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Torres Strait

**PZJA**

Protected Zone  
Joint Authority

## Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee

Meeting #52

June 16 2010

# CHAIR'S SUMMARY

Chair: Mr Ian Cartwright

Prepared by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority on behalf of the Torres Strait  
Protected Zone Joint Authority

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The 52<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee (TSSAC) was held at Fisheries Queensland in Brisbane on 16 June 2010.

### **Major outcomes**

The TSSAC:

- Reviewed the Annual Operational Plan for Torres Strait fisheries.
- Completed a review of draft report on cultural protocols for the Torres Strait and agreed to release the draft report for public comment, as well as to develop a stand-alone operational guide for researchers, based on the draft protocols.
- Assessed the outcomes of the completed research '*Sustainable harvest strategies for the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Fisheries*' (PI: Mr Tim Skewes, CSIRO).
- Agreed on the process to call for pre-proposals for research starting in the 2011/2012 financial year.

### **Operational Plan for Torres Strait fisheries**

The Committee conducted its annual review of the Operational Plan for Torres Strait Fisheries. In addition to making amendments to research priorities for individual fisheries, the TSSAC will be soliciting feedback on these priorities from Torres Strait working groups and committees as soon as is practicable. The Committee also decided to provide indicative rankings on the level of priority of research items. This will help separate those projects with larger timeframes such as every 3 years, from urgent need projects which need to be completed within the next financial year.

The Committee discussed ways to solicit proposals of high quality on identified priorities. It was agreed that if submitted pre-proposals did not address high priority research needs, and there is available funding, the TSSAC would actively undertake a second call and target researchers with the necessary background and expertise to submit proposals to the TSSAC for consideration.

### **Cultural Protocols for Researchers Working in the Torres Strait**

The TSSAC continued the review of the draft report '*Development of Cultural protocols for researchers working in Torres Strait*' developed by Professor Martin Nakata, and the degree to which the current document achieves the goal of the project. The Committee considered the recommendations in the document and discussed changes to procedures that would address these recommendations.

Overall, it was felt the protocols need to more clearly detail the operational aspects for researchers to follow, outlining the practical steps needed to undertake research in an appropriate manner, in adherence with clearly stated and easy to understand cultural protocols. The TSSAC will meet this need by developing a stand-alone operational guide, based on section 4 of the protocols document. This guide will be provided to researchers, with the larger cultural protocols document referenced as a source of further, more detailed, information.

The draft protocols document provided by Professor Nakata will be released for comment by Torres Strait fisheries stakeholders and researchers along with the operational guide.

### **Assessment of the research '*Sustainable harvest strategies for the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Fisheries*'.**

Using a newly developed assessment tool, the TSSAC assessed the completed research '*Sustainable harvest strategies for the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Fisheries*' (PI: Mr Tim Skewes, CSIRO). One key objective of the research, a decision support tool, is still to be delivered. Overall, the Committee assessed the research very favourably, especially with regards to the involvement and employment of Torres Strait Islanders and the value it has added to previous research.

In general, as proposals are assessed on their ability to extend and communicate to Torres Strait Islanders, the Committee would like future research agreements to specifically request community consultation be carried out before research starts and that there be appropriate dissemination of information to communities when the research finishes.

### **Current project update**

Approval is currently being sought from AFMA for seed funding for an Indigenous Commercial Fisheries Forum in October 2011 in Cairns. An organising company will be hired to seek further sponsorship and to facilitate the organisation of the forum. AFMA will continue to work with the TSSAC as this forum progresses.

The research '*Recovery of the *Holothuria scabra* (sandfish) population on Warrior Reef, Torres Strait*' (PI: Mr Tim Skewes, CSIRO) is on track with surveys completed in March 2010. A milestone report was provided to Committee members. The first three milestones, being community consultation, field surveys and provision of a report on the field surveys, have been completed and the project is on track and on budget. The project progress was viewed positively by the TSSAC.

A full revised proposal for the research project '*An Integrated Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the Torres Strait tropical rock lobster population*' (PI Plaganyi-Lloyd) was provided to AFMA. A letter addressing comments on the proposal from TSSAC 51 was also provided to Committee members. The proposal will now be submitted to AFMA for funding when 2010/2011 budgeting is finalised.

### **Funding round for the 2011/2012 financial year**

The TSSAC agreed that the process calling for pre-proposals in 2009 was effective and efficient and adopted the same process used for the 2011/2012 financial year with the following change; on receipt of pre-proposals, the TSSAC will assess the proposals for any research gaps and, where appropriate and subject to funding, actively canvass suitable research providers to submit proposals for specific high need projects.

### **TSFMAC update**

The Committee was provided with an update of TSFMAC#11 held on Thursday Island in November 2009. The TSFMAC agreed to the outline of the finfish management plan and a number of amendments to current fisheries management instruments. A PZJA Standing Committee public forum was also held in conjunction with the TSFMAC and key issues discussed included the 5-year lobster Business Plan, lobster Management Plan, and the PZJA Administrative review. A more comprehensive report from the TSFMAC meeting can be found at the PZJA website.

## **Budget**

The 2009/2010 Torres Strait research budget has been reduced in mid-year budget cuts, however, this has not effected funding of approved projects (either contracted or recommended).

The TSSAC expressed concern regarding the slow progress of the recommended research project '*An Integrated Management Strategy Evaluation (MSE) for the Torres Strait tropical rock lobster population*'. This research is viewed as having significant importance in future management of Torres Strait fisheries.

The Committee feels that it has significant expertise to effectively assess research projects based on a wide range of criteria in a transparent and objective manner<sup>1</sup>. The TSSAC feels that its recommendations should be considered by AFMA with some substance.

## **Other business**

### PNG hand collectable

Mr Mobiha was not present, however Dr Jones informed the group that Bêche de mer surveys have been carried out on the PNG side of Warrior Reef but not in collaboration with the CSIRO surveys undertaken in February 2010. The TSSAC are keen to hear more updates on the PNG surveys when they are available. Mr Mobiha, through an email communication, indicated he will seek to attend the next TSSAC meeting and will provide an update on the issue at this time.

### Coral bleaching in the Torres Strait

Observations of coral bleaching were received by TSRA and AFMA in early 2010. Coral bleaching was also observed by CSIRO during the lobster mid-season surveys in June. TSRA Land and Sea Management Unit (LSMU) have sought advice on this matter with Prof Andrew Baird from James Cook University visiting the area to investigate. The likely reasons for the bleaching include higher water temperatures and exposure at very low tides. However, no algal growth has been observed on bleached coral during the recent lobster surveys suggesting that the coral had not died and may still recover.

CSIRO representatives raised the suggestion of installing weather stations in Torres Strait to collect climate data such as water temperature at different depths. The TSSAC members (CSIRO and TSRA) will further investigate the potential for such weather stations in the area and possible location to allow for better monitoring of climate change in the Torres Strait.

### TSSAC teleconference discussion

The TSSAC discussed feedback from the teleconference of the last meeting and whether it has use in certain situations. Despite a few technical issues, teleconferencing was seen as an effective tool to use if there are few agenda items. Various video-conferencing software solutions were also discussed and will be investigated further.

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<sup>1</sup> The process for and criteria used by the TSSAC to assess research proposal can be found in the Operational Plan for Torres Strait Fisheries at [pzja.gov.au/resources/publications/fishery\\_publications](http://pzja.gov.au/resources/publications/fishery_publications).

## Seagrass monitoring in the Torres Strait

TSRA provided an update on the benthic seagrass monitoring currently taking place in the Torres Strait in the Great North East Channel by the Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI). The surveys will provide useful information to the effectiveness of dugong sanctuaries and the effects of shipping incidents on seagrass habitat.



**Mr Ian Cartwright**

**TSSAC Chair**

In attendance at TSSAC 52 were:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest</b>
Mr Ian Cartwright	Chairperson	Consultant
Dr Annabel Jones	AFMA Representative	Manager, Thursday Island
Ms Rebecca Williams	Executive Officer (AFMA)	Assistant Management Officer, Thursday Island
Dr Michael O'Neill	Scientist	Agri Science QLD, DEEDI
Dr Roland Pitcher	Scientist	CSIRO researcher
Ms Sevaly Sen	Social/Economics Member	Consultant
Dr Stephen Newman	Scientist	WA fisheries scientist
Mr Ian Jacobsen	Fisheries Queensland Representative	Fisheries Queensland Fisheries Manager
Mr Steve Hall	TSRA representative	Fisheries Policy Officer
Mr Tony Vass	Industry Representative	Ex Mackerel Licence Holder
Mr Gavin Mosby	Islander representative (proxy)	TIB Fisher (Masig) and traditional owner

## **Apologies**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Declaration of Interest</b>
Mr Augustine Mobiha	PNG Representative	PNG National Fisheries Authority
Mr Charles David	Community Fisher Representative	Iama Traditional Owner