

14 September 2021

Dear Torres Strait Finfish Fishery Stakeholder,

I am writing to advise of the successful funding for continuing the *Torres Strait Finfish Biological Sampling Program* through to June 2024.

This three-year project - *Torres Strait Finfish Fishery: Coral Trout and Spanish Mackerel Biological Sampling 2021-24* - is funded by Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) management agencies (Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) and Fisheries Queensland) and is being led by Fisheries Queensland (Jo Langstreth and Andrew Trappett).

This continues the research conducted in both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 fishing seasons. The need for the research has been identified as a high priority by the PZJA Advisory Groups (Finfish Resource Assessment Group and Finfish Working Group) due to the uncertain stock status of Spanish mackerel and the concern about declining catch rates shown in recent stock assessments. There is also a need to collect information to support the Torres Strait coral trout stock assessment which was only conducted for the first time in 2019.

With your support, we will continue working with your community over the next three years to achieve the objectives of the research which are to:

1. Collect information from commercial catches on the **sex, lengths** and **ages** of Spanish mackerel and coral trout.
2. Collect information on the **catch composition** of coral trout (percentage split between the four main commercial species).
3. Analyse this information and securely provide the results to AFMA to support Spanish mackerel and coral trout stock assessments.
4. Report the findings back to the PZJA and communities.

To achieve the objectives the project team will continue to:

- Work with fishers and fish receiver businesses in your community to collect biological information from the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector for study. Across eastern communities we are seeking to:

- Collect **100-200 Spanish mackerel frames** per season.
- Collect **100-200 coral trout frames** per season.
- Measure every fish from **20-30 Spanish mackerel catches** per season.
- Measure every fish from **20-30 coral trout catches** per season.

- Visit Erub and Mer communities twice during the season to take any samples fishers and community members can keep frozen to support the project.
- Work with fish receiver businesses to keep frozen fish frames and ship these to the Cairns laboratories (Northern Fisheries Centre) at intervals through the pre-paid Seaswift account.
- Analyse the samples provided at the Cairns laboratories and report these data back to communities electronically and when visiting.

The Sunset sector will also continue to provide several hundred Spanish mackerel and coral trout frames per season (**200-300**) along with measuring 20-30 catches.

The information collected will be useful to:

- assist communities, scientists and managers to better understand the status of the Torres Strait Spanish mackerel and coral trout stocks,
- inform the scientific stock assessments for the Torres Strait Finfish Fishery that set appropriate catch levels for the fishery,
- maintain the profitability and long-term sustainability of the Spanish mackerel and coral trout fisheries in the Torres Strait which support local businesses, and
- empower communities with information to support making their own local management arrangements for their sea country and resources.

The next step will be for myself (Andrew Trappett) contacting Torres Strait Island Regional Council Councillor's and Island Native Title Prescribed Body Corporates to arrange dates that will work for communities to have the team visit. These visits are to conduct sampling and share results from the 2020-21 fishing season that was recently completed. I also will be contacting fishers and fish receivers asking them to continue retaining samples and filling out length sheets for collection by the project team during the first visit.

Further information on the project is available on the PZJA webpage here:

<https://www.pzja.gov.au/torres-strait-biological-sampling-program>. Please contact me (or one of the other project partners below) if you would like any additional information or if you would like to discuss any concerns or provide feedback.

I hope to see you soon and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Yours sincerely



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Project partner: Quinten Hirakawa (TSRA) 07 4069 0700 or Quinten.Hirakawa@tsra.gov.au

Important Note on COVID-19: Project staff will not be visiting the Torres Strait while any COVID-19 travel restrictions are in place. Project staff will follow all Government guidelines and will discuss any visit with community leaders before planning any travel.