

Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group Meeting 36

Final Meeting Record

11 July 2024

Videoconference

Note all meeting papers and record available on
the PZJA webpage: www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

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Meeting participants

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Ian Knuckey	Chair	See Attachment A
Andrew Penney	Scientific member	<p>Director of Pisces Australis Pty Ltd, an Australian registered marine/coastal research and management consultancy based in Canberra - interests in any opportunities in this regard.</p> <p>Currently Principal Investigator on FRDC Projects Nos 2017-180: Design and implementation of an Australian National Bycatch Report: Phase 1 – Scoping; and 2019-036: Implementation of dynamic reference points and harvest strategies to account for environmentally-driven changes in productivity in Australian fisheries, potentially red leg banana prawns or TRL.</p> <p>Independent scientific member on the AFMA Southeast RAG, the Tropical Rock Lobster RAG and the Small Pelagic Fishery RAG. Member of the AFMA ERA Technical Working Group.</p> <p>No shareholding and hold no positions relating to any other companies, including any fishing companies or industry associations.</p>
Éva Plagányi	Scientific member	<p>Lead scientist for PZJA funded TRL research projects conducted by CSIRO. Contribute to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including currently Shared science and Indigenous knowledge to support fisheries capacity building in Torres Strait. No other interests in the fishery.</p> <p>Independent scientific member of HCRAG and NPFRAG.</p>
Les Pitt	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Kemer Kemer Meriam	Apology
Charles David Joined 0955 hrs	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kulkalgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kulkalgal, TSRA Fisheries Advisory Committee and Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Patrick Mooka	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda Maluligal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda Maluligal. TIB licence holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries representative. TSRA Board member, and involved with CSIRO Climate Change and Fisheries Project.
Jermaine Reuben	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Maluligal	Apology

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Thomas Fujii	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalalgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalalgal. Queensland East Coast TRL and TIB license holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member. Involved in the CSIRO Climate Change research project.
Brett Arlidge	Industry Member	Director of MG Lobster Kailis Pty Ltd. MG Kailis Lobster Pty Ltd is a holder of 5 TVH licences. Seafood buyer from Torres Strait, QLD and PNG TRL fisheries.
Ken McKenzie	Industry Member	TVH licence and quota holder. Queensland East Coast TRL license and quota holder.
Damian Miley	TSRA Member	TSRA Fisheries Senior Manager, TSRA holds multiple TVH TRL fishing license on behalf of Torres Strait Communities but does not benefit from them. No personal or pecuniary interest.
Jenny Keys	QDAF Member	Queensland Fishery manager of tropical rock lobster fishery, sea cucumber fishery and aquarium and coral fisheries.
Steven Harris	AFMA Member	Nil conflicts to declare.
Georgia Langdon	Executive Officer	Senior Management Officer for Tropical Rock Lobster Fishery. Nil conflicts to declare.

Observers

Name	Position/Organisation	Declaration of interest
Yen Loban Joined 1020 hrs	TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member	Traditional Owner. TSRA Board member and TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member. Chair of Zenadth Kes Fisheries
Quinten Hirakawa	TSRA	TSRA employee, TIB license holder with a TRL endorsement.
Laura Blamey	TRL Working Group Scientific member	Contributes to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including Torres Strait climate change and fisheries project. No other interests in the fishery.
Leo Dutra	CSIRO	Employed by CSIRO and involved in TRL research in Torres Strait on the TRL survey and on the climate change project (AFMA and TSRA funded). Also involved in sea ranching opportunities for beche-de-mer at Ugar Island (funded by CSIRO Indigenous Science and Engagement Program)
Nicole Murphy	CSIRO	Employed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and from time-to-time CSIRO receives funds to undertake research relating

Name	Position/Organisation	Declaration of interest
		to Torres Strait fisheries. Diver on the TRL pre-season survey. Principal Investigator on the project black teatfish sampling and stock assessment, white teatfish stock assessment and the development of conversion ratios for curryfish projects.

^ joined the meeting at 10:20am

1 Preliminaries

Welcome and apologies

1. The 36th meeting of the Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group (the RAG) was held online and opened with a prayer at 9:30am on Thursday 11 July 2024. The Chair welcomed participants and acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the various lands on which members were participating from and paid respect to the elders past, present and emerging. Members introduced themselves.
2. Participant tables reflect attendance. The following apologies were received:
 - a) Les Pitt, Traditional Inhabitant member, Kemer Kemer Meriam
 - b) Jermaine Reuben, Traditional Inhabitant member, Maluyilgal

Adoption of agenda

3. The RAG considered draft agenda which was circulated to members on 28 June 2024.
4. The draft agenda was adopted by the RAG and is provided at **Attachment B**.

Declaration of interests

5. The Chair advised members and observers, of their PZJA Fisheries Management Paper No. 1 (FMP1), conflict of interest obligations.
6. The Chair requested that members update the record of declarations. These are detailed in the meeting participant tables at the start of this meeting record.
7. With determining research priorities under Agenda Item 2, the Chair noted a conflict for the scientific members and observers who conduct research directly with the fishery and they were asked to leave the meeting temporarily while this was discussed.
8. The RAG members agreed that research providers would remain for discussion but leave the meeting during the final research prioritisation.
9. Industry and traditional inhabitant members were asked to leave the meeting temporarily. Noting that industry members have a direct interest in the fishery, the remaining RAG members agreed that industry could be part of both the discussion and final prioritisation of research priorities.

2 TRL Fishery Research Priorities

10. The RAG discussed the research priorities and needs identified or discussed at previous TRLRAG and TRLWG meetings to provide advice on the research priorities for the 2025/26 – 2029/30 five-year period, noting in particular that the currently funded three-year TRL project “*Torres Strait TRL Fishery independent survey, stock assessment and Recommended Biological Catch calculations*” is in its final year and is not scoped nor funded beyond 2024-25.
11. The RAG noted there are several projects already underway or scheduled for funding that will address some of the identified research priorities. Although these will not require funding consideration by the TSSAC, the RAG agreed it remains useful to have these included in the research plan. Of key relevance, the RAG noted that the new climate change project will help to further our understanding of larval connectivity and distribution across the Torres Strait region.
12. The TSRA funded climate change project is looking at broader scale regional climate drivers. It is hoped that this may help develop finer scale models to better understand the regional oceanography of the Torres Strait, including how the currents and other environmental drivers work together to influence distribution of different TRL life stages. This will partly answer some of the industry-based questions relating to connectivity between the Torres Strait and the East Coast. The Torres Strait Climate Change project, in conjunction with a separate Fisheries Research and Development Council (FRDC) funded climate change project, will also facilitate a better understanding of broader regional Northern Australia climate drivers and connectivity.
13. Industry member Ken McKenzie questioned the impact of diurnal tidal streams on the distribution of TRL larvae. The CSIRO Scientific member noted that this is currently a knowledge gap as we do not have fine scale resolution models to understand the complex oceanography on a diurnal basis. Such research is also quite expensive so it will be useful to see the outcomes of the climate change modelling work to see if it yields some useful outputs towards answering that question.
14. The CSIRO scientific member noted that because the annual pre-season survey directly monitors the incoming recruitment of lobsters into the region each season, it is less critical to understand the mechanism by which this recruitment occurs, particularly with limited research funding available. It is a trade-off of investment to undergo a very detailed process to attempt to model the 0+ lobsters versus getting an accurate estimate of 1+ lobsters from the survey, which directly influences the total allowable catch the following season, and accounts for 70 per cent of the data weighting in that TAC calculation. Nevertheless, it was acknowledged that when considering broader strategic management of the fishery, particularly under future climate change scenarios, detailed understanding of recruitment and connectivity is still important.
15. The TRL Working Group member Laura Blamey (and observer to the RAG), as the project lead on the climate change project offered to meet with industry member Ken McKenzie to further discuss some of the finer details and document his understandings of the system that could feed into the Climate change work.

ACTION ITEM – CSIRO Scientific members to engage with industry member Ken McKenzie to discuss further information to potentially feed into the climate change project.

16. Noting numerous questions and concerns from industry and traditional inhabitant members regarding the connectivity of TRL between the Torres Strait, Papua New Guinea, the Queensland East Coast and Indonesia, the RAG discussed that the currently identified research priority “**Understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies**” should be promoted from desirable to ‘essential’ and acknowledged that the current climate change project will help to better understand the oceanography that underpins some of the larval movement and recruitment of TRL into the Torres Strait.

17. The RAG further discussed that the highest 'essential' priority for the fishery remains the need to undertake **fishery independent surveys, stock assessment, harvest control and Recommended Biological Catch (RBC)** work, noting that a new project scope will need to be developed out of session for TSSAC's consideration at their August 2024 meeting.
- a) The CSIRO scientific member raised that while the project is essential, there remains an obvious gap around market opportunities and challenges, or other ways to manage these emerging non-stock related issues that interact with and impact the outputs of the project. It will be important for the new project scope to incorporate methods to adapt and account for these changes in climate and market.
 - b) Noting there has been previous interest from people in having greater involvement in the pre-season survey work it could be useful to incorporate language in the scope that might invite innovative ways of working together or transitioning to deliver some of the core work that CSIRO currently leads.
 - c) The AFMA member reminded the RAG that at their 44th meeting in July 2023, the PZJA directed PZJA agencies, RAGs and Working Groups to further develop mechanisms to incorporate traditional ecological knowledge in their fisheries monitoring and assessment which should be kept in mind when developing the next project scope.
18. In response to some questions from industry and traditional inhabitant members about how the survey was designed and how counts are undertaken, the Chair reminded the RAG that a previously identified research priority was to undertake a peer review of the TRL Fishery survey design, consistent with AFMA's best practice *Guidelines for quality assurance of Australian fisheries research and science information*, noting that this has dropped down in priority in recent years and is currently listed as desirable.
19. The RAG acknowledged the last Ecological Risk Assessment undertaken for the TRL Fishery was in 2007 and deemed the fishery to be low risk due to the high selectivity of the fishing methods used. Although not required as a condition of the Fishery's WTO accreditation, the RAG discussed that undertaking an ERA should remain an essential priority in the longer term but is not required in the next five year plan. The RAG was also reminded of AFMA's Guidelines for ERA re-assessment triggers for Commonwealth Fisheries which provide clear guidance on whether a new ERA is required. The independent scientific member noted that under current circumstances the TRL fishery would not trigger a new ERA.
20. Improvements to data collection and understanding fisher behaviour continue to remain important pieces of work in the Fishery although the RAG data sub-group has not met since 2019. The RAG noted that the work of the sub-group is funded through AFMA's fishery budget and AFMA will look to reconvene a data sub-group meeting in early 2025.
21. While improvements to the fishery dependent data are always encouraged, the RAG acknowledged that the critical issue for the fishery is the ongoing economic viability of the industry as a consequence of the effects of COVID-19, import sanctions, freight disruptions, increased costs and reduced profitability. Fishing effort is significantly down and larger boats are struggling to retain crew. The independent scientific member highlighted that unfortunately, the experiences of localised depletion, or reduced industry profitability as a result of recent market impacts tend to be misinterpreted as either declining stock and result in criticisms of the survey design and its outputs.
22. The RAG noted that there is no formal quantitative economic analysis for the TRL fishery and that an improved understanding of the economics would be beneficial. This could include: other research being undertaken on supply chains and future opportunities; Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification and possible price differentials; or what infrastructure investment

would be required versus the benefits under a potential shift back to a tails market. The RAG noted that an economic analysis of the fishery would require input and collaboration from all aspects of the industry but is considered an extremely high priority for the fishery.

23. Due to time constraints, the RAG agreed for AFMA to lead an out of session discussion of technical members of the RAG and Working Group and interested traditional inhabitant members/industry members to try and further develop a project scope for an economic analysis of the TRL Fishery for the TSSAC's consideration for the 2025/26 financial year.

ACTION ITEM – AFMA to coordinate an out of session discussion of the technical members of the TRL RAG and Working Group, as well as interested traditional inhabitant or industry members, to further develop a scope for an economics-related project/analysis for TSSAC consideration.

24. Having regard to the RAG's discussions on each of the existing research priorities and new ones identified, CSIRO scientific members and observers were excused from the meeting while remaining RAG members discussed prioritisation of each research need. The recommended research priorities (essential versus desirable with a ranking of 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest ranking) are provided in the updated TRL Fishery Five Year rolling research plan 2025/26 – 2029/30 (**Attachment C**) and summarised as follows:

- a) the highest 'essential' priority with a ranking of 1 for the fishery remains the need to undertake **fishery independent surveys, stock assessment, harvest control and Recommended Biological Catch**, and should include elements of increased involvement from non-researchers and Traditional inhabitants, and also incorporate methods to adapt and account for changes in climate and market;
- b) RAG members discussed the current poor economic state of the TRL fishery and agreed that undertaking an economic analysis to improve understanding of the full supply chain, markets, business structures, associated fixed and variable costs, critical risks, financial thresholds and economic dynamics of the fishery is a new essential priority with a ranking of 1;
- c) **Impact and mitigation of climate change effects in Torres Strait Fisheries** remains essential priority ranking 1, noting that a three-year project is currently underway and funded by TSSAC.
- d) **Understanding connectivity, environmental drivers and adaptation strategies** is increased from desirable to essential priority ranking 2.
- e) **Improvement of data collection** remains essential but is reduced to priority ranking 2. **Understanding changes to fishing power** is to be included as an element of improvement of data collection research need, to be initially pursued by the RAG data sub-group.
- f) Undertaking an update to the 2007 **Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA)** for the TRL Fishery remains an essential priority with a ranking of 3, noting a new assessment would not be triggered under AFMA's Guidelines for ERA re-assessment triggers for Commonwealth Fisheries, an ERA should not be prioritised in the next five years;
- g) **Understanding fisher behaviour** remains a highly desirable priority with a ranking of 2; and
- h) The **Science peer review** remains as a desirable priority ranking 3.

25. The RAG noted update AFMA would circulate any new draft project scopes for comment before submission to TSSAC.

26. The meeting was closed at 12:31pm on Thursday 11 July 2024.

Declaration of interests
Dr Ian Knuckey – October 2022

Ian Knuckey positions:

Director –	Fishwell Consulting Pty Ltd
Director –	Olrac Australia (Electronic logbooks)
Chair –	Northern Prawn Fishery Resource Assessment Group
Chair –	Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Assessment Group
Chair –	Victorian Rock Lobster and Giant Crab Assessment Group
Chair –	Victorian Central Zone Abalone Fisheries Resource Advisory Group
Chair –	Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery MAC Research Scientific Committee
Scientific Member –	Northern Prawn Management Advisory Committee
Scientific Member –	Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery Management Advisory Committee
Scientific Member –	Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group
Scientific Member –	SESSF Resource Assessment Group
Member –	The Geelong Agri Collective

Fishwell current projects:

AFMA 2022-	Annual monitoring, reporting and assessment of SPF marine mammal interactions, including effectiveness of mitigation measures
AFMA 2020-0807	Bass Strait Scallop Fishery Survey – 2024/ 25
FRDC 2019-027	Improving and promoting fish-trawl selectivity in the SESSF and GABTS
FRDC 2018-021	Development and evaluation of SESSF multi-species harvest strategies
Traffic Project	Shark Product Traceability
Sea Cucumber Ass.	Design and implementation of various sea cucumber dive surveys.
Australia Bay	Queensland Gulf of Carpentaria Developmental Fin Fish Trawl Fishery

**TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP 36
(TRLRAG 36)**

Thursday 11 July 2024 | 930am – 12pm

Video Conference

ADOPTED AGENDA

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair will welcome members and observers to the 36th meeting of the RAG.

1.2 Adoption of agenda

The RAG will be invited to adopt the draft agenda.

1.3 Declaration of interests

Members and observers will be invited to declare any real or potential conflicts of interest and determine whether a member may or may not be present during discussion of or decisions made on the matter which is the subject of the conflict.

2 TRL FISHERY RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The RAG will discuss and provide advice on research priorities for the 2025/26 – 2029/30 five-year period.

The Chair must approve the attendance of all observers at the meeting. Individuals wishing to join the meeting as an observer must contact the Executive Officer – Georgia Langdon (georgia.langdon@afma.gov.au)