

Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee

Meeting 20 Record

29-30 January 2020

Northern Fisheries Centre Cairns

Note all meeting papers and record available on
the PZJA webpage: www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Meeting participants

Members

Name	Disclosures of interest
Members	
John Glaister (Chair)	Chair NORMAC, Chair Torres Strait Rock Lobster Working Group, Member Parks North Management Advisory Group.
Lisa Cocking (EO)	Australian Fisheries Management Authority employee.
David Power	No conflicts of interest to report.
Darren Roy	Queensland fisheries Employee.
Edwin Morrison	TSPF Licence Holder and operator. Has declaration of interest for agenda item relating to TPC licences, as he currently has an application in for one.
Clinton Farman	Holder of TSPF licence.
Glen Duggan	Licence holder in TSPF and QLD East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery.
Jim Newman	Holds 1 Torres Strait licence.
Clive Turnbull	Independent scientist employed to undertake TSPF annual data work. Also currently contracted to undertake 1 research project in the TSPF. No perceived conflicts of interest are associated with this though.
Allison Runck	Torres Strait Regional Authority employee.
Gavin Mosby	Traditional Owner, Traditional fisher for BDM, TRL and Finfish. TSSAC member.
William Stephen	Traditional owner. TIB fisher. Member of X committee.
Mark David	Traditional owner. TIB fisher. Member of TRL Working Group.
Mr Francis Pearson	Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member. TIB fisher. Kulkalgal RNTBC chair, TSIRC Councillor for Poruma.
Mr Gavin Mosby	Traditional Inhabitant Industry Member.

Commented [CL1]: TSRA, are you able to help with this? I
lost some notes from this section of the minutes.

Name	Position
Observers	
Robert Curtotti	ABARES economist and observer of TSPF Harvest Strategy Working Group
Ian Butler	ABARES stock assessment team

Apologies

Name	Position
Mr Marshall Betzel	Industry Member
PNG representatives	PNG representatives
Maluwap Nona	Malu Lamar representative

1 Preliminaries

1.1 welcome and apologies

1. The meeting was opened in prayer at 09.40am on Wednesday 28 January.
2. The members were welcomed to the first face to face meeting since the new membership was elected/ re-elected. The Chair stated an Acknowledgement of Country.
3. Attendees at the TSPMAC are detailed in the meeting participant tables at the start of this meeting record.
4. Apologies were received from Marshall Betzel (industry member), Maluwap Nona (Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC), Chairperson and representatives of the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority.

RECOMMENDATION 1.1.1

That the TSPMAC **NOTED**:

- a. an acknowledgement of Traditional Owners;
- b. the Chair's welcome address;
- c. apologies received from Marshall Betzel (industry member), Maluwap Nona (Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islanders) Corporation RNTBC), Chairperson and representatives of the Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority, unable to attend.

1.2 adoption of agenda

5. The committee agreed to adopt the agenda as it stands.

1.3 declarations of interest

6. The Chair advised members and observers, that as provided in PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1), all members of the MAC must declare all real or potential conflicts of interest in Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF) at the commencement of the meeting. Where it is determined that a direct conflict of interest exists, the MAC 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 leave the meeting for the remainder of the discussions on that issue.

7. Declarations of interests were provided by each meeting participant. These are detailed in the meeting participant table at the start of this meeting record.
8. The MAC 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).
9. One TVH licence holder, Ed Morrison declared an interest against agenda item 4.1 - Grant of carrier boat licenses in the Torres Strait, as he currently has an application in for a TPC-B licence in with AFMA. Mr Morrison left the room and the committee agreed it would be useful for him to be a part of initial discussions in order to provide some information on his specific application.. The committee agreed he should leave the room while the final recommendations were developed..
10. The remaining commercial TVH fishing licence holders left the room while the committee considered their interests. The MAC members agreed that although the excused members have pecuniary interests in the fishery, given they hold commercial fishing rights, their expertise is critical in the development of advice. On this basis, it was agreed that the TVH licence holders (industry members) be permitted to participate in discussions under all agenda items in the formulation of MAC recommendations.
11. All traditional Inhabitant industry members left the room while the committee considered their interests. It was agreed that the excused members be permitted to participate in discussions under all agenda items in the formulation of MAC recommendations.
12. Clive Turnbull's declarations of interest were discussed, and no potential conflicts were identified for this agenda.
13. The TSPMAC agreed that aside from Ed Morrison relating to agenda item 4.1, all members could be present for each of the agenda items.

RECOMMENDATION 1.3.1

That TSPMAC members and observers:

- a. **NOTED** the previously declared real or potential conflicts of members and update this list with current real or potential conflicts of interest (**Table 1**);
- b. **AGREED** that Mr Morrison should take part in discussions relating to the issue of TPC licences, however, not be a part of the final discussions or recommendation noting his declared interest, having an application for a TPC-B licence with AFMA.
- c. **NOTED** that the record of the meeting must record the fact of any disclosure, and the determination of the TSPMAC as to whether the member may or may not be present during discussion of, or decisions made, on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.

2 Meeting Administration

2.1 Actions and/or business arising from previous TSPMAC meetings

14. The TSPMAC went through the progress against actions arising from previous TSPMAC meetings. Progress can be found in the actions arising agenda paper, and for a number of items, in detailed agenda papers presenting against these actions.
15. The committee further discussed the following action item: **Action 18.3 – AFMA and TSRA to work together to discuss the membership and consultation with traditional inhabitants regarding Torres Strait management.** The committee noted that the TSRA have introduced an annual visit to communities, to support PZJA forum members to visit their cluster islands to discuss fishery and RAG and WG matters. This visit is likely to occur in October/ November this year.

RECOMMENDATION 2.1.1

That TSPMAC members **NOTED**:

- a) the progress against actions items arising from previous TSPMAC meetings.
- b) the final meeting record for TSPMAC 19 held via teleconference on 17 September 2019 (**Attachment 2.1a**). These minutes were sent for comment on 23 September 2019, and the final ratified version sent to TSPMAC out of session on 10 December 2019.

3 Reports

3.1 Native title update

16. No native title update could be provided in the absence of a Malu Lamar representative.
17. 3.1.1 That the TSPMAC NOTED that an update could not be provided for native title in the absence of Malu Lamar, the representative body.

3.2 a) Industry update

18. The TSPMAC noted updates provided by industry members on the performance of the TSPF during the 2019 season, in particular:
- There have been some difficulties with mother shipping – specifically around difficulties unloading and getting fuel. The motherships were running out of space, and even though fishers were pre-booking, it was sometimes difficult to know exactly what quantity of product they would have to unload.

- There were quite large fluctuations in the number of boats throughout season with vessels attracted to the region due to the good catch rates but also experiencing difficulties unloading and shipping product to market.
 - The committee acknowledged that Seaswift generally perform transshipping of product, which is then taken to mainland ports for offload.
19. One TIB member raised concern regarding potential quarantine issues for product being brought into the Torres Strait. AFMA explained that quarantine rules are more a concern with product going to the mainland from Torres Strait than the other direction.
20. The committee discussed the desire from communities to be able to buy prawn straight from the TSPF boats, which also helps with building relationships between communities and the industry. Sometimes boats do not sell product directly to communities. The committee noted that it is difficult for some skippers to sell product when they are employees, not owner/ operators, as often the owner give strict rules that no product can be sold directly from the boat.
21. The committee noted that the larger numbers of boats fishing in the 2019 season were largely a result of better catch rates in the TSPF compared to the QLD East Coast fisheries.
22. There was also an issue with prawn prices being low this year. Fishers were attracted by the good catch rates but prices were likely depressed due to high catches and supply during 2019.

b) PNG update

23. No PNG update could be provided, as PNG were unable to attend the meeting.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2.1 - That the TSPMAC NOTED

- the updates provided by the TSPF industry members.
- that PNG were unable to attend the meeting and provide an update.

3.3 Management update

TSRA update on fisheries specific matters.

24. The TSRA have been undertaking a project to set up a company to hold the sunset fishing rights on behalf of the Beche de Mer and finfish fisheries.
25. These fishing rights are currently held in trust, by the TSRA, however they project will transfer them to a community run and owned company. The company will probably be set up by July this year. They are still waiting to get community consensus on the format, and a large forum is being held before July to try to reach this.

Commented [CL2]: Tsra, DOES THIS INCLUDE trf?

26. The TSRA are also exploring ways to better support the outreach and engagement of the traditional inhabitant industry members in the PZJA committees. This has included more support around community outreach to the islands in the clusters they were elected to for, and organising cultural awareness training to assist with improving collaboration and understanding between all PZJA committee members, and thus assist with making PZJA advice more collaborative.

AFMA Management update

27. The TSPMAC noted that AFMA is currently assessing the cost efficiency of continuing to use the current TSPF Ecological Risk Assessment methodology (the sustainability assessment) including what would be required to update that assessment type, compared to moving to the standard AFMA ERA. AFMA will provide advice to the TSPMAC once it has undertaken this comparison.
28. The TSPMAC noted that the TRLRAG has raised some concerns with the unknown level of TRL catch, given TRL are currently not required to be reported in the TSPF logbooks.
29. TIB members noted the importance of fishers being honest about what they are catching, as it creates bad blood when they are dishonest, more than if they catch something and are honest about it.
30. The committee noted that industry is not allowed to retain TRL, and past studies have also shown a high survivability of individuals that are caught and released. A catch, tag recapture study showed TRL being picked up in PNG long after tagging and release.
31. The committee also noted it would be difficult for TSPF fishers to mix cray in with prawns, as the vendors receiving the product would need to report this.
32. The committee agreed to discuss the matter of TRL catches more deeply under agenda item 4.6, relating to species of interest catches.

3.4 Compliance report

33. The TSPMAC noted the compliance report for the TSPF, including that 6 at sea boarding's occurred in the 2018-19 financial year, and no breaches were reported.
34. A TIB industry member noted that they believe trawl boats seem to be coming closer and closer to warrior reef.
35. The committee note the east of warrior reef seasonal closure (1 February to 1 August each year), which was implemented by industry, to protect small prawns, and the permanent closure west of warrior reef.
36. TIB members agreed it would be useful to provide information to communities again about the dates and range of seasonal closures, so they understand when boats are able to fish certain areas and when they can't.

ACTION: AFMA to assist TSRA to provide list of season closure dates and areas in next update to communities.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4.1

That the Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC) **NOTED:**

- a) the update on compliance activities for the Torres Strait Prawn fishery for 2018 and 2019.
- b) that 6 at sea boards were undertaken in the TSPF and no breaches were reported.

3.5 Data report

- 37. Mr Turnbull presented a summary of data for the TSPF for the 2019 season. The tiger prawn CPUE in 2019 was the highest since 2013 and the endeavour prawn CPUE was the highest since 2008. Taken together this resulted in the highest combined prawn (tiger + endeavour + king + mixed) CPUE since the start of full logbook records in 1989.
- 38. Fishing effort (around 2600 days) was the highest since 2015 and is likely a result of the record prawn CPUE encouraging TSPF licenced vessels to spend more time in the fishery. This is 38% of the available Australian fishing days.
- 39. The tiger prawn (514t) and king prawn (11t) catches were the highest since 2015 (tiger 553t, king 17t) while the endeavour prawn catch (298t) was the highest since 2008 (420t).
- 40. The committee noted that both the mackerel and TRL fisheries, and some others, had poor catch rates in 2017 after a very warm 2016. So the low effort and CPUE values in 2017 are not only for this fishery. This may be due to some environmental factor effecting recruitment into the fisheries.
- 41. The committee noted that effort in the fishery is generally further in the north, around Yorke Island nowadays. However, there was a bit of effort further south, in the outside but near area in 2019, where there used to be more effort in the past.
- 42. One TIB member questioned whether we could close areas for a period to give the stock a rest. The TSPMAC noted that we already have a number of closures in place, and the stock is short lived, and replenishes every year, so there is no real need to put more closures in place at this time.
- 43. The committee noted the monthly effort was low in 2018, until many boats came during June, when they heard catch rates were very good. Fishing started earlier in the season in 2019 based on expectations that good catch rates would continue.

44. The committee discussed the prawn grades caught since 2004, which has had fairly consistent division of grades, with mainly 10/20s. There was also an ungraded category, which AFMA would clarify with the data team, as there was uncertainty of why there were ungraded prawns reported. In the past when catches were really high, they would use the ungraded category when they ran out of time to sort product, but this shouldn't be an issue with catch levels today.
45. The committee agreed the new data including grades could be included in the data summary, once we clarify what the ungraded selection were.
46. The committee also noted the need to get more prawn price data from more licence holders for future assessment around fishery economics.

ACTION: AFMA to work with Mr Turnbull and the AFMA logbook team to identify what the ungraded category is and update before putting in the data summary.

RECOMMENDATIONS

3.5.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** and **DISCUSSED** the trends in catch and effort for the 2019 fishing season and the updated fishery analysis and figures for the 2019 Data Summary.

3.5.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the new grade and price data, and **agreed** for it to be added to the TSPF data summary, once AFMA clarify the category relating to "ungraded" product and update if needed.

3.6 Comparison of logbook and observer data for Threatened, Endangered and Protected species

47. The TSPMAC considered a presentation on the comparison of logbook data with observer data for TEP species in the fishery. This presentation was designed to provide an indication of the level of reporting that is happening in logbooks for TEP species, and where AFMA may need to continue educating fishers around mandatory reporting of TEP species, to improve the level of reporting.
48. During 2007-2019 the logbook and observer data show very low levels of interactions with sawfish, turtles in the Torres prawn fishery. This is expected given the lower numbers of sawfish in the area and that Turtle Excluder Devices are mandatory and allow turtles to escape easily.
49. There is sporadic reporting of sygnathids, and higher reporting of sea snakes in logbooks. When compared to observer data the rate of reporting for sea snakes and sygnathids is much lower in logbooks
50. Based on the observer data it is likely that fishers are not reporting all sygnathids (seahorses and pipefish) in their logbooks. The committee noted that sygnathids are much more difficult to identify due to their size and appearance and it is difficult for fishers to report them all.

51. This agenda item was closed, noting the presented data, and the TSPMAC discussed ways to improve data on TEP species under agenda item 4.6 on the next meeting day.

4 Management

4.1 Grant of carrier boat licences in the Torres Strait

52. The committee discussed the PZJA wide issue relating to applications to grant carrier and or processor licences to non-traditional inhabitants in any Torres Strait fishery. This matter has come up in other fisheries in the past, with a few parties enquiring about gaining either a processor, or processor carrier licence on the Finfish or BDM fisheries.

53. There is some uncertainty around the PZJA policy to grant these licences, because the PZJA licensing policy discusses only issuing new licences to traditional inhabitants.

54. The committee noted the PZJA, under the Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984, has an objective: “to have regard, in developing and implementing licensing policy, to the desirability of promoting economic development in the Torres Strait area and employment opportunities for traditional inhabitants.”

55. Also, the PZJA licensing policy states that ‘carrier licences may be granted to boats which are legitimate cargo vessels’. Another section of the Guide states ‘all new fishing licences and carrier licences are only to be granted to Traditional Inhabitants’ (tropical rock lobster, Spanish mackerel, pearl shell, finfish, beche-de-mer, trochus and crab fisheries, pp.19). This has created ambiguity on AFMA knowing how to apply the PZJA licensing policy.

56. The committee also noted that the above policy specifically excludes the TSPF, so there appears to be no policy against issuing carrier or other licenses in the TSPF, to non-traditional inhabitants.

57. The committee noted that as well as discussing this broadly, and how to apply it to the TSPF going forward, there is also a currently application in from Ed Morrison, to gain a TPC-B (carrier only) licence for the TSPF, and other fisheries if possible.

58. Mr Morrison explained some of the drivers around his application for the licence:

- there has been ongoing concern with the uncertainty around the future of Seaswift operations in servicing the TSPF.
- There have been logistical difficulties the last several years, since Seaswift reduced their services and changed the boats servicing the Torres Strait, as they can no longer take crew, and it is harder offloading product as the Seaswift vessels have less space.
- Mr Morrison noted there is a need for additional cargo capacity and for a boat that can operate in a similar way to Seaswift but also transport people, and offer mechanical, refrigeration specialists and electricians to both service the fleet and Torres Strait communities.

- The proposed new cargo vessel would be available to support all TSPF vessels as well as other fisheries and communities if there is interest.
- Mr Morrison explained to the committee that having another body providing cargo services in the Torres Strait may reduce costs (of freight and fuel), as currently with only one provider, there is no competition, and prices have continued to increase.

59. Mr Morrison left the room, given his conflict of interest, for the remainder of this discussion.

60. The committee noted there were some concerns from TIB members, which reflect some community members more generally, around servicing the TVH fishers in other TVH fisheries such as finfish, BDM and TRL. They are concerned that this may make it easier for them to catch product more quickly, and they are worried it could create a localised depletion, and effect the local community that may want to fish that area as well.

61. However, these TIB members were generally supportive about Mr Morrison's proposal, servicing the TSPF fishery, and could see broader possible benefits to communities through employment opportunities, the ship being able to service communities including large items due to cranes.

62. The Chair noted that constraining new endeavours unreasonably may stifle competition and hence change for the better

63. Because these licences are also renewed annually, the PZJA can make a different decision in the future if they want to cease offering these licenses, such as if a local community started providing the service as well.

64. The member for Masig acknowledged and thanked Mr Morrison for all of the community outreach he does, to build relationships with communities. He is supportive of his specific proposal, as it can improve services and accessibility for communities, and may offer additional employment opportunities.

65. AFMA were supportive of the application provided compliance risks are able to be managed. As with increased catches and difficulty getting product out, considering management and economic objectives for the fishery, this could be helpful.

66. Traditional inhabitant industry members were generally supportive of the proposal, noting competition should lead to reduced costs. They did note the risk that Seaswift could pull out their service when faced with competition, which would then leave with 1 operator again with less experience. However given fuel doubled when the competition left 10 years ago, and freight costs increasing, they are hoping a competitor will help reduce costs.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1.1

That the TSPMAC **NOTED**:

- a) the PZJA Standing Committee recommendation to consult with the PZJA forums alongside Native Title Notification on the grant of Carrier B licences to freight vessels, which may be owned by non-traditional inhabitants, in light of the ambiguity with PZJA licencing policy on the issue of new licenses to non-traditional inhabitants;
- b) a pending application for a Carrier B licence from a non-traditional inhabitant looking to provide services to the TSPF and other fisheries, including mechanical, electrical and other services to these fisheries and communities.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1.2

The TSPMAC **SUPPORTED** the PZJA to issue new TPC-B licences for the TSPF generally, noting greater competition can lead to efficiency, and there may be a better consistent supply of freight services.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1.3

The TSPMAC **SUPPORTED** Mr Morrison's application specifically because it may have additional benefits including:

- Possible benefits to community from increased access to services, including shipping facilities and freight and potential employment and training opportunities.

RECOMMENDATION 4.1.4

TSPMAC **NOTED** that this advice only relates to the TSPF, and recommends other committees provide advice on the other fisheries, noting some of the concerns from TIB members around other fisheries.

4.2 BRD Review

67. The committee discussed the current progress regarding the trial of new, more effective BRDs in the TSPF, with the aim of reviewing the allowable BRDs in the fishery, to remove those less effective and introduce new more effective BRDs.

68. The trial has found around a 14% average reduction of bycatch when comparing the Toms fishery and a standard fishery, and a very small increase of prawn catch (however this may not be significant). This can't be compared to the NPF

results, as they were comparing the new BRD to the square mesh panel, which is far less effective than the regular fisheye.

69. They also discussed the need to have consistent arrangements across both the TSPF and Queensland East Coast Otter Trawl Fishery, as all but 2 boats are dual endorsed. Without this consistency it would be very difficult for fishers, who fish both fisheries in a year.
70. The QLD member confirmed they only need confidence that any new BRD is effective for seasnakes, and fisheyes have been the most effective at this. However, new fisheye versions should still be effective.
71. The NPF boats dual endorsed in the TSPF tend not to change their nets, so they will want to be able to use the same BRDs as the NPF.
72. The committee noted AFMA is considering the best approach to introduce the new BRD over a staged period, to ensure the most effective BRDs are used.
73. This is similar to the approach taken in the NPF where they are introducing the new BRD in two stages. The Tom's fisheye was required in half of all nets deployed during each shot by a vessel during 2019 and from 2020 all nets must have one of the new approved BRDs.
74. The committee noted there were some concerns from Industry in having only the Tom's fisheye allowed, given the high cost of this device. They discussed the option of allowing the other four devices that were trialed and found to be effective.
75. The committee agreed we should get the additional data from the second trial before making a decision on a way forward. This may include allowing a series of fisheyes, and removing other BRDs that are less effective. This will likely sit well within the QLD East Coast Trawl Fishery legislation.
76. They agreed to provide results of the BRD trials to communities, once the second trial is complete.

ACTION: Present results of BRD trials to communities, following the second trial. This may be best done during TSRA or AFMA community visits.

77. Following on from this issue, a TIB member, asked for information regarding the outcomes of the season dates changes to a 1 February season start. Communities were consulted on this change, and it was noted it would be useful to provide information back to communities on the effects it has had on the fishery. The committee supported providing feedback after the results of the new season dates management strategy evaluation project are available, including the information on observed fleet changes..
78. The committee discussed whether the AFMA compliance team are checking BRD measurements etc when they are doing compliance trips. AFMA were not certain and agreed to check this was happening. It isn't as easy to check BRDs as in the NPF, where they have pre-season briefings and check all boats before they go out.

ACTION: AFMA to check with compliance that they are measuring nets during compliance boarding's on TSPF boats.

79. The committee agreed we should get the additional data from the second trial before making a decision on a way forward. This may include allowing a series of fisheyes, and removing other BRDs that are less effective. This will likely sit well within the QLD East Coast Trawl Fishery legislation. They agreed to provide results of the BRD trials to communities, once the second trial is complete.

ACTION: Consult with TSPMAC following section BRD trial to decide on a way forward for amending allowable BRDs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 The Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC)

NOTED:

- a) the preliminary results of the TSPF Toms Fisheye BRD trial in the 2019 fishing season, and intention to undertake another trial early in the 2020 season on a different boat.
- b) AFMA will provide results of the second BRD trial out of session for discussion following the trial.
- c) the need to mirror any future changes to BRDs in the QLD ECOTF and any risks of introducing a device in the TSPF before Queensland have trialled/ agreed to the device.

4.2.2. The TSPMAC RECOMMENDED:

- a) the additional data from the second trial be considered before making a decision on changes to allowable BRDs in the TSPF, and how the changes should be implemented.
- b) that the results of the BRD trials be presented to communities, once the second trial is complete.

4.3 Stock Assessment

80. Mr Turnbull presented the results of the updated tiger prawn stock assessment for the TSPF. The results of the 2019 stock assessment show that tiger prawn stocks in the Torres Strait are in a healthy state with high CPUE and biomass levels ranging between 60-88% of virgin biomass. The assessment update required a new gear survey to update the fishing power for the fishery. The gear survey which collected information on around 90% of boats fishing since 2000.

81. The survey was updated to collect information on headline length (accounting for any "net effect"), hull units, and whether a boat is licenced to fish in the NPF, as part time TSPF fishers effects fishing power.

82. The main results from the gear survey, showed that overall fishing power remained steady, with the following changes recorded to inputs:

- Horse Power increased substantially up to early 2000s but has stabilised at around 400HP since 2005. It is difficult to measure horsepower today,

as its computer controlled. Some people have larger motors running at lower revs, which may decrease costs on fuel/ increase fuel economy. This is because they aren't necessarily using the whole available horsepower, so using that in fishing power calculations may not be accurate.

- There may be an issue with changing fishing power with the implementation of new BRDs. The stock assessment model counts a reduction in catch rates from their initial implementation around 1999 but doesn't consider future changes. It is possible to test the effect on fishing power by adding information on BRD which result in less prawn loss.

83. The ABARES stock assessment specialist (meeting observer) questioned how fishing power could remain steady given technology improvements such as sonar. Industry members considered the results are accurate, as sonar is not used in the fishery due to cost, and there has been very little changes to gear and boats given there is a boat length limit. There have probably been some minor improvements due to improvements to TEDs and BRDs, resulting in less prawn loss, but this would be minor.

84. Mr Turnbull went on to explain the major results of the stock assessment update:

- Both the Beverton-Holt (BH) and Ricker (R) stock recruitment curve (SRC) were used.
- Both the BH and R SRC had very similar biomass curves, however, the R curve had slightly lower biomass levels predicted. The R curve has a slightly higher estimate of Biomass at Maximum Sustainable Yield than the BH curve.
- When we start to translate this data into an estimate of the effort associate with maximum sustainable yield (E_{msy}), it becomes more difficult.
- The 2004 estimates were based on the CPUE of the fleet in 2003. If you apply that 2003 CPUE to the new assessment, they still find an E_{msy} value at a similar range. However, this reduces down when we apply the current fishing effort, which is higher, so takes less time to catch (so results in a lower number of days to fish).
- This is why Dr Penney, who was engaged to assist with redrafting our harvest strategy. He suggested we change our triggers to CPUE triggers instead of effort triggers because there was a good correlation between annual CPUE's (both standardised and nominal) and the annual stock biomass estimate

85. The AFMA member discussed this point, noting that the stock is currently in a very healthy state, with very high numbers and CPUE. So the results of the stock assessment, indicating a lower effort level of fishing is more sustainable, isn't necessarily the best way to manage the fishery. This will be discussed further under the harvest strategy agenda item.

86. The committee concluded that the stocks are in a very healthy state, as a result of lower fishing effort, which has allowed the stock to build up. We will discuss options for managing the stock going forward under the harvest strategy agenda paper.

87. The committee also noted that the fleet used to be able to fish at much lower catch rates, because they took endeavour and tiger prawns. However now endeavour prices are so low, they are only taking tiger prawns, meaning they need higher tiger prawn catch rates to be viable economically.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3.1

That the Management Advisory Committee **NOTED:**

a) a stock assessment for tiger prawns in the Torres Strait was completed in 2019 and is available at **attachment B**.

b) that the 2019 stock assessment has shown that tiger prawn stocks in the Torres Strait are in a healthy state with high CPUE and biomass levels ranging between 60-88% of virgin biomass.

4.4 Harvest Strategy trigger review

88. AFMA explained the process that has been undertaken to draft the new recommended harvest strategy triggers, following the TSPMAC recommendation (to go ahead with this drafting) at its teleconference in 2019.

89. The committee noted the components of a harvest strategy include:

- target and limit reference points for the fishery. These are associated with the stock being at a certain level of biomass.
- The target reference point should be set at a biomass level where we would like the stock to be. That is, with good sustainable catch rates that ensure the vessels that vessels can fish with good economic returns.
- The limit reference point is the level that we do not want to allow the stock to go below, as it will pose an unacceptable risk of recruitment failure.
- The second part of the harvest strategy requires us to identify an indicator of population biomass, which is used to monitor and assess the stock. In this case we are proposing to use CPUE as the indicator given the good alignment with biomass.
- The third component is to specify trigger levels and decision rules, based on the biomass indicator, which we follow when the stock biomass decreases. So we know what steps to take if the triggers are hit and thus the stock is declining.

90. The current TSPF Harvest Strategy has a limit reference point of B_{20} (20 percent of virgin biomass), which is the amount recommended in the Commonwealth harvest strategy policy.

91. The target in the past was set at B_{msy} , which corresponded to B_{28} in the old stock assessment. This level is quite low, and has low catch rates, which isn't ideal for good economic return for the fishery. Industry members noted that if the stock were at this level, it would be unviable to fish.

92. The committee noted that the current Harvest Strategy uses effort based triggers, and the HSWG are recommending (on advice from stock assessment consultant

Andrew Penney), that it should move to a CPUE based trigger system. The effort based triggers we are currently using don't give us a clear ability to monitor declines in the stock, which is what we want for the fishery.

93. CPUE triggers are more effective as they allow us to measure declines in the stock and ensure the stock biomass doesn't drop from good levels down to low and potentially unsustainable levels. This new system would also require us to specify the decision rules that define the management response if the stock does down.
94. The TSPAC considered it was beneficial to have two sets of triggers:
 - a. The first trigger should tell us when the stock is moving away from our optimal stock level (the target); and
 - b. The second trigger is an alert which indicates when we are at risk of approaching and breaching the limit reference point.
95. The committee agreed that the second trigger should be set at a level above the limit the reference point to ensure that there is sufficient time to take action.
96. The committee noted that using nominal CPUE would be suitable, as nominal and standardised CPUE have a very close correlation.
97. The committee recommended that a three year rolling average of CPUE should be used as the indicator, instead of single years. This minimises natural fluctuations in the stock, and highlights large variations and trends. For the lower trigger, the committee recommended that a more precautionary trigger approach is used that ensures the trigger is met when either the three year rolling average is hit, or the trigger is hit two years in a row.
98. The TSPMAC discussed the levels that the triggers should be set at, and what decision rules should sit around. Industry had some concern that there would be drastic action taken when we hit the first trigger, which could close the fishery. AFMA clarified that the first trigger is conservative and designed to start a conversation with the MAC, about what actions we do need to take, and to explore why the trigger may have been hit.
99. Following some discussion, the chair agreed the committee should consider the suggestions overnight, and return to finalise them with a formal recommendation on day 2 of the meeting.
100. Industry had some concern with how we would manage the fishery if there is a change towards targeting endeavours rather than tiger prawns. This could reduce the CPUE for tiger prawns, and may affect indicator of abundance for the tiger prawn stocks. Mr Turnbull pointed out that it is still ok to use tiger prawn as an indicator in these situations, as there is an overlap in the species. We would just need to be aware that it would likely be slightly depressed, and take this into account when interpreting the data.
101. This will only be an issue if they are targeting endeavours for a whole season or multiple seasons, as its looking at annual CPUE.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.4.1

That the Management Advisory Committee **NOTED**:

- a) advice form the Harvest Strategy Working Group to amend the Torres Strait Harvest Strategy to remove effort based triggers and replace them with catch rate based triggers that reflect changes in biomass within a season.

102. This highlights the importance of industry being willing to provide product prices and economic behaviour to AFMA and the MAC, so this reasoning can be validated.

103. When the TSPMAC returned to the discussion on Thursday, the following triggers and decision rules were agreed to, which could be presented as draft changes when consultation occurs with licence holders and Torres Strait communities.

104. The TSPMAC agreed to these triggers and decision rules in principle, noting AFMA would need to do some more work finalising the wording, which the TSPMAC could comment on out of session with the minutes.

105. The TSPMAC noted that the higher costs of operating in the fishery have resulted in fishers being unable to operate at the same CPUE levels as they have historically. This is why effort, and the number of active boats are now a lot lower. This also results in the fishery being somewhat self-regulating, as fishers are unlikely to go to the TSPF to fish if CPUE drops significantly, as it won't be economically viable to fish under current market conditions.

The committee discussed the methods of consultation that should be undertaken with both licence holders, and Torres Strait communities regarding the suggested changes. They agreed that it would be enough to consult the four communities in the main area of the TSPF, and start with a letter to licence holders describing the change. Further consultation with licence holders could be carried out through phone calls or meetings if needed.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4.3 - The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that AFMA undertake consultation with the four main Torres Strait communities in the area of the TSPF (Iama, Masig, Ugar and Poruma) regarding the suggested changes to the harvest strategy.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4.4 - The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that further consultation with licence holders could include a letter notifying them of the suggested changes to the harvest strategy, and further consultation be conducted if requested.

ACTION: AFMA to finalise the draft amended harvest strategy which will be sent for consultation to TSPF licence holders, and used for consultation with the four main Torres Strait communities during 2020.

4.5 Total Allowable Effort limit 2021-2022

106. The TSPMAC discussed the total allowable effort limit for the TSPF, which needs to be set by November 2020, for the 2021 fishing season.

107. The committee noted that Andrew Penney, the stock fisheries consultant assisting with the harvest strategy review, recommended that we consider leaving the TAE at the current level, noting that the suggested changes to the harvest strategy will ensure sustainability is taken care of using the new reference points, triggers and decision rules.
108. The 2019 stock assessment indicates that the TSPF tiger prawn stocks are not overfished and not subject to fishing with the stock biomass levels between 60-88% of unfished levels. Given the healthy stock status, the committee supported maintaining the TAE at the current level and recommended applying the TAE for three years, subject to monitoring CPUE against the recommended trigger levels.
109. ABARES raised discussion around the outputs of the stock assessment which had suggested a TAE reduction based on effort levels associated with maximum sustainable yield. It was noted that it doesn't make sense to reduce the TAE when the stock is increasing and well above target levels. Industry and AFMA acknowledged that this would force a lot of pressure onto industry for a restructure of the fleet when it isn't really needed.
110. AFMA explained that the new harvest strategy rules will allow us to continue to manage the fishery sustainably, within the current TAE. AFMA and the TSPMAC will monitor CPUE annually and consider further management action if the CPUE declines and the proposed harvest strategy triggers are reached.
111. The TSPMAC agreed to set the level at 9,200 days for 3 years, 2021, 2022 and 2023, noting it can be changed any time during, or between seasons if there is a risk to sustainability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.5.1** The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that the PZJA set the Total Allowable Effort in the TSPF at 9,200 days for the 2021, 2022 and 2023 seasons.
- 4.5.2** The TSPMAC **NOTED** the Total Allowable Effort can be changed by the PZJA if needed within or between seasons by determination or emergency determination, if the stock assessment indicates a new Total Allowable Effort is required.

ACTION: AFMA to set TAE limit at 9,200 days for the 2021, 2022 and 2023 fishing seasons.

4.6 Species of interest and logbooks

112. The TSPMAC discussed options for collecting additional information on species of interest to the traditional sector.
113. The committee noted that there was an action from the last TRL working group (TRLWG) meeting, where the group raised concerns with the unknown

level of TRL that is taken (and their survival rates) by TSPF boats. The TRLWG are concerned with any unreported sources of mortality that may need to be taken into account in the stock assessment for the TRL fishery.

114. The committee clarified that it would be useful to know the numbers of TRL caught, including the month and location, even if they are released alive (noting that may not be a mortality source needing to be added to the TRL stock assessment), because it could add additional data to the stock assessment, knowing more about the migration patterns.

115. Despite the survivability study undertaken for TRL in the past, using catch, tag, recapture methods, there was concern from TIB members that more individuals may die than we currently know of. In their experience, TRL are very sensitive, and some that are hand caught die easily. AFMA reiterated that months later these individuals were found alive in the Gulf of Papua, but acknowledged there was still some uncertainty around individuals that may be injured in the trawl nets. Mr Turnbull also noted that they witness very little surface mortality during the study, when TRL were released, as sharks were more interested in the bycatch than TRL, which tended to go straight to the bottom.

ACTION: Ask the TRLWG to report back to the TSPMAC with their data needs, so we have an understanding of the data they are trying to gain, so we can work out the best methods for collecting this data in the fishery.

116. The committee agreed that AFMA should contact industry asking them to begin recording TRL take in their logbooks. There are only a small number of fishers so this should be fairly simple.

RECOMMENDATION

4.6.1 That the Torres Strait Prawn Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC) **DISCUSSED** the species of interest to the traditional sector and consider the best way to monitor catch and release for these species.

4.6.2 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that AFMA contact fishers asking them to begin reporting TRL in their logbooks, including how many TRL are caught and released.

The chair closed day 1 of the meeting at 515pm.

Day 2 of the meeting was opened with a prayer.

117. The chair brought the focus of the meeting back to discussions about collecting better data on Threatened, Endangered and Protected Species (Agenda item 3.6) and species of interest, noting the observer program only

collects a small subset of data, which is indicating there is less reporting happening in the logbooks than we should expect.

118. The committee discussed the option of having crew member observers, similar to the Northern Prawn Fishery. Industry acknowledged it may be unlikely skippers would be willing to do this work, and we would more need to target owner/ operators. They also questioned if AFMA could rely on the data collected by crew. AFMA noted that we do rely on this data in the NPF, and do comparisons across trips and looking at species catch rates to check data.
119. AFMA noted that for this fishery, we are mainly wanting to get broad data on numbers of seasnakes, sygnathids and any take of sawfish. We could also add TRL, or the species of interest into this data collection. Because we wouldn't be doing measurements or weights, just a good estimate of numbers of individuals it's less onerous training, less costly, and less work for the data collectors.
120. The committee noted it may be difficult organising crew member observers in the TSPF, because there are only around 15 active boats, and no industry association to coordinate something like this.
121. They acknowledged the past discussions around training indigenous observers, and noted that this may be a good for collecting this data. The indigenous observer program was never progressed, as AFMA acknowledged they were welcome to apply for the observer program in the same was as other applicants, noting there are only around 30-50 days each year in the TSPF, which doesn't provide a lot of work for someone only working in this fishery.
122. This may be a good avenue to get a similar sort of program happening, but which is tailored specifically to the TSPF.
123. TIB members noted that the local communities have common and local knowledge of their species, so if we use the right names (local names), and there could be a lot of interest from younger people on the islands that are interested in marine science but aren't sure how to start. This could be a good avenue, and good for relationship building, and flow of benefits to communities. This will help them to have some ownership in the fishery to. They may also have opportunity to learn about fishing while they are onboard.
124. TIB members also acknowledged it may be good to have more senior community members initially to do this work, so they can then share the experience with young community members to explain what is involved, noting in the past there has been some difficulty maintaining interest from younger people working on trawlers. Mr Mosby and Mr David were both interested in this.
125. TSPMAC agreed the role would require collection of data on species of interest and TEP species, and AFMA would need to do some work to decide on a suitable target of days (i.e. 10%), and a training/ data collection protocol.
126. The TSRA noted that they may be able to co-fund TIB observers to undertake this role.

ACTION: AFMA to further develop protocols for an indigenous community member (or crew member) to collect data on TEPs and species of interest, including deciding on target levels.

4.6.3 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that AFMA work with the TSRA to further pursue options for an indigenous data collection program, which would collect basic data (quantities / individuals) on species of interest and TEP species.

4.7 Preliminary results of management strategy evaluation of different season dates

127. The TSPMAC noted progress against the research project exploring how changes to the start of the season impact on the value of the fishery, catches and profitability.
128. The project has come from differing views on the best time period for season dates in order to maximise profitability for the fleet.
129. The aims of the project are to:
- build a stochastic length based tiger prawn stock size simulation model that can be used to investigate the impact of different season lengths and start/end dates.
 - Simulate different start/end dates to assess the impact on the relative value of the catch throughout the season and the possible effect that catching small prawns at the start of the season could have on catches later in the season.
130. The model will test the annual mean tiger prawn CPUE and convert it to dollars per night (using prawn grades and price data). We need to know dollars per night for different months, so as to suggest season dates that can maximise profitability across a range of scenarios (high or low effort seasons etc).
131. The project will use the stock recruitment relationship to calculate forward projections into 2019, based on different scenarios, with different data parameters.
132. Mr Turnbull is suggesting 4 scenarios be run,
- Use the mean of the years 2016-19 to simulate a February season opening.
 - Use the mean of years the 2008-15 to simulate a March season opening.
 - Use (b) with the March effort redistributed into April and May; 80% to April and 20% to May, to simulate an April season opening.
 - Simulate a February season opening but with the highest proportion of effort in February then March. This simulates the “pulse fishing” at the start of a season that has frequently occurred after the introduction of a seasonal closure. This scenario has 0.2 as a proportion (or 20%) of the annual total in

February. March to October use the proportions from scenario (b) x 0.8 to scale them down and the remainder (1 – sum (February to October)) is in November.

133. Mr Turnbull noted we could also look at high and low effort for each of these four options, making 8 options.
134. The Chair questioned whether the model would take into account the market being inundated with product, which generally leads to a large drop in product price. This level of information isn't taken into account in the model, but is looking at the best value we can get out of the fishery based on the current economics and prawn prices. It's designed to determine if an earlier opening could be putting a pressure on the stock and then reduce profits overall for the season. And could a later opening be better or worse, in this same regard.
135. Mr Turnbull explained that the size growth of the prawns is calculated using growth data from an old tagging study. It also in a sense, tracks individual prawn growth including males and females noting their differences in growth. This allows for variability, so this is more detailed than the other models used in the stock assessment.
136. The committee agreed the scenarios presented were suitable, and no others were suggested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.7.1 The TSPMAC **NOTED** the progress on a Management Strategy Evaluation of different season opening dates for the TSPF.

4.7.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the simulation scenarios and criteria being used to evaluate the effect of varying the seasonal closure opening.

4.7.3 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** the season dates MSE be progressed with the scenarios suggested by Mr Turnbull.

4.8 Outcomes and future potential extension work from research project “Improved TSPF profitability and pathways for a sustained flow of TSPF benefits to Torres Strait Island Communities”

137. The TSPMAC discussed the outcomes from the past research project exploring ways to improve profitability and pathways for a sustained flow of TSPF benefits to Torres Strait communities. The project listed a number of possible outcomes, and noted that most were considered unlikely to improve flow of benefits to communities.

138. At TSPMAC 18, the committee agreed that AFMA should present the results for discussion at this meeting, to see whether any suggested projects could be progressed, and how. The committee agreed that any suggested projects related to bycatch collection, for fishmeal or other purposes (bait) would not be feasible for industry or communities. The level of bycatch taken would be very hard to get to communities, and the profits from such an endeavour would likely be low if any.
139. The committee noted the desire from communities to have good access to fresh product directly from the boat.
140. The seafood branding project was pursued by the TSRA, and they are looking to tie this into the setup of the company discussed earlier in the meeting (the company looking after sunset licences for finifish and TRL).
141. The project suggested considering indigenous observers, and the committee noted it would be very beneficial to employ indigenous observers in data collection programs focusing on TEPS and species of interest. This will be explored further based on data needs and in accordance with actions under agenda item 4.6.3.
142. The TSRA discussed a year 11 and 12 program called growing our own, for people in school interested into going into maritime careers, to put them onto that pathway. They also have a year 13 traineeship.
143. TIB members also acknowledged that it could be good having a group of youths ready if they are short of crew at any time that could jump on board to work and help out. They shouldn't only limit the opportunities to these observer type roles, but as fisherman and crew.
144. Industry asked if there is an organisation they can call to get deckies. TIB members said they are unsure of the exact number right now because there has been a restructure. Mypathways is the main agency but it has recently rebranded itself. They also acknowledged going through the fishers association would be a good way of getting decent employees, as they can recommend reliable people for work. This is helpful for industry as sometimes they lose staff at the last minute, and it can be hard to get new crew from the mainland at short notice

ACTION: AFMA to work with TSRA to identify the best contact for TSPF licence holders to seek crew when needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

4.8.1 That the TSPMAC **NOTED** the outcomes of the past research project "*Improved TSPF profitability and pathways for a sustained flow of TSPF benefits to Torres Strait Island Communities*".

4.8.2 The TSPMAC **DISCUSSED** the possible initiatives for improving flow of benefits in the fishery, identified through the research project, and their feasibility for progression.

4.8.3 The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that three main ideas would be pursued:

- Ways to implement a community data collection program for the TSPF.
- Ways to improve pathways of communication for TSPF fishers to find crew from communities when needed, through using the local employment agencies and fishers associations.
- The seafood branding project which is already underway through the TSRA.

5 Finance

5.1 TSPF draft budget for 2020 season levies

145. AFMA explained that that draft budget would probably be available in a few weeks, and would be sent to TSPMAC out of session.

RECOMMENDATION 5.1.1 - The TSPMAC **NOTED** the draft budget would be distributed out of session for advice.

6 Other Business

6.1 Date and location of next meeting

146. The TSPMAC noted that the next meeting would be in 12-18 months, depending on progress for consultation and the draft amendments for the Harvest Strategy. There would be an out of session paper relating to the draft budget coming soon for consideration.

6.1.1

147. The TSPMAC **NOTED** that the TSPMAC Executive Officer will send dates for the next meeting once progress on consultation with the draft harvest strategy amendments are made.

6.2 Research priorities

148. The TSPMAC discussed the research priorities for the TSPF, which go into the five year rolling research plan. The next face to face meeting will be after the

next call for research, which occurs in November each year, so the plan needs to be updated now.

149. The TSPMAC made the following recommendations regarding research priorities:

- We should remove the current research project “Environment drivers of prawn recruitment in the TSPF and biomass including the impacts of climate change”, noting a broader Torres Strait climate change project is being carried out. They also noted catch rates are strong again so the question is not as relevant as when the project was raised.
- A TSPMAC ecological risk assessment also needs to be in the plan for the next five years. This may either use the AFMA standard ERA methodology, or an updated sustainability assessment.
- A management strategy evaluation (MSE) of the harvest strategy triggers and decision rules should be added on year five, noting it can be moved back if it isn't needed. An MSE is recommended at some stage regarding the proposed HS triggers and decision rules.
- The committee agreed that the proposed community (indigenous) data collection program should be placed in the research plan, as a pilot study. This could include the training program and salary component. AFMA would need to explore whether this is something that could be funded through the TSSAC, and the best way to seek funding, as generally any TSPF projects seeking TSSAC funding have to be paid 75% by industry. TIB members commented that because the project is benefiting communities, maybe we can explain it should be treated differently other TSPF projects. The TSRA acknowledged they may be able to co-fund the project.

ACTION: AFMA to update the five year fisheries rolling research plan and send to TSPMAC for review out of session.

150. The Chair thanked members and observers for being in attendance at the meeting.

151. The meeting was closed with a prayer at 1145am.

ACTIONS arising from TSPMAC 20 and ongoing actions from past TSPMAC meetings

Item number	Action	Responsibility	progress
ACTION 20.1	AFMA to assist TSRA to provide list of season closure dates and areas in next update to communities.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.2	AFMA to work with Mr Turnbull and the AFMA logbook team to identify what the ungraded category is and update before putting in the data summary.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.3	Present results of BRD trials to communities, following the second trial. This may be best done during TSRA or AFMA community visits.	AFMA and TSRA	
ACTION 20.4	AFMA to check with compliance that they are measuring nets during compliance boarding's on TSPF boats.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.5	Consult with TSPMAC following section BRD trial to decide on a way forward for amending allowable BRDs.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.6	AFMA to finalise the draft amended harvest strategy which will be sent for consultation to TSPF licence holders, and use for consultation with communities in 2020.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.7	AFMA to set TAE limit at 9,200 days for the 2021, 2022 and 2023 fishing seasons.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.8	Ask the TRLWG to report back to the TSPMAC with their data needs, so we have an understanding of the data they are trying to gain, so we can work out the best methods for collecting this data in the fishery.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.9	AFMA to further develop protocols for an indigenous community member (or crew member) to collect data on TEPs and species of interest, including deciding on target levels.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.10	AFMA to work with TSRA to identify the best contact for TSPF licence holders to seek crew when needed.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.11	AFMA to update the five year fisheries rolling research plan and send to TSPMAC for review out of session.	AFMA	
ACTION 20.12	TSPF industry members to provide fuel and beach product price data to Clive Turnbull for use in the data summary and future harvest strategy monitoring	Industry	
Actions from past meetings			

ACTION 18.19	AFMA to work to review the observer protocols to be sure the data being collected is still relevant.	AFMA	Ongoing. This action has not been progressed due to other higher priority work.
ACTION 18.12	AFMA to consider steps to remove the five boat rule policy for TSPF as industry are not generally concerned. Send a letter of question to industry.	AFMA	Ongoing. The five boat rule is a policy which is applied across all Commonwealth fisheries. Given the five boat rule applies broadly, AFMA is reticent to ceasing its application in just one fishery. It is more likely that AFMA would need to review the policy and consult with the industry in order to determine the status of its future value across all Commonwealth fisheries.