

TORRES STRAIT PRAWN MANAGEMENT ADVSIORY COMMITTEE	Meeting No. 2 19-20 September 2006
OBSERVER PROGRAM 2005 Trip Report	Agenda Item No. 7.1

THE TSPMAC RECOMMENDS

That the PZJA

- (a) **NOTES** the 2005 trip report for the observer program in the fishery (Attachment 1); and
- (b) **REQUESTS** that trip reports from 2006 trips for the program are released as soon as possible to allow the TSPMAC time to review the objectives of the program prior to the commencement of the 2007 season.

BACKGROUND

The Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF) observer program commenced in March 2005. The program was initiated in response to numerous references to an observer program in the Bycatch Action Plan (BAP) as the only feasible way to collect the required data/information for the fishery to address the provisions of the *EPBC Act 1999* and retain export approval, and it is also specifically referred to in the Strategic Assessment recommendations for the fishery.

DISCUSSION

A report for the 2005 season has been prepared by the observer section in AFMA. There were a number of delays in the finalisation of the report due to staff movements and a delay in entering data from some of the observer trips.

The report provides detail on:

- the objectives and procedures of the program;
- observer effort in the fishery;
- catch taken in the fishery;
- data collection;
- environmental observations; and
- breaches of permit conditions.

Observers undertook 11 voyages aboard 10 vessels between March 2005 and September 2005. 357 shots were observed out of a total of 373shots. This accounted for 115 observed sea days.

Collection of wildlife observations, vessel activity and catch data which is not available through official logbooks is the main focus of the observer program. In particular, wildlife interaction with threatened, endangered and protected (TEP) species was reported for the observed shots. The fate and life status of turtles, sea snakes and seahorses was recorded for each shot. The Observer Reports notes that all 5 turtles caught were released alive and that the majority of the sea snakes appeared to be released unharmed. The fate of seahorses and pipefish is less certain.

The observers also recorded the fate and life status of other discarded bycatch. There were 138 interactions with Tropical Rock Lobster (TRL) recorded during observer trips in 2005. Only one of these was recorded as being retained, with 133 discarded alive with the life status of the remaining four recorded as unknown.

Catch composition, length frequency and sex information of the three main prawn species (Brown Tiger, Endeavour and Red Spot King) was also recorded and analysed as part of the report.

The report also noted that all vessels complied with MARPOL regulations and no breaches of permit conditions were reported during the trips.

MAC members are asked to review the report and provide comments to AFMA representative from the Observer Section (Steve Auld), who will be attending TSPMAC 2.

Attachment 1

Report of Observer Operations from 2005 in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery

TORRES STRAIT PRAWN MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE	Meeting No. 2 19-20 September 2006
OBSERVER PROGRAM 2006 Program update	Agenda Item No. 7.2

THE TSPMAC RECOMMENDS

That the PZJA

- (a) **NOTES** the activity in the observer program in the fishery for 2006 to date.

BACKGROUND

Observers have been deployed into the fishery during the 2006 season in order to meet recommendations arising from the Strategic Assessment process by the Department of the Environment and Heritage and to provide data for the fishery to assist in making management decisions.

DISCUSSION

The observer program budgeted for 180 observer days in the fishery for the 2006 season. This equates to approximately 2 ½ % coverage for the fishery (based on 6,867 allocated days to the Australian industry). As of 1 September 2006, 135 of these days have been achieved, which represents less than 2% of all allocated fishing days.

Table 1 provides details of the vessels that have participated in the observer program for the 2005 and 2006 seasons. A total of 16 vessels have participated, with four of those vessels participating in both the 2005 and 2006 seasons.

Table 1 – Vessels that have participated in the Observer program during 2005 and 2006

Vessel	2005	2006
Impact	X	X
Valkyrie Voyager	X	
K Maree II	X	X
Maggie Jo	X	
Ida G	X	X
Faysea G	X	
Judy B	X	X
Cassandra	X	
Signet	X	
Gold Coaster	X	
Aquarius 6		X
Ankh Cross		X
Danny B		X
Violetta		X
Crystal Enterprise		X
Relentless		X

Observers have expressed their thanks for the cooperation of vessel crews involved in the program. Also, a number of skippers and crews have provided positive feedback on both the program and the observers themselves.

One observer assisted industry in trialing the effectiveness of bycatch reduction devices in the fishery during 2006. A formal written report on the trial will be included as part of the overall 2006 Observer Report. However, an update on the trial will be provided verbally at the TSPMAC2.

Steve Auld from AFMA's Observer Section will provide members with an update of operations in the fishery for the 2006 season at the meeting. Any feedback on the program should be provided to Steve at the meeting for consideration in the development of the observer program for the 2007 season.