject to a 15 tonne TAC and daily reporting landed catch noting that:

- a. based on all available information, including preliminary results from scientific dive surveys in November 2019 and January 2020, that the biomass of black teatfish is likely to be over the limit biomass reference point (BLIM - 40 percent of estimated unfished biomass);

- b. monitoring and management arrangements (with daily reporting) are adequate;
  - i. a mandatory landed catch reporting system is in place and reporting standards in the BDM Fishery have progressively improved since the system was introduced. This includes voluntary reporting of effort information.
  - ii. Fish receivers will be able to submit records to AFMA electronically (SMS, email) during the opening with hard copies to be sent to AFMA in the mail.
  - iii. AFMA is now responsible for domestic compliance and is committed to undertake a targeted compliance program to support a future opening.
- c. although the preliminary results of the recent scientific survey suggest the stock could sustain a higher TAC, priority was given to ensuring the TAC was demonstrably conservative which is a requirement of the harvest strategy;

The Working Group welcomed the commitment from Malu Lamar, with support from TSRA, to work with fishers to agree voluntary measures to reinforce cultural lore with respect to who can fish where and further ensure accurate daily catch and effort reporting. These arrangements are likely to complement regulatory efforts to reduce the risk of exceeding the TAC.

## 6 Prohibition of Hookah in the Beche-de-mer Fishery

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89. The Working Group noted:

- that the issue of permitting the use of hookah in the BDM fishery is a long standing issue, with strongly divided views among stakeholders;
- the views of Torres Strait communities on the use of hookah in the BDM fishery as discussed during PZJA Traditional Inhabitant member cluster consultations (Agenda Item 2.1);
- that HCWG15 (1-2 August 2019) recommended a discussion paper be developed to explore a longer term strategic approach to using hookah in the BDM fishery.

90. The AFMA member sought the Working Group's agreement on AFMA's proposal to undertake a dedicated, strategic workshop to address the use of hookah in the BDM fishery, which is currently prohibited, in the context of the newly implemented BDM Harvest Strategy. The Workshop would form part of the Future management priorities workshop recommended at the last HCWG meeting.

91. The AFMA member noted some stakeholders have had long held concerns relating to the sustainability and risk of over-exploitation of using the hookah method to collect BDM, some of which have since been mitigated through the implementation of the BDM Harvest strategy and the Fish Receiver System to collect catch data. Outcomes of recent Traditional Inhabitant cluster consultations however indicate that community views on the matter are still varied and stakeholder workshop would enable those views to be better understood and possible management options developed against management objectives and capacity to cost-effectively administer and enforce various options.

92. The Traditional Inhabitant member for Gudumalulgal acknowledged some stakeholders' opposition to fishing with hookah, however, it is important to review the prohibition on hookah in the context of removing barriers to economic opportunities for Torres Strait islander communities. The prohibition on hookah is currently limiting fishing for White teatfish given the species is mostly found in deeper waters and some operators are putting themselves at risk free-diving to depths of up to 30m to fish. He expressed his concern that communities traditionally known to not fish for White teatfish, and are therefore least impacted by this decision, are commenting on behalf of those that rely on the species for their livelihoods. He further reiterated that it is important to consult with full time fishers on their views on the removal of the hookah ban as opposed to those that do not fish on a consistent basis.

93. Other Traditional Inhabitant representatives (MP) agreed/confirmed that some of the stakeholders that expressed their opposition to lifting the hookah ban during the cluster visits do not have much experience working in that fishery and lacked understanding of the hookah fishing method or the impact of the prohibition on the eastern communities that depend on this resource for their livelihoods.
94. The Working Group recommended that this issue be considered in a broader stakeholder workshop and recommended that it form part of the Malu Lamar led workshop process being organised to finalise customary arrangements for the trial opening of black teatfish. This will ensure that there is good representation of communities across the Torres Strait region and provide a good opportunity to:
- share the most recent science on the distribution and status of the white teatfish stock
  - address any misinformation that may exist regarding the use of the hookah method
  - discuss and perhaps agree on the arrangements that could be implemented through cultural law to complement the regulatory ones in progressing the review of the hookah prohibition.
  - discuss possible options for lifting and/or amending the hookah prohibition. The Working Group noted, a number of communities support the use of hookah only for white teatfish and not other species. The Working Group also noted a suggestion from one traditional inhabitant member that a trial be undertaken to test the ability of traditional inhabitant fishers to take the catch using hookah.
  - develop strategies to mitigate any of the unintended risks that may arise as a result of lifting the hookah ban.
95. AFMA advised that it would support the strategic stakeholder workshop by providing advice on the administrative and compliance capabilities that currently exist to oversee and manage possible changes to the hookah prohibition.
96. The Working Group reiterated that the perception of conflict of interest needs to be addressed during this process and that all stakeholders across
97. the region is afforded procedural fairness by having an opportunity to present their views.

**Action item 6.1** – Malu Lamar to discuss the review of the hookah prohibition at the stakeholder workshop with a view to developing management recommendations.

## 7 Research

98. The Working Group discussed the research pre-proposal submitted by Nicole Murphy, CSIRO, on 'Determining weight conversion ratios for curryfish species *Stichopus hermanni* and *S. vastus*', with a view to providing advice for the TSSAC's consideration at its March 2020 meeting. In considering the research application, the Working Group noted that the research application directly addresses a research priority in the Hand Collectable Fisheries Five Year Research Plan. That is to develop weight conversion ratios for the various process forms for curryfish.
99. The Working Group supported the pre-proposal progressing to a full application noting that the proposal:
- addresses an identified research priority. Having species specific weight conversion ratios will improve the accuracy of total catch data for the fishery. Species specific weight conversion ratios would replace the conservative default conversion ratios currently used;
  - is value for money and seeks to engage two Traditional Owners to assist with data collection to provide an understanding of local conditions and processes.

- Broader consultation with traditional owners on the full application will be undertaken through the TSSAC application process.

## 8 Pearl Shell and trochus fisheries

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100. The Working Group noted the update from AFMA on reported fishing activity and licence numbers in the Pearl and Trochus Fisheries as detailed in the agenda paper. No commercial catches have been reported to AFMA through the Fish Receiver System during 2019 with limited activity reported in the Pearl Shell Fishery reported since 1 Dec 2017.

## 9 Other Business

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101. Prompted by concern from a Traditional Inhabitant member that there is insufficient ongoing research in the BDM Fishery, the Working Group discussed strategic research planning for the Fishery. The Traditional Inhabitant member noted that BDM Fishery has the potential for high returns (BDM is sold the capital cities for \$350/kg) but there is no ongoing research investment to maintain and expand our understanding of BDM Stocks. The member sought advice on whether the HCWG should recommend more research into the Fishery.

102. The Scientific member advise that the TS BDM Fishery would always be a small fishery compared to the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery with moderate returns to fishers. The Scientific member agreed however that there are important research areas that need to be addressed for example, where the fishery wants to go, getting better certainty on stocks such as sandfish, understanding the potential for reseeding and how best to maximise value through optimum utilisation of the resource and value adding. The Scientific member noted that further development of a strategic research plan that focuses on maximising the return of benefits to Traditional Inhabitants across Torres Strait Fisheries overall (this is different to trying to maximise the benefits from each fishery) is needed when funding is constrained.

103. The AFMA member advised that AFMA's annual Torres Strait research commitment is around 400k and is part of AFMA's broader government budget which is constrained. In other Commonwealth fisheries, AFMA recovers most research costs from industry. As further investment into the growth of Torres Strait fisheries continues through TSRA's significant investment in fisheries infrastructure and training, the gap in research needed to support fishery expansion and AFMA's funding is likely to grow, highlighting the challenge to attract additional funding outside of AFMA.

104. The TSRA member highlighted the commitment from the Minister for Indigenous Australian's to increase economic and employment opportunities in the region and that this may be an avenue through which some of the research gaps can be addressed.

## 10 Date and venue for next meeting

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105. The HCWG noted the tentative date for the next HCWG is week beginning 3 August to consider the final draft outcomes of the black teatfish survey.

106. The Chair thanked members for their contributions and professional conduct throughout the meeting. The Chair recognised the significance of matters being deliberating by the HCWG on

fisher's livelihoods. The Chair noted the need to have HCWG advice to the PZJA before the TSRA board enters caretaker mode to ensure consideration of a black teatfish opening later this year can be made. The Chair encouraged timely collaboration between Malu Lamar, stakeholders, TSRA and AFMA to ensure the proposed stakeholder workshop is undertaken as soon as possible noting the likely importance of community measures to supporting a successful opening.

107. The Chair again thanked TSRA for convening the cultural awareness training and thanked members for their full participation. Member were to complete the training feedback form for TSRA.

108. Mr Sereako Stephen closed the meeting with a prayer.

**Table 4. Status of actions arising from previous HCWG meetings.**

#	Meeting	Action item	Responsibility	Status
1	HCWG 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	<b>Complete.</b> The PZJA agreed to the final Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy at their meeting on 19 November 2019 which was formally implemented on 1 January 2020. Changes to minimum size limits will not be implemented until the remaking of <i>Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15</i> is complete.
2	HCWG 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	<b>Complete.</b> The PZJA agreed to the final Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy at their meeting on 19 November 2019 which was formally implemented on 1 January 2020. Changes to minimum size limits will not be implemented until the remaking of <i>Fisheries Management Instrument No. 15</i> is complete.
3	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	<b>Ongoing (replaced with Action Item 6, below).</b> The TSRA supported PZJA Traditional Inhabitant members to undertake cluster consultations in late 2019 which sought feedback from communities on the use of hookah to fish for white teatfish. An overview of the consultations outcomes will be discussed under <b>Agenda Item 5.</b>
4	HCWG 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	<b>Ongoing.</b> AFMA suggests removing this item from the list of actions. While no formal MOU has been developed, a suite of parallel activities have since taken place including a full round of community visits focussed on Fish Receiver System education and awareness, and more recently PZJA traditional inhabitant member cluster consultations. AFMA also continues to work with individual operators to improve data collection. Having regard to clear HCWG advice at this meeting, AFMA will meet with communities to discuss black teatfish arrangements including reporting requirements.
5	HCWG 15 (1-2 August 2019)	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	<b>Complete.</b> AFMA circulated information on upcoming scientific conferences on behalf of Dr Plaganyi via email on 5 August 2019.

#	Meeting	Action item	Responsibility	Status
6	HCWG 15 (1-2 August 2019)	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	<b>Ongoing (linked with Action Item 3, above).</b> The TSRA supported PZJA Traditional Inhabitant members to undertake cluster consultations in late 2019 which sought feedback from communities on the use of hookah to fish for white teatfish. An overview of the consultations outcomes will be discussed under <b>Agenda Item 2.1</b> . Noting key issues to be discussed under <b>Agenda Item 6</b> , AFMA is recommending this action be discussed in more detail at the planned future management priorities workshop.
7	HCWG 15 (1-2 August 2019)	AFMA to arrange a half/full day future management priorities workshop in conjunction with the next Hand Collectables Working Group meeting.	AFMA	<b>Ongoing.</b> AFMA was unable to arrange the workshop in conjunction with HCWG16 as the focus of this meeting is to seek firm advice on black teatfish for a 2020 opening. AFMA is still committed to arranging a half day workshop to discuss future management priorities for Torres Strait Hand Collectable Fisheries. A time and date for the workshop is to be discussed under <b>Agenda Item 10</b> .
8	HCWG 15 (1-2 August 2019)	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	<b>Complete.</b> AFMA circulated a revised Five Year Research Plan to Working Group members' out-of-session for comment on 16 September 2019. A summary of all comments provided by members out of session was then circulated to members via email on 9 October 2019. The updated Research Plan with incorporated member comments was considered by the TSSAC at their teleconference meeting on 25 November 2019. An update on the TSSAC outcomes will be provided under <b>Agenda Item 7</b> .
9	HCWG 15 (1-2 August 2019)	AFMA to investigate the possibility of a HCWG industry member accompanying AFMA staff to the next Queensland Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group meeting.	AFMA	<b>Complete.</b> There has been one Queensland Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group meeting held since HCWG15 however PZJA Traditional Inhabitants were not permitted to attend. AFMA will continue to liaise with Fisheries Queensland about future Sea Cucumber Fishery Working Group meetings and possible HCWG Traditional Inhabitant member attendance.

## Attachment A – Adopted Agenda

### 16th MEETING OF THE PZJA TORRES STRAIT HAND COLLECTABLES WORKING GROUP

Friday 21 February 2020 (8:30 am – 5:00 pm)

TSRA Boardroom, Thursday Island

### DRAFT AGENDA v2

The meeting will open at 8:30 am on Friday 21 February 2020.

#### AGENDA ITEM 1 PRELIMINARIES

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

The Chair will welcome HCWG members and observers to the 16th 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 and observers 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 members

Industry members and observers will be invited to provide an update on matters relevant to Torres Strait Hand Collectable fisheries, including a report from PZJA Traditional Inhabitant members on their recent cluster consultation meetings.

##### 2.2 Scientific members

Scientific members and observers will be invited to provide an update on matters relevant to Torres Strait Hand Collectable fisheries.

##### 2.3 Government Agencies

The Working Group will note updates from AFMA, TSRA and Fisheries Queensland on matters relevant to Torres Strait Hand Collectable fisheries.

##### 2.4 PNG National Fisheries Authority

The Working Group will note an update from the PNG National Fisheries Authority.

##### 2.5 Native Title

The Working Group will note a verbal update from the Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC.

**AGENDA ITEM 3 CATCH AND EFFORT SUMMARY**

The Working Group is invited to note a summary of reported catch in the Beche-de-mer Fishery for the 2019 fishing season.

**AGENDA ITEM 4 PRELIMINARY RESULTS OF THE BECHE-DE-MER STOCK SURVEY**

The Working Group will consider the preliminary results of eastern Torres Strait stock survey of Beche-de-mer species that took place in (TBC).

**AGENDA ITEM 5 FUTURE BLACK TEATFISH OPENING**

In consideration of the preliminary stock survey results, and guidance under the Beche-de-mer Harvest Strategy, the Working Group will provide advice to the PZJA on an appropriate TAC and relevant management arrangements required for a possible future black teatfish opening.

**AGENDA ITEM 6 PROHIBITION ON HOOKAH**

The Working Group is invited to consider the outcomes of the PZJA Traditional Inhabitant member cluster consultations and provide advice on a strategic approach to pursuing the development of a proposal to remove the prohibition on hookah in the Beche-de-mer fishery.

**AGENDA ITEM 7 RESEARCH**

The Working Group is invited to note an update on the current TSSAC research funding cycle for 2020-21.

**AGENDA ITEM 8 PEARL SHELL AND TROCHUS FISHERIES**

The Working Group is invited to note an update on activities in the Torres Strait Pearl Shell and Trochus fisheries.

**AGENDA ITEM 9 OTHER BUSINESS**

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

**AGENDA ITEM 10 DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING**

The Working Group will be invited to discuss a suitable date for the next meeting.

**The Chair must approve the attendance of all observers at the meeting. Individuals wishing to attend the meeting as an observer must contact AFMA ([fisheriesTI@afma.gov.au](mailto:fisheriesTI@afma.gov.au)).**

## Attachment B – PZJA Traditional Inhabitant Members Cluster Consultations 2019-20

Attached separately.

### Summary of Actions Arising from HCWG16

#	Action item	Responsibility
Action item 1.1	Malu Lamar to make recommendations to AFMA and TSRA on an as needs basis to establish an MOU to assist in improved data collection in the Fishery.	Malu Lamar
Action item 5.1	Malu Lamar to take the lead in convening a stakeholder workshop to further discuss and agree on cultural lore and industry agreements with respect to fishing for black teatfish and report outcomes to the HCWG.	Malu Lamar
Action item 5.2	AFMA explore media opportunities such as radio to widely communicate the additional management and reporting requirements for a black teatfish re-opening.	AFMA
Action item 6.1	Malu Lamar to discuss the review of the hookah prohibition at the stakeholder workshop with a view to developing management recommendations.	Malu Lamar

### Summary of HCWG16 Meeting Recommendations

#	Recommendation
1	<p>In line with the harvest strategy (section 2.11.4), Working Group recommended a trial fishery reopening for black teatfish subject to a 15 tonne TAC and daily reporting landed catch noting that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. based on all available information, including preliminary results from scientific dive surveys in November 2019 and January 2020, that the biomass of black teatfish is likely to be over the limit biomass reference point (BLIM - 40 percent of estimated unfished biomass);</li> <li>b. monitoring and management arrangements (with daily reporting) are adequate; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. a mandatory landed catch reporting system is in place and reporting standards in the BDM Fishery have progressively improved since the system was introduced. This includes voluntary reporting of effort information.</li> <li>ii. Fish receivers will be able to submit records to AFMA electronically (SMS, email) during the opening with hard copies to be sent to AFMA in the mail.</li> <li>iii. AFMA is now responsible for domestic compliance and is committed to undertake a targeted compliance program to support a future opening.</li> </ul> </li> <li>c. although the preliminary results of the recent scientific survey suggest the stock could sustain a higher TAC, priority was given to ensuring the TAC was demonstrably conservative which is a requirement of the harvest strategy.</li> </ul>
2	The Working Group recommended that this issue [prohibition on hookah] be considered in a broader stakeholder workshop and recommended that it form part of the Malu Lamar led workshop process being organised to finalise customary arrangements for the trial opening of black teatfish.