



Queensland
Government



5 January, 2011

Dear TSPF License Holder,

Re: 20 m boat rule and associated gear restrictions in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF)

The 11th meeting of the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee (TSPMAC) was held on Wednesday 24 November 2010. The main agenda item discussed at the meeting related to the relevance of the current 20 m boat rule restriction¹ and input controls on trawl gear². Both of these issues were discussed at length by the TSPMAC including the potential benefits and consequences of amending and / or removing one or both of these provisions. The TSPMAC paper relating to this issue and the TSPMAC 11 Chairs summary has been attached to this information notice.

Following these discussions, the TSPMAC made the following recommendations:

The TSPMAC **RECOMMENDED** that:

- a) gear restrictions for the TSPF be amended to allow larger gear into the fishery in an aim to facilitate less restrictive and more efficient fishing operations amongst current TSPF license holders; and
- b) undertake a 12 month trial allowing a small number of boats greater than 20 m to operate in the fishery using larger gear to gauge the changes in efficiency of the boat configurations and the realised benefits to the TSPF;
- c) PZJA agencies determine the best processes to implement recommendation a) and b) (above) including fishing power conversions and present to the TSPMAC.

On 2 December 2010, Officers from DEEDI and AFMA held a teleconference to discuss the best way to implement the above recommendations. Subsequently, it was agreed that developmental permits were the most appropriate mechanism for the PZJA to implement recommendations (a) and (b) whilst monitoring fishing power increases in the TSPF. Under the proposal, a set number of permits would be offered by the PZJA to undertake two concurrent trials including: 1) a trial for appropriately endorsed operators wanting to use larger gear and 2) a trial for larger boats wanting to access the fishery using larger gear (open to both current license holders and

¹ Currently governed by section 3.7 of the *Torres Strait Prawn Fishery Management Plan* and Fisheries Management Notice (FMN) 47.

² Currently governed by FMN 71.

fishers not currently holding a license). In accordance with section 3.6 (2) of the *TSPF Management Plan 2008*, developmental and scientific permits can only be granted to holders of a TSPF boat license.

Due to the complexities of estimating accurate fishing power conversions, DEEDI and AFMA agreed that the most cost effective and beneficial way of allowing larger boats and / or larger gear to be used in the TSPF would be to control fishing power through an increased minimum unit holding. Unit values would remain the same meaning one effort unit would still equal one day of fishing. Minimum unit holdings for permits though would be set at a level that removes enough effort from the fishery in a given year to counter-act potential increases in fishing power. If adopted:

1. boats of 20 m or less (same as current restrictions) wanting to use gear in excess of the current restrictions *i.e.* larger gear would require a minimum holding of 275 units; and
2. boats greater than 20 m wanting to access the fishery and use larger gear will
 - a) need to lease or purchase a TSPF endorsement if they are not a current license holder and
 - b) have a minimum holding of 550 units.

No changes have been proposed to the minimum unit holding (34 units) for TSPF licence holders currently operating under the existing input controls.

By using developmental permits attached to a TSPF fishing license, no amendments would need to be made to the legislation (the Plan or FMN 71) until the trials are completed and the fishery determines whether the benefits are realized. This minimizes risks of using fishery expenditure through amending management arrangements before there is certainty that these changes will benefit the fishery. It would also enable the PZJA to implement sufficient conditions to ensure accurate information on fishing power could be collected from current TSPF boats using larger gear and larger boats not currently permitted in the TSPF.

This preliminary proposal will need to be considered by the TSPMAC out of session in early 2011. The TSPMAC will need to agree on the processes for undertaking these trials, include the best methods for controlling fishing power, the number of boats to undertake the trials and period of time the trial will run for. Once a process has been agreed to, the proposal will need to be presented to the PZJA Standing Committee for consideration.

If you have any questions regarding the issue please contact Lisa Cocking, Senior Management Officer, AFMA on 02 6225 5451.

Yours sincerely

Adam Wade
A/g Manager
Torres Strait Prawn Fishery