



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority



**HAND COLLECTABLE WORKING GROUP
MEETING NO. 5**

CHAIRS SUMMARY

29-30 NOVEMBER 2011

PEARLS BUILDING, THURSDAY ISLAND

CHAIR: MR ALIFERETI TAWAKE

The 5th meeting of the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group (HCWG) was held on 29–30th November 2011 at the Pearls Building, Thursday Island.

Major Outcomes

- 1) The CSIRO sandfish survey results from Warrior Reef were presented to the HCWG showing some signs of recovery, however overall abundance was not found to have increased from previous surveys.
- 2) PhD candidate Alifereti Tawake presented two Community-based Hand Collectable Fisheries Harvest Strategies developed by Erub and Warraber communities.
- 3) The HCWG agreed to recommend to the Torres Strait Fisheries Management Advisory Committee that a 15 tonne Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for black teatfish be introduced to be fished for a maximum of one month during the Tropical Rock Lobster hookah season. This will be provisional on a quota monitoring system (including mandatory reporting of catch) being agreed to by the PZJA agencies based on options presented to the HCWG by the Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC) members with assistance from TSRA.
- 4) The HCWG agreed to recommend to the Torres Strait Fisheries Management Advisory Committee that blackfish and deepwater redfish be removed from the current 80 tonne 'other species' TAC and introduce individual 5 and 25 tonne TACs respectively for these species.
- 5) The HCWG considered the current restriction on use of hookah in the Beche de mer fishery and agreed to review the ban in twelve months when more information from the two current developmental permits allowing for the use of hookah gear is available.
- 6) The HCWG considered the current restriction for Traditional Inhabitant (TIB) licence holders in the Beche de mer fishery to less than 7m vessels. The IFAC members requested more time to consider the views of community members and fishers on the current restriction before the HCWG makes a recommendation on this management arrangement.

Fishery Update: Beche de mer, Trochus, Pearl shell

2010 activity and catch in all hand collectable fisheries is insignificant. There has been significantly increased activity in the Beche de mer fishery in 2011 to date where substantial numbers of white teatfish (>13 tonne) and prickly redfish (>10 tonne) have been collected by operations using hookah gear under development permits.

Fisheries Management Instruments (FMI)

Two FMI's have recently been implemented relevant to hand collectables including FMI No.6 prohibiting the take of coral and live rock and FMI No.7; replacing Fisheries Management Notice No. 69 to include the genus *Pteria* in the pearl shell fishery.

A business proposal for a live coral collecting business was also presented to the HCWG. The Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC) members were unwilling to endorse this business plan that conflicts with FMI 6 and views recorded at the previous HCWG meetings without consultation with the former members.

Fishery Strategic Assessment Update

Torres Strait Beche de mer Fishery export approval has recently been issued to the fishery (valid until June 2014) with the conditions and recommendations. An Annual Status Report for the Torres Strait Trochus Fishery is currently out for public comment. The Working Group agreed to ensure that information on the strategic assessment process and resultant export approval is communicated to fishers.



2010 Sandfish Surveys

Abundance survey of sandfish on Warrior Reef carried out by CSIRO in 2010 found densities of sandfish were at similar levels to 2004 surveys, and ~80% less than observed in 1995/96; at which time the population was considered to be overexploited. However, there were some signs of population recovery with juveniles showing a large increase in abundance compared to 2004 and larger range of size distribution of individuals than previous surveys. A sandfish experimental survey is recommended to investigate possible survey bias due to burrowing by sandfish.

Reef Gardens Assessment Update

The HCWG noted progress of a reef gardens assessment research project being conducted by CSIRO. This project will collate information to assist traditional owners in identifying suitable locations, and stocking rates for reef gardens for valuable hand collectable species including sandfish, black teatfish and trochus in Torres Strait. Reef gardens are identified as important components in the two community based harvest strategies developed by Warraber and Erub communities.

Sandfish Experimental Catch Survey

Experimental catch surveys for sandfish at Warrior Reef are planned for February 2012 by CSIRO. This experiment will include a small number of Islander fishers collecting sandfish using normal commercial fishing conditions over a limited period to determine catch rates. The catch rates will be compared with those from the mid-1990s when the fishery was at its peak and fish stocks were considered to be at unfished levels. The catch will be restricted to less than 2 tonnes to minimise risk to recovery of sandfish on Warrior Reef.

CSIRO require the assistance of the IFAC members, TSRA and Traditional Inhabitant fishers to identify community fishers to participate in the experiment.

Hand Collectable Decision Support Tool

CSIRO have implemented a number of changes to the Decision Support Tool developed by them in 2010. The tool was developed to assist managers and communities in identifying effective management strategies by mapping out abundance and standing stock of each species of Beche de mer and Trochus in Torres Strait on individual reefs. The updated Decision Support Tool was presented to the HCWG and is now available on CD.

Sea Cucumber Species Guide

Tim Skewes and associates from CSIRO have developed a Sea Cucumber Species Guide providing photo identification of beche de mer species, identifying characteristics, species distribution and environmental and habitat preferences. AFMA agreed to work with CSIRO to progress the species guide into a user-friendly format with limited copies available for distribution to fisher and wider distribution available on the PZJA website.

Hookah Depth Loggers

Fine scale effort information has been captured as part of two developmental permits issued for the use of hookah gear in the Beche de mer fishery. The dive information collected includes average depth per collection species along with catch rate information such as the numbers of individuals collected per minute. The HCWG noted that repetitive sampling of this kind of information could be used as a basic index of abundance.

Community Based Harvest Strategies Warraber & Erub

Community-based Hand Collectable Fisheries Harvest Strategies have been finalized with the communities from Erub and Warraber as part of a project by CSIRO researcher Alifereti Tawake. The strategies details desired co-management arrangements, harvesting practices and protocols identified by the communities. Further development of these harvest strategies resulting in implementation in these communities and development of harvest strategies for other Torres Strait communities will be investigated at future HCWG meetings.



Beche de mer Fishery Boat Length Restrictions

The HCWG discussed the relevance and applicability of the 7m boat length restriction currently in place for the Beche de mer fishery. The HCWG agreed that a decision could not be made on removing this restriction until TSRA and the IFAC had consulted with those communities affected by a decision. The restriction will be reviewed in twelve months.

Beche de mer Fishery Future Management Options

The HCWG discussed possible future development and management options for the Torres Strait Beche de mer fishery based around recommendations of Skewes *et al.* (2010) from the 2010 Torres Strait Hand Collectables survey. The HCWG agreed that daily reporting of fishing activity and catch was essential for monitoring quotas and would be mandatory for removing restrictions in the fishery. The HCWG agreed to an introduction of a 15 tonne Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for black teatfish available for a maximum of one month during the Tropical Rock Lobster hookah season provisional on a quota monitoring system (including mandatory reporting of catch) being agreed to by the PZJA agencies. Options provided from communities will be presented to the next HCWG meeting by the Indigenous Fisheries Advisory Committee (IFAC) members with assistance from TSRA for consideration.

The HCWG also agreed to recommend that blackfish and deepwater redfish be removed from the current 80 tonne 'other species' TAC and introduce individual 5 and 25 tonne TACs respectively for these species.

Compliance Update

There have been no known domestic or foreign compliance issues relevant to hand collectable fisheries since the last HCWG meeting.

Torres Strait Scientific Advisory Committee update

A summary of the major activities of the TSSAC was provided including the Hand Collectable fishery research priorities identified in the 2011 Annual Operational Plan for Torres Strait Fisheries. The HCWG considered the research priorities and agreed that there were no additional priorities for the hand collectable fisheries to recommend to the TSSAC at this time.

2011 Fisheries Bilateral Meeting

Key discussions at that 2011 Bilaterals meeting with regard to hand collectable fisheries included support to maintain the closure for the Beche de mer fishery in PNG and the need for collaborative research on Hand Collectables.

HCWG Membership

The HCWG agreed to renew the expired HCWG memberships whilst noting the need to identify a replacement chair for the Group.

The IFAC members present felt that an additional IFAC member present at the meeting would aid in the effectiveness of the group by providing greater breadth of Traditional Inhabitant representation. It was considered likely that an additional IFAC member would be present at HCWG meetings when the final appointments of IFAC members was completed. Up to six Traditional Inhabitant members may sit on a Working Group.

Next Meeting

The next HCWG meeting is planned for the first half of 2012.



The following members and observers were in attendance at the Torres Strait Hand Collectables Working Group:

Name	Role	Declaration of Interest
Mr Alifereti Tawake	Temporary Chairperson	Researcher
Mr Adam Leatherbarrow	Executive Officer (AFMA)	AFMA Senior Fisheries Management Officer
Dr Annabel Jones	AFMA	AFMA Fisheries Manager
Mr Dimas Toby	IFAC	IFAC member
Mr Kiwat Lui	IFAC	IFAC member
Mr Shane Fava	TSRA*	
Mr Grant Leeworthy	Tasmania Seafoods (PHONE LINK UP)	Buyers boat license holder
Mr Nyall Ledger	TVH Fisher	TVH Fisher, buyers boat license holder
Mr Tim Skewes	CSIRO	Researcher
Mr Lyndon Peddell	Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol Compliance*	Domestic Compliance officer
Mr Ian Jacobsen	Fisheries Queensland (PHONE LINK UP)	

Observers

Name	Role	Declaration of Interest
Mr John Marrington	AFMA Foreign Compliance*	Foreign Compliance officer
Ms Alicia Sabatino	AFMA*	Observer

Apologies

Name	Role	Declaration of Interest
Mr Steve Hall	TSRA	
Mr Neville Nakata	TSRA	
Mr Kenny Bedford	Interim Chair	

*Day 1 Only

