



**Australian Government**

**Australian Fisheries Management Authority**

# Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery

**Management Arrangements Booklet  
2023-24**

Current as of November 2023

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# OVERVIEW OF TRL FISHERY MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

<b>Species Names</b>	Tropical Rock Lobster   TRL   Crayfish   Kaiar   <i>Panulirus ornatus</i>		
<b>Management System</b>	The TRL Fishery is managed through a <b>Quota Management System</b> under the <u><a href="#">Torres Strait Fisheries (Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster (Kaiar)) Management Plan 2018</a></u>  Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector: 662,016 quota units      Transferrable Vessel Holder (TVH) sector: 337,981 quota units		
<b>Licence requirements</b>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <b>TIB sector:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a <b>TIB</b> licence;</li> <li>• with a Tropical Rock Lobster [CR] fishery entry; and</li> <li>• unused <b>quota units</b>, held individually or by the TSRA on behalf of the TIB sector</li> </ul> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <b>TVH) sector:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a <b>TVH</b> licence;</li> <li>• with a Tropical Rock Lobster [CR] fishery entry; and</li> <li>• unused <b>quota units</b></li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table> <p>If you are using a <b>primary/tender</b> operation in either sector you also need a <b>Processor-Carrier A licence (TPC-A)</b> to carry and process catch from your tenders.</p>	<b>TIB sector:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a <b>TIB</b> licence;</li> <li>• with a Tropical Rock Lobster [CR] fishery entry; and</li> <li>• unused <b>quota units</b>, held individually or by the TSRA on behalf of the TIB sector</li> </ul>	<b>TVH) sector:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a <b>TVH</b> licence;</li> <li>• with a Tropical Rock Lobster [CR] fishery entry; and</li> <li>• unused <b>quota units</b></li> </ul>
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<b>Fishery rules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fishery season runs from <b>1 December until 30 September</b></li> <li>• <b>Collection only by hand</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Handheld implements (e.g. spear, scoop net) may be used</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The use of <b>SCUBA and underwater propulsion is prohibited</b></li> <li>• The use of <b>hookah gear is prohibited from 1 December – 31 January</b> and during <b>moon-tide hookah closures</b> (see Appendix 1 for the 2023-24 closures)</li> <li>• <b>Lobsters can be tailed</b> (but you cannot remove the meat from the shell)</li> <li>• <b>Minimum size limits:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Tail must be 115 mm or greater</li> <li>○ Carapace must be 90 mm or greater</li> </ul> </li> <li>• You must land all your commercial catch to a <b>licensed fish receiver</b></li> <li>• Fishing <b>boats must be 20 m or less</b> in length                         <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A boat replacement policy applies to TVH licences</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Each licenced boat must display its unique <b>boat mark (e.g. TRAWQ001)</b></li> </ul>		



# 1 Fishery Rules

## 1.1 Which licence do I need?

- 1) To fish commercially in the TRL Fishery **Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector** you need:
  - a. a TIB TRL licence for each boat that you operate;
  - b. a Processor-Carrier Class A licence (TPC-A), if you are using a primary/tender operation; and
  - c. unused TRL quota units (held individually or held by the TSRA on behalf of the TIB sector).
- 2) To fish in the TRL Fishery **Transferrable Vessel Holder (TVH) sector** you need:
  - a. a TVH TRL licence for each boat that you operate;
  - b. a Processor-Carrier A licence (TPC-A), if you are using a primary/tender operation;
  - c. unused TRL quota units (held individually); and
  - d. the person in charge of the boat must hold a Master Fisherman's licence.
- 3) If you are receiving commercial catch of TRL, a Torres Strait Fish Receiver licence is required (see section 3.1 for more information on the Fish Receiver System).

To learn more about licensing requirements, refer to the [2021 Guide to Licensing Arrangements in the Torres Strait](#). To apply for a licence contact AFMA Licensing on 1300 723 621, or email [licensing@afma.gov.au](mailto:licensing@afma.gov.au).

You can also check the *Torres Strait Fisheries Public Licence Register* to see who holds a licence in all Torres Strait Fisheries, available here: <https://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/concession-holders-conditions> or by contacting AFMA.

## 1.2 Relevant Legislation

To fish commercially in the TRL Fishery you must comply with all requirements detailed in legislation and licence conditions.

Key legislation that applies in this fishery includes:

- the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster (Kaiar)) Management Plan 2018*;
- the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Tropical Rock Lobster) Management Instrument 2018*; and
- the *Torres Strait Fisheries (Furnishing of Logbooks) Instrument 2023*.

The fishery is managed in accordance with the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* and the *Torres Strait Fisheries Regulations 1985*, which give effect to the fisheries elements of the *Torres Strait Treaty* (The Treaty between Australia and the Independent State of Papua New Guinea

concerning Sovereignty and Maritime Boundaries in the area between the two Countries, including the area known as the Torres Strait, and Related Matters 1985).

## 1.3 Traditional Fishing

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You do not need a commercial fishing licence for traditional fishing

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You do not need a commercial fishing licence (i.e. a TIB licence) for traditional fishing.

Traditional fishing is the taking of living natural resources (including fish, turtles and dugong) by traditional inhabitants for their own, or their dependants' consumption, or for use in the course of other traditional activities. Product taken in the course of traditional fishing cannot be for sale. Torres Strait traditional inhabitants of both Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Australia may undertake traditional fishing activities in both the Australian and PNG waters of the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ).

## 1.4 Recreational fishing

Recreational fishing (fishing that is not for traditional or commercial purposes) is managed by the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) under the *Queensland Fisheries Act 1994*.

More information on recreational fishing can be found on QDAF's website at <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries/recreational>.

QDAF also manages fishing charter boats and aquaculture in the Torres Strait.

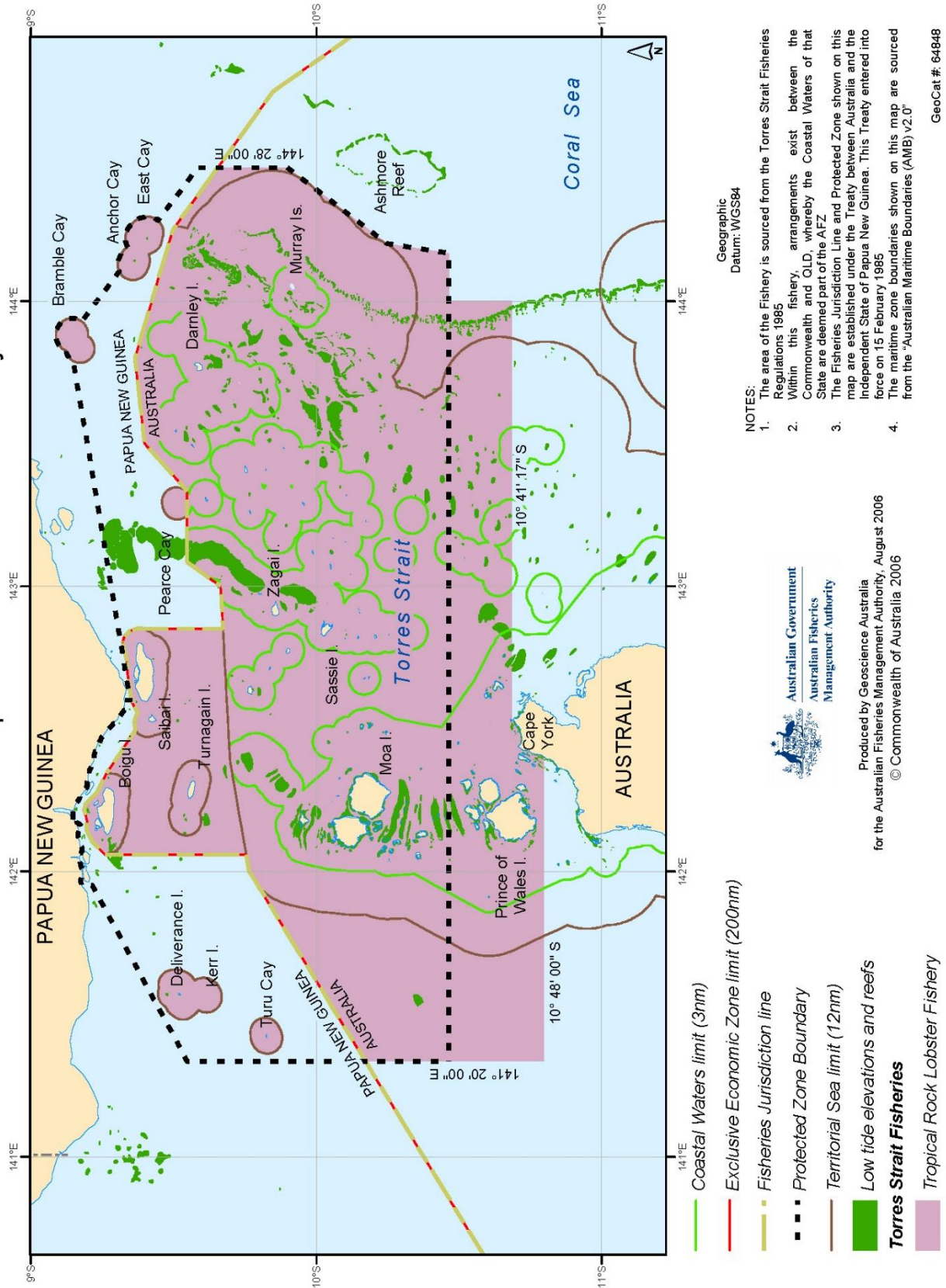
If you have any questions regarding recreational fishing rules and regulations, charter licencing or aquaculture please contact QDAF.

Contact details are provided in section 5 of this booklet.



# 1.5 Where can I fish?

## Torres Strait Fisheries Area of the Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery



## 1.6 Permitted species

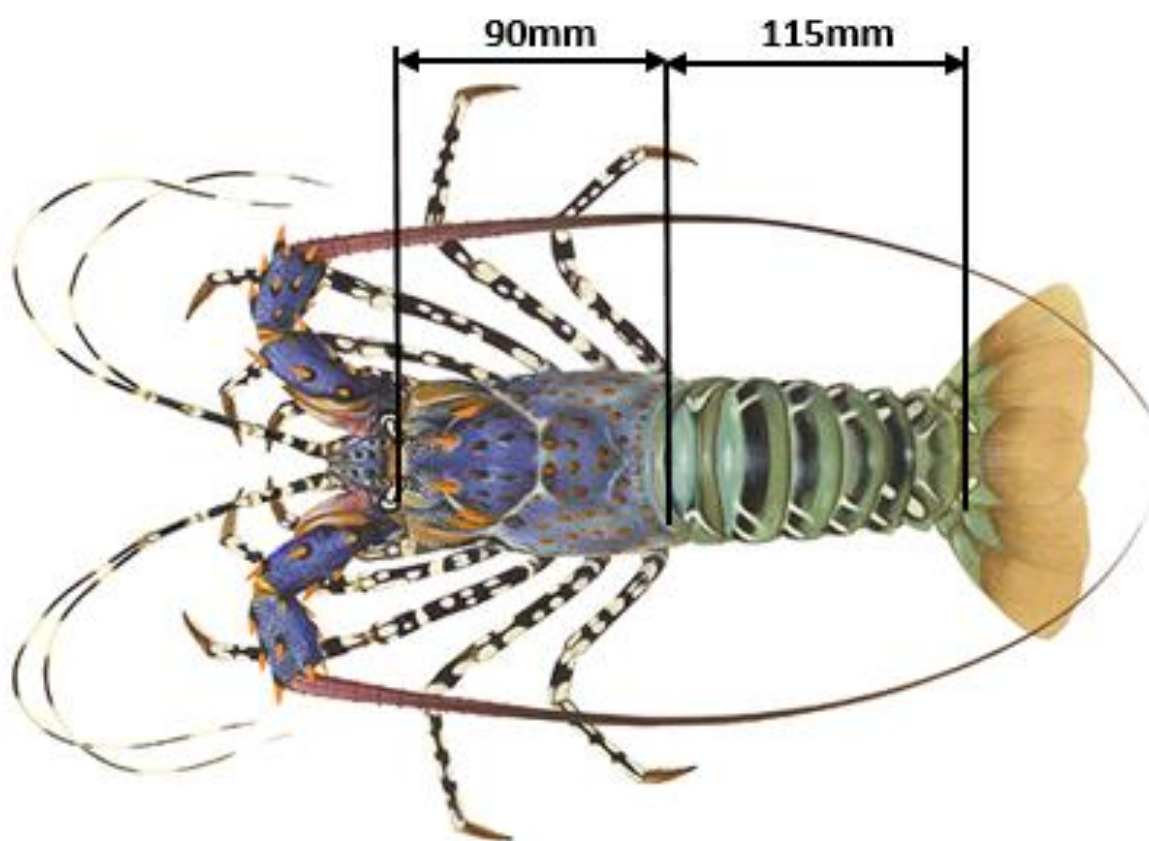
All *Panulirus* spp. lobster species may be taken in the TRL Fishery. The main species is the Tropical Rock Lobster (*Panulirus ornatus*).

## 1.7 Size limits

Minimum size limits apply in the TRL Fishery to allow tropical rock lobsters to reach maturity and complete their breeding cycle before they are caught.

The length of the carapace of the tropical rock lobster must be 90 millimetres or greater when measured as illustrated in the figure below.

The length of the tail of the tropical rock lobster must be 115 millimetres or greater when measured as illustrated in the figure below. When measuring, the tail must be laid flat with firm downward pressure placed on the middle segment of the tail.



AFMA have free crayfish measures available to assist fishers as a guide in meeting minimum size limit requirements. Please contact the AFMA Thursday Island Office to request one.



## 1.8 Gear restrictions

### You can take Tropical Rock Lobster

- by hand or using a handheld implement such as a spear or scoop net.
- using hookah gear during permitted periods only – see section 1.8.1 below.

### You cannot take Tropical Rock Lobster

- using equipment that allows breathing underwater such as SCUBA. Hookah gear is exempt from this prohibition at certain times of the year.
- using mechanical equipment which allows for underwater propulsion, such as underwater scooters.
- using diving equipment (face mask and fins) at night (between 1900 hours and 0600 hours Australian Eastern Standard Time). Diving equipment must be stowed and secured during this time.
- using hookah gear outside of permitted periods – see section 1.8.1 below.

### 1.8.1 Hookah gear restrictions

- You cannot use, possess or have under your control, hookah gear on board your boat between 1 October and 31 January each year.
- You cannot use, possess or have under your control, hookah gear on board your boat during specified moontide hookah closure periods. A calendar showing the moontide hookah closure periods for the 2023-24 fishing season is provided in Appendix 1 of this booklet and on the PZJA website.

If you want to fish (e.g. free dive, lamp fish) during hookah closure periods, all hookah gear must be removed from your boat during the hookah closure periods. Holding tanks are to be aerated through other means.

## 1.9 When can I go fishing?

The TRL Fishery season is open from **1 December until 30 September** or until available quota units have been caught. Further information on the quota management system is provided in section 2.1 of this booklet.

## 1.10 Processing restrictions

- You cannot carry Tropical Rock Lobster that has been processed by removing the meat from its shell.
- You can tail lobster.

## 1.11 What size boat can I use?

Your fishing boat may not be longer than 20 metres in length\*

If you are a TIB or TVH operator, your boat may not be longer than 20 metres in length.

\* If you are a **TVH operator**, the following conditions apply if you want to replace your boat:

- a vessel measuring six metres or less should be replaced by a vessel measuring six metres or less;
- a vessel measuring between six metres and 10 metres in length should be replaced by a vessel measuring 10 metres or less;
- a vessel greater than 10 metres and less than 14 metres in length may be replaced by a vessel of 14 metres or less; and
- where the existing vessel is greater than 14 metres in length and prior approval has been given for a replacement vessel, as far as practicable, the replacement vessel should be of the same size as the existing vessel or less.

The length of a boat is determined by measuring the distance between a vertical line passing through the foremost part of the hull and a vertical line passing through the aftermost part of the hull in a horizontal plane. This includes the length of any appendage, which effectively increases the length of the hull, but excluding the length of any anchor rail, bowsprit or similar appendage.

## 1.12 Unique boat marks

Your licenced boat must clearly display its unique boat mark at all times according to the specifications below and depending on the size of your boat. Boat marks are a unique combination of letters and/or numbers (e.g. TRAWQ001) assigned to your fishing boat licence.

Length of boat	Height of letters or numbers	Width of letters or numbers
Under 6 metres	100mm	10-15mm
Under 10 metres, but greater than 6 metres	200mm	20-25mm
Under 25 metres, but greater than 10 metres	300mm	35-40mm
Greater than 25 metres	450mm	60-65mm



## 2 Quota and TACs

### 2.1 The quota management system

The *Torres Strait Fisheries (Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster (Kaiar)) Management Plan 2018* implements a quota management system in the TRL Fishery.

A total of 999,997 quota units were granted under the TRL Management Plan.

- 662,016 quota units (or 66.2%) were allocated to the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) comprising:
  - 562,000 units to hold on behalf of the traditional inhabitant sector; and
  - 100,016 units for the three primary/tender TVH licence packages it holds.
- 337,981 quota units (or 33.8%) were allocated to holders of the remaining TVH licences.

Individual quota units are tradeable (they can be temporarily or permanently transferred).

The maximum total number of quota units under the TRL Management Plan is fixed and will not change from fishing season to fishing season. However, the amount of catch that may be taken against each quota unit will change as the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) changes each fishing season. Once a TAC is determined by the Minister, the value of each quota unit is calculated. This is done by dividing the TAC (in kilograms) by the total number of quota units (999,997). The result of this calculation is the weight value in kilograms of whole tropical rock lobster that can be taken for each quota unit held. If the TAC is increased, the weight of lobster you may catch for each quota unit will also increase proportionally.

**For example:** if the TAC is 500,000 kg, each quota unit will equal 0.500 kg.

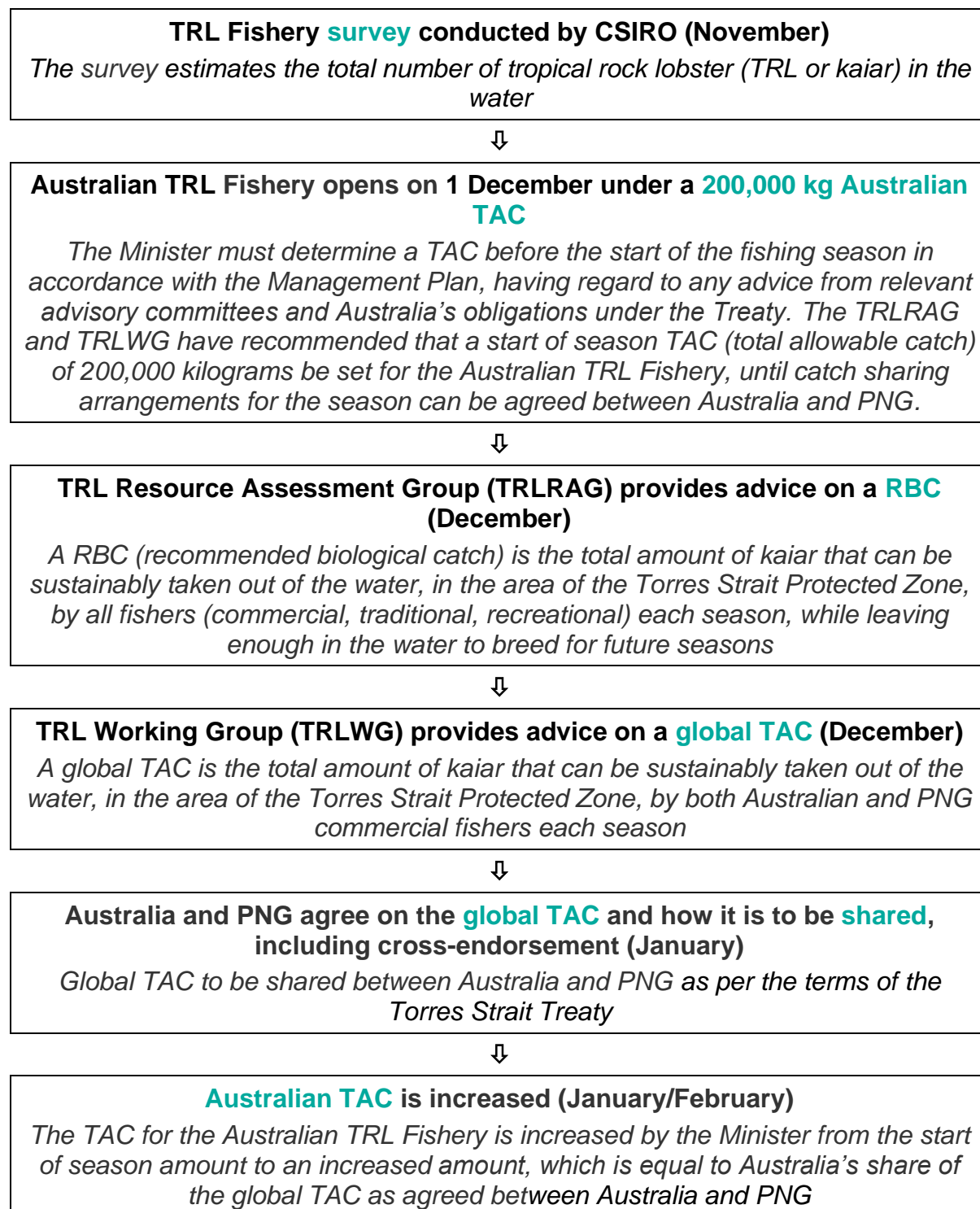
When the traditional inhabitant sector or an individual TVH licence holder has taken their proportion of the TAC they must stop fishing for the remainder of the season.

A Guide to the TRL Management Plan (and the quota management system) can be found on the PZJA website:

[Guide to the \*Torres Strait Fisheries \(Quotas for Tropical Rock Lobster \(Kaiar\)\) Management Plan 2018\*](#)

## 2.2 How is the TAC set?

The flow diagram outlines how the TAC for the TRL Fishery is set prior to the start of each fishing season and increased to the final amount.



## 2.3 How much can I catch?

### 2.3.1 If you are fishing under a TIB licence

- 662,016 quota units have been allocated to the TSRA to be held on behalf of Traditional Inhabitants. These quota units are available to be fished exclusively by TIB licence holders.
- When all the quota units held by the TSRA have been caught, TIB licence holders will no longer be permitted to fish commercially in the TRL Fishery.
- TIB licence holders will be provided with a notice by the Minister when this occurs.
- Catch disposal records from the Fish Receiver System will be used to account for TIB sector catches against the TSRA's quota holdings (see section 3.1 for more information on the Fish Receiver System).
- AFMA will monitor the TIB sector catches against the TSRA's quota holdings, and provide regular catch reports to TIB licence holders on the remaining catch that is available to be taken. These reports will be made available on the PZJA website and sent to TIB licence holders by email and SMS where licence holders have these details registered with AFMA.
- Licence holders can also contact the AFMA Thursday Island Office to seek an update on catches at any time throughout the season.

### 2.3.2 If you are fishing under a TVH licence

- 337,981 quota units have been allocated to individual TVH licence holders. These quota units are only available to be fished by the individual that holds them.
- When all the quota units (including any leased units) held by a TVH licence holder have been caught, the licence holder will no longer be permitted to fish commercially in the TRL Fishery.
- It is the responsibility of each TVH licence holder to monitor their catches against the quota units that they hold.
- Catch disposal records from the Fish Receiver System will be used to account for TVH licence holders' catches against their quota unit holdings (see section 3.1 for more information on the Fish Receiver System).
- AFMA will provide regular catch reports detailing the total catch by the TVH sector (not individual catches). These reports will be made available on the PZJA website and sent to TVH licence holders by email and SMS where licence holders have these details registered with AFMA.
- TVH licence holders will also be able to check their quota holdings at any stage throughout the season by registering for GOFish, AFMA's e-licensing system. Licence holders can do this by contacting the AFMA Licensing team. Contact details are provided in section 5 of this booklet.
- Licence holders can also contact the AFMA Thursday Island office to seek an update on catches at any time throughout the season.

## 2.4 Catch sharing with Papua New Guinea

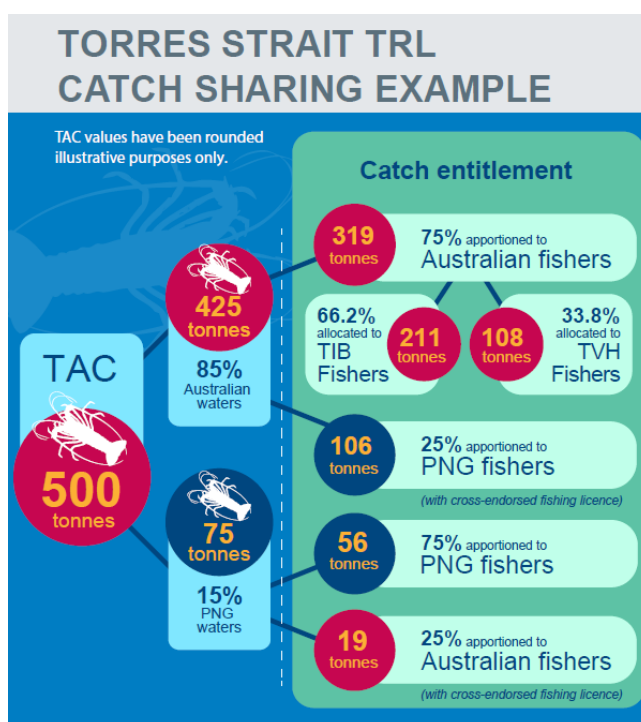
Australia and PNG established the TSPZ under the Torres Strait Treaty (the Treaty) with the principal purpose to acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of the traditional inhabitants of both Parties including their traditional fishing and free movement. A further purpose is to protect and preserve the marine environment and indigenous fauna and flora in and in the vicinity of the TSPZ. A range of subsidiary obligations and rights exist under the Treaty. Relevantly Australia and PNG commit under the Treaty to co-operate in the conservation management and optimum utilisation of Protected Zone commercial fisheries in so far that the achievement of the purposes for the establishment of the TSPZ are not prejudiced.

The Treaty recognises the rights of both countries to Protected Zone commercial fisheries. This recognition is implemented through cooperative management and catch sharing provisions of Part 5 of the Treaty. Since the Treaty was ratified, Australia and PNG have entered into formal arrangements under Article 22 to cooperatively manage six fisheries, referred to as 'Article 22 fisheries', including for tropical rock lobster.

With regards to the commercial catch of TRL, each year Australia and PNG:

- 1) Agree on the global TAC and how it is to be apportioned between Australian and PNG waters.
  - a. It is agreed that 85% of the global TAC is to be taken in Australian waters and 15% of the global TAC is to be taken in PNG waters. This is based on the agreed distribution of TRL in the area of the TSPZ.
- 2) Agree on cross-endorsement apportionments and preferential entitlement.
  - b. Under Article 23(4) of the Treaty, each country is entitled to fish for 25% of the other country's TAC apportionment in the waters of the other country, unless otherwise agreed. This is commonly referred to as cross-endorsement.
  - c. Under Article 25 of the Treaty, where Australia and/or PNG does not itself propose to take all the TAC to which it is entitled, either in its own area of waters or that of the other country, the other country will have preferential entitlement to that share. This must be agreed between Australia and PNG.

The PZJA have agreed that subject to further consultation with stakeholders, the preferred arrangement for utilising Australia's cross-endorsement catch entitlement within PNG's waters is to not seek cross-endorsement of Australian boats in PNG waters but rather pursue a preferential entitlement arrangement under Article 25 of the Treaty. In effect this means, Australia will seek to take a proportion of PNG's cross-endorsement catch entitlement within Australian waters equivalent to Australia's cross-endorsement catch entitlement in PNG's waters. Conversely, PNG would be entitled to take Australia's cross-endorsement catch entitlement in PNG's waters. Under such an arrangement, Australia's cross-endorsement catch entitlement would be shared across all Australian licence holders in both sectors of the TRL Fishery



## 3 Monitoring

### 3.1 The Fish Receiver System

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It is a condition of your fishing licence that you land your catch to a licensed Fish Receiver

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A fish receiver is a licenced person who is required to weigh and record a fisher's catch when it is unloaded. A list of fish receivers can be found on the Torres Strait Public Licence Register.

Fish receivers must record catch data using either the paper system by filling in a Catch Disposal Record (CDR) or electronically (e-CDRs). For more information about how to get set up using electronic CDRs, please contact AFMA Licensing.

The data provided through the Fish Receiver System is used to ensure commercial catches do not exceed the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) or individual quota holdings in a given fishing season.

#### 3.1.1 Checklist for fishers

When you land your catch you should make sure that:

Your catch must be weighed and reported in a catch disposal record (CDR) by a licenced fish receiver when it is unloaded (this does not include the catch you keep temporarily in cages or traps at sea (e.g. live kairi in sea cages) before it is unloaded).

When you land your catch you must:

- Ensure the person weighing the fish and completing the CDR is a licenced fish receiver or a Registered Agent for a licenced fish receiver.
- Have your fishing licence details ready.
- If the fish receiver using paper-based CDRs: Verify the details of the licence and your landed catching being recorded on the CDR by signing and dating the *Fisher Details* section of the paper CDR. Keep the pink carbon copy of the CDR from the receiver.
- If the fish receiver is using e-CDRs: Provide your name, fishing licence number and boat symbol to the fish receiver. You will receive an SMS or email notification from AFMA with details of your landed catch once the CDR has been submitted by the fish receiver.

Giving information about where you went fishing (fishing area), what method you used (e.g. hookah or free dive), or how many people fished from your boat is voluntary, but is very important information for managing Torres Strait Fisheries sustainably. Please consider providing this important and useful information under Part B of the CDR.

## 3.1.2 Checklist for fish receivers

When you receive commercial catch from a fisher you must:

- ✓ Nominate your fish receiver premises with AFMA and only receive fish at the premises nominated on your fish receiver licence. You can nominate more than one premises.
- ✓ Have your paper-based TDB02 Torres Strait Fisheries Catch Disposal Record (CDR) book, or your GoFish account ready to enter your eCDRs. For more information about or to get set up for eCDRs please contact AFMA Licensing.
- ✓ Check whether a CDR has already been filled out by another fish receiver. Do not complete a CDR if one has already been completed.
- ✓ Ensure the fisher you are receiving catch from has a current fishing licence.
- ✓ Ensure the fish you are receiving are of legal size and do not receive any no-take species.
- ✓ Record the fisher's name and licence information correctly. No nicknames please.
- ✓ Record the weight by species as soon as you receive the fish. You need to weigh the fish and **fill in a CDR immediately after you receive the fish**.
- ✓ Ask the fisher if they will provide voluntary information about their fishing trip. Providing information about where they went fishing (fishing area), methods they used (e.g. hookah or free dive), or how many people fished from their boat is very important information for managing Torres Strait Fisheries sustainably.
- ✓ If using paper-based CDRs:
  - ✓ Make sure the licensed fisher (or their authorised agent) verifies their licence details, the record of catch and signs the *Fisher Details* section of the CDR.
  - ✓ sign and date the *Receiver Details* section of the CDR showing your name and licence details.
  - ✓ Give the fisher the pink copy of the CDR.
  - ✓ Send the white copy of the CDR **to AFMA within 3 days** of receiving the fish.
  - ✓ Keep your own green copy of the CDR for 5 years.
- ✓ If using eCDRs: Make sure you record the fisher's/authorised agent's mobile number or email (if their name is not in the drop-down list) so they receive a notification once you have submitted the eCDR.

More information about the Fish Receiver System is available on the PZJA website or by contacting the AFMA Thursday Island office. You can download a copy of the Checklist for Fisher and Fish Receivers from the PZJA website:

[Checklist for Fishers and Fisher Receivers](#)



## 3.2 Which logbook should I use?

TVH fishers must use the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Daily Fishing Log - TRL04.

TIB fishers do not have to use logbooks but can assist in the management of the fishery by voluntarily completing the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Daily Fishing Log - TRL04.

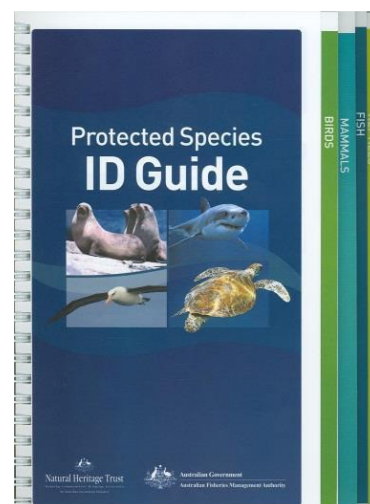
For more information about logbooks contact AFMA Licensing on 1300 723 621 or the AFMA Thursday Island Office on (07) 4069 1990, by emailing FisheriesTI@afma.gov.au or by calling in to the AFMA Office at the Pearls Building on Thursday Island.

## 3.3 Reporting wildlife interactions

A wildlife interaction is any physical contact a person, boat or gear has with a protected animal that causes death, injury or stress. This includes any collisions, catching, hooking, netting, entangling or trapping of a protected species.

You should report all interactions with protected species to AFMA.

CSIRO has published a *Protected Species Identification Guide*, which can help you identify protected species. If you would like a copy, please contact AFMA or you can download a copy here:



<https://www.afma.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/protected-species-id-guide.pdf>

## 3.4 Vessel Monitoring System (VMS)

### 3.4.1 What is a VMS?

A Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) on commercial fishing boats helps manage fisheries in the Torres Strait by allowing AFMA to monitor the location, speed and course of a boat.

This information helps AFMA see if a vessel is doing something it shouldn't be, like fishing in a closed area, or fishing outside of the fishing season.

### 3.4.2 Do I need a VMS on my boat?

You must have a working VMS unit fitted to your boat if it is a primary boat, or a carrier boat. Vessels operating for freight shipping are exempt from installing a VMS. Exemptions may also be provided for carrier vessels that are six (6) meters or less in length.

All VMS units must meet AFMA standards which can be found on the AFMA website: <https://www.afma.gov.au/fisheries-services/vessel-monitoring>

Your VMS must be working at all times. If your VMS breaks or is not working, stay in port and let AFMA know as soon as possible by calling (02) 6225 5555 (and follow the prompts to the

VSM team); or by emailing [ausvms@afma.gov.au](mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au). For more information about VMS visit the PZJA website or call the AFMA Thursday Island Office.

## 3.5 Illegal fishing

You can help us make sure your fish stocks are protected for the future by reporting any illegal or suspicious fishing activities you see.

Illegal fishing activities include:

- Landing catch to someone other than a licenced fish receiver
- Illegal use of fishing gear
- Unlicensed commercial fishing
- Catching protected species
- Fishing in closed or prohibited areas
- Commercial fishing during seasonal closures
- Foreign fishing

### 3.5.1 How can I report illegal activities?

If you think you have seen illegal fishing operations or suspicious activity involving fishing you can contact:

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AFMA's free call 'CRIMFISH' hotline on **1800 274 634 (1800 CRIMFISH)**

AFMA's Duty Officer on **0428 196 114** or **(02) 6275 5818** (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)

AFMA Thursday Island Office on **(07) 4069 1990**

Email to [tistaff@afma.gov.au](mailto:tistaff@afma.gov.au)

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You can also report any incident by lodging your information on the AFMA CRIMFISH webpage: <https://www.afma.gov.au/monitoring-enforcement/report-illegal-fishing-activity/>

Reports may be made anonymously and all information received will be treated with the strictest confidence.



## Reporting illegal fishing activities

The following information should be provided if possible:

- name and call sign of the boat suspected of breaching fisheries legislation;
- description of the boat involved- type of boat, distinguishing features, registration details;
- type of illegal activity (for example shark finning, using hookah during a hookah closure);
- nationality;
- where the offence took place (give as much detail as you can) e.g. latitude/longitude;
- time and date;
- description of the suspected offenders, including the clothing they were wearing;
- names of the suspected offenders and any distinguishing features (if known);
- type of fish being caught;
- fishing gear – nets, traps, trawls etc;
- photographs; or
- other information you feel may be useful or any other suspicious activity that might be associated with the offence.

# 4 Background

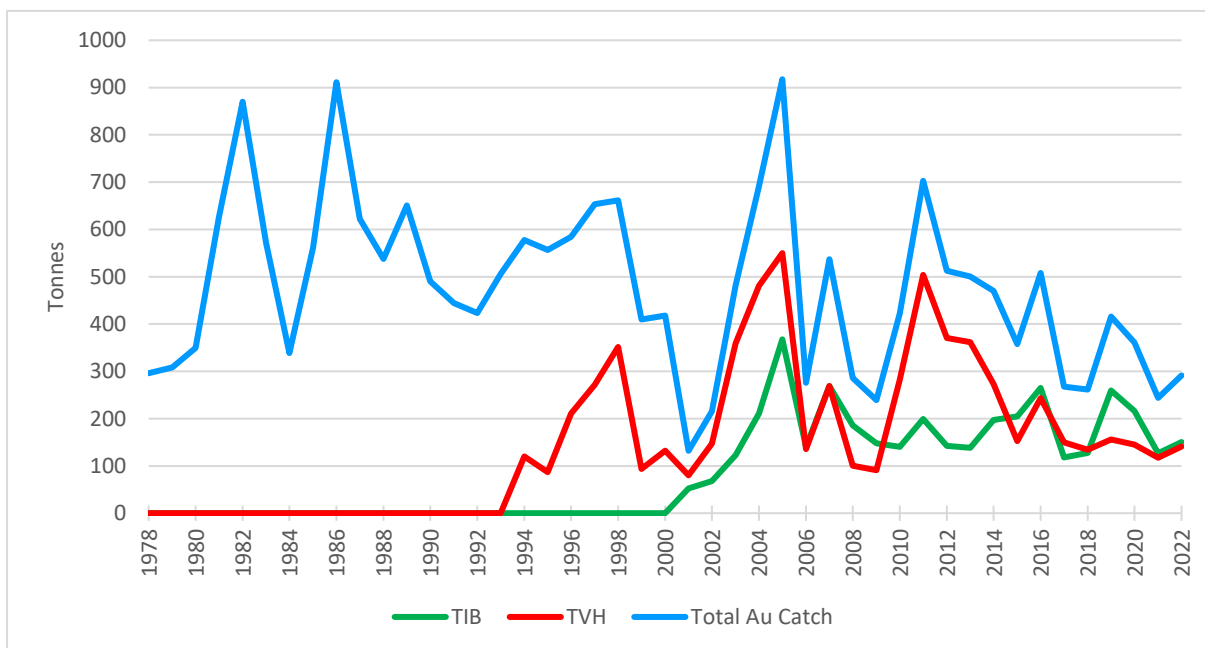
## 4.1 Fishery Overview

The TRL Fishery is the most valuable commercial fishery in the Torres Strait and supports an export market for live lobsters to China.

The TRL Fishery extends from Cape York to the northern border of the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ). Most catch comes from the western and south-eastern parts of the fishery, where the densities of tropical rock lobster are highest. Access to this fishery is shared by Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG) under formal arrangements in the Torres Strait Treaty (see section 2.4 for more information on catch sharing with PNG).

Tropical rock lobster are taken by hand or a short hand spear by divers working 4-6 metre tenders from dinghies. Most divers free dive on shallow reef tops but others use hookah (surface supplied air) to dive the large areas of open bottom in Torres Strait. Most fishing occurs during neap tides when currents ease and underwater visibility improves. Additionally, lobsters may be collected at night on shallow reef flats by fishers using a lamp and handheld spear or scoop net.

Commercial catch records of TRL in the Torres Strait date back to 1978. Figure 1 below illustrates the total Australian Torres Strait diver catch of TRL from 1978 through to 2022. Catch records are split between fishing sectors from 1994 onwards.



**Figure 1. Total recorded diver catch of the Australian Torres Strait TRL Fishery from 1978 to 2022.**  
Source: AFMA catch records.

## 4.2 The TRL Harvest Strategy

A harvest strategy is a set of pre-agreed rules that use an evidence-based, precautionary and transparent approach to controlling the amount of fish that can be caught in a fishing season. These rules are created to meet defined objectives for the fishery. A harvest strategy describes the performance indicators used for monitoring the condition of the stock, the fishery-independent survey and stock assessment procedures and the rules applied to determine the recommended biological catch (RBC) and the total allowable catch (TAC) each fishing season.

The TRL Harvest Strategy was implemented in 2019 and developed in accordance with the [Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines 2018](#) (HSP), consistent with objectives of the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act).

The TRL stock is highly variable meaning that some years there are fewer lobster to fish than others. This is understood to be driven in part by environmental conditions. As a result, there is potential for large variations in the amount of TRL that can be sustainably taken from year to year. The TRL Harvest Strategy takes into account what is known about the TRL stock and sets out the management rules to achieve agreed objectives for the TRL Fishery.

The TRL Harvest Strategy provides stakeholders with certainty about how the TAC is set each season.

The objectives of the TRL Harvest Strategy are:

- 1) to maintain the size of the TRL stock (on average), or return the stock to, 65 per cent of the original unfished size of the TRL spawning stock (TRL of breeding age) in 1973 (considered to be the start of the Fishery).
- 2) to maintain the size of the TRL stock above a lower limit of 32 per cent of the original size of the TRL spawning stock in 1973.
- 3) if the size of the TRL stock falls below the lower limit two years in a row, stock rebuilding strategies are to be implemented.

The TRL Harvest Strategy uses an empirical (data-based) harvest control rule (eHCR) to calculate a recommended biological catch (RBC) each fishing season. This is the amount of TRL that can be sustainably caught. A TAC is then calculated by taking into account any other sources of mortality (traditional and recreational catch). Extensive testing has shown that over the long-term, the eHCR should maintain the stock around the target level.

You can download a copy of the TRL Harvest Strategy from the PZJA website here

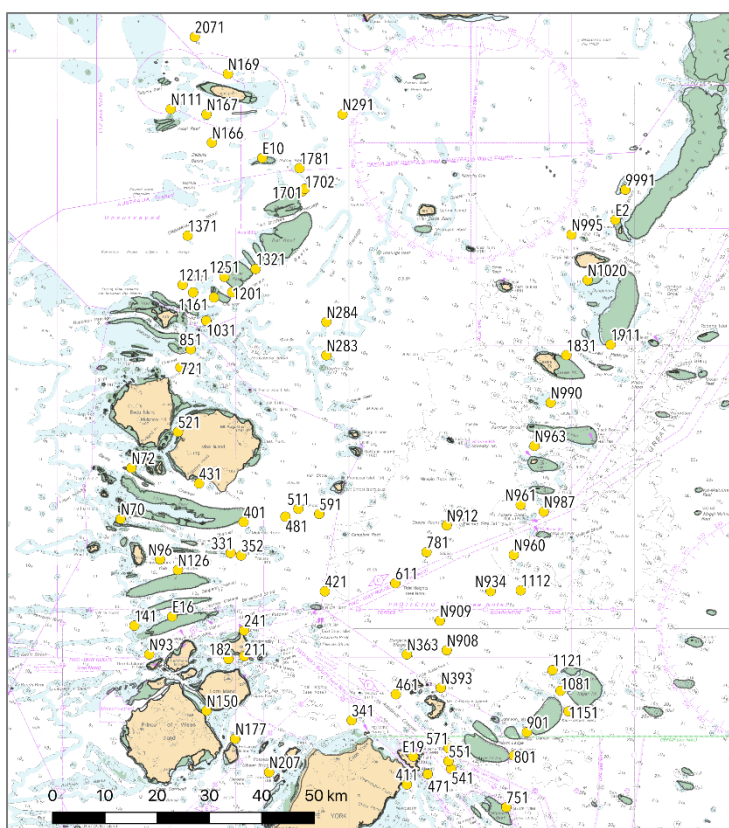
[www.pzja.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/Tropical-rock-lobster-harvest-strategy-nov-2019.pdf](http://www.pzja.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-05/Tropical-rock-lobster-harvest-strategy-nov-2019.pdf)

or download the Harvest Strategies Fact Sheet here:

[www.pzja.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/harvest\\_strategies\\_faqs\\_final\\_april\\_2019.pdf](http://www.pzja.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-01/harvest_strategies_faqs_final_april_2019.pdf)

### 4.3 Scientific research in the TRL Fishery

Each year in November, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) undertake an independent scientific pre-season survey to determine the relative abundance and size of lobsters in the Torres Strait, together with an assessment of the habitat. Benchmark fishery-independent surveys (1989 and 2002) identified regions of lobster habitat within the TRL Fishery area. This allowed scientists to design ongoing annual population surveys using a few randomly-selected sites, with the number of sites commensurate with the sub-region area and lobster abundance. Figure 2 is indicative of pre-season sampling sites surveyed since 2014 to provide information on lobster numbers in the fishery and weight of lobsters available to be fished annually.



**Figure 2. Map of survey sites for the TRL pre-season survey.**  
Source: CSIRO

Fishery-independent surveys have been conducted in the Fishery since 1989. Historically (1989-2014 and 2018), mid-season (July) surveys focused on providing an index of abundance of the spawning (age 2+) and juvenile (age 1+) lobsters. Mid-season surveys have been replaced with pre-season (November) surveys (2005-2008; 2014 to current) which focus on providing an index of recruiting (age 1+) lobsters as close as possible to the start of the fishing season to support the change to a quota management system and setting of a TAC. Pre-season surveys also provide indices of recently-settled (age 0+) lobsters, which may become useful depending on how reliable they are, as they allow forecasting of stock one year in advance and are used in the eHCR.

To learn more about the different age classes of lobsters, check out the CSIRO infographic over the page.

For more information on current research projects please visit the PZJA website. If you would like to learn more about scientific research in the Torres Strait you can contact the AFMA Thursday Island Office.

# Kaiar/Tropical Rock Lobster

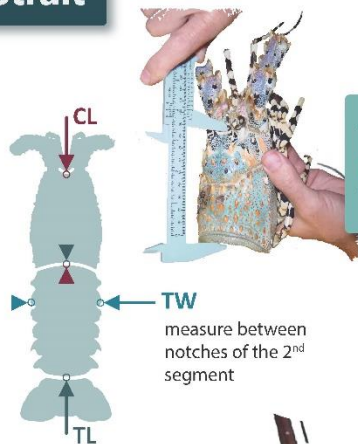
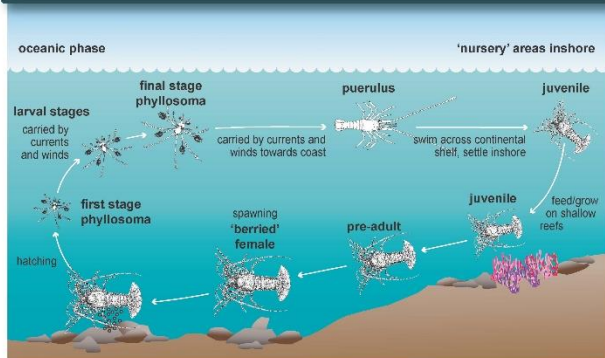
Scientific name *Panulirus ornatus*

Dr Eva Plaganyi  
eva.plaganyi-loyd@csiro.au

Mark Tonks  
mark.tonks@csiro.au



## Age class definitions in the Torres Strait



Tail length (115 mm)\* \_\_\_\_\_ TL  
Carapace Length (90 mm)\* \_\_\_\_\_ CL  
Tail Width (62 mm) \_\_\_\_\_ TW

\*Legal sizes. Source AFMA

Size ranges for age classes are approximate values and will depend on the time of year lobsters are measured, and the natural variability in individual growth and settlement time. The data used to compile these age class size ranges were derived from CSIRO Mid-year Population Surveys.

Lobster in the Northern range grow faster than those in the Southern range.

Age class  
**2+**

Fished	
TW	57-85 mm
TL	111-165 mm
CL	>83-123 mm
Weight	>0.5-1.51 kg

Age class  
**1+**

Recruits	
TW	22-56 mm
TL	44-109 mm
CL	33-81 mm
Weight	0.04-0.48 kg

actual size

Phyllosoma at 3 months

Age class  
**0+**

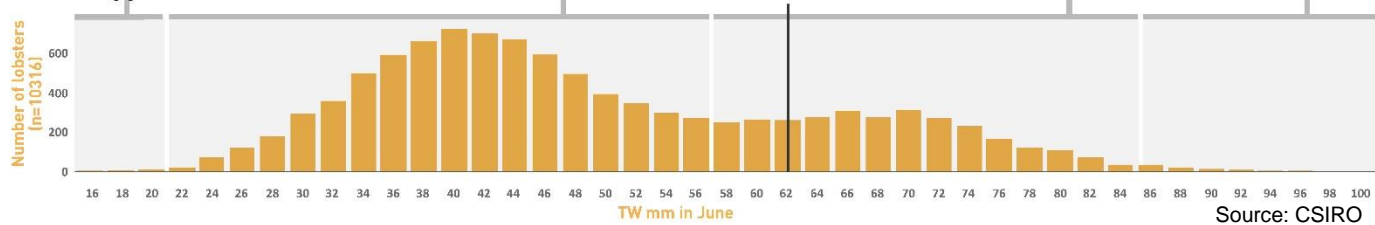
Newly settled	
TW	<22 mm
TL	<44 mm
CL	<33 mm
Weight	<0.04 kg



Age class  
**3+**

TW	>85 mm
TL	>165 mm
CL	>123 mm
Weight	>1.51 kg

Legal size (equiv. CL 90 mm)



Source: CSIRO

## 4.4 Ecological Risk Assessments (ERA) and Ecological Management

The direct and indirect impact of the TRL fishery activities on the marine ecosystem was assessed in 2007 using the Ecological Risk Management (ERM) framework. The assessment found that the TRL fishery has little direct impact on the marine environment or other fish species, since hand-collection fishing methods allow careful selection of catch. The level 1 ecological risk assessment did not identify any species at medium or high risk, and found that interactions with protected species were negligible or low because of the nature of the fishery. Therefore, no further risk assessments were undertaken.

The Ecological Risk Assessment and Ecological Risk Management Report for the Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery can be accessed from the PZJA website:

<https://www.pzja.gov.au/corporate-and-reports/ecological-risk-assessment-effects-fishing-report-torres-strait-rock-lobster>

## 4.5 Export approval

Approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is required for TRL from the TRL Fishery to be exported overseas. The TRL Fishery was last strategically assessed under the EPBC Act in 2023 and is formally approved on the List of Native Exempt Specimens (LENS) for export 04 December 2023.

You can read more about strategic assessments for Torres Strait Fisheries here:

<https://www.environment.gov.au/marine/fisheries/commonwealth-managed-fisheries>

## 4.6 The Torres Strait Treaty

The *Treaty between Australia and the Independent State of Papua New Guinea concerning sovereignty and maritime boundaries in the area between the two countries, including the area known as the Torres Strait, and related matters* (the Treaty) was signed by both Parties in Sydney on 18 December 1978 and ratified by Australia on 15 February 1985. The Treaty defines the border between Australia and Papua New Guinea and provides a management framework of the common border area. This area is defined by the Treaty and is known as the Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) (Figure 3).

The TSPZ was established by the Treaty to acknowledge and protect the traditional way of life and livelihood of the traditional inhabitants of the area, including traditional fishing and the traditional right of movement between the two countries. Additionally, the TSPZ enables the development of sustainable commercial fishing in the region. Treaty articles 20-28 set out a framework to guide both countries in providing for the management, conservation and sharing of fishing resources, and inspection and enforcement in the TSPZ.



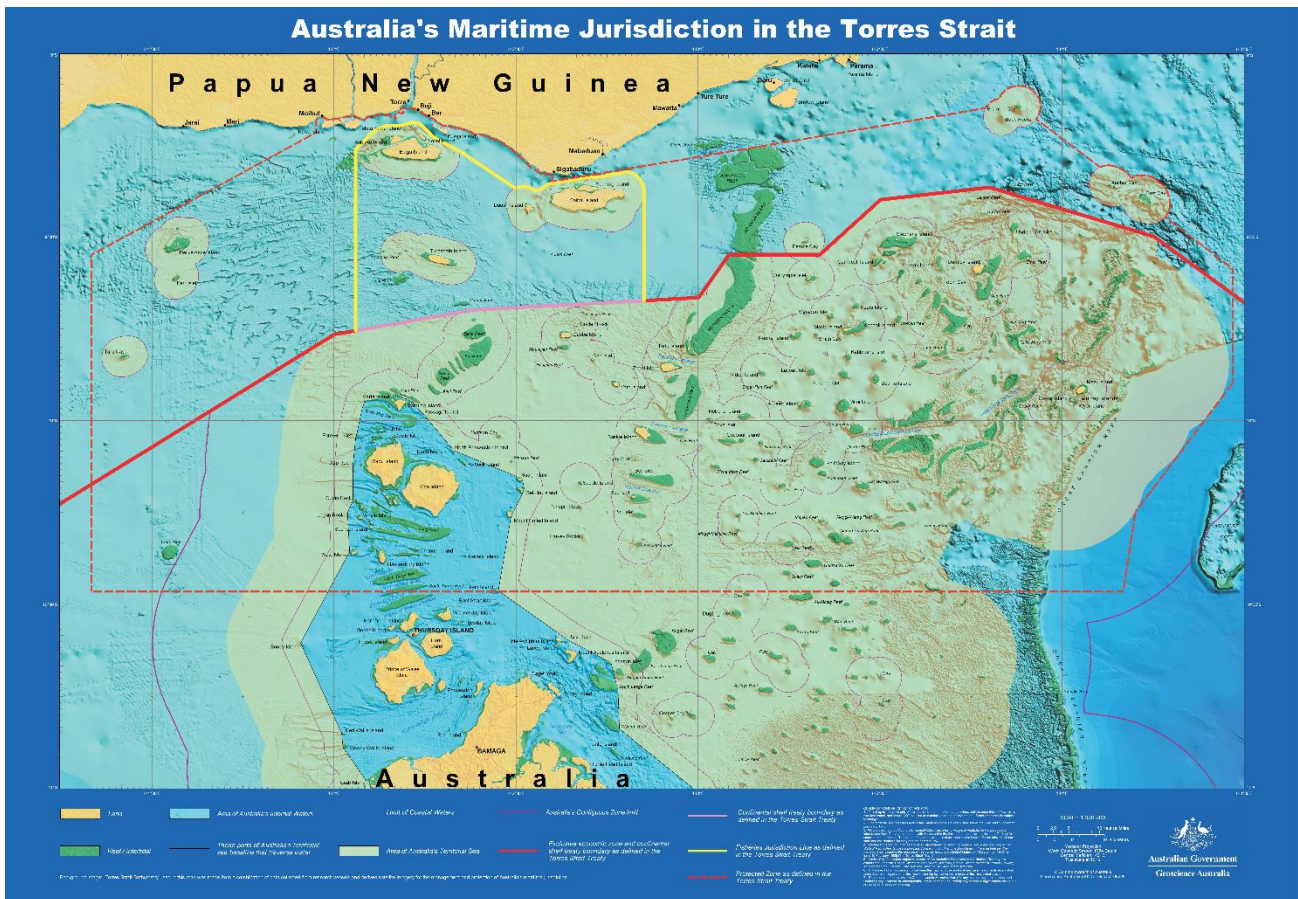


Figure 3. Australia's maritime jurisdiction in the Torres Strait. Source: Geosciences Australia

## 4.7 The Protected Zone Joint Authority

The Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) is responsible for making decisions and formulating policies relating to Torres Strait fisheries within the areas of Australian jurisdiction of the TSPZ under the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984* (the Act). The Act gives effect, in Australian law, to Australia's obligations under the Treaty as they relate to fisheries. Section 30 of the Act establishes the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA), which consists of the Minister administering the Act; the Queensland Minister administering the laws of Queensland relating to marine fishing in the Protected Zone; and the Chairperson of the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA), which is the Commonwealth agency established under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005* that represents the interests of Torres Strait Islanders.

The PZJA is supported by four government agencies (known as 'PZJA agencies') - the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE), the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF) and the TSRA.

AFMA is responsible for providing day to day fisheries management services for the PZJA including compliance and licencing, and undertakes its delegated functions in consultation with PZJA agencies.

## 4.8 PZJA Advisory Committees

To assist in the management of these fisheries the PZJA has established the Tropical Rock Lobster Working Group (TRLWG) and the TRL Resource Assessment Group (TRLRAG) as the advisory committees for the TRL fishery. The role of the TRLWG is to discuss issues, identify concerns and develop solutions and provide advice to the PZJA on a range of management matters. The TRLWG is comprised of 5 Traditional Inhabitant members (one from each cluster nation), non-traditional inhabitant industry members, QDAF, TSRA and AFMA members, fisheries scientists and an economist.

It is the role of the Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (TRLRAG) to provide advice on the status of fish stocks and on the impact of fishing on the marine environment. Advice provided by the RAG should address biological, economic and wider ecological factors affecting the fishery. The TRLRAG is comprised of 5 Traditional Inhabitant members (one from each cluster nation), non-traditional inhabitant industry members, fisheries scientists and QDAF, TSRA and AFMA members.

You can download copies of the meeting records and meeting papers from TRLWG and TRLRAG meetings from the PZJA website:

<https://www.pzja.gov.au/advisory-committees/pzja-committees>

A list of the current members on both the TRL Working Group and TRL RAG are outlined below.

TRL Working Group	
Chair	Dr. John Glaister
Traditional Inhabitant member – Gudumalulgal	Patrick Mooka
Traditional Inhabitant member – Kaiwalagal	Thomas Fujii
Traditional Inhabitant member – Kemer Kemer Meriam	Les Pitt
Traditional Inhabitant member – Kulkalgal	Charles David
Traditional Inhabitant member – Maluiligal	Jermain Reuben
Industry member	Mark Dean
Industry member	Trent Butcher
Industry member	Peter Frazis
Economics member	Sevaly Sen
Scientific member	Dr Laura Blamey
QDAF member	Manager, Queensland TRL Fishery
TSRA member	Manager, TSRA Fisheries Program
AFMA member	Senior Manager, Torres Strait Fisheries

TRL Resource Assessment Group	
Chair	Dr. Ian Knuckey
Traditional Inhabitant member – Gudumalulgal	Patrick Mooka
Traditional Inhabitant member – Kaiwalagal	Thomas Fujii
Traditional Inhabitant member – Kemer Kemer Meriam	Les Pitt
Traditional Inhabitant member – Kulkalgal	Charles David
Traditional Inhabitant member – Maluiligal	Jermain Reuben
Industry member	Brett Arlidge
Industry member	Ken McKenzie
Scientific member	Dr. Eva Plaganyi
Scientific member	Dr. Andrew Penney
QDAF member	Manager, Queensland TRL Fishery
TSRA member	Manager, TSRA Fisheries Program
AFMA member	Senior Manager, Torres Strait Fisheries

## 4.9 Native Title

AFMA on behalf of the PZJA, consults with registered native title body corporates (RNTBC), registered native title claimants and any representative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies. In accordance with section 24HA(2) of the *Native Title Act 1993*, AFMA on behalf of the PZJA undertakes native title notification for formal Future Act Notification. In addition, AFMA engages with RNTBCs, registered claimants and representative bodies through formal consultation and as invited participants on the PZJA advisory bodies.

A summary of all native title notifications undertaken by AFMA since 2019 can be found on the PZJA website: <https://www.pzja.gov.au/native-title-notifications>



## 5 Contact List

### AFMA Thursday Island Office

Level 1  
 Pearls Building  
 38 Victoria Parade  
 Thursday Island QLD 4875 Australia

PO Box 376  
 Thursday Island QLD 4875 Australia

#### Enquiries

Office hours: 9am to 5pm Mon-Fri

Phone: (07) 4069 1990

AFMA Direct 1300 723 621

Fax: (07) 4069 1277

Email: [tistaff@afma.gov.au](mailto:tistaff@afma.gov.au)

### AFMA Licensing

Phone: 1300 723 621

Email: [licensing@afma.gov.au](mailto:licensing@afma.gov.au)

(02) 6225 5555

Business hours: 9am to 5pm Mon-Fri

### VMS Enquiries

Phone: (02) 6225 5555

Email: [ausvms@afma.gov.au](mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au)

follow the prompts to  
 the VMS team

After hours, please contact:

Phone: 1300 723 621 or (02) 6225 5555 - follow the prompts to the VMS team

Email: [ausvms@afma.gov.au](mailto:ausvms@afma.gov.au)

## Illegal Fishing

Contact the 24 hour CRIMFISH hotline on 1800 274 634

Email: [intelligence@afma.gov.au](mailto:intelligence@afma.gov.au)

## Recreational fishing, charter boats and aquaculture

Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries

General Enquiries 13 25 23

Email: [fisheriesmanagers@daf.qld.gov.au](mailto:fisheriesmanagers@daf.qld.gov.au)

Website: <https://www.daf.qld.gov.au/business-priorities/fisheries>

## Fishwatch Queensland

To report unlawful fishing in Queensland contact the 24 hour FISHWATCH hotline

Phone: 1800 017 116

## Torres Strait Regional Authority – Fisheries Program

Level 1

Torres Strait Haus

46 Victoria Parade

Thursday Island QLD 4875 Australia

**Enquiries** Website: <http://www.tsra.gov.au/>

Phone: (07) 4069 0700 Toll Free: 1800 079 093

Mobile: 0448 044 979 Email: [fisheries@tsra.gov.au](mailto:fisheries@tsra.gov.au)

# Appendix 1: 2023-24 Moontide hookah closures

Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery Moontide Hookah Closures for the 2023-24 Fishing Season\*

Month	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun							
<b>Dec-23</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Jan-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Feb-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Mar-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Apr-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>May-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Jun-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Jul-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Aug-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Sep-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Oct-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
<b>Nov-24</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31

\* The 2023-24 fishing season runs from 1 December 2023 through to 30 September 2024.

**KEY**

- New Moon
- Full Moon
- Fishery closure (commercial fishing not permitted)
- Hookah closure (use of hookah gear not permitted)
- Moontide hookah closure (use of hookah gear not permitted)
- First Quarter
- Last Quarter