

Torres Strait Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Advisory Group Meeting 35

DRAFT Meeting Summary with
comments

12-13 December 2023

Thursday Island and Microsoft Teams

Note all meeting papers and records are
available on the PZJA webpage:

www.pzja.gov.au



Australian Government

Australian Fisheries Management Authority

Meeting summary

The 35th meeting of the Tropical Rock Lobster Resource Advisory Group (TRLRAG) was held on Thursday Island and Microsoft Teams on 12-13 December 2023. The meeting opened in prayer and the Chair welcomed participants and provided an Acknowledgement of Country. A list of attendees, declarations of interests and apologies is provided at **Attachment A-A1**. The Chair noted the difficult circumstances caused by Cyclone Jasper hitting Cairns, and the resulting communication issues between members. The Chair noted the potential conflict of interest for industry members, including traditional inhabitant members, when discussing TAC advice. The AFMA member left the room with traditional inhabitant members to discuss their concerns while the remaining RAG members discussed how to handle the conflict. The Scientific member proposed that in future, members could stay in the meeting until a recommendation was made. A traditional inhabitant member requested that it be noted in the minutes that traditional inhabitant members are elected, which should be considered when having these discussions, and their input needs to be strongly considered because of the Traditional Ownership of the resource. The remaining members stepped through the conflicts of declarations process.

The agenda was adopted without change (**Attachment B**). A summary of actions agreed during the meeting is provided at **Attachment C**.

Updates from Members

The TRLRAG noted updates provided by industry members on the trends and observations in the Tropical Rock Lobster fishery during the 2023-24 season so far. Industry production in the Torres Strait is reduced, which is unlikely to be a biological issue with the stock, but rather is due to economic and social issues impacting fishing effort. High fuel prices for outboard dinghy motors, market restrictions on selling TRL into China, and a reduced lobster market price across Australia have all impacted the profitability of the fishery. Rebates for unleaded fuel were suggested as an option to mitigate the economic situation in the fishery. A few TIB members felt that overfishing contributed to the cause, potentially from commercial members, but also from illegal and recreational fishing. Some TIB representatives also expressed concern about whether climate change may also be having an impact on the fishery. As a key market, concerns remain about whether China will lift the current import ban on TRL. A traditional inhabitant industry observer noted that lots of small and medium-sized crays were being observed around several islands, which is a good sign there will be a good season, but it is too early to say. Industry observers also raised concerns about the cost of operating and about illegal fishing.

The TRLRAG noted updates provided by the scientific member, in particular:

- a) that a regional marine heatwave briefing had been held for northern Australia,
- b) A community event was held on Waibene, 16 November, and also shared information on climate forecasts, launched the new Torres Strait climate project, plus celebrated the 35th annual kaiar survey;
- c) the climate change project funded by the Torres Strait Regional Authority (TSRA) has commenced, with press and articles shining a light on good management, and the fishery in general.
- d) AusSeabed map is now updated, which is a resource that can be utilised by the fishery.

- e) The supply chain workshop was rescheduled for the next meeting. A traditional inhabitant member suggested that, although the supply chain project is positive, further research on economic development in the Torres Strait is of greater importance.

The TRLRAG noted updates from the Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA):

- a) the recent Wildlife Trade Operation (WTO) assessment under the EPBC Act had granted the TRL Fishery approval for export until 2033 (subject to normal reporting conditions).
- b) Outcomes from the RAG and WG meetings will go to the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) in early 2024.
- c) AFMA plans to conduct community visits and will work with communities on the timing of visits.

The TRLRAG noted updates provided by the TSRA member on the Crown of Thorns Starfish (COTS) outbreak which has been observed. There is approximately \$2 million funding for the CSIRO/AIMS/GBRMPA towards training and mitigation to act on the COTS outbreak. Additional TSRA updates included the launch of WAPIL2, a climate change and fisheries project with the CSIRO looking at water temperature measurement, and the tender for the TIB TRL Quota Allocation Project (TTQAP) process.

The TRLRAG noted an update from the Queensland Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (QDAF):

- a) it was not a good season on the east coast, with only 46% of the quota caught.
- b) the decrease was due to market costs and difficulty getting crew, divers and fishers, and only one mothership has been operating in the fishery instead of three.

The TRLRAG noted updates from the Papua New Guinea (PNG) National Fisheries Authority (NFA), and sought information on PNG lobster imports into Australia. PNG catches have been slow; only 30 tonnes, or about half of the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) have been caught. Some data discrepancies, including some potentially missing catch data, is verified by NFA. The low catch and effort may have been influenced by changes in weather, including strong winds and currents that impacted fishing and diving, but the NFA observer advised that they will report back to the RAG by late December 2023 on whether the low reported catch is related to actual catch or misreporting. The RAG suggested further CPUE analysis on PNG catch may be useful and queried whether shore-based catch and boat-based catch reporting were accurate.

NFA noted that they are looking at the benefits that MSC certification will bring, and there is interest from European markets such as France and Italy. The TRL fishery is the best managed fishery and will set the standard for a lot of PNG fisheries. PNG exports face the same challenges as Australian TRL, and market prices in Hong Kong and Thailand have crashed recently due to cheaper imports.

Climate and Ecosystem Conditions

The TRLRAG noted a presentation by the CSIRO on the Climate and Ecosystem Status Report for the fishery. There has been a long-term trend of warming water that interplays with ENSO cycles, intensifying a combination of factors. 2023 was windier than average, with daily solar exposure fairly average, apart from in November, where it was above average. Coral

cover has been increasing since 2018, algae has been close to average, and sand/seagrass have been low in recent years.

El Nino can create cooler sea temperature conditions, weaken trade winds, and increase solar radiation (low cloud cover); expect cooler water in early Summer but warmer water in late Summer, along with the potential for more sand incursions. 3-month and 10-day sea surface temperature (SST) forecasts were shared with the TRLRAG.

A TSRA member asked about the 2016 seagrass dieback and its connection with climate. The CSIRO observer explained that seagrass beds are naturally variable and diebacks aren't unusual but really large or prolonged diebacks can be due to both freshwater runoff e.g. from PNG as well as sand incursions. An AFMA member asked about the large Fly River and other PNG river runoff and associated plumes, and whether it is worth exploring. The CSIRO observer explained that there are some rainfall maps that may be able to include it, but there is no specific index for the Fly River. The AFMA member noted that studies have shown a significant correlation between seagrass distribution and freshwater runoff.

A traditional inhabitant member asked how long hot conditions were expected. The CSIRO observer explained that El Nino typically comes to an end around the middle of the year, with very warm conditions expected in February. TRLRAG members were invited to provide observations for the 2023 year to be added into the status report.

Catch and Effort Analyses for the 2022-23 Fishing Season

The TLRAG considered an overview of total reported catches for Australia and PNG and the corresponding catch and effort analyses undertaken by the CSIRO.

The TRLRAG noted that the total reported landed catch for the Australian TRL fishery between 1 December 2022 to 30 September 2023 was 241.2 tonnes, with 125.1 tonnes caught by the Traditional Inhabitant Boat (TIB) sector and 116.1 tonnes caught by the Transferable Vessel Holder (TVH) sector.

The TRLRAG noted that the total reported 2023 catch from PNG was 30 tonnes between January and October 2023, however the TRLRAG noted that this number was incomplete for the PNG fishing season. Using average catch from the missing months, a method previously agreed by the TRLRAG, the total PNG catch estimate was increased to 36.6 tonnes. The total catch with the extrapolated PNG catch was 277.2 tonnes, which represents 71 per cent of the TAC, and represents the lowest catch on record for the TRL fishery.

Additional information included:

- Split between tails and live catch is similar to previous years;
- Catch per month has been similar to previous years;
- Both TIB and TVH effort has been lower than average; and,
- TIB and TVH slightly above average for standardized CPUE, with further detail on the effect of low catch to the index to be analysed and provided in early 2024.

TRLRAG noted the need to look into and discuss seller standardisation.

The TRLRAG noted an update on the bycatch in the Torres Strait Prawn Fishery (TSPF). Analysis shows that lobsters are caught almost always alive and are almost always discarded as part of the TSPF. AFMA agreed to follow up 2023 observer data from the TSPF to be provided to CSIRO.

The TRLRAG discussed the CPUE analysis, data accuracy and updating survivability in the TRL model. Concerns about the accuracy of the data, illegal and unreported fishing, compliance from the Australian prawn trawl fishery, and fishing of smaller TRL were raised. Some TIB members feel there has been a decline in biomass which is not being reflected or addressed, although some TIB observers felt numbers had been average. The scientific member explained that varying levels of survivability including sensitivities to account for uncertainty about illegal fishing and PNG catch, had already been included in the model.

A traditional inhabitant member requested an independent scientist reviews the model. CSIRO highlighted that they are happy to have a review of any work that is done, including the survey/data collection and the assessment process and noted that the assessment process is published, and peer reviewed by scientists internationally. Given Dr Andre Punt has just done a review of lobster stock assessments all over the world, the Chair suggested the RAG wait for these results to be available shortly before creating a new research project.

The scientific member thanked members and observers for the feedback on the CPUE data and noted that the information would be useful to analyse to assist with the standardisation process. CSIRO reminded the RAG that the CPUE index has a weighting of only 20% (10% for each of TVH and TIB) in the eHCR while the 1+ survey index has a 70% weighting, because it is a better indicator of the coming year. The remaining 10% is attributed to the 0+ survey index. The survey is trying to capture this annual pulse, and there is high variability between years. The availability of lobsters to fishers can depend on where they settle; local depletion may still be a concern, but CSIRO looks at the stock overall.

The Chair reminded the TRLRAG that the objectives of the fishery are not just economic or market driven, but also include sustainability and supporting the livelihoods of Torres Strait Islanders. The top priority is to have healthy stocks and optimise the sustainability of the resource.

The AFMA member agreed to discuss further with TSRA on how AFMA raises and addresses compliance issues and how this may be improved, including the possibility of employing Torres Strait Islanders in compliance roles.

ACTION ITEM - AFMA to discuss further with TSRA on how AFMA raises and addresses compliance issues and how this may be improved, including the possibility of employing Torres Strait Islanders in compliance roles.

Robustness of the pre-season survey – testing and analysis

The TRLRAG noted a presentation from the CSIRO on the testing and analysis done to ensure the robustness of the pre-season survey. In particular, the pre-season survey is a key input to the empirical harvest control rule (eHCR) and the TRL harvest strategy (HS) by giving an estimate on lobster size and abundance. The CSIRO aims to survey all sites selected for comparison to previous surveys, subject to weather constraints.

The TRLRAG noted and discussed the following:

- The goal of the survey is to provide an index of 1+ lobsters through looking at the same sites each year;
- Sometimes there are partial transects due to weather, currents and safety concerns, which may impact the data. Testing and analysis showed the partial transects do not

have a significant impact on the 1+ index because they are a small proportion only of the overall transect length;

- Analysis suggested that should partial transects be necessary, they should be avoided at the TI bridge and Mabuiag sites if possible, and conducted at the Kirckaldie site to reduce the impact on the survey indices.
- Overall, the survey was good, all sites were surveyed and influence of partial transects was non-significant as the survey team covered 97% of the total survey distance.

Results of the November 2023 pre-season survey

The TRLRAG noted a presentation by a CSIRO observer detailing the preliminary results of the 2023 pre-season survey. The pre-season survey was conducted between 2-14 November 2024 with a CSIRO dive team and collected information on lobster abundance and water quality. The survey provided indices of abundance for recruiting age lobsters (age 1+) and recently settled lobsters (age + 0). Generally, most of the older lobsters (age 2+) have migrated out of the fishery by the time of the survey. Species of interest such as the Crown of Thorns Starfish were also counted and habitat type and coverage was recorded, including the presence of bleached corals. Key points included:

- The age 1+ abundance was lower than 2022 and the long-term average, the survey variance was slightly smaller than the 2021-2022 and 2018-2019 surveys, and the lobsters had a similar spatial distribution compared to 2022. The abundance index for age 1+ lobsters in 2023 indicates that recruitment to the fishery is generally widespread across the different regions surveyed.
- The age 0+ abundance index point estimate showed a significant increase from the previous two years to levels that are the second highest after 2005 and followed the common trend, being more commonly and disproportionately observed on the western side of the survey area.

The TRLRAG discussed the survey results and heard observations from TIB and TVH members of environmental conditions. TIB members suggested that the presence of shells indicate good crayfish habitat, and added that they had observed a large amount of small, finely filamentous algae in some areas. Industry members asked about ecosystem conditions at Kirckaldie, including the presence of fish, shell coverage and sand coverage. The CSIRO observer noted that nothing appeared too different from last year. CSIRO agreed to:

- Identify the species of algae that has been noted as a matter of concern by some members;
- Explore including data on shell habitat in the survey; and,
- Look at disaggregating the report and presenting results up by region.

Empirical harvest control rule

Amending the eHCR for future seasons

The TRLRAG noted a presentation from the CSIRO on options to revise the eHCR, following a recommendation from TRLRAG 31 (December 2021).

The TRLRAG noted advice regarding amending the eHCR for future seasons, including:

- That the survey is weighted heavily in the eHCR and is not influenced by external factors such as bycatch, discarding and illegal fishing..
- Some uncertainties were included and tested in the model when it was developed, including the possibility that there is discarding and unreported catches. This feeds into implementation uncertainty along with non-fishery related drivers, and influences the eventual TAC recommendation.
- Preliminary testing indicates that risk is higher when climate links are considered.

An industry representative noted that they have not seen eggs on lobsters in a long time. The CSIRO representative indicated that this may be discussed in the 2024 meeting.

Some concerns were raised by traditional inhabitant members about a potential perceived decline in biomass of the stock. TIB members queried whether a constant catch TAC could be implemented in place of the current model and eHCR approach. Scientific members and the Chair highlighted that a constant catch TAC would have to be set at a very low precautionary level to cover years of very low abundance. Without the survey to give an estimation of biomass, you would have to be prepared for the stock to be at its worst every year, which would mean missing out on potential catch when the biomass was higher.

CSIRO advised they are happy to take on feedback on the model, and requested that members provide suggestions or scenarios for inclusion as uncertainties in testing. For example, if members felt concern about climate change or illegal fishing, these could be explored within the model testing.

ACTION ITEM - Members to provide their input to CSIRO's revision of the eHCR on issues they may want reflected in the operating model options and implementation errors.

Outputs for the 2023-24 season

The TRLRAG considered the outputs of the eHCR, having regard to the analyses and discussion from items 3, 4, and 6. CSIRO agreed to circulate the spreadsheet detailing the outputs.

Recommended Biological Catch 2023-24

The TRLRAG noted and discussed a Recommended Biological Catch (RBC) for the TRL fishery for the 2023-24 fishing season, having regard to the outputs of the eHCR, discussion under item 3, and the decision rules under the TRL HS. TRLRAG members discussed concerns around increasing the TAC where there are concerns from Traditional inhabitant members around overall biomass. The CSIRO scientific member explained the calculation of the TAC, referring to the eHCR, the age structure of the stock clarified the way in which the inputs were used in this calculation. There is spatial variation evident in the stock, and apparent declining biomass may be a question of localised depletion. If TIB fishers are unable to travel greater distances due to fuel prices the effect of fishing on home reefs may appear greater.

There were dissenting views on recommending the TAC as estimated by the eHCR and according to the decision rules of the TRL harvest strategy. Although the Chair noted that individual views could be recorded and presented to the TRLWG as a non-consensus position

from the RAG, the RAG must still provide scientific advice, based on the outcomes of the data and information presented. Social and economic concerns are the purview of the WG.

The non-conflicted members of the TRLRAG recommended an RBC of 530 tonnes as output by the eHCR. However, the RAG recognised in their recommendation that spatial issues and potential non-reporting of catches remain a concern.

Proposed changes to management arrangements

In light of the difficult economic position of the fishery, the TRLRAG noted three proposals put forward by an industry member to:

- Remove moontide hookah closures;
- Bring the hookah season forward two weeks and close two weeks earlier (15 November to 15 September; and,
- Permit freediving only during the fishery closure from October to November for TIB fishers only.

Having regard to the management objectives of the fishery and the *Torres Strait Fisheries Act 1984*, the TRLRAG was asked to consider the proposals in the context of any impacts they might have on the scientific inputs used in the management of the fishery.

The Chair noted that the proposals were mostly proposed changes to management arrangements, for economic and social purposes, and were therefore a WG issue but requested that members provide advice on any scientific implications from the proposed amendments.

Members advised that the hookah closures are not in place for biological reasons but are designed to reduce effort related to competition between fishers. Although there was some concern about catching smaller TRL earlier in the season, if lobsters are targeted above the legal minimum size there would be no biological scientific issue. A CSIRO observer noted that hot summer conditions are forecasted and harvesting earlier in January/February might reduce losses from hotter conditions expected in March, especially recalling the impact of high temperature on post-capture mortalities in a previous heatwave in 2016. Overall, the RAG did not believe there was any scientific basis to indicate the proposals would be of concern.

International Lobster Conference

The TRLRAG noted a verbal update from members who attended the 12th international conference and workshop on lobster biology, which was held in Freemantle, Western Australia from 22-27 October 2023. In particular, an Indonesian presentation about small larvae sold to Vietnam was of interest. The TRLRAG considered that there is some stock connection between the Torres Strait and Indonesia, but it is limited.

Likewise, a Mexican presentation on using ‘*casitas*’ to attract lobsters was of interest. Members who attended valued hearing about the future of the industry in other regions, with key takeaways from the conference including hearing about international supply chains, international concern about climate change, and aquaculture.

ACTION ITEM - CSIRO to circulate connectivity studies from Indonesia.
--

Other business

TRLRAG noted the strong preference of traditional inhabitant members for the retention of an Olympic fishing model for TIB TRL quota, over individual transferable quotas (ITQs).

All members agreed that coordination and collaboration to demonstrate the quality and sustainability of TRL for the Torres Strait should be pursued, with regards to compiling a weight of evidence to allow the recommencement of international lobster trade to China. This will involve discussion between DFAT and other arms of government. All members and observers indicated a willingness to pursue this.

Meeting attendees and declarations of interests

Members

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Ian Knuckey (online)	Chair	In addition to the declaration of interests provided at Attachment A , the Chair also declared that he has been approached to quote for a project to design a fishery independent survey for the Commonwealth Coral Sea Cucumber Fishery.
Andrew Penney (online)	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 (online)	Scientific member	Lead scientist for PZJA funded TRL research projects conducted by CSIRO. Contribute to other Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including Torres Strait climate change project and Shared science and Indigenous knowledge to support fisheries capacity building in Torres Strait. No other interests in the fishery. Independent scientific member of HCRA and NPFRAG.
Les Pitt (in person)	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Kemer Kemer Meriam	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kemer Kemer Meriam, TIB licence holder and runs an independent freezer facility on Erub Island. Board member of Zenadth Kes Fisheries.

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Charles David (in person)	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kulkalgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kulkalgal, TSRA Fisheries Advisory Committee and Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Patrick Mooka (in person)	Traditional Inhabitant Member – Guda Maluligal	Traditional Inhabitant Member, Guda maluylgal. Zenadth Kes Fisheries representative.
Jermaine Reuben (online)	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Maluligal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Maluligal. TIB licence holder, GBK employee.
Thomas Fujii (in person)	Traditional Inhabitant Member - Kaiwalalgal	Traditional Inhabitant Member Kaiwalalgal. Queensland East Coast TRL and TIB licence holder. Zenadth Kes Fisheries member.
Brett Arlidge (online)	Industry Member	Director of MG Kailis Pty Ltd. MG Kailis Pty Ltd is a holder of 5 TVH licences. Seafood buyer from Torres Strait, QLD and PNG TRL fisheries.
Ken McKenzie (online) – Apology for day 2	Industry Member	TVH license and quota holder. Queensland East Coast TRL license and quota holder.
Damian Miley	TSRA Member	Apology
Adam White (online)	Acting TSRA Member	TSRA Fisheries Project 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 (online)	QDAF Member	Apology
Rosemary Millward (in person)	AFMA Member	Nil
Elissa Mastroianni (in person)	Executive Officer	Nil.

Observers

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Joseph Posu (in person)	PNG National Fisheries Authority	Works in the Fisheries Management Unit responsible for managing the prawn and lobster fisheries in the Western Province

Name	Position	Declaration of interest
Daniel Takai	Zenadth Kes Fisheries	CEO of ZKF. Owner of the property that ZKF leases out.
Terrence Kedemwana	PNG National Fisheries Authority	Apology
Ned David	Malu Lamar	Apology
Yen Loban	TSRA Board Member and Portfolio Member for Fisheries	TSRA Board member and TSRA Fisheries Portfolio member. Chair of Zenadth Kes Fisheries.
Richard Takai (in person)	Active TRL fisher	Holds a TIB licence.
Harry Nona	TIB Fisher	Holds a TIB licence
Brooke D'Alberto (online)	ABARES	Nil.
Quinten Hirakawa (in person)	TSRA	TSRA employee, TIB license holder with a TRL endorsement.
Leo Dutra (online)	CSIRO	Contributes to Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including currently Shared science and Indigenous knowledge to support fisheries capacity building in Torres Strait, , viability of sea cucumber aquaculture, and tropical rock lobster survey. No other interests in the fishery.
Laura Blamey (online)	TRL WG Scientific Member	Contributes to Torres Strait research projects that receive research funding, including leading the Torres Strait climate change project. No other interests in the fishery.
Steph Brodie (online)	CSIRO	Scientist for PZJA funded TRL research projects conducted by CSIRO.
Roshni Subramanian (online)	CSIRO	Postdoctoral fellow at CSIRO, conducting research on the tropical rock lobster supply chain. No interest in the TRL fishery.
Marjoleine Roos (online)	CSIRO	Scientist for PZJA funded TRL research projects conducted by CSIRO.
Peter Frazis	TRL WG Industry Member	Employee of MG Kailis Pty Ltd. MG Kailis Pty Ltd is a holder of 5 TVH license. Seafood buyer from Torres Strait, QLD, and PNG TRL fisheries.

Declaration of interests

Dr Ian Knuckey – October 2023

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 – Committee	Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery MAC Research Scientific
Scientific Member –	Northern Prawn Management Advisory Committee
Scientific Member – Committee	Gulf of St Vincent's Prawn Fishery Management Advisory
Scientific Member –	Tropical Tuna Resource Assessment Group
Scientific Member –	SESSF Resource Assessment Group
Director –	The Geelong Agri Collective

Fishwell current projects:

DAWE Project	Multi-sector fisheries capacity building
AFMA 2022-	Annual monitoring, reporting and assessment of SPF marine mammal interactions, including effectiveness of mitigation measures
AFMA projects	Bass Strait Scallop Fishery Surveys
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
Expert Witness	Gladstone Harbour development impacts

**TROPICAL ROCK LOBSTER RESOURCE ASSESSMENT GROUP 35
(TRLRAG 35)**

**Tuesday 12 December 2023 | 8:30am – 5pm
Wednesday 13 December 2023 | 8:30am – 2pm
TSRA Boardroom | Thursday Island**

ADOPTED AGENDA

1 PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Welcome and apologies

The Chair will welcome members and observers to the 35th meeting of the TRL 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.

1.4 Action items from previous meetings

The RAG will be invited to note the status of action items arising from previous meetings.

1.5 Out of session correspondence

The RAG will be invited to note out of session correspondence on RAG matters since the previous meeting.

2 UPDATES FROM MEMBERS

2.1 Industry and Scientific members

Industry, scientific and government agency members and observers will be invited to provide verbal updates on matters concerning the Torres Strait TRL Fishery including updates on fishing patterns, behaviours, prices, and market trends for the 2022-23 season and the start of the 2023-24 season.

2.2 Government agencies

The RAG will be invited to note updates from AFMA, TSRA and QDAF on matters concerning the Torres Strait TRL Fishery.

2.3 Papua New Guinea National Fisheries Authority

The RAG will be invited to note a verbal update from the PNG National Fisheries Authority. Information is sought on lobster imports into Australia from PNG.

2.4 Native Title

The RAG will be invited to note a verbal update from Malu Lamar (Torres Strait Islander) Corporation RNTBC and other RAG members on native title matters relevant to the TRL Fishery.

3 CLIMATE AND ECOSYSTEM CONDITIONS

The RAG is invited to note the 2023 Climate and Ecosystem Status Report, and industry members' observations on recent environmental conditions.

4 CATCH AND EFFORT ANALYSES FOR THE 2022-23 FISHING SEASON

The RAG will be invited to discuss TRL fishery catch and effort data for the 2022-23 fishing season, including catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) analyses to be presented by the CSIRO.

5 RESULTS OF THE NOVEMBER 2023 PRE-SEASON SURVEY

The RAG is invited to discuss the results of the November 2023 pre-season survey to be presented by the CSIRO.

6 EMPIRICAL HARVEST CONTROL RULE

Outputs for 2023-24 season

Having regard to the analyses and discussions from agenda items 3, 4, and 5, the RAG will be invited to consider the outputs of the eHCR for the 2023-24 season.

7 RECOMMENDED BIOLOGICAL CATCH 2023-24

Having regard to the outputs from the eHCR, discussion under Agenda Item 3, and the decision rules under the TRL Harvest Strategy, the RAG will be invited to provide advice on a recommended biological catch (RBC) for the TRL Fishery for the 2023-24 fishing season.

8 Amending the eHCR for future seasons

The RAG will be invited to consider options, provided by CSIRO, for an amended empirical Harvest Control Rule (eHCR) to be applied in future seasons.

9 PROPOSED CHANGES TO MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

The RAG is invited to note and discuss 3 industry proposals for changes to management arrangements in the fishery.

10 ROBUSTNESS OF THE PRE-SEASON SURVEY – TESTING AND ANALYSIS

The RAG is invited to note the results of testing and analyses done by CSIRO on the pre-season survey, to ensure its robustness.

11 INTERNATIONAL LOBSTER CONFERENCE

The RAG is invited to note a verbal update from members who attended the 12th International Conference and Workshop on Lobster Biology in Fremantle.

12 OTHER BUSINESS

The RAG will be invited to raise any other matters for consideration.

14 DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING

The RAG will be invited to consider the RAGs workplan and discuss a suitable date for the next RAG meetings.

Actions arising from TRLRAG 35

Item #	Action	Responsibility
1	Members to provide their input to CSIRO's revision of the eHCR on issues they may want reflected in the operating model options and implementation errors.	TRL RAG members
2	The AFMA to discuss further with TSRA on how AFMA raises and addresses compliance issues and how this may be improved, including the possibility of employing Torres Strait Islanders in compliance roles.	AFMA/TSRA
3	CSIRO member to circulate connectivity studies from Indonesia	CSIRO